Maturity in a Human World: A Philosophical Study

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This work offers a philosophical examination of human maturity. Its argument is that maturity in a human world has an infinite structure because such maturity demands taking responsibility for the world. A world is a product of constitution: human beings produce the world, which is functionally the extent of meaningfulness; but while each human being constitutes the world, each human being also enters a world already constituted. Maturity thus demands taking responsibility not only for that which is brought about through one’s own agency but also that which precedes one’s agency. The structure of the world so understood is such that it can never fully be complete. Hence, the responsibility such a world occasions is infinite rather than finite.

This notion of maturity as infinite responsibility is examined through an inquiry into four questions. The first three concern maturity in the domains of reason, action, and the human sciences. Mature reason is argued to involve the development of critical responsibilities. It denotes a responsibility to expand the range of evidence evaluated and to expand the means of critical evidential assessment, which requires efforts that transcend rationality. Mature action, in turn, must account for the ambiguity of acts and intentions, since the meanings of these within a human world are never fully constituted. This calls for critical efforts to distinguish needs from wants to establish intersubjectively meaningful criteria by which one may be held accountable. The human sciences, then, are called upon to examine human “needs” despite the fundamental contingency of human life. This requires mature human sciences to repudiate a deterministic metaphysics in favor of a relational conception of human reality. The fourth and final question taken up concerns how maturity can be chosen. Maturity is conceived as the product of a multiplicity of human acts of valuing, such that it is not the product of an individual’s efforts toward personal maturity but is rather produced through political agency to value maturity.
Maturity in a Human World: A Philosophical Study

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Maturity in a Human World: A Philosophical Study

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A dissertation in the field of philosophy should, presumably, bring its author to ponder a variety of philosophical questions. The process of writing such a work, further, would seem to necessitate that the author would consider a variety of practical questions regarding the purpose and function of a dissertation. The topic that I have chosen has, with great frequency, provoked me to reflect on questions where these two lines of concern merge; in short, I have been drawn at routine intervals to contemplate the relationship between the dissertation as a philosophical work and the maturity of the philosopher who writes it. Each philosophical idea should, it seems, proceed from infancy to maturity. But the dissertation is a collection of philosophical ideas, and it is perhaps typical of dissertations to include both a variety of ideas that have been brought to maturity as well as a range of ideas that are intelligible for now but that have yet to grow into what they may come to be later. The dissertation must, in some fashion or another, serve as evidence of the maturation of the philosopher who has produced it. Is the completion of the dissertation the moment at which the philosopher is recognized as having achieved philosophical maturity, a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood? Or is the dissertation, rather, merely the initiation into philosophical adolescence: the point after which one will scarcely be supervised but shall remain, nonetheless, grasping for answers out of a position of relative ignorance and irresponsibility whose depths are only evident to those elders who, through many years of post-doctoral struggle, have achieved a slow and arduous passage into philosophical adulthood?

The argument put forth in this work would suggest that there need not be a univocal answer to such a question. Maturity in a human world, we may say, is ambiguous. The dissertation to the newly-minted PhD – and, indeed, even to the committee of advisors, referees,
and students gathered to examine the dissertation – can be taken as simple and clear evidence of one’s maturity. And yet the philosopher reflecting on her or his life’s work may rightfully look back on the dissertation as juvenilia, as among the immature efforts of a thinker grappling with a long and winding road to relative comprehension of difficult and expansive problems. In short, evidence of maturity is partial, ambiguous, and relational, rather than complete, univocal, and absolute, and the dissertation functions as evidence of maturity without constituting the final word on the matter.

Given this, we would then have to deal with another implication of the argument put forth in this work: maturity in a human world is not the product of one’s choices alone. That is to say, if an individual may mature, such maturity is a product of that individual’s choices but is not only the product of those choices. No human being achieves maturity without others making choices that ultimately co-produce it. If this dissertation, then, is to be regarded as evidence of my philosophical maturity, then we must deal with the reality that that maturity has been wrought by the painstaking efforts of communities who have, often quite eagerly and perhaps at times begrudgingly, chosen to contribute to my maturation and the maturation of my philosophical contributions to the world.

Indeed, I am moved to tears by even the question of where to begin. There are so many people without whom this simply would not have been possible, and I feel deeply the tragedy of not being able to start the accolades with each and every one of them. But one must start somewhere, and with all apologies to those subsequently to be named, I simply must begin by thanking Anya Bernal. I could never fully express how much of a blessing Anya’s entry into and lasting presence in my life has been. Anya confronted me with a simple reality: it was, she argued, my vocation to return to school, earn a PhD, and share my knowledge with the world.
She confronted me with this challenge as an act of love; she put what was best for me above what she wanted for herself, and, as I learned later, she did this despite her sense that it would likely mean our separation and the dissolution of our relationship. I took her words seriously and began in earnest the process of preparing myself for graduate study. I am eternally fortunate that this did not, as she had feared, spell the end of our journey together. Anya, your support throughout has been indispensable: I simply would not be where I am without your love. I have been blessed to have you as a best friend, partner, and, eventually, wife. Thank you for valuing my maturation in spite of the anguish this choice demands.

My journey to the University of Connecticut was occasioned by extremely fortuitous circumstances. For these I would be remiss if I did not thank Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Nelson, taking your course as an undergraduate was simply transformative. Though I had had philosophical interests, learning from you was the moment in which, simply, I began to fall in love with philosophy. And, as is fitting, this was in large part because you came to philosophy through concerns that transcended it, and those concerns never subsided. In my many years of wandering after the completion of my bachelor’s degree, I remained on track, as it were, because of a mission that I had discovered – out of relative obscurity, to be sure, but that obscurity had been cut through to a remarkable degree by the things I learned from you. So, too, was your support for me when I decided to return to the academic fold indispensable: I simply would not have gotten where I needed to go without your kind and thoughtful guidance and interventions.

Nelson’s efforts brought me, way back in 2005, to the work of Lewis and Jane Gordon, his intellectual mentor and peer, respectively. I have been blessed to have read their work carefully over these many years – an effort that has, due to their all-too-rare talents and maturity, always been a profound joy rather than a task of drudgery. I have been blessed to an
infinitesimally larger degree to then have had the privilege of studying with them these past five years. Though there is no shortage of material by which to individuate them and their respective impacts, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the profoundly beneficial ways in which their work as an indefatigable team has shaped this work as well as the thinker, philosopher, and person that I have become. It is no small feat for academics to be able to work together in productive intellectual work or in the reproductive labor of nurturing future generations of scholars. Lewis and Jane have accomplished this in spades, and the evidence of this is overwhelming.

Lewis is an irrepressible thinker who possesses powers of inventiveness, creativity, rigor, recollection, and responsibility that would each, taken on their own, suffice to yield a human being whose contributions would be lasting and undeniable; taken together, they compose a truly singular figure who is at once a devoted mentor and icon of a standard so high that I know I cannot meet it but must seek unabashedly to try nonetheless. To simply listen to Lewis speak and to learn from his words is a privilege of the highest order, and I am so fortunate to have my privileges extend to a relationship ever more rich and rewarding.

Jane is that rarest combination of the most deeply-rooted and felt responsibility with boundless humor and level-headedness; as both a person and an intellectual, she is a remarkable model of maturity, perhaps the greatest I shall ever know. Though her training is in the field of political science, I regard it as plainly evident that she is a philosopher par excellence whose work philosophers urgently need to learn from and reckon with. Beyond this, she is a builder of intellectual communities, bringing people together and taking responsibility for their cohabitation in houses and homes both old and new.
The impetus for this dissertation, simply, has been an effort to think through, clarify, and expand many of the things I have learned from Lewis and Jane. I take from Lewis the idea of maturity as a tragic responsibility, an imposition upon blues people who face the demand of working to overcome ubiquitous forms of bad faith that impose burdens that are clearly unfair but that warrant fulfillment nonetheless. I take from Jane the idea of maturity as a responsibility for others calling ever for humor rather than seriousness, for consciousness of the impossibility and irrelevance of demands for moral perfection, and for the requirement that one distinguish between wants and needs in order to build a world inhabitable by all. The present work is an effort to think through the implications of the spirit of maturity that I find at the core of their works and their lives.

In the spirit of building inhabitable worlds and homes, I may turn to the two homes that have nurtured this work to its fruition. The first of these is UConn’s philosophy department. My thanks go, first and foremost, to Don Baxter, a department chair better than anyone could ask for. Don, I know it plainly that I wouldn’t have been at UConn without your work to build a world-class, supportive department up to the demands of the 21st century. I thank you for all your work to realize that vision, as well as for all you have done to make my time at UConn rewarding and fulfilling.

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Bloomfield is a man of intellectual conviction and curiosity whose efforts to better both his own work and the work of those around him are incessant. Paul, I thank you for all the effort you have put into making me a better teacher and philosopher, and this dissertation would have suffered greatly had you not been one of my most valued interlocutors. Daniel Silvermint, having read a draft of a paper on the issue of the peculium (briefly discussed toward the end of this work), pushed me to articulate its particular harm. This prompting led me to articulate this harm in terms of maturity, and my dissatisfaction with extant philosophical formulations of human maturity ultimately led me to choose it as the topic of research for my dissertation. Daniel, I thank you for the many hours you have spent discussing philosophy with me; your concern with issues of agency in non-ideal contexts have left their mark on this work in a myriad of ways. Suzy Killmister’s course on autonomy prodded me to examine the limitation of many analytic conceptions of normative ideals and selfhood by way of a Sartrean ontology, and, as the reader will see, dealing with those issues is at the argumentative heart of this work. Bill Lycan’s energetic teaching and incessant pursuit of philosophical growth has served as a model and key source of encouragement.

UConn Philosophy is also, of course, the home of perhaps my most important group of interlocutors and collaborators. I thank all of the graduate students whose times in the department have overlapped with mine; you are each part of the fabric of this work in some fashion or another. Here I will single out a few who warrant special attention. Dana Miranda has become a brother of mine. The extent to which I have learned and benefitted from being able to discuss my work, your work, philosophy and life with you is incalculable. Alycia LaGuardia was my earliest friend in the department and her support has been of enormous importance. Our countless hours of discussion, as well as our seemingly endless efforts toward close readings of
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The other home that has birthed this work is the Caribbean Philosophical Association, and here it is no accident that this is a home that has been built to a large degree through the work of its first three presidents, Lewis, Nelson, and Jane. I am blessed that this home has been part of the basic fabric of my daily existence at UConn, through the presence of Lewis and Jane and the spaces they have built. The spirit of the CPA seems to be present wherever two of its members share a room. In addition to those already named, I have had the rare privilege at UConn of this being frequently the case, as has occurred whenever I have been in the presence of Fred Lee, Derefe Chevannes, Takiyah Harper-Shipman, Greg Doukas, and Samuel Martinez, to name only a few. Fred, you have been an outstanding teacher and prized advocate for me. I thank
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Thus far I have extended thanks to those who have contributed to my philosophical maturation in adulthood. But none of this would have been possible without those efforts that guided my maturation in childhood and adolescence. I must thank, first and foremost, my parents, Margaret and Jim. Mom, the degree to which you dedicated your life to the education of
your children – and the children of others – is extraordinary. Your love and support have made me the person I am today, but they have also tirelessly sought to provide me opportunities to carve out my own path of learning. Many parents tell their children what they must learn: you focused, rather, on always expanding the range of opportunities for me to learn what I wanted to, while providing arguments (rather than commands) for why I should want to learn that which, ultimately, I needed. Dad, you may very well remain the most profound intellectual influence on my life. The many hours spent discussing deep questions of human reality with you I will cherish my entire life, and it is my hope that through my work I allow them to remain alive in spirit for generations to come. As a human being and as a parent, you had the rare virtue of being ever ready to challenge those around you to go further and do better, though without ever lacking the humanity to recognize what had already been achieved. Your loss has been a profound one, yet your legacy has been a challenge I have worked in earnest to live up to. My brothers, Kevin and John, have been life-long sources of debate and support, and I have learned so much more from my time spent with the two of you than anybody but our parents.

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The mistakes in this work are those for which I am solely responsible. Its successes are those for which I can take at best limited responsibility; those named above, as well as those I have failed to name, are those to whom such successes should, ultimately, be credited.
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Introduction

Increased responsibility? What is it, if not responsibility for the world?

– Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

The argument of this work is that maturity *in* a human world is manifest through taking responsibility *for* a human world. Maturity is realized through a choice to affirm heightened and increased responsibilities, as well as through the pursuit of projects to fulfill these responsibilities. Maturity raises, in short, the issue of being responsible for engendering and articulating responsibilities, and it demands projects of taking seriously those responsibilities that have been engendered and articulated. Immaturity, in turn, can be manifest through the choice to renounce, disavow, repress, or defer such responsibilities.

This may strike the reader as a fairly bland claim. Is there anything here beside the simple claim that to be mature requires one to be responsible? There are two issues that problematize such a simplified restatement of our thesis.

The first is that “being responsible” may be inadequate to capture the demand laid forth. A responsible act is not necessarily a mature act. A typical child is capable of responsible acts. One way of being responsible is simply to follow orders. But maturity, I shall contend, does not consist in conforming to demands that have been laid out in advance. Maturity involves a relationship to responsibility that is both productive and reproductive. Maturity demands that I be
able to reproduce, that I be able to put forth human works that meet criteria of value that precede me. Yet maturity demands also that I be able to produce, that I elaborate criteria of value that do not precede me, or that I produce human works that transcend the models and works that precede me in such a way as to re-open the questions around what types of work are desirable and possible. Maturity demands the fulfillment of responsibilities within a reproductive logic of responsibility as well as within a productive logic of responsibility, and this engenders the possibility of troubles and paradoxes emerging from the irreducibility of these two logics into one overarching logic of responsibility.

Maturity thus presents the issue of responsibility for responsibility. Maturity does not amount to simply following the dicta of an adult world, for in the end, a mature human being is responsible for assessing such dicta, for contesting ideals that ought to be contested and defending ideals that ought to be defended, and for re-articulating or inventing ideals that are heretofore lacking. It thus cannot be merely the serious project of doing as asked or doing as told. Maturity requires projects toward the constitution of responsibilities and not merely their fulfillment. This, however, raises the possibility of existential paradox insofar as this requirement itself is a responsibility: to fulfill the productive demand is implicitly to fulfill a reproductive demand, since to do so is to reproduce the human project of invention.

This leads into the second source of problematization: maturity in a human world is not reducible to the ideal fulfillment of responsibilities. We confront here a basic problem. Responsibility in a human world is linked to the notion of accountability. There are others who may hold me accountable, and, of course, there is also that for which I may hold myself accountable. But in such a world, a meaningful distinction between responsibility and accountability can be drawn. There is much for which I am responsible but for which nobody
will hold me accountable – including, indeed, myself. It is the height of immaturity to take myself to not be responsible for something simply because I know nobody will demand it of me. Yet so, too, is it immature to regard myself as needing to achieve all that for which I may be held accountable. Others may hold me to account for that which is ultimately illegitimate or undesirable (for myself, for others, for humanity as a whole), or even for that which is ultimately impossible (or for a set of demands that could be met individually but not in conjunction). Achieving all that is asked of me by anybody is simply not always possible.

Indeed, where maturity is concerned, there is the further matter that one is ultimately accountable to those who are not yet present to hold me accountable. Parents who abuse their young children on the grounds that they have convinced those children to consent to such treatment are acting immaturely: they are failing to render themselves accountable to who those children will become, the adults who will look back and ask “Why did you manipulate me?” Maturity demands at once that we be accountable to those who exist concretely, present to us, and to those who don’t exist concretely, those whose objection to or approbation for our acts can only be imagined. But accountability works according to a logic that brokers contradiction: I must make choices even when some relevant party regards each possible option as a violation. I am held accountable in ways that are not mutually fulfillable.

The temptation here would be to say that maturity, then, ultimately demands that I be responsible to some value that transcends the concrete accountabilities of a human world. The temptation is to say that to be ideally mature would be to meet criteria that come from beyond this world of fellows and from beyond the vagaries of what past, present, and future generations may find me responsible for. In this work, I will seek to demonstrate why this temptation ought to be rejected. Maturity, it may be said, is an ideal that dwells precisely in the non-ideal; it is
most present where the ideal fulfillment of ideals is impossible. Maturity involves both success and failure; it is realized through successful failings, through failed successes, through ironies and paradoxes that emerge in a world that does not precede me fully formed. It involves the project of trying to meet the demands that others impose upon me, even as it must ultimately move beyond the desire to meet each and every such demand. Maturity is an ideal that is realized in a world that is not ideal. Indeed, it is realized through taking responsibility for such a world.

An immediate problem, then: can our argument for mature be a mature one? Can our inquiry into maturity be a mature inquiry? Let us begin with these questions.

I. Problems for Mature Inquiry

a. Maturity and the Constitution of Inquiry

The structure of the argument I have thus far suggested invites a particular problem. Maturity is a demand I confront as already articulated. Yet maturity demands that I articulate – or re-articulate – those ideals that I shall pursue. Maturity precedes me as a simple demand placed upon me by concrete others: “Grow up.” This demand is backed up by and reverberated through layers of institutional practices and meanings; I enter a world whose project of fostering my development precedes my acts. Yet maturity would demand, ultimately, that I take responsibility precisely for these schemata that precede me. It is incumbent upon me, ultimately, to make my path my own.

The structure of this argument suggests, then, an irony: if the world demands maturity of me, then what is demanded ultimately calls for a critical relationship to this demand. It is an imperative that can only be fulfilled through some form of repudiation, through some effort to
evaluate its desirability in light of the evidence. In order to “grow up,” I may need to transform the meaning of “growing up” that is suggested; part of maturing means giving a different meaning to maturity than at first appeared given. To meet the demand requires that I go beyond what is demanded, which might suggest a paradoxical way in which to meet it is to not meet it.

This raises peculiar problems for a philosophical study of maturity. Such a study does not proceed in the wake of an absence of human thought about the question of maturity in order to create, from whole cloth, a philosophical conception of maturity. Nor does it begin with the presumption that the body of discourse on maturity is essentially adequate and/or complete, and that the philosopher’s role is simply to rigorously explain the positions of major or minor thinkers that have come before, or to resolve apparent tensions in the literature to clarify simple misunderstandings. Rather, the position that animates this work is that there are many virtues of extant conceptions of maturity, but that they ultimately demand a philosophical response that neither abandons them nor seeks merely to clarify them. A philosophical inquiry into maturity must, ultimately, take responsibility for trying to develop a more mature conception of maturity.

As such, with regard to maturity, the questions of conventional meaning on the one hand and the legacy of philosophical treatments on the other raise peculiar problems. There is much to learn from these sources, but could a mature conception of maturity defer to their authorities? Immanuel Kant’s famed discussion of maturity (Kant, 1991: 54–60) as calling for the courage to use one’s own understanding would suggest that such deference is, simply, immature. Yet this position pushes us toward paradox: to accept Kant’s position would imply the immaturity of that acceptance. A philosophical project could seek to move beyond this by offering a comparative survey of philosophical treatments of maturity, and, ideally, a critical assessment of the strengths
and weakness of those treatments coupled with a commentary on the reasons for those
divergences that emerge. Is such an approach desirable here? Let us come back to this question.

An alternative project would begin by examining the conventions regarding the meaning
of maturity. To here say “conventions,” though, may suggest that what is at stake is not “the
meaning” of maturity but rather maturity’s array of meanings. The anthropologist Christie
Kiefer writes that “The word for ‘maturity,’ in whatever language one finds it, refers to a
complex abstraction. Its precise meaning is elusive, and it is difficult to translate or define,
because it conveys customary beliefs about good and evil, about nature and the cosmos. Such
beliefs nearly always differ from culture to culture and from era to era” (Kiefer, 1988: 18).
This implies a variety of challenges and opportunities for the study of maturity. An obvious challenge
is that we may find that maturity does not mean one thing but rather means many things. A
problem with this challenge is that it raises the question of how we could have articulated the
singular that becomes the plural: if “maturity” means many things, couldn’t this only be possible
through maturity’s having meant one thing to begin with? We may need to examine the issue in
such a way as not to presuppose either a rigid and immutable singularity or universality – in
which “there can be only one” maturity – nor to presuppose a limitless heterogeneity of
maturities, in which the concept is so multifarious as to preempt any articulation of thematic
unity. To borrow a phrase from the philosopher Michael Lynch’s work on the subject of truth
(Lynch, 2011), we may need to examine maturity as one and many.

Need such an approach be philosophical? I believe that it need not be so. Maturity can be
studied as an object of the human sciences, and such an endeavor need not proceed as a project
guided primarily by philosophical reflection. But there are important limitations to such an
endeavor. Were we to proceed by studying maturity in terms of cultural conventions, through a
comparative study, say, in anthropology, then we could begin with articulating the scope of our inquiry – say, around attitudes toward aging, growth, development, the expectations placed upon adults and the protections and pedagogies instituted for children – and then explore the array of differences and commonalities that emerge through cross-cultural comparison. Yet a problem emerges here in terms of the relationship between the object of such a study and the method employed. Suppose the anthropologist’s task is to seek out representative voices who will describe the worldview of a given culture. The question emerges as to who counts as capable of articulating a community’s worldview. Children, for instance, may not be the ideal mouthpieces for a community’s views. If the view sought is to be representative of a culture, then a fully acculturated informant rather than a partially acculturated one would be desirable. One may, then, focus instead on the views of mature members of the community. To use maturity in the selection criteria, though, raises obvious issues related to circularity if the object of the study is to survey views of maturity. Is the anthropologist to impose his or her own criteria for maturity in order to select proper criteria? Or are criteria that are generally regarded within the discipline as transculturally valid the correct ones to employ? Or should the selection criteria reflect the culture’s own understanding of maturity, in which case the circularity may become rather acute? Are the views of elders to be given equal regard to those of the adult population at large, or do the views of elders hold greater weight? If the present generation of elders has different views than previous generations, what is the implication for the results of the study? And is it a priori given that children have nothing to contribute to such research, that their views could in no way clarify the meaning of maturity within a given culture?

b. Coloniality as Impediment to Mature Inquiry
These are, I have said, limitations to an anthropological approach to the topic, but my claim is not that they are insurmountable limitations. They simply call for a rigorous anthropological endeavor, one that consciously reflects on these as methodological issues, and that may endeavor to show the array of answers that come about under different methodological presumptions rather than to provide a univocal answer to the initial research question. Such reflection, though, may push toward issues that transcend the methodological. Consider the concerns raised by Vine Deloria Jr.’s sardonically titled essay, “Anthropologists and Other Friends,” from his classic *Custer Died For Your Sins* (1988). Deloria, with great humor and cutting observation, describes a framework in which anthropologists annually descend upon indigenous communities, cultivate informants, hold workshops, and return to their university and anthropologist communities. One problem this suggests is that of what we could term anthropological culture – in other words, does anthropology tend toward the creation of particular cultural formations amongst anthropologists, and do these cultural formations in turn shape the anthropologists in ways that the individual anthropologist is unlikely to adequately reflect upon? Another problem this suggests is an ethical and, ultimately, political one. As Deloria puts it,

> It is very unsettling for a teen-age Indian to become an instant authority equal in status with the Ph.D. interrogating him. Yet the very human desire is to play that game every summer, for the status acquired in the game is heady. And as according to current rules of the game, answers can only be given in vocabulary created by the Ph.D., the entire leadership-training process internalizes itself and has no outlet beyond the immediate group. Real problems, superimposed upon the ordinary problems of maturing, thus become insoluble burdens that crush people of great leadership potential. (Deloria, 1988: 85–6)

The relationship between the anthropologist and the community under study – particularly insofar as the anthropologist is linked to powerful institutions, and the informant, often, to institutions whose power is relatively limited – may, in short, generate new cultural formations.
The tendency of the anthropologists discussed by Deloria was to flatten the community of informants by treating adolescents and young adults as if they were ideally representative of a given community’s views. One reason for this may simply be that many elders are less inclined to cooperate with anthropologists, and, indeed, this refusal may ultimately constitute a mark of their maturity. By contrast, many youths – particularly, as concerns Deloria, youths seeking leadership status – may be drawn to such studies due to the networks of power and prestige that such participation may confer (or that they may wrongly anticipate being thereby conferred).

A larger reason may be that referred to above as anthropological culture: the anthropologist, as Michel-Rolphe Trouillot (2003) contends, may be working according to a logic in which there must be a “savage slot.” That is to say, the primary framework in anthropology may be one that a priori presumes the relative or even absolute maturity of the observer in contrast to the supposed immaturity of the observed. If this methodological conceit is, so to speak, “naturalized” amongst anthropologists, then it shapes an anthropological culture that in turn may reshape the cultures under study. A consequence of such an anthropological culture, then, would be to regard the worldview of the culture under study as intrinsically child-like, which may in turn make the matter of distinguishing between mature and immature informants immaterial for the anthropologist.

The anthropologist seeking to correct for these issues methodologically has many resources to draw upon: these are, I have said, not insurmountable limitations to the rigorous pursuit of anthropological knowledge.1 But these issues raise questions that transcend the methodological; they demand reflection, inter alia, on the normative status of anthropology and

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1 For a recent work that provocatively seeks to address and overcome many of these issues, see Suárez-Krabbe, 2015.
the human sciences in general. Such questions are indeed pressing, if, as Jacob Pandian (1985) has argued, the evolution of anthropology emerged as a response to the problem of constructing and legitimating an identity for what was coming to be called “Western civilization.”

Anthropology was bound up in the project of articulating the West as, in essence, a *mature* culture and, hence, the only true wellspring of civilization. That it could offer studied articulations of its differences from other cultures was to partially constitute its claim to maturity.

As Pandian’s treatment suggests, such a schema carries two implicit problems. The first is related to Trouillot’s concern about the savage slot: the mere fact that one seeks to do anthropology may be taken as justification or even *a priori* proof that one is engaging in a mature scientific project, such that the conditions are ripe for what Lewis Gordon (2016a, 2017) terms “methodological fetishism.” The second is that anthropology could not, in Pandian’s terms, be “authentic” if it did not ultimately turn its gaze to the question of its role in fomenting the Western tradition. In other words, anthropology would persist as founding a one-sided and, ultimately, narcissistic conception of the West unless there was an anthropology of anthropology.

But this second problem returns us to Trouillot’s concern, which was elaborated precisely to deal with the problem that anthropology’s foundation in the grammar of the “savage slot” meant it faced acute difficulties in rendering anthropology – as well as the cultures that birthed it – a proper object of anthropological study.

This does not suggest the impossibility of a mature anthropology but does point to the problem, in short, that an immature anthropology can, and apparently has, contributed to an immature conception of maturity. Here we may return to the question, bracketed earlier, of whether a comparative study of philosophical conceptions of maturity is a methodologically desirable approach to the present study. If Pandian’s thesis is correct, then the relationship
between anthropology and the so-called Western philosophical tradition is at issue. A simple sketch is as follows. Anthropology produced the “empirical” grounds for a Western conception of self, with “empirical” here in scare quotes due, on the one hand, to its ready acceptance of dubious, false, and at times simply fantastical evidence, and, on the other hand, to its ready acceptance of a priori presuppositions that, as Anténor Firmin (2002: 328–9) had pointed out in the nineteenth century, governed a racist interpretation of whatever valid evidence was under consideration. Western philosophy, in turn – in doing the work that, for Pandian and Sylvia Wynter (2006), constituted the notion of “Western” – employed this anthropological “data” to buttress a conception of the Western subject in general and the “philosopher” in specific as that type of being capable of rational, universalistic, and modern or modernizing thought. The schema was one in which the ancient Greek and Roman past were to be objects of study in the field of “Classics” in specific and the humanities in general, wherein these ancient works were to hold, as it were, “currency.” By contrast, the study of non-European cultures was, by and large, to be conducted within the fields of physical geography, ethnology, and ethnography, with these eventually being folded into a broader conception of anthropology. The implication was that both the past and present peoples of Europe (a notion that itself was being invented in the process, as a secular and semi-geographical successor of “Christendom”) could be regarded under the rubric of humanitas whereas non-European peoples were to be classified as the anthropos, something ambiguously understood as less than human (Nishitani, 2006; Sakai, 2010). In consequence, the ancient Hellenic past was to be regarded as more “modern” than any contemporary social structures or bodies of knowledge outside of Europe, a schema that Johannes Fabian terms “the denial of coevalness” (Fabian, 1983; see also Mignolo, 2003). On such a schema, Greek and Roman cultures are imagined as ones in which doxastic differences – differing “schools of
thought” – could be present within a single culture, whereas there was an *a priori* presupposition of the homogeneity of “non-Western” cultures and societies, who, for that reason, could be regarded as having nothing to contribute to philosophy or political thought, despite obvious counter-examples like the Egyptian roots of much Hellenic philosophy and the Iroquois roots of the constitutions of modern nation-states. Within such a schema, we could arrive at a situation such as that described by Deloria, in which adolescents are deemed adequate representatives of the theoretical views of their societies precisely because the presence of *mature* theoretical views in such communities was regarded as *a priori* impossible.

A consequence of the rise of this way of understanding the world – which could be understood, in short, as a shift from mere “colonialism” to the broader framework of “coloniality”\(^2\) – could be found in the very notion of what it meant to do philosophy. As Peter K.J. Park (2013) has argued, European histories and conceptions of philosophy prior to the late 18\(^{th}\) century were, with few exceptions, attuned to philosophical traditions in Africa and Asia that were forerunners to or contemporaries of European philosophical traditions. It was, Park contends, through the works of several key figures that a revolution in the European conception of philosophy – for which “European philosophy” would come to be treated as a redundancy – would emerge: the anthropologist and historian of science and philosophy Christoph Meiners, the anthropologist and philosopher Immanuel Kant, and the philosopher and theologian Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as well as, crucially, the philosophical followers of Kant and Hegel.\(^3\) A consequence of this is a disciplinary conception of philosophy in which it remains common, even

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\(^2\) The literature on the notion of coloniality is vast. For a preliminary statement, see Quijano, 2000. For an introduction a wide array of debates on its import, see Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui, 2008, and Mignolo and Escobar, 2013.

\(^3\) For a discussion of whether David Hume should be included in this list, see Flory, 2017 and Park, 2017.
today, for many philosophers to uncritically and deplorably advance the peculiar claim that philosophy originated in ancient Greece.

The disciplinary identity of philosophy, thus, already brings with it baggage that raises problems for the notion of a philosophical study of maturity: namely, that many philosophers conceive of their activity as being one grounded in a conception of civilizational and intellectual maturity. Philosophy and science, on the accounts of Kant and Meiners, are said to begin at that moment where ancient Greeks departed from the childish thinking of ancient Egyptians (Park, 2013: 91-2). This raises a question that, in parallel to Deloria’s remarks on anthropology, implies problems both methodological and ethical – and, by implication, existential: that the philosopher may pursue intellectual projects on the basis of a self-conception that asserts or presupposes one’s own maturity. The philosopher may be one who embarks on the adventure of exploring and mapping the limits of human knowledge, but who is emboldened in so doing by the presumption that the philosopher is one who already possesses a certain intellectual maturity that others lack. On such a conception, it is not so much that thinking philosophically yields a maturation of concepts and ideas but rather that philosophy is the manifestation of a maturity already intrinsic in the heart of one’s being – and, we may say here, in the heart of “man’s” being. This conception is in parallel to the notion of the anthropologist as one who embarks on the project of discovering and explicating cultures whose peripheral status may, upon being explored, illuminate the limits of what human cultures may be. The anthropological project, so conceived, is animated by a conviction that the anthropologist, as a trained scientist educated in a mature civilization, is capable of an objective understanding of people who, the method implies, would themselves be incapable of anything other than a limited, subjective understanding of themselves and their fellows. The methodological question is, simply, that this relationship to
ready-made models of disciplinary maturity may inhibit the discovery of truth and create confidence in false impressions of reality. The ethical question is that the inquirer may have the function, as it were, of an unusually aggressive and inept bovine in a porcelain retailer: that is, the probability of the inquiry causing damage may be quite high while the likelihood of the inquirer taking notice of and responsibility for this damage remains quite low. The existential questions raised are various, but among them is why one should bother with such inquiry at all, if it appears upon reflection as almost given in advance that the inquiry can be neither methodologically nor ethically ideal?

We have here a formulation echoing the greater existential problem that shrouds maturity as a lived human value. Maturity appears to be that which those of the past have achieved yet that which I – or we – presently lack. One could seek to match the achievement of the elders by taking them as model, by taking the achievement of maturity to reside in matching and replicating them. That direction, though, is marked by an incessant anxiety, for human existence works according to an analog rather than digital logic, in which identical replica are unachievable; to idolize preceding generations is to define oneself in terms of their lack, and such lack is ultimately ineradicable. A different direction, then, would be to define the idols in terms of their lack of maturity: maturity, on such an account, is what happens after our generation has affected their twilight; it is our howl beneath the moon’s glow, a yawp that may not be intelligible come morning but is valuable because, ultimately, it is ours. The problem there, of course, is that of relativism: maturity becomes a value without criteria, or, at least, a value reducible to criteria of membership, identity, and property. Indeed, if we replace the first-person plural with the first-person singular the issue becomes acute: maturity means whatever I want it to mean, and functions as an empty ideal. An alternative to these would be to articulate
criteria that are transgenerational: to elucidate what any human being, or group of human beings, must do in order to achieve it. For maturity, there are always criteria that lie beyond adequate apprehension: generations gone whose virtues we cannot fully grasp, generations to come whose needs we cannot fully anticipate.

At issue, then, is that the pretense of methodological maturity may be a prime impediment to the achievement of mature inquiry. An example of this can be found, as Michele Moody-Adams (2002) deftly illustrates, in the philosophical reception of twentieth century anthropology. Partially out of a desire to move past the virulent racism of earlier anthropologists, cultural anthropology in the twentieth century began to adopt the methodological principle that cultures be studied in terms of their own values, rather than be studied as, in essence, deviations from the mores of the anthropologist’s own society. Yet this reform remained within the logic of the savage slot: in the end, the anthropologist’s commitment to moral relativism is taken as the mark of his or her enlightenment. A consequence is the bizarre flattening of the ethical and axiological views of the communities under study: there is an effort to homogenize the moral outlook of a culture, as if disagreements and conflicts between individuals or across generations were merely the manifestations of a transhistorical cultural essence. The move of many philosophers, in turn, was to regard this “data” as engendering a crisis which was to be resolved in self-serving fashion. Philosophers took on the presumption, as Moody-Adams puts it, of “descriptive cultural relativism.” This supposition states, in short, that how human beings really act is determined by the peculiarities of their cultural milieu, and not only in the lower-order dimensions of etiquette and ritual custom but at the higher-order level of basic beliefs about what is good, what is right, what is virtuous, etc. The counterpart of this presumption, though, was where philosophers could set themselves apart from anthropologists: the argument against
normative cultural relativism. By inveighing against cultural relativism as a normative position, the philosopher could, in effect, establish him or herself as a paragon of enlightened reflection in the face of a childish world that uncritically takes on the traditional morals of its forbears. That this philosophical affirmation of descriptive cultural relativism and negation of normative cultural relativism would survive as a transgenerational project suggests the irony: it would function, simply, as a philosophical culture.

The point here is not that philosophy’s rejection of normative cultural relativism ought itself to be rejected. To the contrary: maturity demands that one be responsible for one’s values, and normative cultural relativism is an abrogation of this responsibility. But the clear problem for philosophy is that many philosophers have regarded it as an a priori given that philosophy represents an overcoming of normative cultural relativism, and, hence, may constitute the performance of a mature morality. That attitude, however, may have served a rather different function: to establish a philosophical culture that, on many or perhaps even most matters of crucial import, unreflectively defers to the dictates of its traditions. A consequence could be found in the tendency of the mainstream of academic philosophers to regard only thinkers coming from a narrow tradition of philosophical thought as valid interlocutors or resources. And while that tradition could, at times, be invoked to provide intellectual rejections of racism and sexism (and, less frequently, colonialism), this has led to a culture of a priori rejection of racism and sexism without creating a disciplinary culture disposed to combatting them, much less reflecting on the formative roles that they – as part of a broader project of colonialism and coloniality – had played in erecting that philosophical culture. In short, the rejections of racism one typically finds in academic philosophy are immature.
A simple suggestion, then, is that the maturity of these forms of inquiry may require their decolonization. So, too, may it be the case that the decolonization of these modes of inquiry would be necessary in order for them to be adequate to the task of putting forth a mature understanding of maturity. How to achieve such decolonization?

II. Decolonizations Naïve and Mature

a. The Problem of Maturity “After Man”

Euro-modern colonialism, which has generated what could be called coloniality as well as peculiar modes of racism and sexism, trades on the dubious notion of the intrinsic maturity of European men and the intrinsic immaturity of non-European men and women. Under the logic of Jim Crow, for instance, an elderly black man was duty-bound to address a very young white boy as “sir,” and the white boy was licensed to address the elderly man as “boy.” A person’s degree of maturity, under such a schema, is not so much contingent on personal conduct as it is necessitated *a priori* by one’s closeness to whiteness and distance from blackness. The bitter irony is that this *a priori* ascription of maturity or the lack thereof is often manifest through an inversion of meaningful forms of accountability. White men are often excused for odious conduct on the grounds that “boys will be boys,” while black boys confront hyper-policing and hyper-incarceration in which youthful indiscretions are paradoxically regarded as proof that one ought to be tried as an adult. As Lewis Gordon puts it,

Racism is a form of degradation that attempts to bar certain people from rights and privileges of adult life, such as the dignity of images of self-worth, while contradictorily blaming them for their lack of access to these conditions. That is why people who become objects of racism are treated as perpetual children, people under guardianship of a supposedly adult race. There is the problem of insult evident here, but there is an additional consideration to bear in mind: the
degraded subjects are adults. They are thus faced with adult responsibility while being treated as immature subjects. (L. R. Gordon, 2014b: 19)

To this we can add the phenomena of Euro-modern conceptions of maturity as gendered through-and-through. Aside from “grow up,” the phrase most linked to maturity in the English language is “be a man.” Sociologically, it may even be the case that the latter has a performative force that the former lacks; “grow up” may often be regarded as feminine nagging that a man is licensed to ignore, whereas “be a man” may typically be regarded as counsel that one ought to take with the utmost seriousness. To “man up,” as well as a variety of metonymic equivalents, often drawing synecdochally on testicles (“grow some balls,” “grow a pair,” “sack up”), are used to refer to the imperative that one take responsibility for oneself and one’s actions in spite of the discomfort this may engender. “Woman up” and “be a woman” read as mere oddities, failed attempts to work a facile gender symmetry into a profoundly gendered conceptual scheme. The feminine counterpart to “man up” would seem rather the imperative to “be lady-like,” where a lady is regarded, ultimately, as one who subscribes to social conventions of decorum. Indeed, the “lady,” insofar as it is an adult figure of heightened responsibility, is such by virtue of confronting an increased burden to nurture children and childish men. If, as Simone de Beauvoir famously notes, “One is not born but rather becomes a woman” (Beauvoir, 2011: 283), then the question remains open as to whether the “woman” on such a formulation is the mature counterpart to a girl or is, rather, a female adult acculturated into a role that in many ways demands one act immaturesly. Indeed, it is typical for women to be referred to as “girls” well into adulthood – perhaps as long as they are regarded by men as objects of sexual attraction.

Of course, these reflections take as their point of departure not a universal and ahistoric form of patriarchy, misogyny, or sexism, but rather a historically particular form instantiated through Euro-modern colonialism (Wynter, 1990; Oyèwùmí, 1997; Lugones 2007). What is it at
issue is not so much the intersection of standalone forms of racism and sexism, but rather their mutual co-constitution through an imperial and colonial matrix of power. Following Sylvia Wynter, we may then raise the issue that the problem of maturity may be linked to what she terms “the over-representation of Man as if it were the human” (2003). “Man” takes as its point of reference a white, European or Euro-American bourgeois male, a “global breadwinner” whose economic mastery is attributable not to illegitimate regimes of appropriation and exploitation but rather to Man’s intrinsic virtue. The modern episteme, Wynter contends, is premised on elevating Man to the status of an a priori ideal of humanity. A consequence is that modern forms of knowledge are shrouded in a logic of “biodicy” (Wynter, 2006), in which whatever ills humanity confronts can be attributed not to the misdeeds of Man but rather to the intrinsic lack of value to be found in those human beings who are not Man – women, people of color, the global poor, etc. As such, the imperative lurking behind Euro-modern conceptions of maturity, as well as their enshrinement and naturalization within Euro-modern institutions, may be not only “be a man” but simply “be Man.”

“Man,” of course, stands ambiguously at the heart of many modern discourses. On the one hand, “man” can be taken to refer explicitly and particularly to adult males. On the other hand, “man” and “mankind” are taken to refer to humanity in general, with similarly gendered pronouns and suffixes serving as generic referents. Feminist thought has long had to reckon with the ripe conditions for equivocation that this engenders, and Wynter and other thinkers confronting problems of racism and coloniality have gone further in establishing that for Euro-modernity, “man” equivocates between references to all human beings and references merely to European peoples (and perhaps the occasional “honorary white”).
Yet receiving much less attention is another central ambiguity: if “man” has an equivocal relation to categories of race and gender, what of its relation to age and adulthood? If Euro-modern discourses on man over-represent a racialized, gendered, classed subject as if it represented humanity writ large, is there a similar error in over-representing the adult as if it were all humanity? Clearly, it would be an error to say, for instance, that human rights are rights by virtue of one’s having attained adulthood; the “rights of man” often refer to rights that would appear to be the human rights of children as well as adults. Indeed, there may be some human rights that are distinctly owed to children – consider, for instance, S. Matthew Liao’s argument that children have a right to be loved (Liao, 2015). Yet here the issue of paternalism emerges, a source of recurring debates in Euro-modern thought due to its imbrication in colonial and patriarchal modes of power. If children have a right to have guardians, then the debate rages as to whether the child-like should likewise have some form of protectorate imposed upon them.

Here a critical response emerges: if paternalism functions as a Trojan horse for colonization and patriarchy, then perhaps it simply ought to be rejected wholesale. Hence, what if decolonizing values requires discarding the notion of maturity altogether? In other words, maturity is woven into the fabric Euro-modern values, and it is therefore a medium for the propagation of coloniality. Where efforts to value maturity are present, it seems, the valorization of “Man” and devalorization of women, people of color, etc. lurks in the shadows. If Wynter’s call is for “the human after Man,” then it might follow that what is needed is the achievement of the human after maturity.

b. The Problem of Naïve Decolonization
The notion that any values associated with colonialism or coloniality ought to be discarded, however, is fraught with problems. The apt metaphor here pertains to the folly of throwing babies out with the bathwater. Colonialism is an effort to instrumentalize land, people, culture, values, and knowledge; it invariably makes use of that which is valued prior to colonization. This is not to say that colonialism does not introduce new values of its own, but even where this is the case, colonialism often seeks to impose these through projects of co-optation that are established in reference to the values that precede them. In brief, the issue is that efforts to value maturity are by no means original or exclusive to Euro-modernity and coloniality.

Consider here Ifeanyi Menkiti’s contention (1984, 2004) that it is typical of African conceptions of personhood that one must mature in order to become a person. Full personhood is not a product of birth alone but is rather achieved through the acts and influences that make one meaningfully a member of a community. The claim, then, is not simply that it is better to be mature than not, but rather that a type of maturity is requisite to attain an ontological status of personhood: “passage through time helps create not only a qualitative difference between young and old, but also an ontologically significant one” (Menkiti, 2004: 325). The notion of maturity as bearing normative significance and even the notion of maturity as constitutive of the difference between those who are fully human and those who are not are not purely European or colonial inventions. This is not to say that Europe did not re-invent notions of maturity or bring to them a significance that was distinctly colonial and not indigenous to a pre-colonial context. Nor is it to claim that it was African societies’ normative attachment to forms of maturity that made them more susceptible to efforts of European colonization. The point is simply that maturity refers, ultimately, to ideals about which many societies have had constructive ideas.
prior to colonization, and the fact that there are colonial ideals of maturity, as well as pre-colonial conceptions of maturity that have been colonized and transformed in the process, does not imply that maturity ought to be discarded wholesale on the grounds that it is no more than a colonial artifact.

The effort to reject whatever is associated with colonizers or epochs of colonization can be termed “naïve decolonization.” I do not mean to suggest that decolonization is itself naïve but rather that one can distinguish between forms of decolonization that are naïve and forms that are mature. Naïve decolonization often works according to the logic of guilt by association. Under this framework, decolonization’s chief responsibility becomes to repudiate whatever happens to be associated with the colonizers. The problem with such an approach is one that Aimé Césaire raised in *Discourse on Colonialism* (2000): that to oppose colonialism, to maintain that it dehumanizes both colonized and colonizer, does not mean that one can go back to a pre-colonial world. Frantz Fanon, likewise, issued the call to “Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them” (1963: 311), but this “leaving” meant to refuse the claim that Europe was an adequate model, that its “successes” made it worthy of imitation. “It is a question,” Fanon wrote, “of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe’s crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his unity” (1963: 315). In short, the imperative to build a world no longer suffering from colonial pathologies may require that one not discard all European thought in much the way that European intellectuals often claimed that all non-European thought could be discarded. Naïve decolonization regards repudiation of the colonial as sufficient for
decolonization; mature decolonization confronts a responsibility to build a world that is genuinely after colonialism, a world, as Fanon called for, in which tools would not possess human beings and enslavement would be brought to a permanent end, and wherein it would be possible for human beings to discover and love each other, wherever they may be (1967a: 231).

In that sense, we may issue a warning that Wynter’s call for “the human, after Man” may not mean, as such, the death of Man. The obvious points of reference here are Michel Foucault’s vision that man could be erased “like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea” (Foucault 1994: 387) and Friedrich Nietzsche’s “God is dead. … And we have killed him” (Nietzsche 2001: §125). The problem with a call for Man’s death is that the death of Man is not necessarily the end of Man’s power. That Man should have hegemonic power in shaping the world, in organizing it in such a fashion so that each of its part serves Man’s ends, is an acute concern. But the death of Man does not guarantee the diminishment of such power. Foucault had expressed a similar concern in warning that having literally cut off the king’s head does not ensure that one will have done likewise in the realm of political theory (Foucault, 1978: 88-9); the question can remain, though, as to whether even cutting off the king’s head in political theory would eradicate the king’s power over how politics is thought about. Here African ontologies suggest a relevant point of consideration: the death of ancestors does not eradicate their power with regard to present and future generations (Gyekye, 1995: 68–84; Henry, 2000: 26–43; L.R. Gordon, 2006: 58–61).

Wynter, in building off of and beyond Foucault’s framework, discussed these matters in terms of “transumptive chains” that govern the shift from one episteme and epoch of power to another. The symbols and modes of knowledge production put into effect to undergird one regime of power, do not “resume” so much as “transume” – that is, their interruption by
revolutions and epistemic breaks yields their continuation in altered forms. The “death of God” at issue for Nietzsche and others was less an issue of God’s absence and more an issue of how God had been replaced; could science, philosophy, or Man really serve the knowledge- and world-orienting roles that God had? To ask of humanistic institutions that they replace God is, in its own way, a continuation of the power of God: it is to impose a demand that is exogenous to those institutions and that may transcend their capacities quite drastically. The degodding of the Western episteme, Wynter contends, moved it out of a Christocentric framework of knowledge production into a partially secularized episteme of Man-1, premised on the centrality and ideality of “homo politicus,” which in turn was further degodded and begot Man-2, the episteme of “homo oeconomicus” (Wynter, 2003, 2006). But the structure of the argument implies that present efforts toward decolonization could, simply, beget Man-3, and simply because one takes as one’s aim that one will kill Man-2 does not negate the possibility that one’s efforts will culminate in the hegemony of Man-3.

A further reference point of relevance, then, is Sigmund Freud’s notion of the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1977: 207–8, 328–38). Human beings enter into a world in which they are cared for, but their maturation facilitates the diminution of that care. Confrontation with an adult world, though, may spark forms of resentment that engender an anxious or oppositional relation to those by whom one has been nurtured. The notion of the Oedipus complex suggests a desire to displace and replace those sources of care, and the structure of such desire would be to persist without reflective awareness: e.g., I want to spite my father by surpassing him and reincarnate my mother’s love through another, but I may fail to understand that this desire is implicitly manifest in my acts. The psychoanalyst, then, can point to the structural tendency of human existence to produce Oedipal desires, and for the patient under analysis, this can facilitate
reflection on how one’s behavior may ultimately be the symbolic expression of the Oedipal. Fanon (1967a), though, by taking this method seriously, saw that a rigid interpretation of it would have to be transcended, for in a colonized society, the sociogenesis of Oedipal structures would be quite different than it would be in the European context that stimulated Freud’s explorations. If in both France and Martinique it was Man that was symbolically produced as paragon of value, then the investment of Oedipal desire in one’s father could be typical among white children in France and atypical among black children in Martinique. The tragic consequence is that many black people would, in turn, act upon these desires unreflectively, pursuing dreams of integration and white acceptance that were simply unrealizable. Hence, the Oedipal could, in the colonial context, be an extension of colonial power, part of the array of psychological tools that undergird domination. A further problem, then, is evident even in opposition to the colonizer: pursuing the death of the colonizer, to passionately seek the death of Man, could be to fail to confront the causes of one’s debilitation and, indeed, to exacerbate them.

Psychoanalysis hinges on the importance of moving from a naïve understanding of one’s desires to a mature one. Ironically, this point is often lost on many of those who repudiate Freudian psychoanalysis. Indeed, both in positivist and post-structuralist psychologies there is much evidence of an Oedipal relationship to Freud, an over-investment in, as it were, cutting off his head in psychological theory. This may take pathological expression where it means that one recapitulates the worst of Freud’s mistakes and discards his most prescient insights. An example is illustrated by Emma Perez’s criticism of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze’s _Anti-Oedipus_. If Guattari and Deleuze are correct that the Oedipal does not arise in the pre-colonial kinship structures of the non-West, it does not thereby follow, Perez contends, that colonization has not imposed the Oedipal on them. To resist the Oedipal diagnosis, in short, does not combat the
“Oedipalization” that coloniality puts into place (Perez, 1999: 102–110). The “anti-” of anti-Oedipus may, ultimately, betray an Oedipal anxiety at the heart of post-structuralist efforts to hasten the death of their forbears. So, too, for positivist approaches that, repelled by the limitations of the “talking cure” approach of psychoanalysis, beget an uncritical and at times fetishistic relationship to neurophysiological reductionism. That there are limitations to the early articulations of psychoanalysis does not entail that one ought to overlook its strengths, in the same way that the psychoanalyst may recommend that the patient respond to the influence of a flawed parent by at least attempting to grasp and understand the parent’s genuine virtues and accomplishments; otherwise, the disdain may become pathological. The point of examining structures of Oedipal desire is not to discover an inevitable fate – to find that one is doomed to pathology and catastrophe – but rather to help one take responsibility for reflecting upon what one really wants and needs and, to use Fanon’s term, to be actional in the face of powers one cannot fully eradicate.

What Fanon and Perez point to, then, is a model of mature decolonization for which the mere acceptance and application of European ideas and concepts is inadequate but for which the wholesale and uncritical repudiation of those ideas and concepts is undesirable and irresponsible. Hence, the maturity of decolonization involves heeding both Audre Lorde’s warning that it would be naïve to expect the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house (Lorde, 1984: 110–3) as well as Jane and Lewis Gordon’s warning that the effort to dismantle the master’s house is necessary but insufficient for projects of decolonization (Gordon and Gordon, 2006). The master is, indeed, well-versed in how to use his tools to maintain his house; for this reason, decolonization that limits itself to immanent critique of the Euro-modern intellectual canon is likely doomed to tilt at windmills, for this canon was by and large erected in order to facilitate
enduring modes of coloniality. But the diminution of the master’s power is not merely a matter of dismantling his house, and tools that the master has sought to employ might nonetheless be useful to construct other houses, to create alternative possibilities and futures. In short, naïve decolonization takes its responsibilities as delimited by the need to overthrow the master, but mature decolonization encounters an expanded responsibility which demands the creative and critical apprehension of the resources and inventions that can build a new world and set afoot a new humanity. As such, it needs to be wary of naïve decolonization, for, among other issues, naïve decolonization is a tool that masters can manipulate, have manipulated, and may even at times appropriate as their own. Think, for instance, of the many ways in which the ideal of a color-blind society, offered up initially as an anti-colonial idea, has been turned into an asinine but effective tool for passing and upholding policies with racist effects, or the ways in which the expansion of U.S. colonial power drew upon exploitation of the so-called “Black Legend” to replace Spanish colonial power without eradicating the colonial standing of the locales thus “liberated.”

To speak of “naïve decolonization” at all, though, is to raise a thorny linguistic issue, for “naïve” shares its etymological roots with the term “native.” The notion that its articulation in modern French and English vernaculars is completely unrelated to conceptions of “natives” in the colonies strains credulity. To decolonize the concepts that shroud intellectual production and normative life requires critical reflection on the relationship between the concepts as inherited and the greater conceptual scheme of which they are parts. So, for instance, we may speak of the efforts of those like Kwasi Wiredu (1997: 136–144) or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) toward decolonization by way of rethinking concepts from the perspective of languages not imposed by colonizers and, indeed, to be able to think enmeshed in these languages rather than as a merely
occasional visitor to them. But it does not follow that one is in all cases better off by having abandoned terms that appear in the language of the colonizer, and the imperative of cross-cultural communication – both in general and in the particular case of projects of decolonization – may require being able to critically and reflectively employ language that is neither purely innocent nor purely colonizing in its pragmatic effects. “Naïve” may simply refer to a cultural universal with transcultural validity, whereas the peculiar sense of “native” in Euro-modern languages may be the cultural particular of a cultural formation guided by the telos of colonization. And where “naïve” is used in such a way as to implicate this “native” baggage, one need not throw one’s hands up and abandon the term, since the alternative of distinguishing better and worse uses of it remains.

An analogous case is that of the term “virtue,” which derives from *vir*, meaning “man.” To say that the genealogy of “virtue” has nothing whatsoever to do with masculinity would be erroneous; we can consider, for instance, Susan Moller Okin’s argument that Socrates sought to universalize Hellenic notions of virtue and excellence from their masculine origins but that Aristotle’s conceptions sought to re-root them in manliness (Okin, 1979: 73–98) or Arlene Saxonhouse’s discussion of Niccolò Machiavelli’s attempts to return the notion of virtue to its masculine roots (Saxonhouse, 2004). The lineage of the term is distinctly linked to usages for which masculinity served as the ideal, and, hence, wherein the masculine was regarded as intrinsically more virtuous than the feminine. But so, too, does the lineage include a different tendency in which “virtue” has been subject to feminization, and forms of misogyny very often work through the imposition of a fetishized appreciation of “feminine virtues,” related to the above-discussed notion of “being lady-like.” “Virtue” has thus played a dual role in buttressing

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4 On cultural particulars and universals, see Wiredu, 1997.
forms of patriarchy and misogyny, negating women’s value both through the assertion of their lack of masculinity and the assertion of their lack of femininity. Does it follow, then, that the burgeoning field of feminist virtue theory is guilty of performative contradiction? I submit that it does not. What matters for a feminist theory of virtue is that it critically apprehends the meaning of the term. Doing so does not foreclose the possibility that one can articulate a meaning of virtue that transcends the masculinism of its etymology. We could here caution against a naïvely feminist theory of virtue, and such naïveté could be manifest in one of two directions. The first would be to articulate virtues in light of a wholesale rejection of the masculine, in which to give a feminist account of virtue would mean to define the masculine as that which a priori lacks virtue. This is the approach, in short, of a naïve reversal. The second would be to offer an account of virtue in which it is presupposed that one’s definition must have transcended the masculinism of the term’s earlier iterations. That is, this tack would define itself as feminist (or universalist, or “post-masculinist”) by fiat, by a declaration that one will not be playing by the rigged terms laid out by misogyny. The problem, though, is that one may not know in advance how the game has been rigged; it may require reflection to discover the nuance of its riggings.

As such, a mature feminist theory of virtue may have to – as those like Okin and Saxonhouse have sought to do – take account of the ramifications of masculinist theories of virtue on how we think about virtue today. For present purposes, we may note one such consequence of importance. If the notion virtue has taken the life of a “man” as the frame of reference for its realization, then what remains of that frame of reference once we take the preference for masculinity over femininity out of the equation? Can we speak, that is, of virtues “after man” that are thus the province of any human being? The problem that emerges is that taking the gender out of “man” does not leave us with a human being simpliciter, because an
ungendered man (or woman) is still an adult, and not all human beings are adults. In short, virtues give an account of normative life that focus not on the moment of action but rather on the development of a mature character. We may say that maturity is not a virtue as such because maturity, or at least a degree of maturation, is what is required in order for virtues to manifest. Maturity on that line of thinking would constitute a condition of possibility for virtues.

It is, of course, true that one could go further in criticizing the linkage between virtue and “man” (or “Man”), by rejecting the claim that virtues are the province of adults. On the one hand, this seems a step forward, insofar as it would be dehumanizing to children to regard them as *a priori* incapable of being virtuous, in the same way that it is dehumanizing to regard women and/or people of color as incapable of virtue. On the other hand, however, it need not follow that the difference between children and adults be regarded as totally beside the point for how virtue is understood. No doubt, children can develop virtues, and can ultimately prove more virtuous than many adults; likewise, many adults may fail to develop virtues, or can facilitate the atrophy of those virtues they had earlier accrued. But a conception of virtue in which, for instance, a child’s innocence is viewed as a virtue may be simply wrongheaded. A society that regards lack of trial as evidence of goodness may confront rather profound problems. Maturity is a feature of a normative life in which pure innocence is no longer possible. That there are reasons to protect children’s innocence speaks to a basic fact that maturity is not of all-encompassing and unmitigated value; to value maturity is not to demand it at every point in a human being’s development; immaturity is not that which must be eliminated altogether but rather that which must be experienced for maturity to become a possibility. To define innocence *simpliciter* as a virtue would be to commit the same folly as found in regarding men (or Man) as intrinsically virtuous: the child becomes *a priori* good, and the notion of virtue as something achieved
through acts, through growth and maturation, would be cast aside. Indeed, the child who then sets off on life’s experiments, putting her or himself in position to learn difficult lessons and cultivate an adult perspective, would be seen, ultimately, as vicious and worthy of reprimand. Feminist thought provides a salient example here, insofar as various schemata of regarding women as intrinsically virtuous have rested on forms of infantilization in which women are praised for the purity of their innocence; women who seek, under such conditions, to experience and understand an adult world of responsibility are scorned and assaulted for the vice of corrupting their innocence. To avoid the dehumanization of children, then, might require drawing a distinction that can regard the child’s innocence as valuable but not virtuous.

These reflections on “virtue” thus bring out something of importance for our discussion of naïveté. Put simply, there is a need to reckon with the reality that there simply are meaningful differences between children and adults, and that while these kinds of differences have been abused by colonizers and many other modes of domination, it does not follow that the distinction ought to be eradicated. Yet neither should it follow that one treats the distinction as a dichotomous classification, wherein one is either a child or an adult, without ambiguous cases or elements of humanity that are shared across the distinction. Child and adult, in this sense, should be taken as what in the phenomenological spirit might be called thematic essences. Adults can be childish insofar as their conduct may reflect that which is thematically the province of children, and many children will engage in adult behavior. In brief, there is that which is typical of adults and that which is typical of children, but any given individual or meaningful group of individuals will manifest characteristics that are atypical. To say that a degree of naïveté is characteristic of children is not to condemn children, nor is it to provide justification for the declaration that naïveté is of equal value to maturity.
c. The Desirability of Maturity for Decolonization

A simple reason why examination of such typicalities and thematic essences is important is that holding children accountable for adult responsibilities can be both unrealistic and counter-productive. I am reminded here of my youth, when my parents were active in the pre-school that my brother and I attended; the buzzword repeated by its staff and parent volunteers, seemingly ad infinitum, was “age-appropriate behavior.” It is typically unreasonable to expect children to behave like adults. That there are exceptions means that mechanisms of accountability need to be nuanced. Human beings can be crushed both by unrealistically high expectations and unrealistically low expectations. It is, simply, inappropriate to expect children not to be naïve, yet it is likewise inappropriate to attempt to make children remain naïve.

Decolonization, I contend, is compatible with valuing maturity over naïveté, and mature decolonization, further, demands valuing maturity over naïveté – though with the caveat that this does not mean the eradication of the naïve but rather an existential commitment to growth and maturation. Methodologically, this suggests a tool that decolonization has reason to employ: namely, phenomenology. Phenomenology can be understood as an endeavor to take responsibility for the suppositions that shape inquiry. A “presupposition” is that which is supposed but is ignored, forgotten, or repressed; it is that which is not reflected upon. The ideal of phenomenology is the achievement of presuppositionless thought. Is such an ideal realizable? The answer is, it would seem, a qualified no. That is to say, it is difficult to imagine thought that is entirely free of presupposition: what is supposed often rests upon other suppositions, and thinking as a conscious activity may simply not be able come to reflective awareness of all that is supposed. Consciousness may be such that it cannot achieve this ideal. Yet I here say a
“qualified” no, because much depends on how one understands the meaning of the ideal, for phenomenology that does not achieve this ultimate end is not necessarily a failure. On the contrary: rigorous phenomenology uncovers presuppositions and, in so doing, sets the conditions for the future examination of that phenomenological endeavor. It is thus an ideal, it could be said, in an existential sense, and the unrealizability of an ultimate ideal need not negate the value of progress toward its fulfillment. It is in this sense that Maurice Natanson, paraphrasing Edmund Husserl, refers to phenomenology as an “infinite task” (Natanson, 1973). Taking seriously its aims means not that one achieves a God-like ideal of omniscient thought but rather that one seeks ever to pursue the maturation of inquiry. Phenomenology is a process through which one can take ever greater responsibility for that which one supposes.

It does not follow that mature decolonization would thus amount to simply applying the ideas of phenomenologists to questions pertaining to coloniality and decolonization. That would amount to a failure both to understand the meaning of decolonization and the meaning of phenomenology. Phenomenology refers not a set of ideas or body of doctrines but rather to a set of animating questions, whose meanings will vary considerably depending on the problems that draw one to the inquiry to begin with. Thus, as Paget Henry (2016: 27–58) argues, we can distinguish between the phenomenology of Husserl and other Europeans who followed him in the project of finding a rigorous philosophical grounding for the sciences from Africana phenomenology, an endeavor set afoot by thinkers from Africa and the African diaspora in order to develop a rigorous understanding of the colonization of lands, peoples, and consciousnesses in order to take up the practical and political project of decolonization. The former project provides tools and questions that are of use to the latter project, and vice versa. It is true that many of the thinkers who count as exemplars of the latter project came to their approach without having
studied the works of the former, and it is true that many today still pursue the former project without giving any consideration to insights in Africana phenomenology. But it does not follow that the work of Africana phenomenologists can in no way be improved or extended by bringing it into dialogue with the European phenomenological tradition, and those who today pursue projects through the European tradition exclusively are, in their willful ignorance of the Africana and other traditions of phenomenology, imposing unfortunate handicaps on their work. In each case, the phenomenological spirit simply calls for a movement to go further, rather than a warrant to reject prior work on the grounds of its limitations.

As such, it is the methodological perspective of this work that a mature inquiry into maturity requires taking seriously the thematic concerns of decolonization and phenomenology, and that this pairing is copacetic because the concerns of decolonization ultimately invite phenomenological turns and the concerns of phenomenology ultimately invite decolonial turns. It is true that there are many pursuing the project of decolonization who reject phenomenology as a tool belonging to the community of masters, especially because of Husserl’s obvious failings to displace his own Eurocentrism (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Sakai, 2010). It is my contention that this is move represents a form of naïve decolonization. But so, too, do those who take up Husserlian phenomenology without inquiring into how coloniality has shaped its contours and introduced implicit presuppositions engage in a form of naïve phenomenology. The relationship between phenomenology and naïveté is a peculiar one: phenomenology is a mode of inquiry that tries to account for the naïve, to show what the naïve is missing and, indeed, to understand how the naïve works. To announce these aims is not to contend that the naïve is without value. Put simply, naïve scientific inquiries need not be unproductive or unsuccessful. Physical sciences need not fully account for their metaphysical presuppositions in order to produce scientific
knowledge. But to counter scientific error and stagnation may require an investigation into foundations, an effort toward the maturation of the sciences. Phenomenology does not achieve this by asserting, in effect, that it knows more than the sciences. Rather, in order to account for the naïve, phenomenology adopts the posture of the naïve: on a model for which Socrates serves as a classic icon, phenomenology begins by supposing it knows nothing. Such a posture facilitates taking responsibility for whatsoever one will come to know, by treating it as the product of a maturing inquiry rather than by treating it as simply known prior to inquiring.

In short, the present study attempts to offer a phenomenological account of maturity by way of taking seriously questions raised by efforts of decolonization, and it seeks to contribute to efforts of decolonization by offering a rigorous phenomenological perspective on maturity. Let us now turn to a sketch of how the work might achieve these ends.

III. A World of Meaningful Responsibilities

a. Constitution, Meaning, and Freedom

The title of this work refers to maturity in a human world. What is a human world, and why does it matter? Similar to “virtue,” the terms “human” and “world” can both be traced to etymological origins in terms meaning “man.” The “world,” so conceived, is produced and reproduced by human beings. To speak of a human world, in brief, is to speak not of a physical locale (as one would in referring to a “planet”) but rather to a horizon of meaning: the world is that which represents the limit of human acts and the meaning thereof. The paradox of life in a human world is that one is indigenous to this world yet one also builds and creates this world: it is that which precedes me yet it is that which my life, lived in relation to the world’s other
inhabitants, serves to fabricate. The world thus occupies a paradoxical position, insofar as it is that which constitutes me and that which I constitute, and it is that which constitutes us and that which we constitute. Hence, it can be said that the world is a topic for which phenomenological inquiry is well-suited, but in turn the world is a fundamental problem for phenomenology (Langrebe, 1940); phenomenology works from a naïve understanding of world toward a mature one, but in so doing, it does not remove from the world its problematic status.

Much could be said here about the meaning of world if considered independently of human beings. One can inquire as to what a non-human world would be. The salient matter here, though, is that even inquiry into the meaning of a non-human world eventually confronts the matter of the inquirer’s presence in a human world, and the answer about non-human worlds given may already be constituted by implicit dimensions of a human world. Mature inquiry, in short, faces the matter that the human world may not eliminable as a problem for human inquiry. Here, then, we may delimit our inquiry as not about maturity in any type of world whatsoever but rather maturity in a human world. What, then, are the distinctive features of a human world?

A world, we have said, is constituted, and further it constitutes those who constitute it. Much could be said here about the physical or material dimensions of constitution. But there is, as well, that which transcends the materiality of constitution, and though a variety of terms could serve as our entrée here, the simplest place to begin is with the notion of meaning. In drinking a glass of water, I physically constitute my world: I move the water from the interior of the glass to the interior of my mouth, throat, torso, etc. So, too, does my drinking it in some sense reflect the way the world has physically constituted me: I am a type of being capable of the drinking of water, and, further, I may also be a being who needs to do so. But my relationship with the water is not exhausted by the physical, for it also has meaning to me: I could easily characterize myself
as drinking it. If asked what I am drinking, I may reply, “Water.” Meaning is part of the constitution of my acts; it is a dimension for which a material description may be insufficient insofar as the material description does not capture the idea I have of the water and of my drinking it. This is not to say that most of what is meant does not find its correlate in the material, nor is it to claim that I could have ideas without there first being my material existence. It is simply to say that meaning may transcend the material, though with the caveat that such transcendence is not radical and complete but rather partial. The meaning “water” is not in the water but is rather manifest through my relationship to the water; it is the fact that I call it water, or that I would do so when asked, that matters for it to have this meaning, rather than the facts of its chemical composition.

Yet if this explains how I constitute the “waterness” of the liquid before me, it does not follow that I constitute it alone. “Water” comes from language; my use of that language finds me in relation not only to the liquid but to intersubjective relations through which “water” is meaningful. Language, in that sense, is one of the ways in which the world’s constitution of me precedes my constitution of the world. When I use my society’s ready-made words, I am using them through a relation to its conventions; in producing my own statements, I am reproducing the meaningfulness of the language. But so, too, do I find myself constituted if I seek to step outside of the language: if I choose to use an expressive grunt, a mimed gesture, or simply silence, then my act has meaning insofar as it suggests I have chosen to not employ the language, as would also be the case were I to say, “Bebo el agua.” I constitute meaning, but these meanings are meaningful by virtue of that which constitutively precedes them. And these preceding meanings emerge, once again, not exhaustively from the materiality of this world but rather from
the consciousness of this world that others have. In short, a necessary structural feature of a human world is the presence of shared meanings.

We could seek to question such a view by reflecting on what it would mean for such a world to be meaningless. The problem, though, is that such a question operates within meaning rather than from a vantage beyond it; to pose the question is not to achieve the world to which it would refer. As such, the more crucial question becomes: what would it mean if meaning didn’t matter? Here an answer is easier; we can imagine a world in which the materiality of things was sufficient to exhaust their reality. A human world manifests its reality through the relation between meaning and matter. A world where only matter matters would be something else; a reality exhausted by the material alone would be one in which meaning was of no import. If meaning matters, then, we may say we are working within a framework where what happens is not exclusively determined by the material.

Now, it does not follow that all that matters in a human world is meaning to the exclusion of matter. An illustration is the functioning of a computer program. Computers are programmed through meanings: they operate according to the logical production of outputs on the basis of inputs, where both input and output are “significant,” as in the symbols one finds in binary code (namely, ones and zeros). The function of a computer program is one that is determined by meanings: each input is meaningful, and its meaning has consequences for the output, which is to say that they matter. But if we now analyze not the program but the computer itself, the realization of the program is embedded within a material entity; the program does not determine the material construction of the computer, and, indeed, what can halt the functioning of the program is a material defect in the computer itself – a broken fan can cause the program to cease to function. If we analyze human life in these terms, the simple rendering is that human life is
one in which both the meaningful and the material matter: our material relation to the world conditions the way in which we give it meaning, and the array of meanings developed shapes our material interaction with the world.

Where human life is distinct from the computer is thus in something that is philosophically complex but terminologically simple. The machinations of the computer are determined by the interplay between the physical laws that govern its matter and the logical laws that govern its processing, its production of outputs. But this interplay is a simple dynamic: it is ultimately a matter of sequencing. Proper physical functioning ensures proper processing, and processing will not interfere with the physical functioning unless it requires a rate of computation beyond what the hardware can withstand. In human life, however, the interplay between meaning and matter is far more complex. The word that illuminates the difference here is choice. When humans output meanings, they often do so not according to the dictates of laws but rather according to the dictates of deliberation and whim. Human meanings are subject to affect, to ways of responding that are not governed by program. Moreover, even where human meanings are the product of an attempt to follow the laws, to apply the rules in computational fashion, such endeavors remain subject to the vagaries of interpretation, to the possibility of confusion, and to the pressure to act on a decision before one has reached a proper conclusion. In short, then, we are dealing with something that can be expressed in a simple term: freedom.

b. Responsibility, Anguish, and Shame

It should follow that in a human world, even simple terms initiate complexities and troubles, and “freedom” is no exception. Human beings are free to interpret the meaning of
freedom, and, thus, much confusion may arise about its meaning. For our purposes, what freedom means is that one can choose. A consequence of this, as will come out in the course of the inquiry, is that freedom also means one must choose, for to “not choose” means to choose not to choose. It is true that freedom could also be given other meanings – it is very often conflated with what could be called “liberty” or with what could be called “license,” which mean, respectively, that one has an array of viable options or that one has an array of protected options. Liberty and license, though, are products of a social world: they depend upon a world of human beings who choose to make certain types of options available. Freedom, by contrast, occupies a more primary role in the dynamic of a human world, since freedom constitutes a condition for the possibility of liberty and license. Both liberty and license require somebody who can make choices and a world that chooses to provide them options; each would be unintelligible without freedom. But freedom is still intelligible where liberty and license are lacking.

This also implies that in speaking of freedom, we are not necessarily referring to what is termed by many “free will.” Definitions of the latter are myriad, but it is typical for them to take a position on the ability of the agent to act in such a way as to make elements of the world conform to her or his desires. But this is to speak of what we may call “success conditions” for an act, i.e., the question of whether an agent succeeds in making his or her intentions manifest. Freedom, for the purposes of this study, is not a matter of success conditions but rather merely sets the “attempt conditions,” as it were. Freedom means one can try to make one’s needs or desires manifest, but it is contingent whether one shall succeed or fail in the endeavor.

If freedom is so conceived, then its analytic counterpart is responsibility. Freedom means that what one does is meaningful. Responsibility enters the fray as the meaning of this meaning. I choose this over that on some basis; this basis is the meaning of my choice. Reflecting on that
basis, in turn, engenders consciousness of the meaning of my choice in relation to the meaning of other possible choices. Such reflection can yield, among other possibilities, the assessment that I acted *irresponsibly*. So, too, can such reflection be future-directed: what action would be most responsible? We note here that it does not follow that I *must* evaluate my acts in light of such considerations. Freedom does not require any particular reflection; otherwise, it would not be free. Yet nor does it follow that a human being can plausibly live a life without any reflection whatsoever on responsibility, particularly in light of the fact that such reflection may be undertaken indirectly. For instance, to desire something is to imply a responsibility regarding the fulfillment of that desire, and although this may often be so at times in the very weakest sense of responsibility, it is a form of responsibility nonetheless. To say that I’d like to have a beer this evening does not mean that I must, or that I really ought to, but it does imply the weak responsibility that in order for me to fulfill my desire, I need to procure a beer. That there are stronger senses of responsibility is undeniable – we have, for instance, *needs* that are stronger than mere desires. Yet there remains the problem that needs and desires refer to the prospective meaning of acts and that one is free to err, distort, or misrepresent the relation between an act and the fulfillment of needs and desires. The structure of fulfilling needs is one in which that which is needed is ultimately desired, and tragedy may follow insofar as one may regard a need as a desire like any other and hence fail to fulfill what one needs. So, too, may one treat what is merely desired as if it were truly needed; weak responsibilities may be lived as strong ones and vice versa.

These reflections suggest another layer of responsibility: a responsibility for evaluating what one regards as needed and/or desired, hence, a responsibility for reflecting on responsibility. Responsibilities conflict and one must assess how to proceed. To fail to undertake
such assessment is, ultimately, irresponsible. Again, though, human existence is such that it is free to be irresponsible. A crucial question thus arises: why would a human being want to be irresponsible? A simple response: responsibility can be painful. The fulfillment of needs is often arduous. That the failure to fulfill them is also painful is no salve for the pain of fulfilling them. The case is similar for the fulfillment of that which is merely desirable. To fulfill desires is frequently hard work. But to beg off such work, or to give up, or to malinger, or to feign indifference is to resign oneself to a desire unfulfilled, and the typical accompaniment to such resignation is some sort of pain. To seek to live a human life without pain of any sort thus seems, as is a cornerstone of Buddhist thought, entirely untenable. But here a further wrinkle merits consideration. Such pain is lived within a realm of meaning, though this is not to say that pain is immaterial. One can live with much pain because it is, ultimately, meaningful; the struggle and toil necessary for human achievements is meaningful in light of what is achieved, or even, at times, in light of the fact that it was worth trying to achieve even if one ultimately has failed.

Two problems persist, however. The first is that often times the pain I inflict cannot, ultimately be justified; I may find the harm of my acts to be without justification. The second is that there may be pains that can be explained and understood but that I nonetheless fail to accept. There are torments that persist in spite of the scales of justice being balanced, hauntings and traumas that could reasonably subside but nonetheless do not. There is the possibility of my doing right but being unable to shake the sense that I’ve done wrong. We may say that these two problems taken together suggest a distinct type of pain that we may, in the tradition of existential phenomenology, term anguish. To be free is to confront the reality of my freedom; because I may apprehend my freedom as a source of pain, then this pain of finding myself responsible for my pain – a pain in the second degree – is a typical form of anguish. The peculiar problem here
is that even in my apparent innocence I nonetheless may take myself to be guilty, and we may say that anguish refers to the meaning of this misplaced sense of guilt.

The use of “I” here points to what may appear a source of remediation. Anguish is a form of “aloneness” (Natanson, 1970: 14-5), that which I confront through my giving my acts a particular meaning (or, more to the point, through my having to give my acts meaning). A human world has a salve ready-to-hand: namely, others. As Søren Kierkegaard explored in Fear and Trembling (1983), one who acts out of ethical duty can be understood, and the understanding of others can relieve the anguish and anxiety of one’s acts. Through them, my acts take on a meaning, a weight, that I alone cannot provide them. A deep sacrifice I make now in order for a chance (but not guarantee) to improve my life years from now, for instance, may be tough to live with; but a similar sacrifice made in order to ensure the survival of a child may be more easily undertaken – it comes with a ready-made source of relief, even if this does not as such nullify the pain of the sacrifice. A problem remains, though, insofar as the choice of how to relate to others ultimately remains mine. To regard myself as needing to meet the demands for which others hold me accountable may, ultimately, be a cheap way of relieving my anguish: to do that which is mundane and conventional, to fulfill a socially-sanctioned set of duties, may be a way of evading my responsibility to erect a different sense of duty, to formulate a different set of duties, and, ultimately, to renounce those “duties” that have been imposed upon me wrongfully. In other words, if others are a source of relief for my anguish, I still confront the anguish of having to account for the possibility that I turn to them for an unearned and facile form of relief.

Indeed, the issue of others returns us to the matter of constitution, for it is I who constitute my relation to others but it is others whose constitution of me precedes my acts of constitution. The “me” that I confront has already been produced and given meaning by others
who have named and situated me prior to my acts, and though my acts in turn may re-situate and even re-name myself, they do so by constituting (and/or re-constituting) relations with others who in turn re-constitute me. As with freedom and responsibility, we note that such relations persist whether they become an object of active contemplation or not. Quotidian reality is shaped by many such acts: I daily engage a world in acts that are made intelligible by others, and their intelligibility to others in turn constitutes my situation, setting the course for another round of acts, and so on. Consider, for instance, what it takes for a driver or even pedestrian to navigate traffic: the intelligibility of one’s acts point, ultimately, to a world of shared meanings. My acts are meaningful to me and they are meaningful to others. At times, disconnects may persist, not only between myself and others but also amongst the others. But the nature of such disconnects is that agents may endeavor to resolve them; meanings that are not yet shared can become so, and, again, the grounds for such endeavors are preceded by systems of meaning – language, symbols, conventions, etc. – through which common ground can be achieved.

A peculiar mode of such constitution comes to the fore in what can be termed shame. In shame, I apprehend the “me” that others apprehend – that is, to paraphrase Jean-Paul Sartre, in shame I see myself being seen (Sartre, 1992: 301–3, 350–2). Shame, in that sense, can be understood as a peculiarly social form of anguish: it is a reflection on the meaning of this “me” for which I am responsible. Were our concern here one of probabilistic empirical psychology, we could state what often or generally happens when one reports an emotional experience of shame. But if we limit ourselves to the philosophical question of shame from the vantage of existential phenomenology, then we must account for the fact that shame is experienced by a freedom – that is, my response to shame is not determined in advance but is rather contingent. I am my shame and I am its manifestations – it is not that which bears down upon me from the outside and
makes me do this or that but rather that which I choose. After all, I can fail to see that I have been seen (as conventional language would have it, I can choose to “be shameless” or “act shamelessly”), or, having seen myself seen, I may seek to repress the seeing, either by convincing myself that what I saw not a reflection of me or by convincing myself that I hadn’t seen it at all. In short, shame points to the anguish of my having to give meaning to the meaning that my acts and presence have for others.

As such, it is worth noting that the key terms used here, “anguish” and “shame,” appear to have a peculiar and unconventional meaning once subjected to phenomenological scrutiny. In conventional usage, anguish is a form of pain and shame a form of acute discomfort; they are to be avoided. Yet we have also noted that a life devoid of pain may not be realistic and, even further, we may call the desirability of a pain-free life into question, for, among other things, a pain-free life might have to be lived beyond the bounds of desire and hence would be one for which desirability would be an analytically irrelevant criterion. If anguish and shame are taken to be ontologically descriptive and normatively neutral terms, then they may take on another meaning. Anguish is the inescapable existential condition that, whatever my choices, these choices exist in relation to responsibilities and I am responsible for those responsibilities through which I give my choices meaning. Shame is the inescapable existential condition that my acts have meaning for others and that I may not be able to entirely evade the evidence of the meanings thereby engendered. But need I have a negative attitude toward anguish and shame? If the condition of my existence is that I live freely in a human world – a freedom, again, that means not the absence of burden but rather the burden of making my presence meaningful – then the meaning of my anguish and my shame are, in the end, up to me – or, at least, they are up to us insofar as who I am is already a matter of co-constitution. In other words, I may be free to
deprive anguish and shame of the pain that they would at first appear to portend. If I am free to constitute their meaning, then ultimately it would be irresponsible for me to dread anguish and shame as if their meaning were fixed.

c. Maturity in a World as Responsibility for the World

The argument of this work begins with the reality that a human world is one that is lived existentially. That is to say, a human being is a being insofar as it lives the question of its essence, rather than a being whose essence determines it in advance. This is not to say that a human life is one of unlimited and unconstrained choice: we have to account for what in existential phenomenology is termed facticity, those elements of an existence that precede choice and that set constraints upon what can be achieved. But even the most rigid of constraints still leave open the question of the attitude with which one shall regard them, even if at the extremes there are forms of intoxication or psychological domination that reduce such attitudinal choice to only the faintest of glimmers. But if human reality is in this sense existential, then it means that one lives with the product of past choices. To perdure in a human world is thus to generate an expansion of responsibilities, insofar as with each choice I further constitute the set of meanings relevant to those choices to come. That is to say, to continue to exist is to continue to add to that for which I can be held to account, by others as well as by myself.

On this account, it can be said that maturity is an existential choice insofar as it is a matter of how I relate to an encounter with an expansion of responsibilities. To encounter my responsibilities, we have seen, is phenomenologically to experience anguish, and to encounter them in the modality of accountability – which implies a responsibility to others, or at least to
some form of an alter ego – is to experience shame. Anguish and shame may stimulate immaturity, which is an effort to respond to an expansion of responsibility by trying to make it go away – to disavow, repress, or mock one’s responsibilities rather than taking them seriously. To choose maturity, by contrast, would require that one respond to a radical expansion in responsibility without seeking to make it go away. A consequence is that maturity may require one to become comfortable with anguish and shame, though not to the point that one is rid of them – that is to say, to be without anguish is to take oneself as not responsible, and to be shameless is to take oneself to be unaccountable. What is meant here by “comfortable” thus requires refinement, insofar as it would not signal the absence of discomfort – since that would amount to the eradication of anguish and shame – but rather the project of making it possible to live with oneself in spite of the impossibility of one’s being perfect. Maturity comes to the fore as a possibility in an existence that confronts a radical expansion of responsibility, and the fulfillment of this possibility would come not through the ultimately unattainable ideal of successful fulfillment of all responsibilities but rather through the project of trying to meet one’s responsibilities without wishing them away.

One way to say this would be that maturity comes about because of an existential condition of infinite responsibility. This requires clarification, though, insofar as not all infinities are identical. Maturity confronts infinite responsibility insofar as each choice creates the conditions of meaning for future choices and the re-constitution of meaning for past choices; the freedom to choose means that the responsibilities lying at the secondary and tertiary dimensions of meaning are subject to incalculable permutations. In short, the significance of an act is never finitely known at the moment of acting; my responsibilities transcend those meanings that I could consciously reflect upon, and even the question of how much to reflect upon, of how long
to deliberate, remains a matter of debate for which I am responsible, and an infinite regress presents itself were we to ask about how long to deliberate upon the deliberation, and so on. In short, the possible meanings of my acts are limitless. Yet this statement is not without its limitations. The notion of facticity can be invoked here, suggesting that though my choices are limited, they nonetheless occur in situations through which the range of viable options is limited. Such limits are, we have seen, a product of a human world of which I am part, and the infinitude suggested by my ability to generate meanings through my acts finds its dialectical counterpart in the finitude through which my acts seem to reproduce those structures of meaning that precede and constitute them. This latter we have already named, for it is “the world.” The world constitutes the finitude that, paradoxically, establishes the grounds of my infinite responsibility.

The world, we may say, is a well-formed formula only at a second-order of analysis. At the first order, because the world is that which I make and that which we make, its meaning remains not only contingent but open, a parenthetical introduced but not concluded. At the second order, the world’s finitude may be alluded to, but such allusion need not resolve its paradoxical nature; it can be put in brackets or quotations, but inside it remains an incomplete set of parentheses, which is to say, not a set of parentheses at all.

Such is the nature of the already stated claim that maturity in a human world is manifest through taking responsibility for a human world. Immaturity amounts to an attitude in which, ultimately, the world is not my problem. Maturity, by contrast, cannot rid itself of the burdensome world. It does not follow, though, that maturity consists in rendering the world unproblematic, that is, in having solved the world’s problems. The tragedy of maturity is that one cannot achieve it without setting forth new problems; the mature agent may set out to solve the problems of the world that precede it, but in so doing mature agency nonetheless constitutes the
problemas del mundo futuro. Que los problemas del futuro sean menos que los problemas que preceden implica que uno no debe tomar la opinión de que la madurez es un valor absurdo; el progreso, en cambio, es posible. Pero que el progreso es posible no implica necesariamente la imposibilidad del regreso ni la posibilidad de la perfección, es decir, que la erradicación de los problemas humanos no es posible

Este sugiere que nuestras reflexiones sobre colonialismo en esta introducción no tienen un interés meramente metodológico. El colonialismo europeo presenta una peculiar relación con la idea de mundo aquí expresada. Es y ha sido un tipo de dominio que se ha propuesto conquistar todo el planeta, y a su vez, la totalidad del ser humano de lo que estamos conscientes. Es decir, estamos hablando de un colonialismo que se entrelaza con la dominación global y la dominación del mundo. Como "dominación del mundo," no se preocupa únicamente con la conquista y organización del territorio, sino también con la constitución del horizonte de los pensamientos humanos, el límite de las responsabilidades en lo que es significativo. Europa ha buscado, en resumen, hacerse tanto creador del mundo como horizonte. Una consecuencia de esta formulación, desde un punto de vista existencial fenomenológico, es que el colonialismo construye un mundo en el que Europa puede ser sin vergüenza y el resto del mundo debería sentirse avergonzado en su huella.

En *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire examina las afirmaciones de Roger Caillois, cuyo apología sobre el colonialismo se basa en la idea de que establecer la igualdad de todos los seres humanos en principio no significa que sean iguales en hecho. Algunos son más fuertes que otros, y los fuertes, Caillois sostiene, no adquieren más derechos, pero adquieren más deberes; "confieren a los fuertes tareas adicionales y una mayor responsabilidad." Césaire’s respuesta:

Adicionales tareas? ¿Qué son, si no son las tareas de gobernar el mundo?
Increased responsibility? What is it, if not responsibility for the world? (Césaire, 2000: 73)

The contention of this study is that we would be naïve to take decolonization to mean that one ought to reject the formulation of increased responsibility. The error of Euro-modern efforts to take “responsibility for the world” is in the fallacy that this implies nullifying others’ responsibility for the world. Colonialism on this model, though, is ultimately immature: it seeks to alleviate the anguish of responsibility for the world by making Europe confident *a priori* that Europe has what the world needs, and, indeed, that whatever Europe does to “provide” itself is, ultimately, justifiable. Hence, Europe may, as Fanon stated, go to every corner of the world, massacring human beings, on the grounds that what the massacred needed was the presence of Europeans. Ironically, then, Europe’s formulation of responsibility for the world has been one that has sought to relieve itself of the shame and anguish such a project should portend by depriving the world of its worldliness – that is, by eliminating people and peoples, both materially through acts of genocide and bondage as well as at the level of significance by removing them as sources of meaning and judgment. What Callois defends, then, is not European responsibility but rather European license. Euro-modern colonialism is immature, and not because there was a mature variant that they failed to discover but rather because colonialism is an immature response to the problem of responsibility for the world (if, indeed, it can be seen as a response to that problem at all; colonialism’s motives, despite M. Caillois’ contentions, almost certainly lie elsewhere).

The justificatory structures erected by colonialism take its duties to be self-evident, ready-made features of the world. It is the world, they assert, that demands colonization, regardless of what the world’s peoples have to say about it. In existential terms, this is an instance of the spirit of seriousness, an effort to evade anguish by regarding one’s acts as
determined by unassailable conceptions of right and duty. A consequence of such seriousness is that one ultimately becomes shameless, for the disapproving gaze of an onlooker is taken to be nullified by the comfort of an asserted obligation, constructed out of abstract desires but shrouded in the illusion of concrete needs.

In the existential phenomenological tradition, the antidote to the spirit of seriousness is play. In play, I encounter the anguish of responsibility for my acts, but I make of it a positive: they are, in the end, my acts, and my freedom to choose them is emancipatory rather than cumbersome. A problem, though, is that for many the notion of play devolves into a form of license: the spirit of seriousness enters through the backdoor by establishing that one has a right to play, and that this right cannot be assailed. Ultimately, a spirit of play nullifies concrete responsibilities by making them secondary to the abstract right/duty to do as one chooses. This would seem to suggest an existential paradox, insofar as one could not exit the spirit of seriousness without committing to play, but the commitment to play would seem to be a serious one. The contention of this work is that maturity emerges as a possible resolution to this quandary, that maturity lies between the ready-made duties of the spirit of seriousness and the asserted license that characterizes a life of play. Maturity, in short, involves taking responsibilities seriously without a collapse into the spirit of seriousness.

IV. Itinerary

How is it possible to strike such a precarious balance? The rest of this study will seek to demonstrate this by exploring three realms of human existence for which the radical expansion of responsibility here at issue can be made evident: reason, action, and knowledge of a human
world. In each case, this volume will endeavor to illustrate why the given domain raises the problem of a root expansion in responsibility – a myriad of sources of shame and anguish, of stimuli to immaturity – and to sketch what mature responses may entail. We will then devote a final chapter to a broader reflection on the question of whether and how maturity can be chosen.

The content of the claims made thus far suggest that the present study could not, and need not, be perfect. Maturity does not imply perfection, that all of our acts will, at some later time or from some ideal perspective, be worthy of complete approbation. Maturity may paradoxically require misguided and erroneous acts, ones that constitute the conditions under which maturation may occur. Maturity means I am responsible for giving these missteps meaning, in short, for having ironically produced valuable mistakes. Maturity is compatible with misadventures, even if to pursue maturity means that one cannot simply be content with one’s follies. This work will seek to demonstrate that maturity is an ideal that is not realized through perfect application of or adherence to a given set of rules, values, or procedures. Mature reason, it will be argued, demands transcending rationality; mature action, likewise, involves a transcendence of merely acting well; mature human sciences call both for the elaboration of rigorous disciplines and for the suspension of rigorous disciplines. That the endeavor may ultimately prove erroneous or misguided is the danger it must incur. But we may proceed on the hope that, through the efforts of both author and audience, whatever mistakes emerge may yet prove valuable.
Chapter 1:

Mature Reason

A human world is saturated with responsibility, with freedom and its implicit imperatives of meaning and value. Adult life in such a world involves the intensification of this saturation. Indeed, it raises even the question of responsibility for such saturation, as human beings make choices that will contract or expand the set of responsibilities facing themselves, their peers, and generations to come. An adult is responsible for incurring and having incurred responsibilities. To encounter such responsibility is, of course, to confront the question of what ought to be done. Reason here comes to the fore as a prime (though by no means sole) mechanism through which human beings confront this question. If maturity in a human world requires rising to the occasion of adult responsibilities, and, hence, overcoming the desire to evade anguish, then it seems to follow that such maturity may call for reason. So, too, may it call for mature reason.

The structure of the responsibility that reason confronts, as suggested by the exploration in the introduction, is infinite. To understand one’s responsibilities by apprehending one’s situation and imagining one’s possible choices is an infinite task, for the range of possible choices transcends the finite range of options present for choosing (L.R. Gordon, 2000a: 76–7). Reason thus occupies a troubling position in human existence. Reason is a source, in short, of resolution. Through reason, I resolve questions, including questions of what to do and of what and how to choose. Resolve means a fixedness or firmness; it is a product of having reached a conclusion or at least of having concluded that one ought to regard a particular answer as if it
were sufficiently conclusive. Yet etymologically, resolution traces back to terms meaning to loosen, relax, and release. Resolution is a product, as it were, of letting go of certain questions and concerns in order to regard certain answers and suggestions as worthy of adoption. The issue of constitution discussed previously here returns, for reason would seem to reach resolution by way of encountering questions and concerns that precede it and giving them meanings through which they may ultimately be rendered either insignificant – worthy of putting aside or letting go – or fixed in their significance, that is, necessitating this or that conclusion or course of action. Where this implies a troubling or problematic set of questions is that reason would seem capable of entertaining an infinite range of considerations; to reach resolution is not only to conclude the lines of inquiry constituted as meaningful but to imply that those lines of inquiry that remain unpursued need not, for present purposes, be considered.

As a quotidian matter, the infinity of the task need not prove troublesome. Simply put, reason generally has its work cut out for it, which colloquially suggests the arduousness of its tasks but in a slightly more literal meaning suggests at least some relief from the anguish of having to figure out precisely what work one ought to undertake. That is to say, everyday modes of reason may not require one to reflect on what one needs reason to accomplish; the criteria for the successful performance of acts of reasoning are, as it were, presupposed. In phenomenological terms, this is reason in the natural attitude. Such reason holds itself accountable for procedures and ideals that are taken as settled and resolved. But what of responsibility for settling and resolving these quotidian norms of accountability, and even for exploring the question of how one settles and resolves them? Reason that confronts these questions faces an expansion of responsibility; it may encounter the anguish of having to account for why it reasons as it does. Our overall thematic would suggest that, in the face of such
anguish, immature options are present to reason through the choice of avenues of evasion. Reason may face expansive responsibilities but, having faced them, choose to turn away. What need reason do in order to overcome this temptation to evade?

Mature reason, I will argue, is realized through projects that realize the expansion of reason’s responsibilities. Such projects, I contend, demand a peculiar relationship to rationality. The simple reason is that rationality puts forth a structure of accountability; it constitutes reason’s tasks by holding them accountable to a telos or array of teleological forms. Yet reason’s maturity demands that it be able to account for that to which it holds itself accountable, and an intra-rational accounting leaves the problematic remainder of not having accounted for the choice of rationality – in other words, rationality may be insufficient to provide and justify its telos. Rationality, as such, presents the implicit possibility of evading reason’s responsibility for justifying itself, and may as well present an implicit tendency toward such evasion. To realize the expansion of reason’s responsibilities, then, may require reason’s project of going beyond rationality. This we may thematize in terms of mature reason demanding a *teleological suspension of rationality*. By this, I mean not the claim that mature reason requires a rejection of rationality or even its suspension in general. Rather, the suspension is teleological insofar as mature reason generally requires a capacity for rationality and projects of rationality, but also requires specialized projects of critically assessing rationality as well as modes of imagination through which reason may transcend rationality. Rationality, I will contend, can be understood as reason in a serious mode. A collapse of reason into mere rationality, in these terms, is a project of the spirit of seriousness and amounts to immaturity. The mere achievement of rationality, then, cannot serve as the final telos toward which mature reason aims. Mature reason is responsible for taking rationality seriously without a collapse into rationality alone.
We will proceed first by examining forms of immaturity that emerge through reason’s abdication of or failure to meet its responsibilities for auto-critical assessment. We will do this through a thematic reading of Immanuel Kant’s well-known essay on enlightenment as antidote to immaturity and then develop this thematic through an analysis of the animating concerns behind his *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. We will then move on to an attempt at diagnosis: what stimulates such evasions of reason’s critical responsibilities? We will do this through primarily through an examination of Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential phenomenological treatment of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness*. The upshot is that reason, in order to overcome implicit tendencies toward evasion, must choose responsibly in the face of anguish. We will then explore directly how this problematizes rationality by turning to the existential problem of the spirit of seriousness and the possibilities for transcending it. We will do this through an examination of Sartre’s and Simone de Beauvoir’s accounts of seriousness in light of the problems that bear upon reason as an existential project, attempting thereby to offer an account of reason that takes rationality seriously without devolving into the immature options provided by spirits of seriousness.

I. From Immaturity to Critique

   a. The Problem of Self-incurred Irresponsibility

   “Immaturity,” Immanuel Kant argued, “is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another” (Kant, 1991: 54). This immaturity is “self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another” (54). Enlightenment, for Kant, is the antidote to self-incurred immaturity: courageously to use one’s own understanding.
Is Kant’s description adequate to our task? Much hinges here on what is meant by “guidance.” One reading is that immaturity is simply excessive deference to authority: one imposes one’s own immaturity by permitting others to dictate one’s understanding. At issue, then, is permitting one’s reason to be dominated by others. There are, Kant points out, those who seek to profit by providing false answers and beliefs. If others accept them as “guides,” they can benefit not only from the false beliefs of others but also from the fact that the acceptance of their glib answers will stifle further investigations and propagate ignorance. Self-incurred immaturity, then, involves letting others do the reasoning for you, and brings with it all the dangers of deferred responsibility.

Guidance, though, is not the same thing as acquiescence to domination. A teacher guides a student; is it immature to seek to be taught? For one who does not know much, it would appear to be just the opposite: it would be a sign of immaturity to refuse to be taught. Of course, if maturity consisted only in mastering a given and complete body of knowledge, at a superficial level the fact that someone had ceased to learn could appear to be evidence of that person’s having matured. But this would not be the deciding evidence, for what matters is evidence of mastery attained, not evidence of a pursuit no longer undertaken. Even were one to have mastered the finite body of knowledge, maturity would be defined in terms of such mastery rather than in terms of indifference to further knowledge. All of this appears moot, though, as knowledge in a human world may be such that one cannot master a body of knowledge without pushing beyond the confines of what at first appears given; if there is always more to learn, then maturity may require that one never cease to pursue that which may lead one to further knowledge.
Indeed, if maturity simply means refusal to be guided, we face curious questions about Kant’s role in the proceedings, questions that would implicate philosophy and even reason itself more generally. Kant made the argument in a short essay for the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, and his response famously defended the importance of a free press for enlightenment. One presumes the readers of this monthly did not need Kant’s guidance on the question of the importance of a free press and the rational civic dialogue it engenders. One can, of course, imagine the essay being circulated amongst those who reject the importance of the press, or rational dialogue, or civic engagement, etc. Such people could well be immature prior to reading Kant’s argument, and were they to remain dissuaded because, for instance, their obedience to a particular religious authority brings them to simply reject Kant’s argument, it is fair to apply the Kantian verdict that this audience is immature: it defers judgment to the reasoning of another. But what of those who disagree at the outset and come to agree? Are they guided by Kant and hence immature, or are they merely persuaded by Kant – and is this persuasion evidence of their maturity?

To conclude that “If Kant thinks it’s true, then I think it’s true,” is an immature use of the understanding, for even if one has good reasons for choosing Kant as a guide, one here denies responsibility for the evaluation of the guidance in question; it implies a cowardice vis-à-vis the evaluation of Kant’s reasoning. More mature would be this sentiment: “If I think it’s false but learn Kant thought it true, learning of Kant’s position should prompt me to reconsider my own.” Here Kant guides one not to acceptance of a conclusion but rather to a search for evidence and a project of evaluation. To be guided to evidence is to remain responsible for the use of one’s own understanding to evaluate the evidence – and, indeed, in many cases, the retention of such responsibility may be necessary to perceive some evidence at all.
Perhaps, then, what is at issue in terms of guidance amounts, ultimately, to being responsible for evaluating one’s guides and the guidance they impart. From a mature perspective, no guide has the final authority to chart the course. Immaturity may then amount to blind faith in one’s guides. Such immaturity, of course, could come from not having yet developed the skills through which to assess how one has been guided. But one who has learned methods for scrutinizing guidance is another matter: failing to apply these skills begets self-incurred immaturity, which we may now summarize as an evasion of responsibility for how one is guided.

The existential phenomenological term for evasion of responsibility is *bad faith* (or *mauvaise foi*). Jean-Paul Sartre characterized bad faith as a “determined attitude which is essential to human reality” (Sartre, 1956: 87), an effort to subvert undesirable knowledge in favor of a pleasing falsehood. The Kantian notion of self-incurred immaturity would seem to be just this, a lie to oneself in which I regard my responsibility to think as having been exhausted through my choice of an adequate guide. Such immaturity insists it need reason no further. An adult sense of responsibility, though, may be such that one ought never to be satisfied with one’s reasoning heretofore; to pass the buck, or to content oneself by asserting the adequacy of one’s investigations to date, suggests a reluctance to confront adult responsibility. As Lewis Gordon puts it, “Both Kant and Sartre are urging humanity to grow up” (L.R. Gordon, 1995a: 86).

For both Kant and Sartre, the roots of such evasion can be understood philosophically; for them, to understand responsibility is also to understand why it can be evaded. Sartre’s formulation of bad faith, we shall see, is not an anthropological claim or a perspective on human psychology (though it may have significant implications for anthropology and psychology), but rather derives from a phenomenological account of being and freedom. Before we turn to Sartre’s account, though, let us first examine two interrelated sets of problems through a Kantian
lens. The first concerns reason’s need to assess itself through critique. The second concerns the relationship between responsibility, being, and freedom.

b. Critical Responsibility in the Face of Immature Reason

Freedom involves choice: the condition for freedom, in its most basic sense, is that there are some acts that have been undertaken but that could have been otherwise. “Being” is a somewhat simple matter if choice is not involved: what is merely is, for it could not be otherwise. Freedom, though, raises the issue of not having to be what one is. The issue was a crucial one for Kant, who sought to articulate both a metaphysics of morals – that is, a philosophical demonstration of what a free being ought to do – and a metaphysics of nature that would establish the grounds for the scientific formulation of natural laws. The conflict: if the laws of physics applied universally to all beings, wouldn’t human choice be off the table and freedom merely an illusion? The Kantian response flipped the problem on its head: freedom was, in essence, asserted as a given of the reality that reason confronts – an a priori that the very process of deliberation must presuppose (Kant, 2002: 4-7). Deterministic natural laws formulated through reason, by contrast, were thus held to derive from (and be applicable to) merely the appearances of things, as present through a unity of consciousness, rather than from their reality as such (Kant, 2007: 141-50). On this picture, a human being has the phenomenal appearance of a physical thing in a universe of determined causal relations between objects, but the noumenal reality of freedom, choice, and responsibility.⁵ Hence, the moral law could hold the agent to

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account for what appears impossible according to the natural law (Kant, 2002: 30–1, 49, 63, 89–94).

Kant thus “found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith” (Kant, 2007: 29). Amidst a crisis of “indifferentism” (Kant, 2007: 8), Kant envisioned his metaphysical position as grounding both the sciences and moral philosophy against the charge that their foundations were arbitrary, and his response could be thematized as an effort toward the displacement of knowledge by way of demonstrating the philosophical legitimacy of certain strands of faith. Namely, Kant’s critical project could be taken as seeking to legitimize three modes of faith in particular: first, faith in the relevance of moral claims to practical reason; second, faith in the meaningfulness and usefulness of natural scientific inquiry; and third, faith in the effectiveness of philosophy, conceived by Kant as an endeavor of “pure reason” and thus reason unencumbered by empirical claims. His Critique of Pure Reason, thus, was “of” pure reason in a dual sense: it was, in short, a philosophical justification of philosophical justification, for which pure reason would be both the method and the object of inquiry. Rather than subordinating philosophy to a minor role as subfield within the sciences, this would place philosophy as a crucial source of legitimacy for the sciences. In doing so, it would seek to ground faith in scientific inquiry as well as set the stage for subsequent critiques that would ground faith in moral reasoning.

The “indifferentism” that Kant took aim at was, in brief, a species of the self-incurred immaturity against which Kant regarded Enlightenment as antidote. Indifferentism posited the notion, in short, that no faith is any more valid than any other. Faith that scientific inquiry yields knowledge would thus be no more valid than faith that it does not, faith that reason grounds justifiable beliefs would be no more valid than faith that reason could not, and so on. A clear
problem: if indifferentism is to be regarded as a reasonable argument, it must presuppose, at least in some fashion and to some degree, the legitimacy of reason. Otherwise, if indifferentism is merely an article of faith, then the belief in the truth of such faith would, according to that very belief, be no better than the belief in the falsity of such faith. Hence, indifferentism cannot escape performative contradiction. Kant then points us to the structure of the contention itself: reason. There is no argument beyond reason; to argue is to be within reason’s domain. This does not mean that arguments cannot attempt to displace reason: for instance, one can argue that it would be wise to cut off deliberation and simply make a decision, or that it would be advisable to attempt to take a break from reasoning. But such arguments appeal to criteria that are, in principle, of reason rather than beyond it. To argue for a total suspension of reason is, in essence, an effort at deception. It would be an act of reason through which the audience is supposed to accept the inadequacy of reason. The audience would, in short, be called upon to reasonably choose to accept the guidance of one who calls for an abandonment of reason. Having accepted some basic tenet of reason, though, the audience would in effect be taking the immature stance that one cannot be held responsible for the coherence of one’s reasoned conclusions; one would accept the guidance of another reasoner’s conclusion despite the absurdity this would imply were it to be evaluated in light of the premises upon which one accepted such guidance.

The indifferentist thus makes an error similar to that of the skeptic. The skeptic asserts: “I know that it is impossible to know.” We may thematize this in terms of immaturity insofar as positing its first part (“I know that…”) implies an evasion of its responsibility to the consequences of the second part: the impossibility of knowledge implies the impossibility of knowing that impossibility. The skeptic may resort to a weaker formulation: “I doubt that knowledge is possible,” but this may be untenable if the notion of doubt conceptually
presupposes the notion of knowledge, as Charles Sanders Peirce’s argument in “The Fixation of Belief” suggests (Peirce, 1955: 5–22). A weaker formulation – “It is good to doubt everything,” – is more tenable, at least because such a claim implies its self-applicability, though such a formulation would stop short of affirming the necessity or force of doubt in all instances. In light of these matters, Kant affirmed a skeptical method for transcendental philosophy, in which all claims merit scrutiny, but skepticism as such ought to be rejected (Kant, 2007: 395–6).

Hence, Kant was on firm grounds in showing the weakness of positions expressing skepticism about the possibility of the natural sciences. If science is an activity necessarily inclusive of reason – for science is not merely the collection of data but also its interpretation, and even to collect data is to take seriously certain ideas about what constitutes data and what could constitute its collection – then one can find grounding for science not merely in the phenomena to be studied but as well in an exploration of the method of study. For Kant, then, a Copernican revolution in reverse (2007: 22–6) could elucidate the transcendental conditions of possibility for a study of the natural world, not by focusing on those dimensions of the natural world that lent themselves to study but by studying “study” itself. Science, such inquiry reveals, has to presume more about the possibility of inquiry than it has to presuppose about the object of scientific inquiry. To understand nature, one could, in principle, refine one’s method to the point of presupposing nothing about what is present in “nature,” or perhaps even about what “nature” is altogether. Nonetheless, one may still have to presuppose some elements of the meaningfulness or at least practical possibility of “understanding,” “method,” “presupposition,” and so on.

Given this, inquiry is faced with the problem that its validity would require that it cannot, in essence, assert that inquiry itself is any less real than those phenomena into which it inquires.
To suppose “nature” to be more *real* than “natural scientific inquiry” is folly; though the latter can be mistaken about the former, it would only be in error that the latter would come to a conclusion about the former that implied the unreality of the latter. Even if the scientist must imagine what is not real (e.g., a hypothesis) in order to apprehend the reality of nature, the key insight is not that the scientist is thereby unrealistic but rather that the scientific imagination is capable of comprehending not only the real but the unreal as well (and, we may add, the “irreal” insofar as imagination may posit that which is not yet real but that could come to fruition, as well as that which is unknown but that could come to be known). In other words, if it is granted that materiality is real, it does not follow that all else is merely imaginary. Materialism as the idea that all is *merely* material poses distinct problems, and, as Sartre seeks to demonstrate in his *Search for a Method* (1968) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1991), the consequence of such a position is to render materialism a species of idealism, even as idealism is that which materialism regards as its antithesis. In contrast, if, as Peter Caws (1988: 237–252) maintains, materialism means merely that materiality is an *essential* feature of reality (or at least an essential feature of “our” reality), then materiality need not exhaust reality. If the material is essential, then an idea can only manifest through material realities – human bodies that conceive them, texts that relate them, readers of those texts that reproduce their meanings, etc. – but this does not imply that there is nothing of ideas that transcends materiality. If one were to take the natural sciences as the ultimate arbiter of what is real, and if the natural sciences define reality exclusively through the material, then one may end up with the puzzling metaphysical conclusion that the natural sciences demonstrate that the natural sciences are merely an imaginary construct and not real in the slightest.
These considerations point us to why *Critique of Pure Reason* would put forth its most memorably radical proposition, Kant’s position on the metaphysical distinction between noumenon and phenomenon. The reality of the inquiry itself needs to be given its due while still allowing for the bracketing of such reality within the methodological strictures that guide the inquiry. Questions of method require resolution that cannot presuppose the results of the inquiry without raising the problem of circularity. To examine method means to examine it on its terms, rather than to examine it by the application of the method to the method. Phenomena, in that sense, can be understood as that which scientific method apprehends, but the scientist need not examine the method itself as simply one among many objects of scientific inquiry. Accounting for the noumenal is, as it were, a prior *metaphysical* question, even if scientific inquiry can be undertaken and even make progress without all scientists reflecting critically on the methods employed. Inquiry into noumena may bracket phenomena, and inquiry into phenomena may bracket noumena. Physics, for instance, may need to bracket and interrogate the claims, say, that there is phlogiston or ether; that there are particles or waves; or that even the notion of an “object” is meaningful and coherent. Physics begins with methods appropriate for these examinations. But can physics equally bracket and interrogate the claim that physics is a form of inquiry, or that there may be a meaningful and coherent notion of “inquiry” at all? Certainly, physicists may perform such an operation, but it is not obvious that physics itself can (or must) do so; physicists who raise these questions, we may say, are simply suspending the practice of physics in order to engage reflectively – they displace physics, if temporarily, to explore metaphysics. On the Kantian picture, then, the activity of physics takes phenomena as its objects, while the critical reflection of physicists on physics may require the examination of noumena.
The familiar trouble with such a schema is that it leaves the noumenal as that which is unverifiable; why hew to the metaphysical assertion of the noumenon if one could never prove its reality? But this need not be regarded as a problem, for the simple reason that the very matter being addressed is that “proof” so imagined would not be appropriate for noumena. Noumena, in short, are unknowable. Nuance is called for, though, as unknowability as such does not imply that they may not be made intelligible or that they cannot constitute the object of some sort of inquiry. If the project of knowability is bracketed for such inquiry, then such inquiry must proceed on other grounds. These grounds are explicable in terms of regarding noumena as objects of faith. Here it needs clarifying that noumena refer not to that in which one has faith but rather to that in which faith is warranted. To study the natural world presupposes some degree of faith in the endeavor of “study,” and such faith is, for example, more warranted than would be faith that whatever one has thus far observed must be isomorphic with the world as it really is. In other words, one can have faith in projects of induction without having faith in one’s inductive conclusions thus far. “Faith in knowability” seems a fortuitous complement of knowledge proper, and the intelligibility of the latter may require the presence of the former. It is better for one who knows to also have faith that one can know, though this does not entail that one ought to have faith that one does know this or that.

That such faith may not be explicable through the natural sciences impugns neither the faith nor those sciences. Where the problem of immaturity arises, then, is in sciences that regard themselves as legitimate on the grounds of discoveries they’ve made rather than on the grounds of the legitimacy of their methods, or in sciences that assert their own legitimacy but also the illegitimacy of efforts to evaluate the legitimacy of scientific methods, or in forms of faith that regard themselves as warranting the rejection of the sciences on the grounds that, as an “act of
faith,” such rejection would be no different than the acts of faith that ground the sciences. These
amount to evasions of the responsibility to evaluate one’s claims. Forms of study that take
themselves as needing no justificatory grounding – inquiries grounded in an indifference to
metaphysical foundations – ultimately manifest an immature abdication of responsibility.

Kant suggests that a critique of reason – in which reason transcends itself in order to
discover its foundations and laws – is the antidote; critique of reason is what mature reason
demands. A “matured judgment,” Kant contends, calls for “reason to undertake anew the most
difficult of all its tasks, namely that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will
assure to reason its lawful claims” (Kant, 2007: 9). This tribunal, which for Kant was precisely a
critique of pure reason, was a third step in the maturation of reason. The first was a naïve and
dogmatic postulation, the second step a skeptical examination of belief in light of experience.
“But the third step, such as can be taken only by fully matured judgment … is now necessary,
namely, to subject to examination, not the facts of reason, but reason itself, in the whole extent of
its powers” (Kant, 2007: 607). We note that the structure of such a tribunal would require, in a
word, evidence. If reason is that which must be made evident to reason, then trouble may emerge
in light of a simple matter about reason: namely, that it is a product of freedom.

c. The Problem of Freedom’s Evidentiality

“Reason,” Kant argues, “acts freely; it is not dynamically determined in the chain of
natural causes” (Kant, 2007: 476). A problem, though: for Kant, we have a distinction between
that which is apparent and phenomenal and that which is not apparent and hence noumenal.
Freedom, we have it, is noumenal. A critique of freedom requires making freedom evident. Yet what is there of evidence if we are concerned with that which is not apparent?

To begin to address this question, let us return to Kant’s notion of denying knowledge in order to make room for faith. Suppose such faith to be a subset of belief. Faith is a belief that persists in spite of not knowing that that belief is true, which implies further that faith requires that one knows that one does not know the belief to be true (although, as our discussion of Sartre will show, faith may be compatible with knowledge that one’s belief is false). What is the source of this persistence? One option would be that one has been determined by some essential feature to have this belief: whether by divine intervention, the essence of one’s biological structure, or the intervention of some less-than-divine but still determinative force, one could not possibly believe otherwise. But if “believing otherwise” is conceptually impossible, are we now speaking of belief? We would be in the presence of the indubitable, and Peirce’s explorations noted above suggest that we are now not dealing with belief proper but with something else. An entity that must regard a proposition as true is, we may say, experiencing something other than belief and hence something other than faith. Certainly, if we are to speak of the natural scientist, there would be a problem with asserting that she is one who must regard as true the possibility of gaining knowledge through such inquiry; could not she instead at least entertain metaphysical doubts at certain intervals, even if she then proceeds to continue her scientific inquiries? A second option, then, is that faith is, in short, a product of choice: one chooses to believe that which one knows one does not know.

Suppose then, like the Newtonian physicists Kant had in mind, I should like to explain the lawful relationship between all physical entities in the universe. Simply put, there is something about the reality of my choice that is known prior to the verification of any of my
hypotheses about physical reality. If I arrive at the conclusion that it would have been impossible for me to have conducted this study at all, then it would seem I have simply failed, for my conclusion is at odds with a crucial piece of evidence (namely, that I did conduct the study). We could, of course, raise questions about whether there were “unconscious” dimensions of my choice – did I, for instance, want to conduct the study in the hopes of resolving repressed complexes of desire? But these do not undermine the reality that I consciously undertook the study, and should my results imply the impossibility of any conscious undertaking, then we have serious reason to question and at least partially reject the results. That having been said, though, it does not follow that the physicist ought to prioritize the fact of having embarked upon the investigation as the most real object to be studied. That I chose to study the physical world says something about that world, but it is not therefore prudent to regard it as having privileged status vis-à-vis whatever else I may discover.

We have suggested above that the strength of Kant’s position that freedom is noumenal rather than phenomenal would lie in the fact that it facilitates a bracketing of the fact that one inquires in order to free the inquiry up to discover and interrogate other facts. If I am to entertain a hypothesis that would entail the impossibility of my entertaining it, it might be best to discover other evidence that would contradict this hypothesis, because that evidence may be of crucial importance in refuting other hypotheses that are compatible with the fact of my entertaining them. It is okay to presuppose that one is engaged in investigation, but the fact that one does so need not be elevated to privileged status within the investigation; it is a reality that one might reasonably put aside in order to discover other elements of the reality one seeks to explore.

With regard to moral inquiry, as opposed to natural scientific inquiry, though, a bracketing of the fact that one so inquires may be deleterious. Kantian practical reason may
bracket the results of natural scientific inquiry, for what one has learned about such phenomena may be beside the point. What is known to moral inquiry is that the inquirer is confronted with choice. Were one’s natural scientific conclusions to lead one to believe that one could not act freely, the application of such knowledge to draw moral conclusions would prove a performative contradiction. Practical reason is immature if it does not take seriously the evidence that one is engaged in practical reason and, hence, that one is engaged in an activity of freedom; practical reason is thus for Kant the domain of an autonomy – that which freely dictates the laws it shall abide by – rather than a heteronomy, that which is constrained by laws of nature (Kant, 2002: 54, 62). Practical reason may thus reasonably suppose its freedom – were it to do otherwise, it would ensure its own irrelevance, for it is indifferent what an unfree being resolves to do since such a being would have had to have come to this resolution regardless.

The skeptic of moral reasoning may here seek to rely on the natural sciences to articulate a rejoinder: what if you merely seem free, but it is physical law that determines not only what you are but what you will do and how you will feel about what you do? In other words, the claim that you have no choice but are rather the sort of being who is deceived into feeling as if its acts were chosen. Granting this contention, though, would suggest that the attitude and argument of our skeptic has been equally determined from without: the acts of the skeptic must likewise be caused rather than chosen. Furthermore, this would entail that the activities of the natural sciences are equally determined. The less-than-rigorous moral skeptic may welcome this conclusion at first on the grounds that the natural sciences are therefore correct and rigorous, because they must bring the inquirer to uncover reality as it really is. But this does not follow from the skeptic’s argument: if it is granted, then the natural sciences must give us the results that they do, but these results can nonetheless be incorrect and misleading; they are determined to be
the scientific results but they are not determined to reflect reality. If moral inquiry is the product of radical deception, then so too is scientific inquiry. The skeptic may retort that it is in principle possible for moral inquiry to be part of a radical deception but that the determinative forces need not also deceive natural scientific inquiry. But if this is so in principle, it is equally true that the reverse could be true, and in any event, it is clear that the skeptic is clinging to an immature desire to preserve the legitimacy of the sciences while putting forth a moral skepticism that would necessarily undermine scientific legitimacy. Indeed, the argument that we ought to trust the natural sciences but ought to distrust moral inquiry is itself a moral argument and hence a performative contradiction.

Does it follow, though, that Kant is correct to suggest a metaphysical cleavage between noumenon and phenomenon in which the first refers to reality in-itself and the second refers to appearances in such a way that there is no necessary relation between what phenomena reveal and what may be known about reality? Here reflection on the relation between phenomena and noumena on the one hand and the notion of evidence on the other may help clarify matters. Phenomenon, within the Kantian schema, surely refers to a species of that which is evident. Noumenon, though, as the unknowable reality-as-it-really-is, transcends evidential verification. A rigorous application of logic to phenomenal data, as one ought to find in scientific inquiry, points not toward facts about noumena but rather toward facts about other phenomena. It would only be in the transcendental examination of such inquiry that the noumenal would become evident. There we are in the domain of an examination of freedom, since reason acts freely, and freedom is noumenal in the sense that the study of phenomena could not verify it: we may not, for Kant, employ natural sciences to unpack an act and arrive at the choice or choices that engendered it. Should we ask why I have written this sentence, a scientific inquiry into
phenomenal appearances would find a series of causes that caused it to be written: it does not stand alone but stands rather as a link within a long chain that stretches back as far as the evidence may take us and will continue to stretch indefinitely into the future. Science, Kant’s position tells us, could explain why I have acted, but it could not explain such acts as matters of choice; scientific explanation of acts would amount to a deterministic science of behavior.

For Kant, our responsibility for what we do – for our choices and for our reasoning – persists in spite of its non-evidential relation to the sciences; responsibility is, in essence, trans-phenomenal. But in what sense, then, does the Kantian picture broker the possibility of evidence of freedom? Critique of Practical Reason lays out perhaps the most direct answer. We have a priori evidence of freedom that is found in the fact that we argue and deliberate about what to do. Practical reason confronts us as a pressing matter, and freedom is the presupposition that is embedded a priori in practical reason. Freedom constitutes that which is indubitably evident to practical reason, and we could repeat the same exercise through the framework of Critique of Pure Reason insofar as the question of how to reason rigorously presupposes the presence of a reasoning and such reasoning is a free activity.

Examining this matter of indubitability, though, raises some interesting issues. Here the skeptic’s challenge may prove illuminating. The skeptic can bring us to cast doubt upon the truth of our freedom – what if, say, a Creator had insisted on making us beings that experience ourselves as having choice but instead are merely determined to do as programmed by the Creator? If we grant the skeptic’s contention, we would seem to be left with this picture: freedom would not be noumenal but would be phenomenal, because we would retain the experience of having observed our freedom, even though such experience is ultimately mistaken. Now, let us suppose the skeptic’s contention to be incorrect. We still would seem to retain the experience of
having observed our freedom. Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* need not examine our
experiences of freedom scientifically to arrive at its conclusions; it simply requires freedom to be
the relevant presupposition that sets afoot practical deliberation. But it does not logically follow
from this that freedom could not be examined experientially, which is to say, it should not follow
that there can be no phenomenon of freedom.

The second *Critique* thus concerns the *indubitability* of the evidence of freedom, rather
than a demonstration that freedom must be noumenal but cannot be phenomenal. The argument
for the latter is given in the third antinomy from the first *Critique* (Kant, 2007: 409–17), and it
amounts to the claim that the structure of phenomena is to be subject to examination in light of
their interrelation through laws of causality. Freedom, on that account, because it is not
determined by a prior cause, is outside the domain of the phenomenal. Kant’s motivation for
regarding freedom as noumenal rather than phenomenal, thus, would seem to stem from the fact
of human freedom’s incompatibility with an understanding of the material world as exhaustively
governed by natural law, on the model of a Newtonian physics.

The lacuna of such a position, however, can be expressed simply: it is, namely, the
problem of the human sciences. Within Kant’s lifetime and work, these properly speaking would
be studied on a model exemplified by his work in physical geography. Such work could be
considered natural scientific on the Kantian model insofar as it concerned the ways in which
human biological development and morphology are determined by environmental factors; the
environment acts upon human material through processes governed by laws of nature. As it
happens, Kant’s own efforts in physical geography and anthropology were hardly systematic and
nomothetic; they were, on the contrary, typically rather preliminary efforts to recount idiographic
details of often dubious origin. His contributions to psychology and political science, by contrast,
were to be understood as philosophical rather than scientific in nature: they derived from rational psychology and pure practical reason, neither of which were to contain empirical content. Much the same can be said for many of his peers. It would be hard to argue that Kant should have regarded the efforts in the human sciences of himself and his peers as exemplary of the sciences in general. But such a position neither entails the impossibility of rigorous human sciences – not only as a future possibility but also as something that could have been the province of earlier scientists, such as Ibn Khaldun – nor does it imply that the natural sciences ought to be regarded as an ideal or even adequate model for science in general.

Kantian metaphysics regards empirical research as that which bears a prior orientation toward the discovery of natural law, an orientation that must work the exclusion of efforts toward discovery of “laws of freedom.” For the latter effort, only transcendental critique would be appropriate. An alternative approach, though, could be like that proposed by W.E.B. Du Bois (2000) for the human sciences, in which one begins with the hypothesis of human freedom in order to proceed, through inquiry, to a discovery of the limits and limitations of human agency and the causal laws of the material world. That is to say, the method does not presuppose in advance what the relation between freedom and the orderliness of phenomena must be. An upshot is that the orderliness of causal phenomena need not be presupposed as the implication of an exhaustive set of determinative laws. In consequence, what is discovered empirically may cause a refinement of one’s understanding of the empirical. Such a method, therefore, leaves open the possibility that empirical discoveries will clarify metaphysical questions. For Kant, such an approach is anathematic to a rational foundation for the sciences: the metaphysics must be rational prior to their application in empirical inquiry. Otherwise, conditions would be ripe for bias and unwarranted assertion masquerading as scientific proof. But a rejoinder would be that it
might be more important for scientists to address metaphysical questions maturely than it is for science to have a mature metaphysics given *a priori*. As Ernst Cassirer puts it, “What science needs is not a metaphysical determinism but a methodological determinism” (1944: 219). The maturity of the scientist requires taking responsibility for what a method demands as well as for discovering and acknowledging the limitations that a method presents; the maturity of the sciences does not require the resolution of all, nor even most, metaphysical questions prior to the development or application of scientific methods.⁶

The problem can thus be posed in terms of whether Kantian metaphysics erects artificial and unhelpful barriers to the apprehension of evidence of freedom. The Kantian notion of phenomenon is unnecessarily limited by its being analytically fixed to the project of apprehending causal laws. An alternative would be to regard phenomena as inclusive of objects whose appearances evidence a relational intelligibility without being reducible to what they evidence about material causality.⁷ On such a conception, we remain open to the metaphysical possibility of discovering evidence of freedom that is not reducible to the discoveries that transcendental critique makes about the noumena of reason and freedom. There are, after all, libraries full of novels, poems, and treatises, and we live in a world of songs, of punk angst, poppy euphoria, jazz improvisation and blues repetition, in which human beings argue and fight and go to war. All of this may be taken, simply, as evidence of human freedom. The skeptic’s rejoinder is that it is *inconclusive* evidence – we may, in light of it all, doubt our freedom nonetheless, and we may certainly doubt that any given piece of evidence points to the freedom of an agent who produced it rather than causal laws that necessitated its coming into being. Yet

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⁶ We will examine these matters in greater detail in Chapter 3.
⁷ For discussion, see Cassirer (1923) and Caws (1988 and 1993).
this rejoinder is beside the point if the notion of a phenomenon does not refer to *indubitable* evidence. The perspective given in the third antinomy – that from a natural scientific point of view, one could never find a free act, since the nature of such inquiry is to discover the prior causes for such an act (Kant, 2007: 409–17) – simply involves a questionable presupposition, namely, that phenomena can be explained *exhaustively* by causal determination. Indeed, the point is perhaps more easily accepted from a contemporary vantage point, from which a Newtonian physics, even once updated with a Kantian metaphysics, may be regarded as an immature science in light of, *inter alia*, the development of quantum mechanics.\(^8\) That physics may require physical evidence interpreted in light of a unified causal nexus need not imply that other forms of inquiry ought not evaluate humanistic evidence or that experiential evidence of human acts could not possibly bear evidence of the freedom that initiated them.

\[d. \text{ The Infinitude of Critical Projects} \]

These matters regarding the evidentiality of freedom point in the direction of a larger problem for the relationship between the Kantian critical project and the metaphysical determinations that it led Kant to make. One way in which this problem can be thematized is in terms of the matter of the finitude of critical endeavors. This is the issue as put forth by Edmund Husserl (1960: 81–8) regarding the difference between phenomenology and Kantian idealism. Kant’s transcendental idealism can be read as having sought to set afoot a transcendental ground for the sciences and normative reason by achieving the third step in his schema of reason’s progression, the step of “matured judgment” that follows the first step of naïve belief and the

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\(^8\) Du Bois (2000) makes a similar point: to do the work of empirical human sciences through the hypothesis of human freedom may ultimately lead to metaphysical insights that change the way we study physics for the better.
second step of skeptical circumspection. With such matured judgment, could reason arrive at its resting place of having completed or achieved the transcendental critique of reason? On this point, Kant could be read as trying to erect a systematic solution to the problem of mature reason by proffering a completed system. Our criticism is not that, in spite of himself, Kant failed to complete this task, but rather that the very pursuit of its completion may be an erroneous project.

The position of Husserl here, in contrast to that of Kant, is that the attempt to give a complete account of the grounds of human reason and knowledge could only discover final answers insofar as these answers would be rooted in the natural attitude. It is the natural attitude that puts forth the demand for finality; the reflective or theoretical attitude need not abide by such a demand. If the critique of pure reason (in either its theoretical or practical variant) provides criteria for the evaluation of a given act of reasoning, the problem is that such criteria may proffer merely a form of accountability – a set of given norms by which the success or failure of reasoning can be judged – rather than a reckoning with reason’s responsibility for the full range of suppositions it employs. That is to say, for instance, that once the work of a Kantian idealism as inquiry into the conditions of possibility for human reason is completed, we may then encounter the question of the conditions of possibility for Kantian idealism, and to presuppose the sufficiency of Kantian idealism for this latter task would be folly. Phenomenology offers an alternative approach, one that is systematic by virtue of demonstrating the necessity of an open system due to “the infinity of theoretically determining work” (Husserl, 1960: 88).

These considerations bring us back to this study’s overarching thematic of the problem of anguish and its evasion. The phenomenological tasks that constitute the Husserlian “transcendental ego” can, in the terms we have thus far established, be understood as constituting a form of anguish. To stop at the “third step” given by Kant can be read, in short, as an evasion
of the anguish that would by entailed if one were to instead regard the critique of reason as an infinite project. If Kant’s third step is the product of matured judgment, it does not follow that arriving and subsequently remaining there would suffice to constitute mature reason. For what if mature reason demands fourth, fifth, and sixth steps, or, indeed, if the structure of maturity is to always demand “step (n + 1)”?

It is noteworthy, if this matter of the finitude or infinitude of the critical project can be thematized as a problem of the anguish of the critical endeavor, that the other aporia of the Kantian project thus identified in our inquiry is that of the evidentiality of freedom. For, from the vantage of existential phenomenology, confrontation with evidence of freedom has a name: anguish. We may thus raise the matter of whether Kant’s answer to the question of mature reason bears limitations that stem, ultimately, from an evasion of anguish. Kantian philosophy suggests rational norms for reason and freedom that bear a formal relation to free acts, but do not necessarily permit knowledge of the lived relation between norms and acts or norms and the actor. They may thus give due regard to the fact of freedom while tending toward disregard of its experience. Existential phenomenology, by contrast, must take seriously the simple point that freedom is lived and experienced; to be free is not merely to be capable of critical endeavor and the application of rational norms, but is also characterized by having to live one’s relations to the critical and the normative. Indeed, if the limitations of Kantian transcendental idealism point us in the direction of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, the infinite work of this latter project would suggest that one matter it must broach is that of the lived relationship to the phenomenological project. Such is a matter that calls, in short, for existential examination – an evaluation, as it were, of evidence of freedom. Let us then turn to such examination, guided by a
question for which Kantian philosophy may be inadequate: why would reason evade its responsibilities?

II. Evidence, Existence, and Evasion

a. Consciousness, Intentionality, and Freedom

Our concern with evidence thus far points to a transcendental matter, that is, to the question of the conditions of possibility for evidence. For something to be evident there must be a perspective from which it is evident. For Kant, we have seen a similar structure insofar as the phenomenon is that which appears to reason, and metaphysically we discover the status of reason as noumenal. Yet such a picture involves metaphysical baggage that, in light of the above discussion of the evidentiality of freedom, we have reason to leave behind. From the vantage of transcendental phenomenology, we may go a step further and, employing different terminology, put forth the thesis that the condition for the possibility of evidence is consciousness. The critical responsibility implied by Kant’s project would in turn call, then, for us to examine consciousness evidentially. What, then, is evident of consciousness?

We may begin our examination of consciousness, so conceived, with what is, in the phenomenological vernacular, termed intentionality. In short, on this account, evidence is possible through consciousness being directed toward that which is evident. Consciousness on that model can be understood as a here directed at a there – or, more precisely, consciousness is that which through being constituted by a there emerges as a here. Direction in this sense is not mere orientation: the computer screen before me is oriented so that it faces my eyes as I sit in this chair, but it does not direct its attention to me in the way that I direct my attention to it. In
short, the intentionality of consciousness implies choice: consciousness could be directed otherwise. I may divert my attention from the images on the screen to the appearance of its glow on my typing fingers. I may divert my attention from how to word this sentence about consciousness to reflection on the intricacies of the polyrhythms in the music playing in the background, or to the question of whether I should turn on the lights as the room now darkens in late afternoon, and so on. Or – as these sentences indicate – I may direct my attention to my attention itself; consciousness is capable of reflecting upon itself. Indeed, consciousness may even reflect upon whether it ought to reflect upon itself.

We are here in the terrain of questions about freedom, invoking the issue raised in Martin Heidegger’s ontological account of *Dasein* as an entity for which “in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it” (Heidegger, 1962: 32). Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* appropriates this formulation but notes a crucial insufficiency in it. If consciousness is capable of self-reflection, then what is at issue would appear to be a *here* directing itself toward the very same *here*. Yet the problem is that the subject of such reflection is not identical to the object of reflection: to be its object, consciousness must be rendered a *there*, and a *there* that refers to *here* is not isomorphic with the *here* that posits itself as its *there*. Hence, Sartre concludes that “consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself” (Sartre, 1992: 24). Matters would perhaps be simpler at this point if self-reflective consciousness was simply illusory. But if the *there* does indeed serve, as intended, to point back toward the subject of reflection – if this *there* makes evident the *here* that faces it – then the object of self-reflection is not merely an invention of this consciousness but is this consciousness itself. The consciousness reflected on, to put it simply, *is*. 
The Sartrean term for that which *is* is *being-in-itself*, which refers to being that is what it is (Sartre, 1992: 29). Because consciousness is an object of reflective consciousness, it would appear to be a being-in-itself. Freedom, though, suggests a notion of being that is not fully compatible with being-in-itself. Suppose I have an identifiable essence, such that it is appropriate to refer to my being-in-itself; suppose, in short, that I am my essence. Could I, under such terms, be free? Freedom means I face a choice as to what to do. Doing, though, implies changes such that what I am now is not precisely the same as what I will be after this moment of choice.

Suppose I resolve that I shall do nothing, with the intention of thereby remaining the same. Even having established this end, though, my choice fails to fully realize it, for I will instead become a being that chose to remain as it was, which is not identical to the being that was as it was prior to such choice. One may, of course, speak of essential characteristics that transcend such a choice: the change engendered did not change the date of my birth, the identity of my parents, etc. These characteristics remain as before. But to regard my essence as unchanged is to employ a framework in which the evidence of my having chosen to be unchanged is simply inessential. I, though, confront such evidence nonetheless; even if it is “inessential” to who I am to some other observer, it is certainly lived by me as a choice laden with possible implications. The observer may have resolved the question of my essence, but I confront the issue that no matter how many times I have resolved that question, I can still raise it again, and in the raising thereof may – and in some sense must - constitute an answer that did not fully precede its being raised. In short, once the matter of freedom is introduced, I must be more than merely my essence.

Alternatively, then, I may say that I am the lived choice of becoming an essence, though such a choice is constrained and conditioned by always being made from a prior essence. Freedom means that no future essence is mandated: what I am to be is not determined in
advance. Yet whatever my choice, I shall continue to be – for even were I to choose suicide, the cessation of biological function is not isomorphic with the cessation of being, since I still would be a person who chose death; what suicide concludes is freedom, not being. At each moment, I must choose what I will be, and at each moment, I must be the product of such choices; even when I choose to negate prior choices, I may become their negation but not their erasure. As Sartre puts it, “it is necessary that we make ourselves what we are. But what are we then if we have the constant obligation to make ourselves what we are, if our mode of being is having the obligation to be what we are?” (Sartre, 1992: 101) His famous conclusion: “to be free is to be condemned to be free. …[W]e are a freedom which chooses, but we do not choose to be free. We are condemned to freedom, ... thrown into freedom or, as Heidegger says, ‘abandoned’” (Sartre, 1992: 186, 623).

Freedom thus means that I am condemned to become what I am not yet, which means I must be other than what I am: freedom “is characterized by the constantly renewed obligation to remake the Self which designates the free being” (Sartre, 1992: 72). The being of the lived choice, then, transcends the object of its choice, even as this object refers back to the being of the lived choice. This mode of being Sartre terms being-for-itself, which must “be itself in the form of presence to itself” (Sartre, 1992: 124). Because such presence to self implies that “it is not wholly itself,” then the for-itself is what it is not and is not what it is (Sartre, 1992: 28, 127). To be free, here as well as in Kantian philosophy, is to be undetermined. But if my freedom means I am what I am not, then we confront an ontological problem that Kant’s positing of freedom as noumenon evaded. This problem is that being-for-itself does not imply a radical escape from being-in-itself: that I am not what I am, paradoxically, does not mean that I cease to be what I am. A full examination of this problem is beyond our scope, but we can summarize the Sartrean
solution by pointing to the characteristic of freedom as *situated*. Freedom cannot exist without already being what it is, even as freedom is also this dimension of being that necessarily transcends its situation through acts that, in turn, produce the situations to come. Freedom thus suggests an ontological structure that is condemned both *to be* and *to be the negation of its being* all at once.

What are the implications for consciousness of its evidently being a form of freedom? Consciousness, as stated above, is not mere orientation, since consciousness bears the choice of where to orient itself. This choice does not spring at each moment out of nowhere, but rather from a situation: “Consciousness confronts its past and its future as facing a self which it is in the mode of not-being” (Sartre, 1992: 72). Consciousness is, in short, responsible for what perspective it shall take. Among the many issues this raises is that of establishing responsible relations to evidence, since consciousness that chooses to only be directed toward a narrow band of *theres* is choosing to limit itself as consciousness of the world. It is, we may say, responsible for knowing where it has looked and for choosing to look elsewhere, though it does not follow that consciousness could ultimately direct itself everywhere.

The issue of choosing a perspective, though, is broader than the issue of selecting *theres*, since perspective also involves what may be termed the *attitude of the here*. I turn my attention to a colleague enviously; I encounter evidence of what makes my colleague enviable. Do I respond to such envy with a desire to replicate her success or a desire to render it unjust and despicable? If the former, I direct my attention to how her acts have engendered her good fortune. If the latter, I direct my attention to those facts that, if focused on to the exclusion of

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9 It can be maintained here that this represents a move from “consciousness” to “mind,” as the distinction appears, for instance, in the work of Sri Aurobindo. For present purposes, we will retain Sartre’s broader formulation of “consciousness,” though there may be other applications in which this terminology would be problematic.
others, may sustain my bitterness. It may be objected here that once consciousness has the freedom to determine its attitudes, something has already gone wrong. Mature consciousness, one may posit, is sober and unemotional, untouched by want. But this line of thought goes nowhere, for consciousness radically stripped of desire is not consciousness. Freedom requires the pursuit of ends, which implies lack. Should I pause and assert, “I want nothing – and lack nothing,” critical reflection would have to raise the question of why I have made this assertion. To assert a lack of desire is to imply a desire to take a position on what (or whether) one desires. Sobriety is a project of warding off intoxication, but of the being that is dead-set on remaining sober, we may ask: Why are you so intoxicated by sobriety, or so passionate about dispassion? The cure is its own form of intoxication, as one often finds, for instance, among many recovering alcoholics: somebody who is passionate about not drinking has to devote hours upon hours to this end, creating a particular social life for themselves, performing rituals, etc. Desire, then, is not the enemy but rather the engine of consciousness. There are myriad ways in which I may direct my attention to a series of written characters, “3x + 1 = 13.” But it is only if I seek, in some fashion, to solve for x that I will conclude that x = 4.

This relationship of lack to consciousness is fundamental rather than accidental. Being, we have established, is evident, and consciousness has the structure of a here directed toward a there. But it does not follow that evidence perceived exhausts the being it evidences. I face a bookshelf across the room. What I see, I am confident in saying, is an array of spines. I am further confident in saying that I thus see books, and that, were I to remove one from the shelf and flip through it, I would find pages, though the pages are not visually apparent to me. In Husserlian terms, this is apperception. I fixate on one book: the tan spine features, in black letters, the words “The Sexual,” clearly legible, followed by another word in red and then another
word in smaller black letters, neither of which I can make out. I infer that the missing words are  
“Contract” and “PATEMAN,” though the operation is over so quickly that, looking back on it,  
I’m not sure if this conclusion was reached because I remember the design of the jacket, or  
because I see “Slavery and Social Death” in highly legible white letters on a black spine two  
books over, or both. A being is such that the series of appearances through which it is evident are  
infinite, yet consciousness is finitely directed. But consciousness is not a passive receipt of  
appearances: it pursues the being of what’s there even as that being is not exhausted in any of its  
appearances. In Sartrean terms, consciousness is thus a transcendence.  

Were transcendence the province of being-in-itself, we could speak of consciousness as a  
machine: data is there, and the here simply calculates inferentially what being must be there in  
order to match the collected data. Yet a being-for-itself is present to itself, and hence faces the  
question of what it ought to be. And consciousness does not simply face the question of which  
direction to face but of what to face – that is, consciousness is directed toward beings. That is to  
say, consciousness is not a spinning top encountering an arbitrary array of appearances,  
indifferent as to which it shall view. It knows, in some respects, what it would like to see, and  
directs itself not at evidence alone but at the beings that transcend such appearances. For  
instance, I may think of beauty, and my thoughts might draw me to recall a striking photograph I  
once saw, and then to recall the face of my beloved, and imagining this beauty may cause me to  
in turn examine photographs and through them contemplate beauty. But in this case, it is not that  
I perceived a body of evidence and then appended beauty as a unifying theme; rather, it was  
through the theme that I was drawn into a world of evidence.  

b. Anguish and Desire for its Evasion
But now suppose that I take the following being as the *there* of my contemplation: *me.* We are back to the issue of anguish. Anguish is consciousness in confrontation with evidence of its freedom, which, put differently, is a confrontation with evidence of its responsibility. It is conceivable to get lost in anguish, as reflection on oneself means to reflect on the one who is reflecting, and this may open onto an infinite loop. The danger here evokes Nietzsche’s aphorism: “[W]hen you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you” (Nietzsche, 2000: 279). An existence exhausted by its anguish is implosive: it loses itself in reflection.

Better, it would seem, to look away, to escape anguish. But taking flight from anguish is *bad faith* (Sartre, 1992: 83). In bad faith, I evade the reality of my freedom (Sartre, 1992: 86–116; L.R. Gordon, 1995a: 9). This engenders several paradoxes. The first is that freedom is a necessary condition for bad faith: I could not take flight if I were not what I wanted to flee, my freedom. The second is implied by the first: bad faith *is also flight from bad faith*: “the first act of bad faith is to flee what it can not flee, to flee what it is” (Sartre, 1992: 115). If I am free, then I am free to be in bad faith. If I succeed in believing I am not free, it should follow logically that I believe also that I am not in bad faith, although whether I make such belief explicit is another matter. Hence, good faith is not as antithetical to bad faith as it would seem (Sartre, 1992: 116; L.R. Gordon, 1995a: 56–8). Indeed, *ideally bad faith* regards its false beliefs as known truths; the perfection of bad faith would imply a mode of being in which I examine myself and find no evidence of bad faith whatsoever. Since it is bad faith, though, this implies that its ideal performance requires bad faith to be in flight from the evidence that it is bad faith.

This is disrupted by a third paradox: bad faith is consciousness of bad faith. A lie has a deceiver who knows the truth and communicates a falsehood to the deceived; bad faith has one and the same consciousness as both deceiver and deceived, which implies that the deceived is
conscious of itself as deceiver (Sartre, 1992: 87–90). Ideally bad faith, then, cannot eradicate its consciousness of being bad faith; it must settle, as it were, for having only pre-reflective consciousness of bad faith. Bad faith is not an unconscious desire to flee anguish but a conscious one. It persists in knowing itself as bad faith but seeks to avoid examining itself as bad faith. It can, of course, fail to do so: to persist in bad faith is to leave evidence of bad faith strewn about. Bad faith does not imply a blindness in which evidence is unseen; it may, then, apprehend itself as bad faith, and it would seem at this point that the jig is up, as when the deceived catches the liar red-handed. Yet bad faith is free to persist as bad faith nonetheless; it is contingent whether the “face-to-face” encounter with evidence of its bad faith will bring the project to a halt. It is thus, in Sartrean terms, metastable: bad faith as successful flight from anguish is inherently unstable, but bad faith as the resolve to take such flight may yield a stable commitment to this unstable project. This implies, then, that such resolve may yield a particular way of being undisturbed by evidence, since what is “seen” could fail to engender reflective consciousness of bad faith as bad faith. Sartre terms this “non-persuasive evidence” (Sartre, 1992: 113), which involves a consciousness of evidence in which transcendence fails to apperceive or apprehend the being that is evidenced. Following Lewis Gordon (2016b), we may note that such a project is ultimately one of depriving evidence of its evidentiality.

We thus face a rather fundamental problem. A freedom is surrounded by evidence of its freedom, so there is no exiting a world of anguish. Anguish may consume consciousness, as the passion that animates consciousness is turned back upon itself. But to avoid anguish altogether, consciousness must pursue a project that subverts evidentiality itself, which, given the fundamentality of evidence to consciousness, amounts to an assault by consciousness on consciousness. One finds this even if the escape from anguish appears less radical, as evidenced,
for instance, in narcissistic self-reflection. Let us imagine a narcissistic man who escapes anguish by asserting the goodness of his acts as a necessary fact and *a priori* given: in the end, he may regard himself as not responsible for his acts in virtue of the fact that their value is foreordained. He can hence reflect on himself without succumbing to implosion, but doing so demands a technique whereby he shall find only evidence of his goodness. But even if our narcissist had been perfect and may reflect from the vantage of a life thus far lived immaculately, the evidence that he could still in the next moment choose to be otherwise would have to be evaded. And, were he to have indeed at times fallen short of such perfection, the narcissist would have to apprehend all evidence of his misdeeds as non-persuasive. Narcissism confronts the problem of having to maintain itself as narcissism: it has to figure out how to make the evidence it apprehends non-persuasive. Ironically, this means that narcissism as a strategy for evading anguish is a strategy that can only be implemented through an anguished procedure.

There is, then, no escape; as Sartre puts it, “consciousness conceals in its being a permanent risk of bad faith” (1992: 116). Kant’s articulation of immaturity pointed in the direction of bad faith, a flight from responsibility for one’s own reasoning; does the ubiquity of bad faith mean, then, that maturity is a conceptual impossibility or lost cause? In a word, no. It simply means that maturity is difficult. Indeed, to give up on maturity because of its difficulty is an evasion of responsibility, and, hence, it is thus evidence of immaturity. Bad faith is a flight from anguish that, as such, involves a flight from reality, and in turn develops peculiar patterns of flight from reality that support this initial flight. Thematically, this suggests bad faith as an irresponsible response to anguish and to reality. Maturity, as antidote, would involve responsibly encountering reality and its accompanying anguish. In short, one must face up to, rather than evade, anguish. Further, since bad faith is also in its internal structure *flight* from bad faith,
maturity will require that one, as it were, stay and fight it, even though the outcome of a perfect escape from bad faith’s possibility is beyond possibility.

c. *Reason as Mature Response to Anguish*

How to face anguish without implosion or collapse into bad faith? Sartre sketches the beginning of an answer:

If *nothing* compels me to save my life, *nothing* prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss. The decisive conduct will emanate from a self which I am not yet. … My eyes, running over the abyss from top to bottom, imitate the possible fall and realize it symbolically; at the same time suicide, from the fact that it becomes a *possibility* possible for *me*, now causes to appear possible motives for adopting it (suicide would cause anguish to cease). Fortunately these motives in their turn, from the sole fact that they are motives of a possibility, present themselves as ineffective, as non-determinant; they can no more *produce* the suicide than my horror of the fall can *determine me* to avoid it. It is this counter-anguish which generally puts an end to anguish by transmuting it into indecision. Indecision in its turn calls for decision. I abruptly put myself at a distance from the edge of the precipice and resume my way. (Sartre, 1992: 69)

In short, the implosivity of anguish is overcome through “counter-anguish.” Implosive anguish utters in terror: *Dear God, I am free!* Counter-anguish responds calmly: *Yes, indeed, I am.* It is as if the former encounters reality as a horrific possibility somehow deprived of its contingency, and the latter encounters reality as – well, *reality.* The former is thus uncertain of or confused about the reality it confronts. An anguish ed contemplation of suicide involves an inversion of the narcissistic self-reflection discussed earlier. It assesses its situation and surmises that *I am one who is free to commit suicide.* From there comes the assessment *I am one who contemplates suicide.* A mature response to this assessment: *So what – contemplation of an action is not initiation of that action.* The immature response: *I am suicidal!* The immature response is a flight from anguish insofar as it posits, in bad faith, a suicidal essence. In short, we have a form of
neurotic self-reflection in which the occasion for reflection secures the judgment that *I am bad*, which reverberates into anguish in the face of choice: *I am bad, so I could do something bad*.

Stated simply, it is immature to posit that anguish must be implosive anguish. What Sartre terms “counter-anguish” is not an escape from anguish but is rather anguish performed in a different register. A mature response to anguish, from the Sartrean view, actually involves further anguish. If anguish is reflective consciousness of freedom, then implosive anguish is immature insofar as it reflects on freedom as if freedom necessitates a discomforting possibility for which I will be responsible. Counter-anguish, as a mature response to implosive anguish, reflects on my freedom and finds it to be a source of my acts’ contingency rather than their necessity. Counter-anguish is anguish guided by a sense of fidelity to evidence.

There is no avoiding that a key distinction between the mature and immature responses to anguish is that the former is *right* about its reality and the latter is not. Were consciousness a being-in-itself, this maturity would then be merely an elusive substance, an essence of being right that one either possesses or lacks. But being right is an achievement of a being-for-itself. How is this achievement pursued? In a word, *reason*.

Reason is an activity of consciousness. Consciousness is not exhausted by reason, though the notion of a consciousness that was exclusive of reason is problematic on its face because this would presume a consciousness lacking freedom. What is the precise relationship of consciousness to reason? Here Husserl is instructive:

*The concept of any intentionality whatever – any life-process of consciousness-of something or other – and the concept of evidence, the intentionality that is the giving of something-itself, are essentially correlative. …The following obtains as a fundamental law of intentionality:
Absolutely any consciousness of anything whatever belongs a priori to an openly endless multiplicity of possible modes of consciousness… To this multiplicity belong essentially the modes of a manifold evidential consciousness…

Thus evidence is a universal mode of intentionality, related to the whole life of consciousness. Thanks to evidence, the life of consciousness has an all-pervasive teleological structure, a pointedness toward “reason” and even a pervasive tendency toward it – that is, toward the discovery of correctness (and, at the same time, toward the lasting acquisition of correctness) and toward the cancelling of incorrectnesses (thereby ending their acceptance as acquired possessions). (Husserl, 1969: 160)

Reason distinguishes the correct from the incorrect. Evidence is its condition for possibility, but evidence as such has its telos in reason, for evidential consciousness is directed toward this discernment of correctness.

This suggests that reason may be understood as the telos of consciousness. But this can only be so in terms of reason being an ideal to be struggled for rather than a foreordained conclusion: if reason were guaranteed, consciousness would be in-itself. Consciousness is free to take flight from reason, which troubles the notion of reason as telos insofar as it suggests that consciousness could pursue a different telos. One direction of such flight would be flight from evidence. Reason, Husserl’s argument indicates, is the telos of evidence; but consciousness starved of evidence is incapable of reason. Consciousness so inclined may accomplish this because it is free to face away from evidence. Yet a lasting accomplishment is another matter: if consciousness is condemned to its freedom, it must “look” somewhere. Even if it is imaginable that consciousness can look somewhere and find no evidence there, to continue to look there indefinitely will generate evidence of the fact that one is looking in order not to see.

A project of persisting entirely as non-evidential consciousness would be an extraordinary achievement of bad faith, but the instability of this pursuit suggests that flight from reason will eventually require a different tack. This points in the direction we have already
elucidated, an assault on the evidentiality of evidence. Reason is consciousness of evidential-consciousness. But evidential-consciousness that evades the evidentiality of its \textit{there}s facilitates misguided reason. Such evasion begets a corrupt transcendence\textsuperscript{10}; the series of appearances are transcended in such a way as to announce the non-being of what is there or the being of what is not there. Evidential-consciousness in bad faith thus colonizes reason; it converts reason into an organ of bad faith. Given Husserl’s formulation of reason as the discovery of correctness and the canceling of incorrectnesses, it may appear that bad faith is conceptually incompatible with reason. But here we may borrow from a common saying: “garbage in, garbage out.” Non-persuasive evidence begets reason that is operating on the grounds of false presuppositions. In turn, the conclusions of such reasoning may be appealed to in order to subvert the evidentiality of subsequent evidence, engendering a vicious cycle.

A corrupted evidential consciousness begets reason in service of bad faith. However, it is also possible for the bad faith to occur \textit{in} reasoning rather than before it. The preceding paragraph put forth that reason is consciousness of evidential consciousness, but it can further be stated that reason is evidential consciousness of evidential consciousness, for reason is evaluative and evaluation is an evidential endeavor. In short, reasoning in bad faith evades the evidentiality of the evidence that I am conscious of as evidence. I \textit{know} what is there, but in migrating from

\textsuperscript{10} From a certain perspective, transcendence may itself be regarded as intrinsically corrupting, insofar as transcendence apprehends being out of appearances; is not this an activity of corrupting the seen? What is supposed in such a formulation is that reverence for the purity of appearances as appearances is both conceptually coherent and desirable. Issues with the desire for purity implicit in this perspective abound. The fundamental issue, though, is the question of how “purity” could arise conceptually without transcendence so described. In other words, to regard transcendence as an intrinsically corrupt enterprise is to engage in a performative contradiction, for transcendence is the condition for bringing about the judgment. It is not a purity of consciousness – through which its transcendence is transcended – that begets the notion of purity at issue; purity is rather an essence that consciousness seeks to apprehend, and such seeking is the product of desire and its accompanying lack. At issue here, then, is the simple fact that if transcendence is an apprehension of being by way of evidence, then a corruption of transcendence – in which one apprehends what is not as what is, by regarding evidence as non-evident and/or regarding that which is not evidence as if it were – is both possible and problematic.
this knowledge to conclusions “derived” from it, my movement mandates the falsity of what I know: gold in, garbage out.

It may be objected that what is described here is not reason at all, but rather the subversion of reason. At the one level we may respond that a distinction should be drawn between a descriptive sense of reasoning and a normative ideal of reason, and the present issue is that of reasoning, a broadly defined practice, serving to undermine reason, the purported ideal of that practice. But this raises an issue at the next level, for what is this practice that is employed to undermine reason? Ironically, it would appear to be a form of reason in the ideal sense, for it pursues the acquisition of correctnesses and overcoming of incorrectnesses – i.e., it asks, “How can I subvert reason very well? How can I ideally undermine reason?” That the performance contradicts the ideal – for one who reasons excellently in service of radically undermining reason has, ultimately, violated the dictates of this telos – does not, though, remove all traces of reason as ideal from the practice performed. In the same way that our narcissistic man confronted the anguish of evading anguish, reason in bad faith confronts the anguish of how to all at once excellently manifest reason and in the same act to undermine reason radically. Since I have apprehended the evidence I should like to evade, and even regarded it as given, as inevitable, I am now charged with the task of being conscious of evidential-consciousness in order to undermine its evidentiality. I apprehend the evidence as an invitation not to reason per se but rather to a rational technique for turning the evidence into evidence of that which it does not make evident. In short, I am called upon to commit a fallacy. But to commit to the fallacy means as well that I must regard the evidence as, in essence, incomplete without this fallacious transcendence: I must believe that the only way this evidence can be truly apprehended is through this fallacy, this rational performance of an illogic that transcends not the evidence itself
but rather the meaning that this evidence shall have for me. Reason in bad faith is thus a form of immaturity in which one apprehends evidential-consciousness through an anti-evidential consciousness; this latter is not indifferent to evidence but is rather an ironic performance of reason in order to invert its telos.

Maturity, by contrast, would demand reason as the evidential-consciousness of evidential-consciousness. The modified interpretation of Kant’s definition of self-incurred immaturity can be clearly explicated within this framework, as deference to guides is, as it were, non-evidential-consciousness of evidential consciousness: I know the reasoned conclusions of the church, the state, the esteemed philosopher, etc., but I regard these as if they had the standing of being my own reasoned conclusions. Guides, in reality, merely point one to evidence. It is true that the guide’s conclusion is evidence – it evidences that one whose reasoning I regard as generally reliable has come to this or that conclusion based on this or that body of evidence – but immaturity asserts that the guide is correctness and knowledge of the guide’s conclusion alleviates the need for reason. For the immature, guides are not apprehended as evidence but instead as a wholly sufficient substitute for evidentiality. Maturity requires the apprehension of the guide evidentially, and hence of the incompleteness and imperfection of the guide, for, after all, the guide furnishes something less than the complete array of evidence necessary for a reasoned conclusion.

Reason, then, demands evaluation of the evidence, and an evasion of this demand is a sign of immaturity. But part of the evidence with which reason must grapple is to be found in reason: I am responsible for utilizing evidence to evaluate the reasoning of others and I am responsible for utilizing evidence to evaluate my own reasoning. Reason, as an activity of consciousness, is a product of choice, of freedom, and because of this mature reason is
responsible for evaluating evidence of freedom: to understand how reasoning has reached its conclusions, reason is responsible for evaluating its choice-laden dimensions. Reason may yield incorrectnesses through erroneous applications of a method – as when I check my work and find that it has taken the sum of 17 and 24 to be 31 – but it may also err, as the issue of bad faith shows, because of the capacity of desire to lead it astray from reality. Does maturity, then, consist of finding that technique, that form, through which reason could be guaranteed to forswear its desires that would lead it astray? Is mature reason, in short, rationality?

III. Rationality and Seriousness

a. Seriousness as Immaturity

“[T]he unfortunate choices which most men make,” Simone de Beauvoir argued, “can only be explained by the fact that they have taken place on the basis of childhood” (2000: 35). A child comes into a world of right and wrong, a world governed by the values of adults, to whom a godlike status obtains generally but finds its apotheosis in the child’s parents. A parent’s commands demand from the child the utmost seriousness, or else certain peril awaits. Does this mean that the child is unfree? No, first because the child is free to disobey (though not without the risks this implies), and second, because the child is given space in which to play. There is a domain of play in which freedom is not only permissible but necessary for development, but there is beyond it a domain in which the child is to regard himself as governed, his range of legitimate actions constrained and determined. Here, the child is disciplined, initiated into conventions and codes of behavior. A child learns in each of these domains: a child who is taught mathematics in a rigid, demanding classroom may come to understand mathematics only through a playful engagement with the world beyond the classroom, and, indeed, may in such
play develop a passion for the subject that will make the strictures of school bearable. If it is granted that play and disciplining are necessary for development, though, eventually the tension between these yields a critical period, namely, adolescence. Adolescents are typically given greater freedom to play with the conventions, to choose and experiment with the set of disciplines that will regulate their behavior, as happens, for instance, when secondary school students are given the opportunity to take elective classes and, eventually, to determine their own path of study. Where this expansion of freedom is denied adolescents, they often tragically pursue it through other means that endanger their prospects for enjoying the freedom of adulthood, as is often a consequence of criminal or suicidal (advertent or inadvertent) behavior.

Adult responsibility, in a human world, places everything on the table. The adult manifests Sartre’s contention that “man being condemned to be free carries the whole weight of the world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being” (Sartre, 1992: 707). It is true that adults, like children, still face obligations imposed from without: there are, for instance, legal orders that one must obey in order to avoid severe penalty. But adults are responsible for what the law is, and the decision to obey a questionable law is rather different from the decision of a child to obey a parent. A child in an ideal relationship may sense, for instance, that though disobedience will incur punishment, it will nonetheless be doled out by a loving parent. An adult facing the authority of a state may know that it is, ultimately, indifferent to his or her well-being; states function according to rules that are often unresponsive to humanitarian pleas (or selectively responsive in an arbitrary fashion, which amounts to the same). And yet disobeying an oppressive state may, despite these risks, be imperative, for fealty to such a state endangers the well-being of a great many other adults as well as children and
successive generations. An adult is responsible for the values and conventions that obtain in their world, and no choice entirely escapes the reach of that responsibility.

Bad faith is an evasion of freedom and the responsibility it entails. If adult life entails responsibility for the very values of the world, then there is a peculiar mode of bad faith that corresponds to this responsibility: namely, the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of seriousness regards values as ready-made, as given to a human world rather than as emerging out of the concerns arising in a human world. The serious misogynist cries out: “It is a man’s world, and a woman’s work is to service man.” The serious white supremacist announces: “White people are biologically superior; a person of color is a moral afterthought at best.” A serious person is, in short, childish. Such people place the fulfillment of their own desires above the responsibilities that a human world demands of them. Yet as a form of bad faith, seriousness evades its status as a product of desire: “No,” the serious protests, “I believe as I do not because I want to be right but because this belief is true.” An ironic consequence: it is through his or her childish seriousness that the serious man or woman affirms his/her status as an adult.

There are many points of entry from which to begin if one seeks to analyze the desire of the serious. One may start with material interests: The rich man believes capitalism is how the world must work; he desires this to be the case because he shall become richer. Yet having established this, we must ask about why the man wants riches. One could here turn to psychoanalysis, as one finds, for instance, in the model of Oedipal desire: this man was ontogenically conditioned to desire the surpassing of his father. And there is, further, as Frantz Fanon reminds us, the sociogenic dimensions that shape the context in which ontogeny and the
interpretation of material interests develop. To get to the root of matters, though, Sartre contends that another dimension of diagnosis is necessary: *existential psychoanalysis*.¹¹

Existential psychoanalysis is psychoanalytic in the sense of offering a diagnosis of how repressed or disavowed desires may manifest through the acts of an agent; it concerns the way in which desires that one is not reflectively conscious of manifest through one’s acts.¹² The desire at the heart of existential psychoanalysis is the desire of a being-for-itself to simply *be*. The unpleasant reality that inspires this desire, we have seen, is the burden of responsibility and the anguish that accompanies it. But a being-for-itself is, as it were, a *lack* of being. Only a being-in-itself could satisfy this end of merely being: even to have broached the question of wanting to just *be* means that one couldn’t fulfill the stated desire. Yet freedom entails that one may fail to overlook the realities of one’s freedom, and the project of doing so – bad faith – thus apprehends its realities as what they are not.

Freedom, we have seen, involves transcendence: consciousness apprehends not only a series of appearances, but also the being that is evidenced by those appearances. The operation of transcendence involves giving meaning: over there is a *black chair*; beside me sits *my phone*.

This is not to say that the meaning is not *in* the chair and the phone: the referent of meaning is

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¹¹ Fanon’s classic statement is that “Beside ontogeny and phylogeny stands sociogeny” (1967a: 11). It may be tempting to argue that Sartrean existential psychoanalysis interrogates a dimension of psychology that stands beside these three, but it would be more accurate to note that existential psychoanalysis deals with questions within ontogeny and sociogeny, particularly if one is working with Fanon’s model, in which the sociogenic is not merely what an agent encounters but also what an agent produces.

¹² I say here “not reflectively conscious of” because, as *existential* psychoanalysis, this method proposes the absurdity of an “unconscious” desire. Desire from an existentialist perspective is consciousness of desire. This is not to say, though, that existential psychoanalysis offers a wholesale repudiation of the Freudian notion of the unconscious, insofar as “the unconscious” on that model may be better understood phenomenologically in terms of desires that one is merely pre-reflectively conscious of, rather than desires of which one is not conscious at all. For discussion, see Caws (2005).
being.\(^\text{13}\) But transcendence implies an activity of consciousness that, to employ the distinction of Ernst Cassirer (1944), involves not merely signs but also symbols. The symbolic raises the issue of agency in investing beings with meaning, and the further issue that such investments do functionally change the being with regard to what it is in a human world. Two lovers break up. They had bought a desk together, and this desk is where she had finished her doctoral dissertation and where he had written the computer code that enabled him to quit his job and start his own business. Each developed a relationship with the desk, and as they set out to divvy up the contents of their apartment, each maintains the same outlook: *that’s my desk*. It is with this same facility that the colonial settler looks upon the colonized that remain and thinks: *things would be so much easier if they would just get out of my country.*

The conceptual counterpart to transcendence is facticity. Transcendence may give meaning to the *here* and *there* of consciousness, but it does not thereby eradicate the fact that I am here and direct my consciousness there. It is through transcendence that consciousness apprehends truth and reality, but this can only be so if there is a facticity that transcends the agency of transcendence. Indeed, a being-for-itself could not be a pure transcendence insofar as the former is *condemned* to freedom, and this condemnation itself is part of a freedom’s facticity. Transcendence implies I am free to lie about my age (even to myself); facticity implies that my actions now cannot change the reality of when I was actually born, and, further, that many of those to whom I tell such lies may readily apprehend the evidence of their falsity.

In bad faith, consciousness regards transcendence as facticity and/or regards facticity as transcendence. The settler regards the colony as if it simply were his, rather than as land that is

\(^{13}\) This is so even if, for instance, one refers to “non-being” or “non-existence,” for what is invoked is the being of the referent: if I speak of non-existence, I speak of what non-existence is.
contingently the province of an invasive sovereign, the dominion of a colonial project that would
collapse if only the settler and enough other colonists regarded it as illegitimate. Hence, if the
problem in terms of existential psychoanalysis is a lack of being, then bad faith permits a for-
itself to regard itself as an in-itself. The problem, though, is that were I to be conscious of myself
as facing choices, such consciousness implies my failure to achieve the desired end. This
suggests the need for a modification of the desired end that would appear attainable: a
consciousness that could be conscious of itself as a freedom but retain the essential features of an
in-itself. Sartre terms this the being-in-itself-for-itself. While for G.W.F. Hegel, the in-itself-for-
itself represent a real and realizable achievement, an in-itself-for-itself in Sartrean terms is
unachievable (Sartre, 1992: 145n12). A synthetic unity of in-itself and for-itself would presume
that the contradiction between the in-itself (that is what it is) and the for-itself (that is not what it
is and is what it is not) is merely an apparent contradiction that would be resolved through a
dialectic movement that would clarify and dissolve the opposition until a unity of contraries is
achieved. But if, as Sartre argues, the in-itself and for-itself are features of human reality rather
than partial or confused attempts to describe it, then they constitute a reality condemned to
freedom that ontologically is irreducible to a synthetic unity.

Bad faith, though, is free to be indifferent to the impossibility of the in-itself-for-itself: it
can imagine a being who is free and who nonetheless simply is. The alternative name for such a
being, per Sartre, is God (Sartre, 1992: 140). The point is made clear if one examines theodicean
arguments. Theodicy poses the question of how bad things are possible if there is an omnipotent
and beneficent God. One response: they aren’t – many things only seem bad because God’s plan
is hidden and unknowable to us. (A rejoinder: if bad has meaning from a human vantage, then
God’s plan is irrelevant; if God does the bad to precipitate the better, this does not establish
beneficence but simply theatricality. Unmitigated beneficence would be the elimination of the bad.) A second response: God’s beneficence is proven by the granting of human freedom; badness derives from human folly. (A rejoinder: if freedom is good, then why do free beings do bad things – and wouldn’t creating good beings be better than creating free beings? If freedom is neither intrinsically good nor bad, then God creating freedom is neither intrinsically good nor bad, and hence, not beneficent.)

There is a basic conceptual problem here. If omnipotence implies agency, then God should be free to be bad; if it doesn’t, then beneficence is an inappropriate issue to be raised, since it presupposes agential capacity – one rightly speaks of oxygen as necessary for human life, but oxygen is not therefore beneficent, as when, for instance, it aids fire in consuming a building full of people. Even if God were free to determine what is good and what is bad, the fact remains that God would be free to choose not to do so, so God’s beneficence would remain a contingent matter. The entire matter is easily resolved if one admits that to regard God as beneficent and omnipotent is a matter of faith, and faith abjures evidence (which, in this case, negates not merely empirical evidence but analytical evidence as well). Søren Kierkegaard instructs us to the logical consequence of this in *Fear and Trembling* (1983): to believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God in the face of calamity is to believe the absurd; the knight of faith should feel no need to make her or himself justified in the eyes of others, since justificatory practices require reason and faith properly requires, at critical moments, the suspension of reason.

Suppose, then, that I maintain the notion that I could be a for-itself that is good (that is, as it were, good-in-itself). Reason is incompatible with such a position, but bad faith has a variety of techniques for putting this obstacle to the side. The consequence? I am absolved of my bad deeds, since logically, as my deeds, they could not have been bad (they may only seem bad to
others, or even to me). The inverse is also possible, for I could simply regard myself as bad and thus be absolved of the responsibility for good: because my deeds must be bad, they are not my fault. Or, indeed, I could take the claim that I am bad to be evidence that, at a higher level of assessment, I somehow am good, for it is better to perfect evil than to be contingently good.

The point of existential psychoanalysis, then, is to show how this desire to evade responsibility by being an in-itself-for-itself shapes human reality. This, for Sartre, is the “useless passion” (1992: 784) at the heart of human existence. The spirit of seriousness is the ideal medium for the pathological unfolding of this complex. The serious person still faces choices, indeed, still confronts anguish and arduous responsibilities. Indeed, the serious may need a prolonged period of deliberation, for even ready-made values may be prolix and not easily reconcilable. But the responsibility of the serious is to those values rather than for those values. It is not the choice of values that matters to the serious but the choices that those “unchosen” values entail. The spirit of seriousness is thus an evasion of responsibility for one’s values; it emerges from an encounter with a root expansion in responsibility, but it blanches in the face of such an encounter, seeking to repress or disavow responsibility for values by way of locating those values elsewhere. It is, in short, immature.

b. Taking Rationality Seriously Without seriousness

If immaturity is manifest both in the bad faith evasion of reason as well as the colonization of reason by bad faith, then what is the peculiar danger raised by the spirit of seriousness for reason? Serious reason would be reason that evades responsibility for its values. The values precede it, and it need not evaluate them: its task is to evaluate evidence through the
excellent administration of those values. For our purposes, we may say that the proper term for serious reason is *rationality*. Rationality is reason tasked with reasoning excellently given a set of values governing the inquiry. Rationality, properly speaking, is not responsible for those values; they function as the explicitly supposed and/or as the implicitly presupposed.¹⁴

This does not mean that rationality evaluates no values whatsoever. For instance, the counting of votes in an election is a rational procedure; one need not contemplate the overall value of the election itself or the political system it serves in order to complete the task adequately or excellently. But one does need to employ reason to deal with ambiguous cases, as when there are hanging chads, check marks instead of fully-filled bubbles, etc., and the procedures for dealing with these cases aren’t fully and clearly legislated. Nonetheless, this turn to evaluative reason does not suspend the rational constraints of the endeavor. If my reason for concluding that an ambiguous ballot should be counted as a vote for X rather than Y because X is my preferred winner, then I have departed from the rational requirements of counting votes according to the ratified procedures. Such an activity could, of course, be rational in *other* terms, as it could represent an instrumental rationality that one finds when the electoral process is colonized by partisan administration, wherein the end for civic engagement is the promotion of particular candidates or positions rather than the impartial administration of electoral procedure.

But in either event, it is my prior commitment to being partial or impartial that governs my use

¹⁴ The response of many will be to contest this as a mischaracterization of rationality. Such disagreement amounts to a disagreement about the meaning of the term “rationality.” My perspective here, though, is not concerned with the use of the term; if it is defined in such a way as to escape this problem of the spirit of seriousness, then so be it. I use the term, simply, because it is the term that best conveys the mode of reasoning at issue. Where a problem emerges is if defenders of rationality offer a defense against this critique of rationality by way of equivocation, in which rationality is exonerated of the charges presented here on the grounds of a multivocal practice of defining it. That would amount, in short, to a rationalization, and would follow the logic of offering up rationality as a being-in-itself-for-itself. In short, the meaning that many others impute to the term “rationality” may not necessitate the problems here elaborated; that is fine, as our concern is with the phenomenon rather than the term.
of reason within the rational procedure. Rationality entails that there are certain values that reasoning must uphold, come what may.

If rationality is serious, and the spirit of seriousness is a form of immaturity, does it then follow that rationality is a mark of immaturity? No, and, indeed, rationality is necessary for mature reason. Is mature mathematics, for instance, conceivable if one cannot rationally calculate equations? No, nor is political reason mature if it cannot, for instance, logically evaluate the differences between available options. The crucial distinction here is that taking values seriously is not the same as the spirit of seriousness. Maturity demands the capacity to take values seriously without a collapse into the spirit of seriousness. Indeed, the former demand logically negates the latter, for the spirit of seriousness by definition means that only given values may be taken seriously. The spirit of seriousness disavows its responsibility for what to take seriously; maturity requires this responsibility and the anguish that comes with it.

Maturity, then, demands rationality, but it demands as well that reason supervises rationality and transcends its limitations. The spirit of seriousness, though, would reverse this relationship, yielding what Lewis Gordon calls “the colonization of reason by rationality” (L.R. Gordon, 2014a: 187). Such colonization begets reasoning in service of the unconditioned values of the serious. This is not to deny that extraordinary achievements can come out of such an arrangement. A single-minded chemist may discover a cure for a disease that will save millions of lives; in terms of the discovery alone, it is indifferent whether this was discovered in an attempt to save millions or in an attempt to develop chemical weapons with which to exterminate millions. Rationality begets potent reason, and it is immature if reason imposes values that subvert rationality and mandate reason’s impotence. But so too is it immature if reason establishes potency as an unconditioned good and in turn institutes a permanent deference to
rationality. Mature reason is responsible for rationality: it must nourish its capacity for success and temper its tendency toward conquest.

There is much that could be said here about how to cultivate the capacity for rationality, but such territory is well-trodden by extensive literature. As such, the focus here will be on the latter concern, how to prevent the colonization of reason by rationality and combat the spirit of seriousness. The discussion of theodicy above is instructive. Suppose that one begins with a theological perspective in which god is omnipotent and beneficent. Suppose that one then asserts and lives by faith in the correctness of this perspective as well as faith that such a God exists. What should such a person see if they examine the world rationally? The answer: goodness (or, at least, infinite evidence of God’s beneficence). Rationality has ceded evaluation of faith’s presuppositions. Does this mean that mature reason ought to begin with an outright rejection of such faith? Not as such, for indeed, how may reason evaluate belief without supposing propositions to be true and then rationally evaluating the consequences of the supposed?

Rationality presumes the infallibility of the presupposed; reason examines the tenability of the supposed. This suggests, then, that the crucial activity for reason to pursue on its path to maturity is the identification of its presuppositions and the critical evaluation of each, in an incessant but never completed movement toward the regulative ideal of independence from any presuppositions whatsoever. This would not entail that mature reason amount to omniscience, a complete knowledge of the true that would obviate the need for reason. Rather, the cancelling of faulty presuppositions creates the ground, as Donald Baxter puts it, “to excellently suppose” (2005: 372).

Here an objection awaits: if the ideal of mature reason is independence from presupposition, then is not mature reason symptomatic of the “useless passion” to become the in-
itself-for-itself? It is absolutely true that the investment in presuppositionless reason may manifest as bad faith, immaturity, and pathology. Such a diagnosis applies to rationality that denies itself as rationality: it presumes to have elevated itself beyond presupposition, but the positing of the pleasing belief that reason has achieved such status ironically serves as a presupposition itself, and in doing so hides from scrutiny whatever other presuppositions remain.

The positing of an ideal, however, is not the same as a pathological or bad faith belief that one has achieved the ideal. Here Sartre and Beauvoir are again instructive. Beauvoir, half-quoting Sartre, writes that “Man… is ‘a being who makes himself a lack of being in order that there might be being’” (2000: 11). Human passion is “useless” insofar as the ideal being it posits could not be; but human passion is useful insofar as the pursuit of its ideals brings about a real being, namely, the human life that struggled toward its ideals. Value does not precede human existence but is rather manifested in human acts. An ideal is that which I lack, but it is also that which I ought to pursue. If the ideal of mature reason is reason without subordination to presupposition, then it does not follow that reason with remaining presuppositions is immature on its face. Rather, what is immature is reason that denies its responsibility for extant presuppositions.

Such immaturity manifests in two directions. The first would be, as above, reason that falsely asserts itself as the fulfillment of the ideal. The second would be reason that asserts that it is merely the lack of fulfillment of the ideal: that is to say, reason that deems the ideal unrealizable in principle and hence calls off the pursuit entirely. Such a position denies, in short,

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15 Though this is not to say that a given human existence would not confront the problem of values whose constitution precedes it – that is to say, each human being enters into a world in which values have already been articulated. But the point is that the meaning of those values is up to contestation and re-articulation by each subsequent generation.
the reality that progress is possible. Progress, as Drucilla Cornell (2004: 85–97) reminds us, does not mean the position that all human life is an inevitable movement toward the realization of transhistorical ideals – though that meaning is assumed to obtain by many, particularly in various iterations of Euro-modern thought. Rather, progress involves first the choice of values that one is to pursue and second the completion of successful projects through which those values are realized. Progress lies in the fulfillment of projects toward posited ideals, though of course not without the complication that this process may involve certain realizations about the nature of those ideals and, hence, the transformation of the articulation of an ideal that emerges through the realization of that ideal. The mark of mature reason is progress toward the ideal coupled with the resolve that one’s task is not complete and there is progress left to bring about.

IV. Teleological Suspensions of Rationality

a. Aesthetic Judgment

The problem with rationality, on this account, is that rationality may facilitate the colonization of reason, and such colonization – as a form of the spirit of seriousness – is an evasion of responsibility and hence a form of immaturity. Here defenders of rationality have a simple rejoinder: what is at issue is not rationality per se but rationalization. Rationalization seeks to afford the veneer of rationality to desired conclusions through the mimicking of rational procedures. The evil of rationalization is that it undermines rationality; it is not really rational at all. Rationalization is the performance of a rational method – though through a distortion thereof – in order to move from evidence to a conclusion that is rationally incompatible with that evidence. Rationalization employs reason in bad faith. But what is the source of that bad faith?
Although there are myriad possible sources, one stands out as being necessary to consider: namely, the desire for rationality. In short, if rationality is posited as the in-itself-for-itself of reason – that form of reason that has transcended its transcendence, has become ideality fully realized – then rationalization is a byproduct of this useless passion. In the same way that humanity lacks being so that there may be being, or alternately, that existence lacks essence so that there may be essence, we may say that reason lacks rationality so that there may be rationality. It is through the acknowledgment that one’s consciousness is not already rational that one may engender projects of rationality. Seriousness, though, asserts a further step: reason starts with the lack of rationality but must become rationality; it is not reason if it does not conclude with the ideally rational. But implicit in this is a desire for rationality that motivates an erroneous pursuit of reason that would be exhaustively rational. Immature reason may prioritize this desire over the responsibilities that reason per se implies, and hence ironically it undermines rationality by begetting rationalization instead. Ironically, at a meta level, such rationalization does imply that one has begotten rationality, but this is so not because one has achieved the posited ideal of reason that is exhaustively rational – rather, it is because one has engendered reason that rationally serves the desire for rationality.

It would seem, then, that the maturity of reason involves its meeting an implicit responsibility: namely, that it takes responsibility for its implicit tendency to desire rationality. Again, this is not to say that the desire for rationality is illegitimate. It is, rather, to say that it is not the ultimate or only end toward which reason ought to direct itself. The structure of rationality presents a paradox in that rationality is an orientation toward the completeness of reason, but rationality can only be rendered complete through that which transcends it. The ends or presuppositions that breathe life into rational inquiry can only foster a complete and consistent
performance of rationality by staying beyond its fray. Reason that seeks to lose itself in the absolute of rationality, as figures like Kierkegaard have warned, tends not only toward errors of rationalization but also to a condition of being starved of those dialectical counterparts that would demonstrate such error.

Mature reason thus faces both responsibility for rational performance as well as responsibility for that which transcends rationality and must, at times, displace it. This latter, borrowing from Kierkegaard (1983), we may call a teleological suspension of rationality. It is a teleological suspension rather than a general suspension. A general suspension would call for the abandonment of rationality altogether. Mature reason, though, requires rationality. But rationality is required for purposes that are not justified on the grounds of rationality – that is to say, rationality is not the telos of reason. What, then, does mature reason need to do to go beyond rationality without its abandonment?

A sketch of an answer may begin with what the above discussion of Kant left out: the “third critique,” Kant’s _Critique of Judgment_ (1987). If the earlier critiques of pure reason and pure practical reason were products of a “matured judgment,” then the question of a critique of judgment ought to come to the fore. As regards our Husserlian criticism of Kant, Kant’s taking on the question of the critique of judgment is, ultimately, an insufficient defense: to merely add the critique of judgment to the list of critical responsibilities and conclude the list at that point would be to evade reason’s responsibilities for an infinity of critical endeavor. But this being the case does not foreclose the possibility that the third critique did, in fact, contribute to the maturation of the Kantian critical project. How might this be the case?

The question that comes to the fore in _Critique of Judgment_ is that of the aesthetic dimension of judgment. We will here leave a detailed examination of Kant’s answers to the side,
noting that many of the issues raised are taken up in alternative form above through the examination of the symbolic already discussed in terms of Cassirer, Sartre, and Beauvoir. A simple portrait is to say that aesthetic judgments transcend mere rational evaluation; they find value through means that are either incapable of being rationally analyzed or where rational analysis has been suspended.

Rationality cannot rationally examine rationality without presuppositions that render the endeavor subject to charges of circularity. Reason thus confronts the question of how to evaluate the presuppositions that undergird its rational procedures, despite the fact that, as presuppositions, they are that which are unannounced and unaccounted for. Yet our phenomenological inquiry into consciousness has raised the problem that the unannounced and unaccounted for could not be written off as the unconscious. Presuppositions, this suggests, function through pre-reflective consciousness, not through unconscious influence upon reason as such. The Kantian critical project can be read as bringing such presuppositions to light. For instance, the transcendental aesthetic of the first critique, in this sense, can be understood as an examination of that of which the sensible intuition is pre-reflectively conscious. The critical project brings that which is presupposed therein to reflective consciousness. That this endeavor could be read, as did Kant, as displacing knowledge in favor of faith stems from the fact that such presuppositions can be subject to rational explanation without being given an absolute justification through rationality. For instance, the problem of induction – that an inductive justification of inductive reasoning is circular – can be resolved, in short, by an aesthetic affirmation of its induction’s value rather than through rational argumentation alone.

One might infer from this that one could find in the aesthetic an unconditioned source of legitimacy. But to affirm the primacy of the aesthetic would amount to a rational commitment to
the aesthetic, which in a paradoxical sense might suggest that one has placed rationality above
the aesthetic in order to render the commitment to the aesthetic rational; in other words, the
aesthetic becomes the pretext for a return to the seriousness of the rational. Even if one
maintains, instead, a radical commitment to the aesthetic without a collapse into a rational
commitment to the aesthetic, the same problem would emerge: an aesthetic commitment to the
aesthetic still functions in a spirit of seriousness with regard to its displacement of the rational in
favor of the aesthetic.

What, then, does this imply for the possibility of mature reason? Reason is capable of
moves that find their grounding through rational justification as well as through leaps of aesthetic
valuation. Immature reason may seek to reduce the one to the other; it finds the aesthetic
rationally justified or the rational aesthetically validated. The problem, though, is that either
direction represents an immature abrogation of responsibility. Reason is confronted with the
responsibility to justify its rational moves beyond rationality and to assess its aesthetic moves
beyond aesthetic modes of assessment. The spirit of seriousness would try to reconcile these
tensions by finding some principle lying beyond both the rational and the aesthetic, and then to
assert that reason is ultimately accountable for the fulfillment of that principle. But we are left,
on such a picture, with the problem of adopting an irresponsible stance toward that principle: it
would be regarded as that toward which reason is accountable, but in so doing, reason could not
account for it without circularity – that is to say, reason could only establish the legitimacy of
this transcendental principle through the application of the very same principle.

For some, this would motivate an attitude of despair toward the prospect of mature
reason, for the ideal fulfillment of such responsibilities would appear to be impossible. Yet this is
precisely our account of maturity: it confronts responsibilities responsibly in spite of the fact that
their mutual ideal fulfillment is impossible; it chooses not, as it were, to look away from that set of demands it cannot fully fulfill. What, then, does such responsibility call for, if neither the aesthetic valuing of the rational nor the rational justification of the aesthetic can suffice to legitimate or eliminate reason’s operative presuppositions?

b. Imagination

We may here turn to the question of imagination which, fittingly, Peter Caws refers to as “the first problem on which [Sartre’s] mature philosophical attention was engaged” (Caws, 1984: 31). Imagination, for Sartre, is consciousness, and hence is consciousness of something. “Every consciousness,” he writes, “posits its object, but each in its own way. Perception, for example, posits its object as existing” (Sartre, 2010: 12). The image is a kind of object of consciousness that must also involve what Sartre terms a “positional act,” which may take the form of positing “the object as nonexistent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere,” or, in a fourth and final option, the positional act “can also ‘neutralize’ itself, which is to say not posit its object as existent” (Sartre, 2010: 12). As imagination, consciousness is not bound by prior constraints with regard to particular relationships to reality: it may posit the present as absent, the absent as present, the elsewhere as here, the here as elsewhere. It is thus, Sartre surmises,

a magical act. It is an incantation destined to make the object of one’s thought, the thing one desires, appear in such a way that one can take possession of it. There is always, in that act, something of the imperious and the infantile, a refusal to take account of distance and difficulties. Thus the very young child, from his bed, acts on the world by orders and prayers. (Sartre, 2010: 125)

Given our overarching thematic, we might here raise the issue of whether the imagination is a form of immaturity. Isn’t the imagination simply an immature consciousness, set upon fulfilling its desires by negating its responsibilities to reality? Here we may say that imagination
conforms to the category of *play*, a mode of activity ungoverned by external demands. In imagination, consciousness works through a framework of license; in the way, for instance, that the common notion of poetic or artistic license functions, it need not constrain itself through a prior commitment to representational fidelity. As licensed in this sense, it is freedom prior to regimes of accountability.

Yet it does not follow, on such an account, that the imagination is an immature mode of consciousness or of reason. Rather, a collapse of consciousness into mere imagination – and hence a project of indifference to reality – could be understood as immature insofar as this abrogates its responsibilities vis-à-vis reality. Reason is a meaningful responsibility for consciousness insofar as reality is evident, and a consciousness purely consumed by imaginative acts would evade its responsibility for apprehending the evidence of reality evaluatively. But if imagination is, rather, seen as a fulfillment of the demands made by reality upon reason, then it may be so, as we have said, as a teleological suspension of rationality. Rationality imposes on consciousness a structure of accountability in advance, that is to say, it renders certain accountabilities as *a priori* given. Imagination transcends such accountability and thus may transcend the *a priori*, which is to say, imagination presents the possibility of reason’s operating beyond the presupposed. Caution here is warranted, though, as to present such a possibility is not the same thing as to celebrate or guarantee its achievement. In short, whether imagination suffices to overcome a given presupposition is a contingent matter; it is an outcome that cannot be demanded prior to the performance through which it would manifest. To establish the possibility, though, is sufficient in one crucial regard: it establishes that it is a domain of reason’s responsibility.
In other words, because it is possible for reason to apprehend its presuppositions through the suspension of all given accountabilities, reason can take responsibility for such apprehension. This creates a paradox of accountability, insofar as for reason to meet such responsibility, it would appear to have to elaborate criteria through which to assess whether it has met the demands such responsibility implies. But the structure through which this responsibility would be met calls for the suspension of accountability; it is a responsibility that transcends that for which it may hold itself accountable, for such accountabilities would impose presuppositions on the imaginative act and hence subordinate it to a spirit of seriousness. What renders this a paradox but not a contradiction as such, though, is that the teleological suspension of such accountabilities can be undertaken in the name of a transcendental telos. This is to say that reason can hold itself accountable for the bracketing and elucidation of its presuppositions, but such accountability demands the suspension of those presuppositions through which procedures of holding itself to account would be set in motion. This transcendental telos, then, must have an open or undefined structure: to fulfill it would require the suspension of the pretense that one knows its meaning in advance.

An undefined telos is that for which maturity ultimately calls, because closure of the telos would imply a responsibility circumscribed, delimited. Maturity, though, confronts an infinite responsibility. Because our object of inquiry in the present chapter is reason, though, we face a teleological delimitation of sorts, at least if Husserl is correct that reason finds its telos in the apprehension of correctness and canceling of incorrectnesses. But mature reason, then, would have to have “correctness” and “incorrectness” as objects of contemplation whose meaning could not be fully given in advance; in other words, mature reason cannot presuppose a definition of correctness and, hence, must take responsibility for supposing its meanings and subsequently re-
assessing the meanings thereby supposed. Reason as mere rational procedure would, in the spirit of seriousness, define its standards of correctness in advance (e.g., correctness as maximum consistency). Reason as mere aesthetic exercise would, in effect, replace rational standards of correctness with arbitrary ones, that is, would content itself with affective forms of satisfaction as opposed to critical forms. Imagination can be understood as an aesthetic exercise circumscribed by responsibilities that in turn call forth the rational, and vice versa; hence, it is an activity of consciousness that transcends the rational and the aesthetic, not through a radical departure from either but rather through a nihilation of the modes of accountability either implies. This is not to imply, then, that mature reason discards the rational and the aesthetic in favor of the imaginative as that which transcends them; rather, mature reason retains – and avows – its responsibilities for all of these: it requires the rational, the aesthetic, and the imaginary, without establishing one of these as the grounds for the legitimacy of the others.

But if mature reason demands imagination through an open teleological structure, in what sense can imagination serve to fulfill such an open telos? Here Husserl is again instructive. For Husserl, we may thematically say that reason confronts an originary responsibility for itself. This is not to nullify or discard responsibilities that go beyond it, but rather simply to point out that these obtain through a relational intelligibility: what reason can hold itself responsible for ultimately calls for reason to apprehend what it itself is. Following Sartre, we see an obvious problem: what reason is, most essentially, is a freedom. Freedom is such that its existence precedes its essence. For reason to apprehend itself, it confronts the problem that in so doing, it will have apprehended that which it ceases to be, by the very fact that the apprehension stands out as the transcendence of the apprehended. But here we may again return to the notion of a thematic essence, that is, the establishment of that which appears essential without the
presupposition that such an essence exhausts the being that it seeks to apprehend. In other words, to use the phrase of Lewis Gordon, we may speak of “essence without essentialism” (see L.R. Gordon, 1995b: 51–8; L.R. Gordon, 2012). To apprehend freedom as “for-itself” is to establish its thematic essence, even as the meaning of this theme implies, precisely, that it is free to bring new meanings to bear.

To examine reason, and, more broadly, consciousness, thus requires imagination in the form of a “free variation.” Imagination, through the “positional act” described above by Sartre, must posit that which is absent or that which is elsewhere in order to make it evident to consciousness. Once evident, it can then entertain the question of whether it accords to that which is here present, either perceptively or through the posited image of what is here present. So, too, may it then proceed through the apprehension of points of comparison and points of departure. For reason to take account of itself, it needs imaginative acts through which it can entertain possibilities about what it really is, without presupposing in advance a final and complete self-definition.

A product of such imaginative variation is what Husserl terms eidetic phenomenology (Husserl 1969: 69–72). The process of variation makes evident that which remains essential under all possible variations; through imagination, it erects reflective consciousness of that which must be here in order for the imagined thers to be so constituted. The outcome, for Husserl, is a discovery of the transcendental ego, that is, reflective consciousness of that which must be a priori present for the possibility of reflective consciousness. If imagination nihilates presuppositions through the suspension of modes of accountability – that is, if it unburdens itself of prior commitments to the real in order to be free to forge the irreal – then consciousness of such imagination may yet take up the responsibility of examining the relationship between such
imaginings. “[I]n a free variation, I can phantasy first of all myself; this apodictic de facto ego, as otherwise and can thus acquire the system of possible variants of myself, each of which, however, is annulled by each of the others and by the ego who I actually am. It is a system of apriori incompossibility” (Husserl, 1969: 141). In other words, to apprehend an infinity of free possibilities is also to apprehend the structural unity or unities that would render them mutually incompatible, viz., for Husserl, the transcendental ego.

But as mature reason, these imaginative proceedings are not bound to a singular teleological structure – that is, while free variation engenders reflective consciousness of the transcendental ego, it need not do so to the exclusion of reflection on its other dimensions or thematic essences. What transcendental egology points to is the contingency of that which transcends the transcendental ego: the transcendental ego is discovered as the limit of consciousness’s facticity, i.e., it is that without which consciousness could not examine consciousness. We are here, then, on the same terrain as Sartre’s remark that freedom is condemned to be free: freedom is, paradoxically, the limit of freedom. If transcendental egology is that which imaginative variation encounters at its limit, though, then there is much else that it may apprehend in the course of the inquiry. Imaginative variation, in apprehending the factically-given status of the transcendental ego, reveals the contingency of its situation beyond this: those elements of its facticity which have appeared heretofore as necessary and/or inevitable now become open to contemplation of their contingency. In turn, then, reason can imagine modes of existing otherwise.

In short, then, what imaginative variation brackets is the world:

Transcendently, [the beginning phenomenologist finds himself as the ego, then as generically an ego, who already has (in conscious fashion) a world – a world of our universally familiar ontological type, with nature, with culture…
and the rest. …At first, even eidetic observation will consider an ego as such with the restriction that a constituted world already exists for him. … [But in] a maximally universal eidetic phenomenology…the ego varies himself so freely that he does not keep even the ideal restrictive presupposition that a world having the ontological structure accepted by us as obvious is essentially constituted for him (Husserl, 1969: 76–7)

For reason to achieve maturity in a human world is thus, in accordance with this study’s overall argument, for reason to take responsibility for a human world. Reason has to put the world into brackets, as it were, in order to not presuppose it. This implies not a radical departure from the world – a commitment to the unreal at the expense of the real – but rather a bracketing that facilitates accountability for the fact that apprehension of the real requires the activities of the irreal, of the imagination that constitutes the free operation of intentional consciousness.

Were the position here that the irreal thereby takes priority, as a responsibility that stands as a prior question to be definitively answered before turning to questions about reality, then this would be a form of immaturity no less problematic than unexamined presuppositions about the nature of reality. Mature reason is thus not first responsible for a critique of the imagination and then subsequently responsible for an examination of the world in light of that critique, but rather retains an infinite responsibility for which the elucidation of a necessary combination of reason’s obligations cannot be reduced to a presupposition about the particular permutation of these demands. We may thus affirm that mature reason calls for a bracketing of the world in the sense called for by Husserl: “Positive science is a science lost in the world. I must lose the world by epoché, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination” (Husserl, 1969: 157). But to lose and regain the world is neither to have enacted the epoché prior to consciousness of the world, nor to have conclusively regained the world through a final and definitive performance of the epoché. It is, rather, the mature choice to take responsibility for the world lost as well as for the
world regained, which is to accept responsibility for the infinite task of ever-losing a world that one remains responsible to ever-regain.
Chapter 2:
Mature Action

Maturity in a human world involves an encounter with expanded responsibilities and the project of meeting these responsibilities. The preceding chapter considered this issue with regard to reason. Yet if reason is an activity of consciousness, then it follows that we have already begun on the path toward the question of mature action. Consciousness is manifest through intentional acts. The notion of action in a human world, though, may denote more than mere acts of consciousness. Such consciousness is not only embodied in the sense of being a priori here, as it were, but is also embodied in such a way as to be, briefly put, an object for others. Through my acts, I am for others; for others, I am a there of consciousness. As regards reason, we have limited ourselves to the questions concerning responsibilities for which reason may hold itself to account. But if a human world is one in which others may hold me to account, then further examination is necessary. One reason, in particular, concerns the teleological nature of reason. The previous chapter argued that reason fit within a teleological structure oriented around the notion of correctness. There it was argued that, paradoxically, reason can only fulfill the demands of such a structure through the suspension of presuppositions about its meaning – that is, reason cannot regard the meaning of correctness as given in advance. Yet if we turn our inquiry to the question of action in a human world, we may start with a simple matter: the teleological structure of action may not be exhausted by matters of correctness; what makes action meaningful may not only be a struggle with matters of right and wrong.

As far as an inquiry into maturity writ large is concerned, then, while the account of mature reason we have given may be necessary, it may also be insufficient. To examine these
insufficiencies, we may now expand our inquiry to involve the category of action. We may thus examine maturity through the lens of action and action through the lens of maturity.

Such an examination offers a preliminary possibility: that some acts beget qualities through which subsequent acts may manifest maturity. On that model, it can be posited that maturity in a human world involves learning from experience. We have seen, already, in the domain of reason some problems and potential solutions to the question of self-understanding. There, the solution was that for reason to come to self-understanding requires, ultimately, a bracketing or suspension of the taken-for-granted world. A problem for such an approach with regard to action, though, comes if the meaning of action is intrinsically social. That is to say, the world constitutes the meaning of my acts, and those meanings remain with the world – they remain present to concrete others, just as I remain present to them – whether I bracket them or not. Imaginative variation on the potential meaning of the world and my actions within it may thus be useful, indeed, central for mature practical reason, but the same procedure would suggest I cannot take it as logically given that mature action is exhausted by a mature execution of practical reason. In other words, to presuppose that mature action is merely the application of mature reason would be to engage in a presupposition that the responsibilities of mature reason would proscribe.

We may, then, be brought to reflect on something that was a central problem of mature reason as it appears instead through the prism of action. “Learning from experience” would seem to imply that I learn not only about the world but also about myself. But in the world, this “self” is not merely a presence to itself (hence, a Sartrean being-for-itself) but is also a presence to others (for Sartre, a being-for-others). To place the latter in brackets in order to establish the supposedly more primal or fundamental reality of the former – to privilege the for-itself over the
for-others – may amount to an immature attitude toward the meaning of my actions. It would, in short, be an irresponsible attitude if it were indeed the case that responsibility for my actions is not only responsibility to myself but also responsibility to others.

As such, in order to establish the meaning of maturity as a matter of action, we need to first clarify the ontological status – or, considered in a slightly different register, the phenomenological meaning – of action. This chapter will proceed through the pursuit of such clarification. In so doing, it will establishment an argument about the shape of action’s responsibilities. Namely, action presents a paradoxical relationship to responsibility: action is responsible for itself in the mode of action, but so too is it responsible for itself as behavior, and, moreover, it finds itself responsible both for the character that it reveals and the character that it constructs. This is to say, in short, that I am my actions, but through them I am also me, and this me transcends the meaning of the I. Action in a human world, then, confronts a root expansion in its responsibilities, for it is responsible for what it is while remaining responsible for what it is not. Having established the structure of such responsibility, we will then examine the conditions for its immature evasion. There it will be argued that the spirit of seriousness, which posits the option of collapsing responsibility into avowedly sufficient structures of accountability, is present to action as a transcendental possibility for the evasion of its responsibilities. The stimulus to immature action, in short, is the possibility of relief from anguish through collapse of responsibilities into mere accountability. Finally, then, we will examine the burdens that mature action must apprehend and take seriously beyond the attitude of seriousness. There it will be argued there is a peculiar and central responsibility that mature action must confront: namely, political responsibility, which is irreducible to any transcendental form of accountability.
I. Action, Behavior, and Character

a. Intention and the Description of Acts

“My arm went up.” Let us call this description one. “I raised my arm.” Let us call this description two. Each of these describe one and the same act. Ludwig Wittgenstein famously raised the issue of what happens if we subtract description one from description two; the latter seems to imply “the fact that I raise it intentionally – or whole-heatedly, or autonomously, or freely” (1953, §621).

Suppose that I am the person describing this act of mine. If I am responding to the question, “What happened?”, then “My arm went up” could perhaps be as appropriate as would “I raised my arm.” But if I am responding to the question, “What did you do?”, then “I raised my arm” would be far more appropriate. If I were to respond simply, “My arm went up,” I have not indicated my deed. Such an answer would evade my intention, my freedom, and my agency. If I had indeed raised my arm but were to believe only that my arm went up and not that I raised my arm, then this would be bad faith: a flight from the reality of my freedom by way of a denial of my agency in having raised my arm.

It doesn’t follow that all of the events of my life ought to be described by me in terms of my intentions. Describing a trip to the doctor’s office, it would be odd to say “my body went to the doctor” rather than “I went to the doctor,” but it would be appropriate to say, “When the doctor tapped my knee, my leg kicked out” rather than “I kicked my leg out.” Describing the end of a dream, it would be appropriate to say “And then I woke up,” but, at least in many cases, “And then I woke myself up” might be inaccurate. Not everything that happens in my life can be attributed to my agency. But nonetheless, there is a problem of bad faith if, in describing those acts that are my “own” – those that derive from my choice to act as such – I describe them as
mere happenings, as outside my intentions. For if my act is chosen, to describe it in such a way as to convey such choice is to describe it as an *action*.

Of course, it doesn’t follow that any time I fail to describe my acts as actions I do so in order to evade my freedom. Among a group of friends, I tell a story about walking through an unfamiliar neighborhood. But as I now tell the story, I realize I cannot remember why I went to that neighborhood. “Well, I happened to be in this unfamiliar neighborhood…” I leave out of the story what my intent was, and when asked, I say I can’t recall. Those actions that I remember as actions I convey as such, but not all of the acts within the story need be recalled as actions – though it would be peculiar if, when pressed, I say not “I don’t remember why” but “I didn’t choose to do that…” when the choice was in fact mine. In short, if an act was intentional and I have an awareness of those intentions, there is something of a problem if I suppress that awareness by choosing not to describe my act as an action.

But let us now examine my descriptions as they encounter acts that are not my own. I walk into a café. As I approach the counter, a woman finishes placing her order, and the young man standing behind her approaches the clerk. I stand behind him. He proceeds to order four large coffees and one latte. This, for me, is an adequate description of his act. I am largely indifferent to his order, though I know that an order of this size will somewhat delay my own. I know what he has done but, as I have no prior relationship with this young man, it matters not why he has done it, or who he is, etc. I have no doubt that there were intentions involved in his act, that it was an action. For me, though, the relevant mode of description has no need to get into why he has done what he has done. It suffices for me to describe his act as *behavior*. It is not that some acts are behavior and others are actions: although there is behavior that is not itself also action, as when my leg kicks out after the doctor taps my knee, all action is capable of also
being described as behavior, denuded of crucial aspects of intention. Of course, to be described
as behavior does not require that one regards the act as not having had intentions: I am sure that
this young man has his reasons for placing this order. It is simply that the behavior I describe, of
his ordering four coffees and a latte, is different than the action he has in mind (“I am picking up
coffee for my co-workers,” or “I am getting refreshments for our study group,” etc.). To speak of
an action is to aspire toward having an adequate account of why someone did as they did; to
speak of behavior, one may comprehend aspects of that behavior as bearing more or less clear
evidence of intention, but the description put forth in no way aspires to exhaust the meaning of
the act as the agent understood it.

In describing my actions, however, given that an ideal description would exhaust the
meaning of my act, it does not follow that it would also exhaust what occurred in the act. Having
typed a paragraph on my keyboard, I can recall the point I was trying to make, I can recall the
argumentative steps taken, and, ideally, I can even remember the words chosen, the sentence
structure, the punctuation, etc. But to describe this action, though I may need to account for how
the parts of the paragraph were intended to serve the whole, it doesn’t follow that I would need
to recall which fingers struck which keys. I may intuitively know my default hand position on
this keyboard, but, as I wrote the paragraph, the matter of the coordinated movement of my
fingers was, for the most part, not an object of reflective consciousness. In choosing and
pursuing an end, I don’t as such choose all the means through which the end will be brought
about; the movement of my fingers upon the keys, at a certain level, might be better classified as
“directed by intentions” than intentional as such – or, at least, it would be fitting to say that the
different elements involved in the execution of an act are saturated with different degrees of
intentionality. As I put on a pair of pants in the morning, the movement and positioning of my
legs is a manifestation of my action ("I put my pants on,"), yet there is little reflective consciousness of these movements, and what attention is paid may be largely apportioned to the leg worming its way into a pant rather than the leg that is mostly stationary but subtly bending to facilitate the passage of the other. Or, keeping my balance may demand careful and equal attention to each leg, but the subtle movements of my torso and arms pass by without reflective attention.

Were there another person watching me type, or watching me get dressed, it would be reasonable for such an observer to focus, descriptively, on my acts as behavior. This is especially true, for instance, if a person were to watch me typing from an angle where they could not read the screen in front of me. If such a person wanted to come to conclusions about how I type, that person could analyze the movements of my fingers across the keyboard. The person might map out which keys are hit by each given finger and note whether there were any keys that were served by multiple fingers. It is true that if our observer has outstanding skills or is able to later examine a video of my typing, she or he may be able to follow what it is that I am writing. But if the observer is interested in my typing rather than my writing, then the object under observation is my behavior as a typist, even as the observer may analyze the behavior of my typing through the same acts that I understand in terms of the action of my writing.

b. Behavior and Responsibility

It is fair to say, speaking generally, that in observing an act in the first person, action is typically the most appropriate mode of description, whereas third person observation is far more likely to describe the act behaviorally. As actions involve intentions, if we now turn our attention
to the issue of responsibility, our discussion would appear to be most at home in the realm of action. I face my responsibilities as an agent, one who chooses this or that act, and though my choice will beget behavior, its direct object is the action. But in choosing the act, I also choose that which transcends my intentions and hence which in some sense transcends my action. Actions may bring with them behavior that is, to varying extents, unintentional.

I stride confidently into a crowded room, rehearsing key points to make in a conversation I will have with somebody who should be arriving any moment. I don’t pay enough attention to those around me, though, and thus fail to notice that as I take off my coat, I will force another person to move in order to avoid being smacked by my arm. Then, as I turn abruptly to hang the coat, my large turning radius crosses into the path of a woman who stops to avoid running into me but in so doing spills a bit of coffee that is carried forth by momentum. The scene can be envisioned going one way, in which I fail to notice the consequences of my acts for these two people, and another way, in which I notice the inconveniences I am imposing and either apologize or cowardly decide not to acknowledge the rudeness of my behavior. Either way, I am responsible for what I have done; this behavior, even if unintentional in crucial dimensions, is mine. I am thus responsible for my acts as action and responsible for my acts as more than action. This entails that I am responsible for behavior that even an ideal description of my actions would not exhaust. To maintain that I am responsible only for my actions and not their attendant behavior would be immature: it would be a flight from the depth of my responsibility.

Here it illustrative that those who are responsible for children – parents, guardians, teachers, care-takers, etc. – are accountable for the behavior of children, and in turn seek to cultivate a child’s sense of responsibility for his or her behavior. A child may be taught a sense of what is right or wrong, a sense of those intentions that are praiseworthy and those that are not.
But, for obvious reasons, what a child is typically rewarded or punished on the basis of is behavior.

I sit in a café, and a child, walking ahead of his father, approaches me. He asks if he can touch my beard; I tell him he may. The father looks on nervously, but I try to non-verbally indicate to him that I am comfortable with the child’s request. Having felt my beard for a few moments, the child withdraws his hand and then pauses. After a moment, he says, somewhat sheepishly, with an apparent sincere curiosity rather than a desire to insult, “You’re fat.”

The father grabs him by the arm: “Jacob! That’s very rude! Tell this man that you are sorry.” The child apologizes and appears on the verge of tears.

“It’s okay,” I say, seeking to make eye contact with both father and child as I speak; “I know who I am and how I look.” The father looks mortified, the child somewhat befuddled, and they proceed to the counter. I understand the child’s actions: his curiosity and desire to interact with me, combined with his limited social repertoire, engendered a statement that, by custom and convention, is regarded as rude and impolite. I do not infer from the seeming rudeness of such behavior that the child is ill intentioned. His father, though, while no doubt regarding himself as responsible for the child’s moral education and hence for the child’s intentions, must, in this context, deal first with the issue of the behavioral problem. The child’s behavior was a violation of the norms of this public space, a violation of my customary rights as an anonymous stranger in a public setting.

The father, at the level of responsibility for the child’s moral education, may not, as such, need to call into question the morality of his son’s intentions. Suppose morality, as Kwasi Wiredu (1996: 28–33) suggests, refers to sympathetic impartiality. It is not obvious, on those
grounds, that Jacob acted on the basis of prioritizing morally problematic values or interests over morally valid ones. Jacob could have imagined me, for instance, saying, “You’re a handsome young man,” and finding this acceptable, even if a touch embarrassing. For two people to speak of each other’s appearances, as an entrée to a dialogue in which each gets to know each other and learn about each other’s experiences, is not in itself immoral, and it may in some circumstances even rise to the level of being morally obligatory. It is reasonable to raise the issue of Jacob’s intentions being insufficiently sympathetic, insofar as he may not have considered how this comment about my appearance would make me feel. But this may be understood as an issue of Jacob’s degree of moral competence rather than of his merely having bad intentions, and in any event, given my actual feelings about what he did, it is not obvious that he was insufficiently sympathetic.

The notion here of “moral competence” would suggest that mature action would involve not simply the absence of ill intentions but the presence of mature reasoning, reasoning capable of meeting the moral challenge of complicated situations in a morally complex world. But as suggested above, mature action may demand more than merely a mature faculty for practical reason. An ideally-reasoned action is not isomorphic with an ideally-executed action. One who routinely fails to adequately bring about the best-laid plans is, at a minimum, responsible for rethinking the planning process. Plans that are a match for the array of the actor’s competences would seem more advisable than plans that would be ideal for an ideally competent actor. A perfect chef could conceivably create an ideal recipe and match it with ideal execution. But a mature chef, by contrast, might understand her or his limitations in performing the requisite tasks, procuring ingredients, time pressures, and so on. The mature chef would face the question of doing her/his best given limitations that cannot be overcome by mere fiat.
But if all this implies was that the mature chef is simply the one who matches the recipe to the means at hand, then it would follow that someone who, lacking any culinary training or aptitude whatsoever, abstained from cooking altogether would be a mature chef. A critical reckoning with one’s limitations is a necessary condition for mature action, but it is an insufficient condition because without an array of competences that can be employed in the act, maturity could simply amount to a minimization of activity. This raises the issue that mature action may require more than simply what one does, but further the presence of capabilities that one has acquired. In short, it raises the action of maturity mandating the development of character.

c. Character

Mature action would seem to involve practical reason that can harness one’s capabilities into behavior that will be as praiseworthy as the intentions behind it. Those capabilities, though, do not arise in the moment of decision-making but are rather cultivated over time. We are here in the terrain of habits, familiarly understood since at least Aristotle in terms of virtues and vices. It is, for instance, a virtue of a chef to have excellent knife skills, or to understand the complementarity of different flavors and ingredients. These are neither innate characteristics nor traits that arise spontaneously in the moment of preparing food; one trains and practices in order to bring these virtues about. One can, of course, speak of innate talents, but skills and habits are not simply manifestations of a talent given in advance. If it is true that the greatest athletes are in nearly all cases those naturally endowed with extraordinary physical talents, it is still the case that such genetic advantages are insufficient to achieve such status: the development of muscles necessary for high-end athletic performance requires training activities and not simply innate
strength, and the practicing of the particular skills required in different athletic events is necessary for the achievement of excellence therein.

Mature action, then, is to a considerable degree a product of actions that precede it. An action is located within a web of habits and capabilities. But this suggests further that mature action does not simply benefit from accrued virtues but is responsible for extending and reinforcing those virtues theretofore accrued, as well as for expanding the range of virtues to be drawn upon in the future by initiating and nurturing the development of additional virtues. This is not to say that all evaluation of an act is tasked with holding the actor accountable for all of the acts that preceded it. It would be immature for me to say of an addict who has taken exemplary steps toward recovery: “Still, there can be little to praise in these actions, since you are, after all, the person who became addicted in the first place; if you simply had abstained from that, there would be no need for recovery today.” But it is also the case that, from the standpoint of that actor, it would neither be mature to adopt such a standpoint (“My attempts at recovery are meaningless, for I am the person who fell into addiction, and that failure exhausts my capacity to do good…”) nor to engage in a wholesale exoneration of the past (“The person whose pursuits yielded addiction is gone now. I am a new person; that person exists no more…”). One cannot pursue recovery by denying that one has been an addict.

This suggests that my responsibility for who I am is, ultimately, an ambiguous one. To address the question “Who shall I be?” is also to provide an answer to the question, “What meaning shall I give to what I have been?” I bought a fancy shirt on Wednesday; on Saturday, I wear the shirt to a party where I over-serve myself red wine, becoming quite drunk. I wake up in a daze Sunday morning, finding my new shirt covered in maroon-tinged vomit. After a variety of efforts to restore the shirt, the stain proves indelible. I have not changed what happened on
Wednesday, but I have changed its meaning: it is infused with a degree of irony. Indeed, whether my life henceforth is littered with similar ironies will determine to a large degree whether the irony of Wednesday will take on a comedic value or a tragic one. Consciousness that reflects on my acts – whether it be my own self-reflection or the thinking of someone else – transcends the series of acts to the meaning or meanings that fix the essence of those acts. And though these series may be limited – as when I reflect on my acts between lunch and dinner and regard them as “this afternoon,” or those acts characteristic of four years in my adolescence as “my high school days” – they ultimately may be taken to a further limit through regarding them as constituting, simply, a person. Who I am is to be found in my acts. But if I ask who I am, I do so in such a way that I am paradoxically other than the object of my reflection, and not only because I am now both the seer and the seen, but because tomorrow I will be the one who yesterday saw himself and hence entered into some type of relationship with what was seen.

If, as our examination in the preceding chapter suggests, consciousness apprehends essence through appearances, then what I appear to be should reveal who I am. Acts disclose a reality. Action and behavior, as two different descriptions of the being of an act, begin from consciousness of different dimensions of that act.

At a party, I am bored. I mean to rectify my boredom by pretending to lose my balance and then falling into a swimming pool. Another partygoer happens to look in my direction just in time to see me begin my descent into the water. The meaning of this act appears quite differently to me than to this observer, who does not apprehend the pretense at the core of my act. For this observer, I have lost my balance and fallen into the pool. “But,” I think, “I didn’t really lose my balance.” And yet, this merely suggests that my observer’s description of my act is incomplete rather than incorrect, for my abdication of my balance did, in fact, affect its loss (though here in
both senses of the verb “affect”). This observer, a stranger to me who has not been attentive to my behavior at the party thus far, correctly describes my act. It is just that my action involves dimensions that are not evident to this observer.

There is, though, another partygoer, Allison. Allison and I have long been acquainted. She has witnessed far more of my acts than could be recollected. She expects me to act in particular ways. My pretending to fall into a swimming pool would, to her, be anything but a surprise. She is inside engaged in conversation. The stranger, having seen me splash into the water, turns and excitedly interrupts her: “That guy with the beard just fell into the pool!” Allison rolls her eyes. “Yeah, I don’t think he fell…” In short, Allison knows my character: she knows what behavior is characteristic for me, and she has reasonable expectations regarding what I will or will not do and why. The simple way to put this is that, in knowing my character, Allison knows who I am.

Ontologically, though, this is clearly troublesome in light of our exploration of Sartrean ontology in the preceding chapter. If human reality involves an existence that it is not what it is, then how, in short, could who I am be known? The moment that I claim to know myself, I have become other than the object of knowledge in that this moment of reflection has altered me. I am a moving target. If I learn who I am, I can in the next moment resolve to be otherwise. This is the ontological characteristic of a being-for-itself. But human reality does not therefore escape altogether the ontological characteristics of a being-in-itself, because, at base, a being condemned to freedom is this paradoxical for-itself. The dimension of human reality that is being-in-itself, though, neither overwhelms the for-itself nor collapses into a tidy synthesis; freedom persists as a sticking out from being, what Sartre terms an ekstasis (1992: 83, 120, 159–87). What I “am” must be to me a problematic type of being, for this being is at issue for me and
as such I, as the being that contemplates my being, stick out from the “my being” thus contemplated – I do not fit inside my being but rather transcend it. This “what I am” that I both am and transcend is, in existential terms, my facticity. I am the person who was born on this date to these parents with this name, but I am also the lived possibilities of disowning those parents, adopting a new name, and lying about my age. Freedom means that I am the ubiquitous possibility of queering my facticity. If this is so, though, how could Allison know me?

In ontological terms, the answer is that human reality is not exhausted by the unsteady dialectic of in-itself and for-itself but also necessarily involves being-for-others (Sartre 1992: 297 ff.). Behavior, as we have seen, may descriptively involve an effort to see the act in the mode of being-in-itself rather than the mode of being-for-itself: we are concerned with the facts of what happened and not necessarily with the consciousness of the actor who brought it about. Acts in a human world, though, are intrinsically linked to patterns of intentional meaning. Behaviorally, the young man in the café ordered four coffees and a latte, and the meaning of his action to him (picking up coffee for his office, or his friends, etc.) is beside the point. But to order coffee is to be involved in a social act, and to describe this behavior we need not know what it meant to the young man but we do need to know to some extent what the young man meant to communicate to the person working the counter, or, at least, we need to know the meanings involved in the communicative conventions that his act invoked. “Four medium coffees, and one small latte, skim milk,” has, we may say, both semantic and pragmatic

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16 This is the subject of Part Three of Being and Nothingness (Sartre, 1992: 301–556). What follows will draw heavily on Sartre’s treatment there, but as an explication of textual correspondences would here be quite cumbersome, we will proceed on the basis of establishing our indebtedness to Sartre rather than by drawing out those passages of his that provide direct support for our contentions.

17 On this and subsequent points, we are indebted to the work of Alfred Schütz, but again, endeavoring to provide a point-by-point elaboration of correspondences in what follows would detract from the strength of the account. See, generally, Schütz (1967, 1970), Natanson (1986), and L.R. Gordon (1995b 13-66).
dimensions of meaning. There is a literal meaning to the words and the order they are put in – even though, in this case, the statement is perhaps grammatically more of a para-sentence (a list) than a sentence as such. There is also a pragmatic meaning, a way in which, to paraphrase J.L. Austin (1975), this young man seeks to do something with words: the conventions relevant to this context mean that this utterance has effectively the same meaning as “I hereby order four medium coffees and a small skim latte.” For me to act is to commit a deed that has meaning beyond the intention I affix to it. Acts thus have an inescapable element of public meaning.\(^\text{18}\) If as a for-itself I am what I do, then the fact that what I do is open to a world of perception and interpretation beyond myself means that my acts are not simply for me. They are also for others, and if I am my acts, this means I am also a being-for-others.

This being-for-others is an ontological description rather than a normative ideal. It is not that when I do things for the benefit of others I make myself a being-for-others. When a confused man approaches me and asks for directions, I am equally a being-for-others whether I provide detailed directions, or feign ignorance, or tell him I know the way but won’t share it with him, or provide false directions that will cause him to be lost for hours, or respond simply by dancing a foxtrot. I am a being-for-others as I sit alone at home reading, and I am a being-for-others as I take a solitary shower. That these acts are done in private does not negate their ontological status as for-others – indeed, it is only as a being-for-others that the privacy of some of my acts could

\(^\text{18}\) This does not imply that acts do or even could have a private meaning in the sense at issue in Wittgenstein’s famous argument against the notion of a private language (for discussion, see Chapter 4). In telling myself that I intend to do this or that, I am conscious of my thoughts. If thinking is both the generation and the apprehension of ideas, then my thoughts have a communicative structure and comprehensibility: I both create their content and understand that created content. The structure of thought is auto-communicative. I may order a hibiscus tea for reasons known only to me, based on thoughts not shared with anyone else. But this means that I keep my intentions private, not that their meaning could not be understood if I were to share them.
have meaning. Should I be stuck on a desert island, I remain present for others as an absence:

“Whatever happened to…?”

Does this mean that, to get to the matter of who I really am, we need simply look at who I am for-others? It does and it does not. I confront myself as a person insofar as I face the choice of what I shall do – hence, as a being-for-itself. But others already apprehend me as what I am – my being-for-others – in a way that my choice can at most modify but cannot negate as such. What is known of me, a being-for-others, is my character. I am the person who did x, y, and z, and through those acts I have been disclosed to a human world. That each individual has different evidence of me suggests that they do not all have the same idea of my character: Allison can describe my character richly, with depth and specificity; the stranger at the party cannot describe my character richly, and though they could attentively watch and describe my movement at a party, it would take quite a while for such descriptions to move from being descriptive of someone to being descriptive of me.

To know someone’s character is to be engaged hermeneutically, for one moves from a mere understanding of behavior and the social meaning of that behavior to an understanding of the relationship between that behavior and the meanings that I attach to my acts. To come to know somebody is to pay attention to them in such a way that one begins to know their actions as much as their behavior. As such, there can be radically different perspectives on my character. A student may know me quite well as a teacher, and a bartender may know me quite well as a patron, and each may have a quite different assessment of my character. But such differences do not imply that one is right and the other wrong, or that they are talking about two different people or two different things – they imply simply that neither perspective on my character is exhaustive. Of course, there can be mistakes about my character, but just as I can mistake a
mouse for a rat, the condition for a mistake is that there is a fact of the matter. One needs a perspective in order to speak of another’s character, but it does not follow that one’s character is either the sum or the series of others’ perspectives on it.

What, then, are the implications for maturity of the fact that my action finds itself meaningful not only on its own terms, but through the meanings of my acts that reverberate through my behavior and character?

II. My Actions as Responsible for Me

a. Responsibility for Action-as-Behavior

If maturity is an encounter with a radical expansion of responsibility and the effort to meet expanded responsibilities, then what are the consequences of this account of behavior and character for mature action? To start with, I am at base responsible for action as action. In the same sense that Kantian ethics had called for one to act out of regard for the moral law, action is responsible for being good (or right, or virtuous) as an intention-laden action. Maturity demands that an action be responsible for its intentions. And yet such maturity, as an encounter with a radical expansion of responsibility, would entail action’s encountering responsibilities that lie beyond those of action as action. My actions are responsible, as well, for my behavior and for my character. What is the meaning of these peculiar responsibilities?

With regard to behavior, the implication is relatively straightforward: mature action is responsible for action as behavior. Typically, as suggested above, a child whose behavior is unacceptable does not stand alone with regard to accountability for such behavior: a parent, guardian, teacher etc. – or, moreover, a family, a school, a community, a nation, or conceivably a
world – takes responsibility for the acts of the child. In many such cases, the child’s action is at fault, but elders accept accountability for such behavior in order to facilitate the child’s process of learning how to act. Children often are shielded from the full consequences that their behavior would prompt were it exhibited by an adult. In general, by contrast, adults simply must face any consequences engendered by their behavior: violating codes of conduct, whether explicitly or implicitly, subjects an adult to reprisal. When children face consequences for their behavior, though, it is often not because of the rules as such but in order to advance the process of teaching the child how to become an adult. A child who makes a mistake or poor decision may, for instance, simply be charged with learning from the experience rather than with taking on the full burden of restitution. Indeed, where adult consequences are imposed upon children, it is often as a result of the child having failed to learn appropriate lessons from past experiences. Ironically, to be treated as an adult can have a remedial dimension: a child who, given ample chances to discern right from wrong and choose to do right, may eventually be subjected to adult consequences because normal means have failed.

This is not to imply that it is typical for children to be absolved of consequences for their behavior: it is simply to point out that the patterns and types of consequences have, as a primary aim, the facilitation of a child’s learning and maturation. One could claim here that this simply means “age-appropriate” punishment is in play. But note that, while it is quite typical for children to face different consequences for their behavior at different ages, this is quite atypical for adults. For instance, it is only in rare circumstances that criminal law would differentiate between a crime committed by a 25-year-old and a crime committed by a 55-year-old. Any such differentiations would likely hinge on appreciating the difference in circumstances between individuals (e.g., some offenses may more easily be forgiven or unpunished if committed by
somebody who is senile). For children, though, variability in reprisal is common. Indeed, the issue is likely not so much that punishments are adjusted for a child’s age so much as they are adjusted for a child’s degree of maturity. Children who mature more quickly often face harsher consequences for their misdeeds than their peers, accompanied by words such as these: “I expected more from you.” Adjusting punishment for adults on the basis of their degree of maturity, by contrast, smacks of injustice, since the notion of adulthood brings with it the expectation of maturity – and not maturity merely to some degree.

This is not to say that one does not find such cases. It is quite typical, for instance, for many contemporary societies to exonerate young men in their early twenties, and at times even into their thirties and beyond, on the grounds, essentially, that “boys will be boys.” This is, in effect, an exemption from the reasonable expectation of maturity. Overwhelmingly, such an exemption is associated with higher social status: it is typically afforded to white, upper- or upper-middle class, heterosexual men, and much less often afforded to any women or people of color. This amounts not to a variability of the standards faced by adults but rather a variability of when different people are expected to face the burdens of adulthood. Relatively wealthy white men are simply granted an extended adolescence, whereas it is typical for women, young men of color, many poor white men, youth with disabilities, transgendered youth, or gay white men to face adult burdens during the period conventionally reserved for adolescence, and often even earlier. This simply fits larger patterns of those societies wherein class, race, sex, ability, and sexuality are factors that radically stratify the responsibilities imposed upon and faced by different human beings.

This does not imply, though, that all that is at stake in action-as-behavior is simple punishment. Action as action is responsible for the value of the act. But my act as behavior has
value that transcends its valuation as my action. Action is a movement from an intention to a completed deed: it is an act passing ontologically, as it were, from the for-itself to the in-itself – from the moment of “what could be done…” to the moment of “what’s done is done.” But as an act-in-itself, it is public: it is, in essence, in-itself-for-others. The responsibility of this “for-others” dimension of an act can be displaced onto adults in order to shield children, but adult life demands a depth of accountability. Thus, maturity entails that when I have chosen the right action, I may still be responsible for how others have been harmed by my act, even though its having been right means, by definition, I have not wronged anyone. The immature actor, on having harmed another, will often demand recognition of the correctness of the act: “It was the best I could have done,” or, plumbing the depths of bad faith, “I had to do it!” A mature actor, by contrast, takes responsibility for the harms visited by his or her right actions. Maturity demands responsibility for even the negative consequences of optimal choices. This does not mean that maturity demands that one agree, for instance, with one who would charge that, because they’ve been harmed by me, they have in fact been wronged by me. Such a position would entail that I abrogate my responsibility for the evaluation of my acts; it is not mature to let the misguided, or the mischievous, use their claims to supersede my responsibility for self-judgment. Maturity does not entail deference to others. Yet to be accountable for my actions means I am responsible for the harm they induce, and not simply responsible for whether they were right or wrong.

\[b. \textit{Responsibility for Action-as-Character}\]

What are the implications for maturity of action-as-character? Here matters are more complex. Maturity demands responsibility for behavior because my acts are not only actions; an
act is a movement from an action-for-itself to a behavior-in-itself-for-others. Action as character, though, suggests the return of the act back to the actor: my actions, though now a transcendence of my facticity, constitute my facticity-to-come. They erect the situations that I shall subsequently confront. My actions now will impose limits and limitations on the actions that will succeed them. I am thus responsible for forging my character, for expanding and limiting capacities, for engendering habits. As I act today, I carry forth responsibility for my actions yesterday; if they have rendered me prone to act unsatisfactorily today, they establish not my exoneration but my guilt: “bad habits are acquired by people; misfortunes and failures are their own making. …A person is responsible for the state of his or her character, for he or she is endowed with the capacity to reform and improve” (Gyekye, 1995: 122–3). As such, each of my actions is charged with responsibility for my becoming-virtuous. “A virtuous character is the result of the performance of virtuous acts” (Gyekye, 1995: 151), and this implies that each human action is anguished in the dual sense of its responsibility for being a good act and of its responsibility for being an act through which one becomes good. I am my actions, but I also transcend those actions in that I am the product of those actions. The responsibility implied by the latter clause may not entirely be subsumable by the former. If, for instance, there are virtues that can only be developed through a process of learning from mistakes, then I face the paradox of needing to be wrong in order to become right.

A child’s life is saturated with a responsibility for becoming. This is so to an extent that it may overwhelm, obscure, or at times perhaps even dismiss responsibility for the child’s acts as actions to be judged in their own right – that is, responsibilities for becoming may supersede certain responsibilities of doing. A child faces the imperative to grow up in such a way that it may dwarf the imperative to act well. This is not as simple as to say that the child has a general
license to act poorly, of course, since acting well is necessary to develop virtues and preempt vices. But it does mean that the child has a certain creative license, a license that suggests that growth often comes from trying things out rather than from a reliable and unrelenting pattern of performing good acts. The child is given the space to learn and to grow through play. Play involves an admixture of heightened and restricted license: the rules within play are radically open, and the rules that delimit the domain of such play tend toward rigidity. There are rules that one must take seriously – rules laid down by adults whose authority, Simone de Beauvoir notes (2000: 35), is often regarded as if God-like – but these rules establish zones within which the child is regarded as autonomous and hence may otherwise disregard the general seriousness of the adult world. As a child ages, the rules typically evolve both in scope and content. An adolescent typically faces an expansion of the domains in which she or he is licensed to be playful, but with that expansion typically comes heightened accountability for one’s acts in general. High school students, for instance, are often given options to take elective classes. But this right to greater autonomy implies duties with adult consequences: high school grades typically bear substantial and enduring consequences for an adolescent’s options as an adult that elementary and middle school grades do not.

To hold a child accountable for character development means, in short, that it is generally inappropriate to hold a child fully accountable for the character developed thus far. A child who fails is often exonerated from accountability for that failure on the simple grounds that the child is still learning. This is not to say that this is how it always is: there are violations for which children face consequences that will subsist into adulthood. But such consequences are often a reflection not of the child’s acts or the state of the child’s character alone but of the relation between the child’s progress and the general expectations for the child.
An example is found in practices like what in the U.S. is called “tracking,” which involves determining the academic “track” of students on the basis of their academic performances at relatively young ages. Tracking as educational policy rests not on the grounds of rigorous empirical study of childhood development but rather primarily on the exigencies imposed by dynamics of race and class on public policy. Tracking is, to quite a large extent, mere shorthand for stratifications in the social and economic status of children. Poor children, in order to avoid the lower tracks, have to clearly demonstrate extraordinary talent. Rich children typically attend schools that don’t bother with the tracking system, as these are de facto upper track. The rare rich children who are in danger of being placed on lower tracks due to merit will, typically, simply be moved to schools, whether public or private, where the child’s socioeconomic status ensures they remain on the upper tracks. As such, tracking as a practice is indicative of the larger tendency within the U.S.: to effectively extend the childhood of the wealthy well into adolescence, to extend the adolescence of the wealthy well into adulthood, and to impose adult burdens on economically disadvantaged children prior even to adolescence. For the most part, then, tracking reflects not an assessment of the child’s character but an assessment of the child’s socio-economic standing. Though this means that many children do ultimately face life-long penalties imposed because of their youthful failure to develop a studious character, in general this simply reflects a suspension of a commitment to fully regard them as children. Such a suspension implies the appropriateness of imposing adult standards of accountability precisely because maturation is not expected of such children, implying in turn that those protections that might facilitate maturation are needless. Those wealthier children who are, in effect, fully protected from the implications of tracking represent the normative path: they are not held fully

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19 For a classic examination of tracking, see Kozol (2012). For a contemporary examination, see Burris (2014).
accountable for their scholarly character because such a suspension of accountability may be necessary to create the characteristics that would prepare them to be held accountable down the line.

An adult, unlike most children, is taken to be fully accountable for his or her character. Though this means that the adult, like the child, remains responsible for character as an ongoing and continually evolving project, the adult faces accountability for each of his acts as product of his or her character heretofore. A tragedy implicit in adult responsibility is that though I am accountable for my acts as an adult, in this accountability I remain responsible for my acts as a child. Through my acts, my character is revealed and evaluated; that being-for-others that is judged – that character saturated with virtues, or vices, or both – is tried as an adult, even though it was, to an unmistakable degree, forged in a child’s world. I am the crimes of my childhood: if I dug a hole in those years of play, my acts now bear the burden of filling that hole in order to stand as if on level ground.

c. Marks and Stains

Childhood, though, does not merely advance some and hold back others. The familiar claim is that events of childhood can cause one to be “scarred for life.” Childhood experiences leave their imprint: the consciousness of the adult is not severed from her/his past, metamorphosed like a butterfly having left the caterpillar behind in the chrysalis. The adult retains a stock of memories, and though perhaps many will be trivial, many others will be traumatic, and all will be formative. The idea is indicated in the psychoanalytic notion of ontogeny: a child endures experiences that engender particular configurations of symbol and
lack, configurations that in turn stamp the thinking and behavior of the adult. As an adult, I am this stamp; I live it as responsibility for it. As the stamp is facticity, then though I am it, I also am not it: I am it as its transcendence; I am me as the ekstases of me. I am my character insofar as I am the queering of my character. But to transcend, to stick out from, to queer this me is not the same as to erase it. My acts as an adult bear the mark of this childhood: they are stained by it. This is not to say that the mark or the stain is necessarily indicative of their origin. My childhood need not mark me in the way that a cattle-brand is taken as not merely indelible but also unambiguous evidence of where a cow has come from. My acts each bear the evidence (though in highly varying degrees) of my traumas, even though as acts they have not thereby been determined by those traumas. Traumas leave a lasting influence, though the nature of such an influence is an ambiguous one, since some of my acts will be performed in order to overcome trauma and others to reinforce them.

Following Fanon (1967a), it is important here to augment this notion of ontogeny with that of sociogeny. A social world stamps me; it fixes patterns of meaning and gives rises to practices that bear particular significances within that schema. For sociogeny as well as ontogeny, it would not work to view them as factors that determine my actions, but they do determine certain factors of what my acts could mean. A member of a religious community need not worship as instructed – the community does not determine that they must do so, even if it requires as such. The practices of the community, though, could be such that the member’s act of abstaining from worship would bear the meaning of being sacrilegious (even if the abstainer would reject this characterization) in a way that non-practice by a non-member would not. To have been born and raised in the United States, my actions are marked – they are the acts of “an American,” even though through my acts I may protest that I am merely a human being, or that
the notion of the United States is arbitrary or illegitimate. I can, of course, seek to evade such status – for instance, by moving to Brazil and telling anyone who will listen that I am Canadian. Yet such acts would bear the mark: they are acts of evading my American-ness, not acts that yield its erasure.

Fanon articulated sociogeny to supplement the Freudian understanding of ontogeny, itself put forth as a corrective to those who would reduce psychological causation to phylogeny. Phylogeny refers to the transmission of traits and characteristics within biological lineages. Human beings enter a world having already received biogenetic inheritances. There are interesting tendencies regarding the over- or under-statement of the reality of such inheritances. On the one hand, there are those for whom the phylogenetic is the only legitimate descriptor of things as they really are. Biology, such thinking often goes, describes human reality; to speak of culture, or the effects of childhood experiences, would be to depart from the real, to indulge in the fantastic. The problem with such a position is its elision of human freedom: though such freedom may have biological roots, these roots are present in human reality as facticity rather than essence. Reductionistic biologism often takes the form of a bad faith evasion of responsibility, by way of regarding certain behaviors as biologically given rather than adopted and performed through human choice.

On the other hand, though, there are those for whom the biological is intrinsically illegitimate in human life. From this perspective, values are the exclusive domain of transcendence (although such a position is often expressed in the language of rationality, autonomy, and mind), and to value biological inheritances as such is an obscenity. Such a

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20 For discussion, see L.R. Gordon (2015) and Bird-Pollan (2014).
position is laudable in its attentiveness to human choice, but in so doing it poses the problem of the evasion of facticity. In its extreme form, this leads to talking about choices as if they transcended even context or situation: choices are deprived of a relation to what they were chosen from. In more moderate form, such a position would hold that the biological conditions are the context of human choice, but that the ideal of such choices, the source of all human values, is the transcendence of the biological. From such a perspective, the phylogenetic has brought us about, but to really be human would mean to accomplish its obsolescence or abolition.

Each of these positions on phylogeny amount to a form of the spirit of seriousness: they regard value as deriving either from what human beings inherit or from the radical escape from that inheritance. Human values, though, are developed in negotiation with such inheritances, in a manner both similar to and interconnected with how sociogeny and ontogeny stamp our valuation.

A woman, of my age and from my community, was born with symmetrical features, blond hair, blue eyes, and light complexion. She has, from her earliest days, been regarded as pretty. Her prettiness does not define her: she is a freedom who chooses this and that. But those choices are, in this world, made by a pretty person. The root materials of her prettiness, we may say, lie in the phylogenic: her facial structure, her eyes, hair, etc. were all received, a combination of traits either present in chromosomes from her biological parents. She bears these marks; they are part of her. Of course, the meaning of such marks is another matter: the meaning of the mark is not given in the chromosomes. Rather, such meanings attach to her marks through the agency of others, through ontogeny and sociogeny. Ontogenically, she is shaped inter alia by her parents’ oft-repeated statement, “She has her father’s eyes,” a meaning that will itself
transform in some sense as her relationship with her father evolves. Sociogenically, she enters a world in which each of her physical traits is seen within a web of symbolic practices. She is seen through eyes leaden with aesthetic judgment, and such judgment functions through values that, though not universal (or, at least, typically not universal) are nonetheless shared values. The world she has entered, in this case, is further a world in which she is seen from the start as a girl, and the mode of seeing encountered by a girl in such a world is, shall we say, hyper-aesthetic. She further has faced a world that, as she became a woman, continued in many ways to see her as a girl (with the hyper-aesthetics this entails) well into, and perhaps even nearly throughout, her adulthood.

Prettiness fades; the markers that denote it in some cases vanish, in other cases are obscured by other markers. But it is a separate matter whether this means that the mark of prettiness lived by this woman ever goes away. When wrinkles emerge – at first often read as adding accent or character to her prettiness, but later on being read as occluding or negating it – their meaning exceeds their merely physical characteristics: they become marks of the erosion of her prettiness. The marks of absence today function here as marks of presence yesterday. This does not mean that these marks function in such a way for all: a young child does not see in his grandmother’s wrinkles the marks of a youth negated. But to a peer, or to somebody who has seen photographs from her younger days, the signs of age are signs of a prettiness transmogrified. A similar dynamic emerges if this woman seeks to remove the marks of her prettiness. If she dyes her hair, it is no longer blonde, but it is hair that’s been dyed; if she cuts her face so as to affect an ugly pattern of scars, she may have removed the characteristics that cause her to be seen as pretty, but she cannot remove from this latter act its having been carried
out to negate prettiness. The mark can only be removed, as it were, with marks that refer to its former presence. The mark, it turns out, is a *stain*.

That I am not merely my acts but also my character means, then, that I am these stains that are me. As a for-itself, I remain in an important sense other than this person that has been imprinted with staining marks and stamps, this being-in-itself-for-others: it is merely the factual, and I am its transcendence. But as facticity it is that which I am *condemned to transcend*: I must be it in the mode of not being it. I am *me* in the mode of a *not-being-me* through which this *me* is disclosed. This is quite different from saying that I am me in the mode of not-being-another: while it is true that I am not Estes Kefauver, and I am condemned not to be him, my existence no more discloses the being of not-being-Kefauver than does the existence of a countless number of others. But this *me* – *my* character – is something that *I* efface in order for it to appear. I, then, am these stains upon me in the mode of not-being-them. Their persistence as stains is not in spite of but rather *through* my not-being-these-stains: I am the “Out, damned spot!” that secretes their indelibility. This does not imply that I could not be at peace with them: I can choose to not-be-them in the mode of indifference, or of pride, or of bemusement. But each of these attitudes as a transcendence of the stain carries forth its factual permanence.

The problem that here emerges is that I thus face a lived responsibility not only for the value of my acts but also for the value of *me*. As the former does not exhaust the latter, I thus face responsibility for the value, in short, of my stains. To be black in an antiblack racist world is to face responsibility for one’s blackness; to be a woman in a misogynistic world is to face responsibility for one’s womanhood. A moral rejoinder: *that’s not fair*. I do not choose the world I enter into, I do not choose my marks, and I certainly did not choose to have *these* marks in this world; how could it be fair to be held to account for them? The problem with this rejoinder: an
unfair responsibility is not a nullified responsibility. Its unfairness may merit its nullification, but this does not mean that I do not have to face them – if a responsibility is unfair, I remain responsible for whether or not I shall regard it as null. Should I declare its nullity – “I hereby disavow this unfair responsibility,” – I remain subject to being held accountable by those who continue to regard it as the law of the land.

In short, maturity means that I am responsible for an unfair world. Even if my choices are morally ideal, I face the anguish of being present to a world that regards the sub-ideal as ideal, or a world that regards the ideal as sub-ideal. An ideal being-for-itself can be present to a world such that as a being-for-others it is guilty of, essentially, failing to be supra ideal. A parent, as noted above, is responsible for the behavior of her or his children. This is in part because a child should not be held fully accountable for conduct that was set afoot by bad instruction. But it is also because an adult is regarded as one who can be held accountable for bad conduct set afoot by good instruction. Now consider a parent who, in the face of reproach for her/his child’s actions, says to the child, “This was all your fault.” Even if the child has been ideally parented, the response is inappropriate and immature. The caveat here is that there may be cases in which the parent says such a thing in order to teach the child how to take responsibility, but if it is admitted that the parent is there right to say as much to the child, it remains immature for the parent to believe the behavior lies beyond his/her responsibility.

A problem emerges here, particularly, as J. Reid Miller (2017) argues, for modern thinking on ethics and morality. Modern thought understands ethics in terms of acts. There are good acts and there are bad acts, and responsibility comes down to what kind of actor I choose to be. Contemporary debates in moral theory largely come down to whether the moral and ethical are reducible to the goodness of an act (as in utilitarian approaches), the rightness of an act (as in
deontological approaches), or the goodness of a character developed through the act (as in virtue ethics). From any of these accounts, it would be easy to conclude that racism and sexism, for instance, are unethical positions: they pre-judge a person’s acts on the basis of non-ethical criteria; aside from a stray utilitarian justification, they are essentially *verboten*.

Yet the fact remains that women and people of color are routinely punished, as it were, on the basis of something other than the simple ethical content of their acts. They are treated as if guilty of a crime, when they have not committed this crime. Efforts at justification abound, many of which, as Miller traces, locate their sources in crimes of a distant past. Blacks, early modern discourse often maintained, were the cursed descendants of Canaan, who was cursed by his grandfather, Noah, for unspeakable acts committed by his father, Ham; or women, some misogynists have maintained, inherit a curse warranted by Eve’s betrayal of Adam. The logic of a curse, Miller suggests, is one in which *criminality* supersedes crime: it is not that one has been found guilty, but that one is intrinsically *suspect* and hence illegitimate prior to any illicit acts.

Modern ethics has proven adept at articulating the illegitimacy of this system of criminal attribution; such attributions, rationally considered, are clearly unjust (even as it has often struggled to articulate why so many of if its key philosophical progenitors – Locke, Hume, Kant, etc. – failed to see the injustice of such a system). But this articulation of illegitimacy is not tantamount to an eradication of the practice. One reason why this is the case is suggested through careful attention to the logic of a curse. The opposite of a curse is a blessing. But a blessing means to receive, in brief, an advantage one has not earned through one’s deeds. This, Miller contends, means that the blessed are just as touched by criminality as are the cursed: a blessing is a mark affixed. The spoils of one’s blessings can be squandered or even renounced, but they stain the recipient as one who received without having earned. The blessed are not guilty because
the blessing was beyond their choosing, but they are saturated with a certain criminality – recipients, as it were, of stolen goods.

A world deeply infused with racism and sexism, then, poses an acute problem for those who seek to address these problems through the logic of ethics. Racism and sexism are granted as being illegitimate. But redress would imply that the blessed are obligated to forego the fruits of their blessings. For an innocent, though, such a demand would be regarded as illegitimate – returning a blessing is praiseworthy but supererogatory, since it has been innocently received. With regard to racism, the familiar association of whiteness and innocence intensifies these dynamics. It can be universally granted that racism is unethical and illegitimate, but nonetheless maintained that efforts to eradicate the unfair advantages it has bequeathed are equally illegitimate on principle. Many ethicists will at this point turn their attention to demonstrating precisely what many whites are guilty of – the crime per se and not merely the criminality of their blessing. The problem, though, is that such an effort would find merely guilty people: it would establish the guilt of vicious and complicit actors, not the guilt of whiteness (the stain) itself. In the face of such a charge, many whites would simply take recourse in demonstrating to the ethicists that they, personally, remain innocent.

The problem here, Miller’s argument suggests, is that for modern ethics, the removal of the stain functions as the ideal: if only we were our acts, and not these (illegitimate) stains. From the vantage of those cursed by modern racism, the issue is clear: to live as stained renders the illegitimacy of the stain tragically moot. Stain removal as an ideal retains the illusory dimensions of the in-itself-for-itself: it is, in short, an unrealizable ideal. To be one for whom this ideal could be at issue is to be one who could not meet it. But the absence or impossibility of the ideal does not imply that all is permitted, or that the pursuit of the valuable is hopeless. To be black in an
antiblack world means to face a world in which one is stained, to live a life saturated by marks of criminality. The immediate meaning of this stain is that one faces a curse. This suffices to render the curse ethically illegitimate. But the ethics of being black must account for lived responsibilities that are not at all spelled out or clarified by the fact of the stain’s illegitimacy.

Blackness thus imposes expanded responsibility. To be black in an antiblack racist world is to be responsible to live in a world of illegitimate modes of accountability. Immaturity, in such a context, can be pursued through bad faith: an effort to evade the reality of a heightened burden and the anguish that accompanies it. The problem, though, is that this bad faith option – as one finds, for instance, in a black person who tries to be regarded as white – may attempt to obscure the stain, but in that very effort merely demonstrates the enhanced burden the stain imposed to begin with. The alternative is maturity: an effort to meet this burden as expanded responsibility. To be black and mature means that one faces the normal responsibilities that come with being human, but one must also meet those extraordinary responsibilities that are imposed by the stain. But if the stain is a deviation from the ethical that cannot be removed through the ethical alone, then this suggests that black maturity involves the extra-ethical effort to eradicate the conditions through which the stain emerges. This suggests, further, that in such a world, a white person – who faces the stain of racism’s “blessing” – faces maturity as a responsibility to eradicate racism as well. And in each case, such a responsibility would appear to be political insofar as it refers to an obligation to change the conditions under which ethical life may proceed, rather than to merely commit to conduct oneself ethically.

The issue of the stain poses a rather fundamental issue for maturity. A child enters a world in which he or she is incapable of fulfilling basic human responsibilities: a child depends on others for food, shelter, education, love, and so on. Ethically, there is a paradoxical sense in
which the child is regarded as ideal: the child represents the ideal of *innocence*. But to regard the child as innocent, as beyond reproach, requires a substantial degree of bad faith. As Anna Julia Cooper argued,

> The human babe can for weeks and months, do nothing but cry and feed and fear. It is a constant drain on the capital of its parents, both physically and mentally. It is to be fed, and worked for, and sheltered and protected. It cannot even defend itself against a draft.

> What is it worth? Unsentimentally and honestly – it is worth just as much as a leak is worth to a ship, or what the mistletoe is worth to the oak. He is a parasite, a thief, a destroyer of values. He thrives at another’s expense, and filches from that every atom of his own existence. (1998: 167)

The *person* who is now an infant can, in time, be of extraordinary value, and this potential value warrants feeding this “parasite.” But if we are to be serious in regarding its acts, the infant itself is guilty, is criminal. The innocence ascribed to the child, then, is not an *a posteriori* assessment of the child’s acts but is rather an *a priori* attribution of exonerative status. This means, in short, that every child that a human world values and raises receives a blessing. Hence, the stain of this blessing haunts this adult who now is that child grown up; it is a criminality for which this adult is now responsible.

Of course, there are as well children who are disvalued: children who are the recipients of the incontinence and grotesqueries of a world that scorns them for reasons beyond their acts. As adults, they bear these stains – they live the double criminality of having been accursed in their blessing. It would be tempting now to posit an adult for whom the blessing and the curse would cancel each other out, but they do not obey an arithmetical logic: even the greatest blessing still, like a palimpsest, leaves the imprint of the curse preceding it, and vice versa.
For a child, responsibility for these stains is, at least under ideal circumstances, nullified. Innocence as the child’s *a priori* status means it need not account for what it *is*. Childhood is lived as a social role that suspends crucial accountabilities by rendering one *a priori* innocent in relation to them. The child is protected from such scrutiny, and this protection implies a radical reduction in a child’s accountability for his or her acts. Eventually, accountability for some domains of acts abridges this innocence regionally, as when a child begins to be accountable for treatment of siblings, or begins elementary school, etc. In adolescence, such innocence becomes a thin veneer, affording only minor protections from adult demands. As we have seen, recipients of social and economic advantage are often privileged through an extension of this innocence well into the period reserved for adulthood. The *a priori* protection from sanction afforded to those adult men by way of the “boys will be boys” defense functions in the same manner as the *a priori* nullification of the infant’s obligation to feed and groom itself.

An adult in truth, though, faces a world in which the protection of *a priori* innocence has been waived, and for this reason the spirit of seriousness that affords racist and sexist exonerations to many adults amounts to a societal commitment to immaturity. The tragedy of truly adult responsibility is that, having lost the protection of *a priori* innocence, there is not a second innocence waiting: one does not begin adulthood with a blank slate. The adult is accountable for the criminality of the child. Indeed, the adult faces far greater responsibility for the child’s *criminality* than for the child’s *crimes*, since the latter will have been nullified as youthful indiscretions but the former lives on as a debt for which all are ultimately accountable. This poses an acute problem if ethics and morality regard as their ideal the innocent, the one who is not guilty of any violation. Adult status is at once the negation of *a priori* innocence and *a*
posteriori a stage only achievable through criminality; the adult is one, then, who encounters normative demands doubly removed from their ideal.

III. Responsibility and Accountability

a. Meaningfulness and Others

Here a more direct examination of the relationship between responsibility and accountability is called for. Responsibility, as argued in the introduction of this study, is an analytic counterpart of freedom. To be free, as Sartre argues, is to be condemned to freedom; to be so condemned is to be condemned to responsibility for one’s choices, and, further, for oneself. If I am responsible for myself, then this raises a peculiar matter: am I responsible for my freedom, and, hence, responsible for my responsibility? On this point, Sartre writes:

The freedom of the for-itself is always engaged; there is no question here of a freedom which could be undetermined and which would pre-exist its choice. We shall never apprehend ourselves except as a choice in the making. But freedom is simply the fact that this choice is always unconditioned.

…Such a choice made without base of support and dictating its own causes to itself, can very well appear absurd, and in fact it is absurd. This is because freedom is a choice of its being but not the foundation of its being. …[H]uman reality can choose itself as it intends but is not able not to choose itself. It can not even refuse to be; suicide, in fact, is a choice and affirmation – of being. By this being which is given to it, human reality participates in the universal contingency of being and thereby in what we may call absurdity. This choice is absurd, not because it is without reason but because there has never been any possibility of not choosing oneself. (Sartre, 1992: 616)

What a freedom does can be explicated, justified, legitimimized. But what a freedom is cannot properly be subject to such efforts; the criteria of justifiability already presuppose the
meaningfulness of acts, and the “fact” of one’s freedom is a prior condition for the meaning of one’s acts.

It would seem a simple manner, then, to maintain that one could be exonerated vis-à-vis the fact of one’s existence. But I confront my freedom as that for which I retain responsibility. My freedom is what it does, so in my doings, I give meaning to it. I am responsible for it. Yet this is absurd insofar as matters could not be otherwise: I couldn’t have chosen not to be free. I am thrown into responsibility without recourse. I may not be “to blame” for the fact of my freedom, but this does not mean I am unburdened of it. It remains a fundamental imposition. We could attempt to stop the analysis here and say that freedom implies responsibility, and thus I live as one who confronts responsibility. A problem, though, suggests a further dimension, and this problem has already been made evident through our examination of bad faith. Bad faith presents the possibility of projects of nihilating my responsibility. As a being-for-itself, I may seek to disavow or repress responsibility. Such projects are ultimately failures: they cannot excise responsibility, and the evidence of this lies inter alia in the fact that bad faith works through a logic of responsibility – that is, in bad faith I hold myself responsible for evading responsibility. This implies, in turn, that through the possibility of bad faith, I confront the matter of responsibility for responsibility.

Such a confrontation, we have seen, is in existential phenomenological terms anguish. If anguish is taken to be a form of pain or suffering, then we note that such pain would appear to be absurd. A reasonable response to anguish, as argued in Chapter 1, is counter-anguish, a mode of reasoning that neither produces a pessimistic response (“I am doomed to be free!”) nor an optimistic response (“I am blessed to be free!”) but simply a reasonable one (“I am free, with all the apparent dooms and blessings that come with it.”). Reason indicates that anguish need not be
painful. Central to such efforts of reasoning, we may say, is a form of alterity. Reason apprehends not only the evidence immediately present to it but also that other evidence that may emerge should it continue to inquire. Reason seeks to apprehend not only that which is evident to its present perspective but also that which would be evident to other perspectives. Such other perspectives may be real: I can go over there, I can wait and collect more evidence upon a second examination from here but later, I can reflect upon how matters appeared to me from here on an earlier occasion; I can ask that person about her perspective, I can learn from those people over there to try to understand their perspective, etc. So, too, may such other perspectives be imagined: what would be evident if I were instead to see things in this way, or if I were to contemplate matters in that manner, or if others were to see the matter through a novel mode of thinking I am now seeking to elaborate? Reason requires other perspectives on the evidence, and such others could be categorized in terms of alter egos – others of me – and concrete others, that, is those who are not me. In terms of our thematic of mature reason, modes of reasoning that only explore matters as they are evident to me and my alter egos are immature, and so too would it be immature to reason only through the perspective of actual others, abrogating the responsibility to work through my own. Such alterity is necessary for reason as an enterprise of intelligibility, which, as Peter Caws (1988) examines, involves the way in which meanings are bound together. The intelligibility of evidence is bound to its intersubjectivity: evidence is that which I can render meaningful to others, whether such others be concrete or be me as alter ego, and it is also that which others can render meaningful to me.

What makes such intelligibility possible? A simple, though not exhaustive, answer: language. Reason and myriad other phenomena of consciousness are possible through language. But here by “language” what is meant is closer to the notion of “communicability” than to the
notion of “a language,” that is, a particular, empirically knowable set of linguistic conventions.

This is the sense in which Sartre refers to language as follows:

Language is not a phenomenon added on to being-for-others. It is originally being-for-others; that is, it is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the Other. In a universe of pure objects language could under no circumstances have been “invented” since it presupposes an original relation to another subject. In the intersubjectivity of the for-others, it is not necessary to invent language because it is already given in the recognition of the Other. I am language. (Sartre, 1992: 485)

Through language, my acts are meaningful. They are capable of meaning to others, and so too are they capable of meaning to me. Thus, what is at issue is not the structure through which such meanings are given expression – a vocabulary, a vernacular, a grammar, a syntax, a set of pragmatic conventions, etc. – but the more fundamental matter of shared meaning. That a language is constructed and subsequently refined by human beings is a matter of the freedom to develop shared meanings, but such projects are preceded by the ontological character of a human reality as shrouded by the capacity for shared meaning.

Now here, as elsewhere, freedom as a capacity brings with it the problem of freedom as that to which one is condemned. This is to say that the capacity for shared meaning brings with it the inevitability of shared meanings. No matter what I do, my deeds will be meaningful to others. In terms of action and behavior, we have seen that because the actions of a being-for-itself are also the acts of a being-for-others they are, for these others, a matter of behavior. But as behavior, they are not radically shorn from action: both concrete others and me as my alter ego are capable of reflecting on the meaning of behavior in order to seek to apprehend the action underlying it. Action and behavior exist meaningfully in relation to each other.

But now suppose we proffer the possibility of an action undertaken without comprehension of its meaning to others, indeed, not only without comprehension of what kind of
behavior it will be regarded as by concrete others but without comprehension of how I will come to regard it – that is, without apprehension of its meaning from the vantage of my alter ego(s). Examples could be given, but the problem there is that the demonstration of the example would alter the apparent character of the action to the point of undermining the significance of the exercise, since to give the example is to reflect on the act thereby indicated. In principle, what is at issue is action I undertake without reflective consciousness of its meaning. The simple question: am I still responsible for this action? The simple answer: yes. The problem, then, is that I remain responsible for that which I did not mean. We have already explored this problem above in light of the issue of being responsible for the unintentional dimensions of my intentional acts. But we here confront a more radical configuration insofar as we may broach the question of responsibility for acts without intentions. From the vantage of another, the matter that my acts may have meanings I did not intend clearly would not subside. From my own vantage, the problem is more difficult to dissect, since even to raise the question would entail examining the matter reflectively. What is at issue, though, is pre-reflective responsibility for my act.

Reflective consciousness is a mode of alterity: it is consciousness reflecting upon itself, such that consciousness functions as alter ego. In reflective consciousness, I account for the meaning of my acts. They are examined within broader frameworks of intelligibility. To reflect on my acts maturely would require, of course, that I reflect not only on their meanings to me but on their meanings to concrete others: such reflection is responsible for apprehending structures of accountability that transcend those that I might impose upon myself. In reflection I may hold myself accountable for whether my acts have been conducted out of regard for the maxims of moral law, as in Kantian ethics, or whether my acts have been conducted out of sufficient care for maximizing the surplus of global pleasure over global pain, as in utilitarianism, or whether
my acts have been adequate for the development of a virtuous character, as in virtue ethics.

Indeed, I may in the reflective endeavor choose to examine my acts against each of these rubrics and many more beyond them. Each constitutes a particular mode of accountability; each offers criteria to adjudicate whether the act was good or bad, right or wrong, virtuous or vicious, etc. Accounts employ criteria to discern meanings.

Accountability refers to the simple fact that my acts are capable of being held to account: they are for-others in such a way as to be intelligible in the light of communicable criteria. Accountability is a mode of reflecting on characters and deeds. That for which I am accountable, though, also transcends that for which I am held accountable. In other words, my acts can be made to account for much, but of all those criteria that can be used to examine my acts, only a fraction will actually be so employed. The lived realities of my situation will delimit what can be my called my concrete accountabilities: that to which I am in fact held accountable, by concrete others, by me as I contemplate potential actions, by me as I contemplate acts already undertaken.

Such concrete accountabilities need not be ideally communicated: another may smell by bad breath and choose not to commingle with me, without my ever having been informed of the reason for this being the case. There is much for which I shall be held accountable without such accountability being made intelligible to me. This presents the possibility of what can be called absurd accountability, that is, I may have the experience of being held to account for that which makes no sense to me. The problem with the notion of absurd accountability, though, is that it is absurd from a given perspective, but not absurd from all possible perspectives. A simple case of absurd accountability is when I am held to account for standards that are not communicated to me and which are not readily apprehended. As a simple case, though, we note that an antidote would be reason: I can commit myself to the project of reasoning through the matter in order to
apprehend those obscure criteria that have been imposed upon me. In other words, I may move from the apparent absurdity of such accountability to the apprehension of its coherence. A more complex case, though, would be those modes of accountability that transcend such efforts to discover their coherence. The antiblack racist holds a black person accountable for the supposed sins of Ham; for a black person to seek to make oneself morally “pure” in the eyes of such a racist would be to pursue the absurd, for the system of accountability is one in which innocence is unattainable. But here again reason is an antidote: what at first appeared as absurd accountability is merely a project of imposing an incoherent accountability. The racist acts in bad faith to impose criteria that don’t properly function as criteria. The absurdity of the criteria is a product of a project that is illegitimate and can coherently be understood as an illegitimate project. We may thus say that while concrete accountabilities have the appearance of absurdity, accountability itself functions at the level of coherence. Accountability trades in shared meanings, in the communicability of coherence. Projects of distorted accountability may make concrete accountabilities internally absurd, but such projects remain subject to examination on the grounds of criteria through which, as projects, they can be held accountable. Abstract accountability is coherent and meaningful, and when concrete accountabilities depart from such coherence, it is on the basis of moves for which they can, in principle, be held to account.

Responsibility, though, is not reducible to accountability. Accountability apprehends its object reflectively: it examines it in light of criteria that transcend it. But responsibility precedes such reflection; before I reflect on my act, before I bestow it with an array of meanings by considering it in relation to criteria, it is nonetheless mine, and this is so whether we are speaking of the past act already achieved or the potential act yet present as future possibility. I cannot be made to account for the fact that I am free, which is why Sartre termed freedom absurd. My
freedom comes with no root of justification to others. It is true that many justifications could be proffered – I have as much right to exist as anyone else, etc. But while such justifications would negate concrete criticisms of my existence (criticisms which ought to be easily dispatched, since they cannot, ultimately, rest on coherent grounds), they would not establish positive justifications for my freedom as such. Here we have a parallel to the status of the adult vis-à-vis childhood: my freedom is that for which I am responsible even though being held accountable for it raises the specter of incoherence. Prior to any meaningful schema of accountability, I am responsible for this *me* and for these acts it undertakes.

In order to fulfill such responsibility, a turn to accountability is not only warranted but necessary. To address the matter of my responsibility, I seek to hold myself accountable, and, if I seek to do so maturely, I may also need to seek out concrete others who would hold me accountable. But this is because “fulfillment” refers, manifestly, to criteria of fulfillment. A responsibility fulfilled is intelligible as such because of examination that puts it within a framework of accountability. The problem, though, is that responsibility retains its meaning prior to such examination. I face responsibility prior to knowledge of all of that for which it may be held accountable. Indeed, it may be possible that I face a responsibility prior to *any* knowledge of the accountabilities thereby engendered.

Anguish, in this light, presents a rather significant paradox of human reality. In anguish, I come to reflective consciousness of my freedom and, hence, responsibility. Counter-anguish is anguish that confronts such responsibility through modes of accountability; it reasons through its situation, holding itself accountable for developing a coherent understanding of freedom. To speak of counter-anguish, though, suggests two other forms of anguish. The first could be termed naïve anguish, in which I come to reflective consciousness of freedom but have yet to ascribe
meaning to that freedom. Naïve anguish is responsible for responsibility, but it encounters such
responsibility without yet making any commitments. Naïve anguish could, subsequently, pass
into counter-anguish, by making commitments, in short, to self-evaluation, and such evaluation
draws it out of its naïveté. But the other form of anguish that may follow is, simply, bad faith.
One form of bad faith, we have seen, is what in Chapter 1 was termed implosive anguish, in
which I apprehend the fact that I am condemned to freedom as implying that I am doomed to a
hellish freedom. In implosive anguish, I apprehend the fact of my freedom and, in bad faith,
come to conclusions that have the effect of negating my liberties: I regard my freedom,
paradoxically, as a fundamental restriction upon my options. But bad faith has a broader array of
possibilities at its disposal than implosive anguish. One such possibility is the assertion of
license: because I apprehend my freedom in anguish, in bad faith I may then draw the erroneous
conclusion that the fact of my freedom negates my accountability to others. License in this form
is a bad faith nullification of concrete accountabilities. So, too, may it take the form of
preventing my reflection on possible modes of accountability, which, for instance, is manifest in
the Kantian picture of a self-imposed moral immaturity: a failure to think through the fact that I
may choose to subject myself to the moral law.

From an external perspective, we may thus criticize bad faith for being a project of
nullifying accountability. From an internal perspective, though, we may also not that bad faith is
a project condemned to intrinsic failure insofar as it cannot radically escape accountability. Bad
faith, ultimately, is a way of holding myself accountable for evading responsibility. Bad faith
functions through the corruption or inversion of evidence and criteria; it is an evasion of coherent
structures of accountability. Yet bad faith as a project holds itself accountable for evading
accountability; it is that which it seeks to evade, which helps explain why Sartre regarded bad
faith as anguish that seeks to flee anguish. It must apprehend its freedom evidentially in order to facilitate its flight from evidential apprehension of freedom.

This points to an issue, though, that transcends bad faith as such: namely, faith. Søren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* again proves an important point of reference here. For Kierkegaard, the notion of faith calls forth the matter of the absurd. Abraham follows God’s command to sacrifice his son, Isaac. In so doing, Abraham places himself beyond the demands of “the universal,” that is, above schemata for holding human beings accountable for the significance of their deeds for other human beings. Hence, Abraham’s faith demands a teleological suspension of the ethical through the affirmation of an absolute duty to God. The problem with a duty to God, on Kierkegaard’s account, is that such a duty cannot be understood: it is, in short, absurd. In God, all is possible, which presents the apparent contradiction that the impossible (e.g., Isaac both being sacrificed and continuing to live) would be possible. For Abraham to act on this basis means for Abraham to be without any coherent justification of his act. It would be different were Abraham to have acted out of a code demanding his immorality or amorality, for such codes would amount to meaningful commitments. But the commitment to God, Kierkegaard maintains, is only coherent if analyzed as a commitment to the absurd. The consequence is that Abraham, in so acting, is profoundly alone. He cannot make himself understood to anyone else. A consequence, it would seem, is that he cannot make himself understood even to himself, that is, he cannot as alter ego understand his act – it remains absurd even to Abraham. What accompanies such faith, then, is a profound experience of anguish, for there is no way of accounting for his act as governed by criteria – it is his, all to his lonesome.

The problem of such anguish, though, would not go away if Abraham were to choose accountability, that is, if Abraham were to choose to be ethical. For such would raise the
question of being responsible for the choice of being accountable, and while once one has
entered into the questions of justification, legitimacy, criteria, etc. there is a relief from anguish
insofar as these present that which is intersubjectively meaningful, the problem remains that
there is no intrinsic criteria to which one can appeal to justify the choice to regard structures of
accountability as meaningful. That is to say, I can be held accountable for which structures of
accountability – which systems of criteria, norms, etc. – I choose to regard as relevant for my
conduct, insofar as there are criteria for evaluating the matter of which criteria I ought to
entertain. But to appeal to criteria of justifiability to make the argument that I ought to justify
myself amounts, ultimately, to a fallacy of circularity. In other words, if Kierkegaard’s argument
explains how Abraham could make a leap of faith beyond accountability, it also illustrates why
some variety of faith is necessary even to bring oneself into accountability. One could here point
out that the facticity of an individual human life will accomplish this without such a leap: in
other words, each of us confronts a world that holds us accountable before we ever entertain the
thought of holding ourselves accountable. But this merely establishes the situation out of which
such leaps would occur; in freedom, I can nihilate not only the concrete accountabilities imposed
upon me, but so too can I seek to nihilate accountability altogether. If the latter is a form of bad
faith, it does not thereby follow that to accept accountability in the abstract is not a form of faith.

If this is the case, then what can we make of this faith that is other than bad faith? Bad
faith seeks to evade responsibility through a (failed) project of evading accountability. That
project is failed insofar as it cannot evade abstract accountability, that is, it imposes
accountabilities upon itself. This, however, does not pre-empt bad faith’s success in the more
troubling domain: bad faith may and frequently does succeed in evading concrete
accountabilities, for instance, the racist murderer who succeeds in not regarding herself as
ethically accountable to her victims. An alternative to bad faith would be naïve faith. Naïve faith would, simply, not be conscious of itself as an evasion of questions of accountability. It would fail, in short, to apprehend the possible meanings of itself in terms of responsibility. Naïve faith acts pre-reflectively, but unlike bad faith, it does not achieve this through the evasion of reflection but rather out of its simple absence. The problem with an argument in favor of naïve faith, though, is obvious: once one has begun the argument, the prospect for naïveté has vanished. Naïve faith describes a type of choice, but “naïve faith” is not as such an option that one can choose, for to regard it as an option would be to render it what it is not. Hence, one cannot reject bad faith in favor of naïve faith.

What, then, is the rejection of bad faith? Already, we have seen one problem, which is that one may reject bad faith in bad faith – and, indeed, the structure of bad faith is that it must in some sense present itself as innocent and hence as not bad faith. But it does not follow that there is no alternative. That alternative we may call critical good faith. Critical good faith would amount to a commitment to accountability, and we may say this is fundamentally a commitment to accountability in the abstract through which one is brought to the development of a responsible relationship to concrete accountabilities. This would entail, as we have seen, a mature relationship to norms and evidence, and, indeed, criteria of evidentiality. As we have seen, this means that critical good faith would commit me to an evaluation of my acts not only in terms of normative criteria for action but as well through norms relevant to behavior and character, and for an examination of the inter-relationship between these dimensions as I develop as an agent in a world of intersubjective meaning saturated with responsibilities to concrete others to whom, in critical good faith, I am responsible for holding myself accountable.
b. *Desire and Need*

Here we may pause to examine this discussion of faith in light of the question of desire. Faith is a product of freedom. Freedom works through the positing of a lack in order to establish a positive project; I do this or that in order to overcome my lack. An argument could be made here that such lack is not fundamental to freedom, for the alternative would be naïve faith. In naïve faith, I know not what I lack, and hence my acts are not products of desire. A rejoinder would be that naïve freedom has pre-reflective consciousness of lack, for naïve faith exists ekstatically in a moment of “now” that is present to a future it lacks, whether it reflects on this or not. Naïve faith, in that sense, is comparable to Socrates’ point in Plato’s *Symposium* (2008: 40) that the healthy man may desire health because he thus far lacks a healthy future: what naïve faith lacks is its future naïveté, and so it may be explicable in terms of fulfilling a pre-reflective desire to remain naïve. Critical good faith, by contrast, can be said to start with a simple desire: ideality. Critical good faith comes because one lacks fulfillment of ideals. To meet this desire, one must enter into a world of engagement with meaningful ideals. Were critical good faith to regard its tasks as complete – to assert its achievement of not only concrete and regional ideals but of ideality in the abstract – this would be a collapse into bad faith, because it would amount to a declaration that accountability was no longer salient. Critical good faith retains its desire for ideality even once concrete ideals have been fulfilled.

In the previous section, it was argued that bad faith desires the evasion of accountability or of concrete accountabilities. But here we can raise the question of whether a more fundamental diagnosis is possible. In short, the question concerns why bad faith would fear, or otherwise seek to evade, accountability. It has been suggested at several points throughout our study that the primary stimulus to bad faith is a desire to evade anguish, which amounts to a
desire to evade freedom and responsibility. Accountability is the mode through which such responsibility is confronted in critical good faith, and hence bad faith seeks to evade accountability in the abstract. But such evasion does not amount to the wholesale nullification of accountability. Rather, it would demand the adoption of concrete accountabilities through which it would seek to efface those accountabilities it wants to evade. Recall, for instance, that bad faith calls upon non-persuasive evidence in order to place itself beyond the proper demands of evidentiality. Bad faith demands counterfeit modes of accountability.

With regard to the overall problem animating our study, we may note that one way in which bad faith may persist is through the fabrication of counterfeit criteria of maturity. If maturity is a meaningful normative demand in human life, then coloniality, for instance, may function through the distortion of the norms of maturity, for which white individuals and European civilizations and institutions serve as icons of maturity while people of color and non-European civilizations and institutions serve as icons of its lack. The simple matter is that, in so doing, coloniality ironically stimulates crises among those it purports to be immature, and the response to such crises may be that they make choices through which they will mature more than they otherwise would have, whereas those that coloniality regards as a priori mature may, because such ascription licenses them to ignore potential mechanisms of maturation, tend toward choices that sustain or heighten their immaturity.

Such bad faith is characteristic of racism, sexism, and colonialism. But the structure of that bad faith is not one of a radical departure from norms of accountability. Rather, it works through the promotion of some concrete accountabilities at the expense of others. The individual sexist man is accountable to misogynistic norms, and his fellow men (and many women) will concretely hold him accountable for upholding such norms. Because bad faith evades
responsibility and hence accountability, it is possible for bad faith to take the form of an attempt to radically depart from normative criteria. But a more commonplace form of bad faith may be this effort to assert the relevance of some criteria through the unjustified or unjustifiable assertion of the irrelevance of other criteria. This is the structure of the spirit of seriousness.

The spirit of seriousness regards its values as unconditioned. “The serious man” holds himself accountable to norms, but not because of a critical apprehension of their normative foundations and a subsequent reasoned choice to favor these norms over the alternatives. Rather, the spirit of seriousness asserts that these are the norms toward which it must seek to adhere. The serious person chooses a regime of concrete accountabilities while repressing any form of accountability for that choice. In Chapter 1, we argued that rationality as a form of taking seriously was necessary for mature reason, because rationality moves from a criterion or set of criteria to a necessary conclusion. But while “taking seriously” in that sense involves an intellectual move to regard such criteria as self-sufficient, the contention was that mature reason mandates a circumscribed, rather than permanent, performance of taking seriously; ultimately, one must entertain other criteria. Action in the spirit of seriousness regards one’s conduct as necessitated, not as a necessary consequence of a contingent schema of accountability (as when one chooses to take seriously a particular normative commitment or set of normative commitments), but as a necessary consequence of a necessary schema of accountability.

Our fundamental diagnosis of the spirit of seriousness, as it is a mode of bad faith, is that it is an evasion of responsibility. In seriousness one seeks to negate one’s responsibility for critical evaluation of evaluative criteria. Responsibility, we have seen, works according to a logic of desire. Responsibility moves from lack toward a project of fulfillment, that is, toward that which is sufficient to obviate lack. Accountability, though, proffers a logic in which there is also
need: accountability demands examination of the necessary as well as the sufficient. There are conditions that need to be met. The problem of responsibility is that it need not pursue accountability. One cannot find such necessity within its intrinsic structure; responsibility implies the need to choose, but not the need of any given choice. Accountability, though, necessitates particular choices. The spirit of seriousness, though, is a project of negating responsibility in favor of accountability, albeit through concrete accountabilities that necessarily circumscribe the possible scope of that for which the serious person could be held accountable. Fundamentally, it could be said, then, that the spirit of seriousness, in evading responsibility, is animated by a desire to evade desire. The serious person seeks to regard herself as the product of necessity rather than desire. It evades, then, even the desire to be held accountable.

We have stated already that the spirit of seriousness is a form of immaturity. Maturity, then, involves acting upon a desire to be accountable. This means one is still accountable for what one regards oneself as accountable for – to want to be accountable means not that I see myself as needing to be accountable to that racist, or this sexist, or those colonizers, etc. The radical expansion in responsibility here at issue is that responsibility expands even beyond accountability, and the serious person blanches in the face of such responsibility, choosing a finite accountability in its stead. Ironically, then, what the spirit of seriousness desires to evade is desire. As immaturity, it is a succumbing to the desire to not be responsible for one’s desires, and this is achieved through regarding its wants as merely the products of necessity.

c. Political Responsibility
Is there an antidote to the spirit of seriousness such that one may fulfill the project of acting responsibly without an evasion of responsibility? The classical examination of the matter comes in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity* (2000). For Beauvoir, the fact that there is no unconditioned criteria to appeal to in order to ground moral claims does not entail that all is permitted (Beauvoir 2000: 15). In other words, accountability need not find its legitimacy in sources lying beyond human choice. The spirit of seriousness seeks to evade human choice by asserting itself as “chosen” beyond human agency. Mature action, by contrast, would have to take up responsibility for the human choices that structure concrete accountabilities. A problem, then, comes with those approaches that regard ethical accountability as a matter of simply abstract accountability. That is to say, there are approaches that regard normative justification as exhausted by criteria that precede human choice. The virtue of such accounts is that they still hold human beings accountable for discovering such criteria – they must, in the manner of a scientist seeking to discover the natural law, discover the implicit moral laws to which human beings ought to hold themselves accountable. The vice of such an approach, however, is that it regards such activity of discovery as an unconditioned and serious project. In other words, it disavows dimensions of my responsibility to concrete others by regarding accountability as *ultimately* located beyond human choice. This amounts to a form of bad faith, for it is a desire to place the criteria of rightful conduct beyond human desire. It seeks to correct for the possible failings that come with human choice of values by taking such choice out of the equation. But this fails to account for the desire to make such a correction, or, at bottom, it regards such desire as inevitable or as intrinsically justified.

What such approaches seek to do is, in short, to define the meaning of human acts exhaustively. This is symptomatic of what Sartre referred to as the desire to be God, for God as
omniscience would be that perspective with exhaustive knowledge of what it all means. One manifestation of the spirit of seriousness would be the human being who regards him or herself as the ideal moral critic. The meaning of any human act would be exhausted by what this moral critic has to say. The consequence is that the critic’s perspective would be regarded as self-sufficient. If it is self-sufficient, though, this implies it need not justify itself. The ideal moral critic is thus in bad faith. A different manifestation of the spirit of seriousness would be an inversion of this: it would be to regard oneself as seen by the ideal moral critic – in other words, a desire not to be God as such but rather to be evaluated by God. This would amount to a desire to experience what we may call “Ideal Shame.” In Ideal Shame, my onlooker or onlookers would give me precisely that moral feedback necessary for me to perfect myself. We note, though, that such onlooker(s) need not be concrete others. For instance, one way of achieving Ideal Shame would be to posit a set of exhaustive rules governing my conduct, as one finds, in short, in moral theories like those of Immanuel Kant or Jeremy Bentham. The utilitarian may, in the dicta to maximize the human surplus of pleasure over pain, find a source of shame where, if its strictures were to be ideally heeded, would render the utilitarian morally perfect. But Ideal Shame could, as well, be achieved through the choice of a concrete other who serves as one’s judge and jury – and, as one typically finds amongst sadists and masochists, executioner. Yet we find that this desire to be evaluated as if by God is, analytically, still a manifestation of the desire to be God. For if God could ideally communicate the standards to me, then I would have God’s perspective. How do I know that the source of Ideal Shame is Ideal? Only if I, ultimately, appoint myself the source of Ideal Shame, though with the caveat that in so doing, I disavow this very move.

An antidote, then, would lie in regarding myself as accountable to concrete others, without having such accountability collapse into the unconditioned. What we may call mature
shame would be a way of taking oneself to be responsible for being accountable to others without, in the process, abandoning one’s responsibility to evaluate one’s interlocutors. In mature shame, I see myself as seen by others, but I reject either the pole of the sadist, who possesses a privileged mode of seeing the other, nor that of the masochist, who has the status of a privileged object in the eyes of a privileged seer. But nor would this entail that, for mature shame, I am accountable only to concrete others, for this would be an abdication of my responsibility to articulate standards of conduct that transcend those already imposed upon me. Mature actions need take responsibility for criteria that have yet to be elaborated; otherwise, there is a simple collapse into forms of relativism. This point is beautifully made by Michele Moody-Adams (2002), for whom the alternative to normative cultural relativism is not the assertion that the philosopher stands, as it were, as an ideal moral critic, but rather that the meaning of moral criteria cannot be exhausted until all human perspectives have come to light. Since each human life is lived prior to such an achievement, we confront the problem of obligations to generations to come. Future generations will hold those of us in the present accountable according to criteria that have yet to be articulated. Their inarticulation at present does not imply the illegitimacy of such practices in the future, and a consequence of this is that I am responsible now for seeking to hold myself accountable to them. This does not, of course, imply that future generations must be right or even that their norms will inevitably be better than those available to me now. What it means, simply, is that maturity demands of me that I be accountable to them, even if foreknowledge of all relevant criteria in the matter is absent.

This means that my actions occur within a purview where ideal knowledge of their meaning is absent. I act from a here and now, but my responsibility for this act is infinite in its meaning; it will generate meanings for which I may be held to account from an infinity of
perspectives, perspectives that I can neither fully apprehend nor whose salience I can dismiss on the grounds of their inaccessibility. Yet this does not imply the irrelevance of efforts now to articulate normative criteria, and not only criteria of meaning to me but also criteria of meaning for us. To hold oneself or one’s generation as unaccountable to future generations would be folly, but so, too, would be the project of declaring in advance that one cannot articulate criteria with which to judge not only oneself and one’s own generation but also generations of the past and of the future. That one may err in the process speaks to the unshakeable depth of the responsibility confronted, but not to the undesirability of projects to meet such a root expansion in responsibility. Hence, mature action would, like Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity, “refuse to deny a priori that separate existents can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all” (2000: 18).

If this is the case, we enter into a distinctive realm: namely, that of politics. In politics, structures of accountability are animated with rational systems of enforcement. In realms like civil or criminal law, for instance, there are systematically defined ends and procedures that govern the treatment of cases. The sources of such laws lie in human choices. A problem, of course, is that one may choose to break such laws, and so, too, may those tasked with their enforcement choose not to enforce them rationally. But this speaks to another dimension of political life: its laws are, by their nature, subject to re-evaluation. Arbitrariness comes in when the spirit of laws is taken to wholly supersede the letter of the law. Yet the arbitrary may also enter through the backdoor when the letter of the law is taken to wholly supersede its spirit, for such seriousness may lose sight of the source of laws, as happens, in particular, when power is concentrated in people who have much to benefit from the manipulation of the laws. It thus remains a political question as to whether the values that animate laws ought to supersede
enforcement of the laws as written. Such questions point, ultimately, to questions of legitimacy that ought to probe the value of those animating values. But the problem of political values is that, while they remain open to contestation, they are realized through institutions that need to make decisions about how to proceed. Politics demands debate, but the political functions through organs that may be incapable of pausing for debate or even critical reflection.

As such, we may state that mature action includes political responsibility. Political responsibility raises the question of having to choose values that will be realized through institutions, and, hence, whose realization is not subject to automatic re-evaluation in the way that a person’s moral or ethical values may be. One type of immature response to political responsibility is to regard it, in short, as merely a venue to make one’s individual wants manifest through values that institutions must respect. It is, in effect, to treat that which I want as having the legitimate status of being that which we need. To act maturely in the political realm, then, means that one hold oneself accountable for examining that for which we shall all be held accountable. Mature action needs, in short, an account of needs. This is so not in the same way that the spirit of seriousness asserts a similar “need.” The spirit of seriousness wants to not want, so it asserts that it needs to do as it does. But institutions confront accountability rather than responsibility; institutions, properly speaking, do not want. This is not to say that institutions do not reflect wants: it is, rather, to say that they need to reflect values that transcend them. Many institutions, in turn, prosecute that which is merely wanted by human beings, but do so through a logic of necessity – indeed, even to the point of asserting that they do so in the name of necessity. Such institutions have as their foundation the whim of those with sufficient power to found them. But political responsibility is not exhausted by having constructed this or that institution. Rather,
political responsibility means one is responsible for those institutions to which one is related, which is to say, those institutions that one has some capacity to bring about or change.

Maturity in the face of such responsibility would seem to call for a project of critical good faith. Although critical good faith would start by acknowledging that one may already be shaped by desires for which one cannot account, it seeks to bring these under reflection and hence make them capable of being accounted for. Critical good faith with regard to political responsibility would suggest that one regards oneself as needing to give a legitimate account of institutional needs: it calls for me to hold myself accountable for forging institutions that serve human needs. A consequence would seem to be that I should want to know what human beings need, and here, not only myself but others, and not only others of this generation but others of generations to come and even, perhaps – as questions like those of fealty to founders or reparations to the violated raise – what needs generations past may still have.

Yet this would seem to present a thorny issue. Mature action ultimately calls upon me to give an account of human needs. But the whole problem was set afoot by the fact that human choices are contingent, that strictly speaking there’s nothing I must do. The needs undergirding systems of accountability are products of construction; they retain the trace, in short, of human desire. For even to speak of what I need in order to survive is to implicitly raise the matter of whether I should want to survive. Could I, then, have an account of human needs that transcends the arbitrary, that amounts to more than an immature project, say, of conflating my desires with the needs of others? In other words, mature action would seem to call upon me to have knowledge of what human beings need in order to assess what criteria are relevant to my criteria. How is such knowledge possible or even conceivable, if freedom renders human life contingent?
rather than necessary? Let us turn now to this question.
Maturity involves an encounter with a radical expansion of responsibility. To what are the human sciences responsible? As sciences, a simple initial answer awaits: rigor. The primary responsibility of science, it may be said, is to be rigorous. The problem of maturity, though, is that it raises the question of whether rigor sufficiently describes that for which human sciences are responsible. While sciences for which a telos of rigor would be adequate are conceivable, this may not be the case for human sciences.

If rigor is not the final end of a science, then what is? It could be said that rigor is always in service of some other end: one does not don a lab coat, sterilize test tubes, and examine chemical compositions in order simply to be a rigorous chemist. Chemistry serves ends that lie beyond it. What chemists study is studied in relation to human needs and desires. To elect to study plastics, or to study cancer biochemically, or to study food science chemically – each of these is a human act with ends that lie beyond what chemistry itself may analyze.

Rigor as a demand on the scientist implores the following: that the end desired not override the scientist’s commitment to the scientific project. If science is in service of greater ends, then mere service to those ends does not scientifically justify less-than-rigorous means of study. Rigor implies demands that transcend the ends that elicit the path of study. Science is immature as science if it evades its commitment to rigor in order to fulfill desires that lie beyond it, even if these desires animated the scientific project to begin with.

The preceding chapter raised the matter of mature action demanding that one be responsible for systems of shared accountability, and such responsibility entails, ultimately, that
human beings must distinguish between that which is merely wanted and that which must be regarded as a human need. To distinguish between wants and needs in human life is troubling, though. Human needs are lived and expressed as human desires. It is difficult to express what we need outside of a language of articulating what we want; to say “I need it” is typically to imply I want it. Even where I admit what I need is not what I want, the admission implies my knowledge that I should want it. Such admission suggests that what is at issue is not an absence of desire for that which I need but rather a conflict between desires that the appeal to “need” is intended to resolve. I may want to “need” something in order not to confront responsibility for choosing what I want. The implicit question confronting the articulation of human needs, in short, is that we may find out that they are desires elevated to heightened normative status in spite of the presence of evidence to the contrary.

Desire is a product of freedom, and hence desires are contingent. Needs, by contrast, imply necessity. Yet their necessity is not of the same order as logical necessity or the apparent physical necessity that when I drop my phone it will plummet toward the ground. Human needs are such that they may fail to be met. Sleep deprivation, starvation and dehydration are contingent conditions – products of freedom – that reflect an unmet need. This, though, raises the question of whether the needs of a human being, or of human beings, can change. Surely, human circumstances change and do so as a product of choices. If a child needs to be fed, we nonetheless confront the matter that there was an earlier time where it was not necessary that that child would come into existence. Human needs might seem, then, to have the paradoxical standing of being contingent necessities and/or necessary contingencies.

This points to a fundamental difficulty for human scientific endeavor. Maturity demands human sciences that can relate the facts of that which is humanly needed. Yet many sciences are
imagined, as discussed in Chapter 1, as simply the explication of that which is necessary: natural sciences are often regarded as those domains of inquiry that reveal natural law, where natural law is understood as those principles to which there could be no exception, or as that activity which could not be otherwise. Human sciences, however, are charged with studying humanity, and humanity is characterized by freedom and contingency. If the demands of mature human action point to the question of mature human sciences, then rigor in the human sciences could not be reducible to a “natural scientific” inquiry into human life. The human sciences must study that which could be otherwise and that which could broker exceptions. In short, maturity demands of human sciences a rigor that is irreducible to explicating necessity, even as maturity demands that the human sciences make evident that which is humanly needed.

This in turn raises questions about whether humanity needs the human sciences and whether the human sciences need to be guided by humanistic concerns. The simple matter is that the practice of human sciences is a product of contingency, so those who study humanity may ultimately do so for whatever ends they please. Much of the research in the domain of the human sciences today, for instance, is undertaken with the primary aim of enhancing the profitability of private businesses. Large corporations and small-scale entrepreneurs alike have a clear interest in studying patterns of human behavior with regard to how consumer choices are made, what products are desired, etc. They will explore food sciences in order to discover products that will maximize return on investment, they will analyze how different age groups utilize technological devices in order to invent applications that will be targeted to different niches, and so on. One could say that the demands of business – the imperative to turn a profit or to fulfill fiduciary duties to investors – necessitate such efforts. But of course, this would seem to be a “contingent necessity,” insofar as other options are available. One could simply quit the business. Or one
could approach business as a craft, a labor of love governed by dedication to the art of producing an excellent product rather than by fealty to the bottom line. Profitability is a desire, and though the serious pursuit of this desire regards it as if it were a necessary end, this does not imply that human sciences in the service of profitability are thereby in service of human needs.

Yet many do come to human scientific endeavors for humanistic ends. Many regard knowledge of a human world as something that human beings need and, indeed, as something that in crucial areas or domains may be lacking. The human sciences point toward truths about human life that may be necessary for people to apprehend in order for them to fulfill ideals that they have resolved to serve. There is, though, potential for methodological crisis that this implies. One may discover that the values that brought oneself to study look rather different after the undertaking; one may learn something about human life that demonstrates that human communities didn’t really need the knowledge that was sought after – or conceivably, even, that the study will reveal its content to be something human beings needed not to know. In short, the telos that brings one to human scientific endeavor may become vulnerable to attack because of the realities thereby apprehended.

One immature response, then, would be abjure such findings on the grounds that they are counter to one’s prior normative commitments – that is, to suspend one’s commitment to rigor in favor of the values that brought one to pursue rigor. But another immature response awaits as well, in which, in the name of scientific rigor, one now comes to disclaim any values undergirding human scientific endeavor. In other words, projects of the human sciences, having shed light on the failings of the commitments that engendered them, might then regard the human sciences as auto-justificatory: rigor becomes a self-sufficient ideal, needing no further justification. This response is immature insofar as it disavows responsibility for the question of
what end the human sciences ought to serve; it regards such responsibility as nullified so long as one holds oneself accountable to criteria of scientific rigor. Mature human sciences, then, would suggest projects that take seriously their responsibility to rigor as well as those ends that transcend rigor as such.

In this chapter I will argue, then, that maturity in the human sciences calls for modes of rigor that can elucidate and fulfill human needs without regarding human acts – including human scientific acts – as necessitated. I will proceed first by articulating a problem confronted by the human sciences: a desire for so-called “hard” science. The problem of such desire is that it ultimately values rigidity to the detriment of rigor, and this matter is acutely problematic in the endeavor to rigorously study human beings. Then, I will contend that there is an approach that facilitates human scientific rigor without rigidity, which is realized through a commitment to understand the objects of the human sciences as relational rather than substantial. I thus argue that human scientific rigor demands what Peter Caws calls, simply, “structuralism.” However, this leads to a matter that may appear troublesome: structuralist human sciences themselves emerge out of a relation – they are a contingent project, rather than an endeavor with a necessary point of departure and finish line. Their rigor requires their freedom. Yet rigor implies particular modes of accountability, and to cultivate one’s ability to regularly meet such criteria calls for discipline. Because the human sciences can broker different points of departure, any given point of departure may imply peculiar demands without necessitating that such demands be imposed upon other points of departure. As such, the human sciences may be conceived as demanding the project of erecting a plurality of disciplined and disciplinary approaches. The problem, though, is that disciplinary seriousness here emerges as a possibility: the discipline regards itself as if it were both necessary and sufficient for human scientific projects, and a consequence of such
seriousness is scientific immaturity. Yet maturity in the human sciences, I contend, should not take this danger as a reason to abandon disciplines, for disciplines do serve scientific needs, and such abandonment may leave many needs unfulfilled. Hence, mature human sciences imply both disciplinary responsibilities – through both the production and reproduction of valuable methods of human study – as well as responsibilities that can only be fulfilled through teleological suspensions of disciplinarity.

I. Desire for “Hard” Sciences

a. Desire for the Purely Objective

A central theme of this work derives from the existential phenomenological insight that human reality faces the problem of a recurring desire to evade anguish. Such desire, I argue, may manifest in immaturity. How might such dynamics manifest in the sciences?

Science is an anguished endeavor. The scientist confronts responsibility for rigor. Were scientific rigor equivalent merely to the meticulous application of a procedure given in advance, then rigor would not need to present the possibility of anguish. The scientist, however, is responsible for determining the validity and applicability of established procedures to the object of study, as well as for innovating new methods and procedures where extant methods are inadequate. The scientist is not merely responsible for following rules, but for interpreting, articulating, inventing, and re-inventing them. It does not follow, of course, that each scientist will confront these responsibilities as pressing demands. Much of science is, simply, “grunt work.” Many scientific tasks are well defined, and many scientists confront a situation where the relevant work is simply the completion of one or more well defined tasks. Yet the possibility for
immaturity comes through the reality that not all scientists confront a situation that merely calls for such tasks.

If science is responsible for method, we may say as well that science is responsible for, in short, accounting for its humanity. It is true that many scientific tasks are conducted beyond human agency: scientific measurements in the contemporary epoch are made primarily with technology that leaves no room for human error, and the same is true of scientific calculations. No scientific tasks, though, are purely independent of human agency, since even those conducted by technologies are nonetheless conducted by human inventions, and even where experiments and measurements are conducted without direct human involvement, human agency figures in both their design and interpretation.

The possibilities for evading anguish with regard to science are not limited to scientists alone. If human communities promote science to fulfill their needs, they may still come to want science to fulfill desires it is ill suited to fulfill. Science as a human project is, simply, an existence – that is to say, what the sciences are is preceded by the matter of choices that manifest through contingent processes of becoming. As Sartrean existential psychoanalysis would posit, then, sciences may be infused with the desire to be rather than to exist. The meaning of such desire, Sartre suggested, could be interpreted as a desire to be God. Since existential psychoanalysis is an analysis of choice, it would not follow that all science amounts to a pathological desire for the scientist or scientific discipline to become God; such would be a contingent matter, and mature scientists and disciplines would figure to be capable of overcoming any implicit tendency to do so. The flip side, though, is that it is certainly possible that many scientists and perhaps even whole disciplines may pursue scientific projects in such a manner that they could be regarded, as it were, as divine. Indeed, whether or not scientists
perceive their task in terms of divinity, a human community profoundly shaped by scientific agency may come to this conclusion. The anguish of political life is intense, but a society may evade such anguish by regarding their decisions as scientifically necessitated. Science can play the legitimating role of a God in whom one must avow faith regardless of whether there is adequate evidence to justify such faith.

One consequence of such an attitude is what may be termed scientism. One manifestation of scientism is to regard scientific findings as having intrinsic legitimacy and to regard all forms of argument and evidence deemed non-scientific as intrinsically lacking legitimacy. A general structure of such claims is to avow that science is objective whereas the non-scientific is subjective. The theological grammar of such a claim is somewhat obvious, as it amounts to an assertion that science, like God, is that which is uncorrupted by human influence; its perfection is regarded as known a priori. Of course, such an assertion is belied by the simple reality that science is a human project, a fallible endeavor. Scientism thus appears to be a form of bad faith—indeed, one with both individual and institutional dimensions, insofar as the efforts to evade the evidence of scientific fallibility may become institutionalized. Such bad faith, though, would manifest through an assault on the evidence that it is bad faith; it would create “evidence” to which one could appeal in order to evade the evidence.

One such piece of “evidence” that is often pointed to is the claim that the sciences are objective. We have already noted that if science is an existence, then what it “is” is a contingent matter. It is contingent whether scientific projects achieve standards of objectivity, even if, as a matter of principle, they all aspire to some form of objectivity as a regulative ideal. Scientism, though, may seek to take flight from this reality in favor of the comforting falsehood that science is objectivity. Objectivity under such conditions may become a fetish, a locus of desires whose

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appeal is regarded as self-evident to the point that one need not critically reflect upon its desirability. Scientism, as an evasion of the anguish that comes with responsibility for what one purports to know, thus takes up the comforting belief that science is objectivity and thus that science is that which ought to be desired unreflectively.

The notion of objectivity that scientism draws upon may already involve a mistaken understanding of the logic of subjects and objects. Subjectivity, we may say, is a manner of consciousness. Because consciousness is always consciousness of something, we may say that a subject must have its objects to be meaningful as a subject. The subject is the “here” of consciousness directed toward its “there,” the object. Recall from Chapter 1 that this implies the issue of intentionality and desire. There is no subject without some form of desire to apprehend an object. Natural science is subjectivity that desires to reveal the reality of its object, nature. A subject apprehends the evidentiality of its object in order to transcend that which is apparent toward a revelation of the object’s essence. Evidence, though, is public in its character; though there may be privileged perspectives with regard to their ability to apprehend a particular piece or type of evidence, evidence is such that it is on principle both communicable and potentially available to a plurality of perspectives. This suggests that even if I direct my subjectivity toward a particular object, another subject may apprehend this object as well: it is “my” object insofar as I am conscious of it, but it could not be “my” object in the sense of it being necessarily only an object for me. In short, objects are compatible with a framework of intersubjectivity: what is evident to me may become evident to us.

If the objects of my consciousness may in principle be equally evident to all consciousnesses, then it follows that I may take a particular attitude with regard to its shared evidentiality. There are those who would prefer that they be a privileged observer – think of the
art collector scavenging in a thrift store for that painting whose beauty _only he_ could see. Such a person might invest in a pattern of belief in line with a sense of radical subjectivity: there is that which only this perspective could unearth, and even were I to try, I could not demonstrate it to others. Yet this radical subjectivity is saturated with bad faith: it is a means of depriving evidence of its evidentiality. It regards evidence as if it could be private in character rather than public.

But the opposite attitude is available as well: a desire for radical objectivity. Radical objectivity would not shy away from the public dimension of evidence but would rather make something of a fetish out of it. Radical objectivity seeks not only that which could be intersubjectively evident but that which would be transculturally and transhistorically valid. Radical objectivity, seeks, in short, to see as God would see. But here we may note a conceptual problem if God is understood as seeing omnisciently. If consciousness is a “here” directed at a “there,” could omniscience be consciousness? Seemingly not, since omniscience would be “everywhere.” Radical objectivity seeks to be this “everywhere.” The problem, of course, is that radical objectivity asserts a consciousness that is everywhere, despite the contradiction of a “here that is everywhere” this implies.

Science is scientific consciousness. It consists of subjects working together toward the discovery of intersubjectively valid evidence and toward a consensus on the significance of that evidence. It is a subject or subjects seeking to apprehend a plurality of inter-related objects. That science would _aspire_ to objectivity as a value is clear and unproblematic. A desire for objectivity is simply part of the scientific attitude. Science seeks to apprehend its objects in such a way that their meaning could not be confined to a particular subjectivity or narrow set of subjectivities. Objectivity in this sense is a regulative ideal for scientific endeavor. Rigorous science is
responsible for the pursuit of objectivity as an ideal: it must seek to apprehend that which is
evident beyond mere appeals to that which is believed by the scientist; rigorous science is not a
simple recounting of the scientist’s subjective appraisals. But if objectivity is an ideal, it is thus
also that which science desires. It is intended. As a pursuit, then, it refers to that which the
pursuer in some sense lacks: it is because science begins from a subject that it may aspire to be
objective. Objectivity is the project of a subject. Without a subject, objectivity would be
impossible. The radical objectivity of scientism, however, seeks to have objectivity without a
subject. Hence, it attempts to elevate science itself to a status of objecthood. The sciences figure
as those perspectives which are beyond perspectivity, unadulterated windows unto reality. They
are untouched by their objects – for their perspective radically transcends the perceived – but
they are as well untouched by other subjects.

The name given by many to these imagined sciences, those that attain objectivity through
a radical but fictive escape from subjectivity, is “the hard sciences.” That they are regarded as
“hard” suggests a conflation of rigor with rigidity. Rigor is a project of consciousness: human
beings pursue rigor, they seek to attain it, they contemplate its meaning and embark on pragmatic
quests to realize it without a final and total blueprint given in advance. Rigor, as such, is opposed
to rigidity. Scientific rigidity would regard methods as fixed and final; it would have no need for
self-critical evaluation, because it would be the mere application of infallible and eternal laws or
procedures to given contexts of observation. Rigidity is not without its uses. For instance,
mathematics would be unimaginable without rigidities: one plus one is rigidly two. But the
project of mathematical rigor involves examining such rigidities rather than merely being
subordinated to them. If science was radically devoid of subjectivity, then rigidity might be
tenable. But precisely because science begins with subjectivity, its pursuit of objectivity is a
project of rigor and while it may discover and explicate rigidities, these are what it reveals rather than what it is. This is not to say that science cannot take seriously a given method: it may apply a proffered law without exception, as rigor requires that a hypothesized law must be interpreted in light of the assumption of its lack of exception. To take a rigid hypothesis seriously is necessary to discover its relation to the evidence. Yet as we have argued in this work, to take seriously must be distinguished from operating in the spirit of seriousness. Rigidity is a project of seriousness; it does not take method seriously but rather seeks to be its method in the spirit of seriousness. Or, rather, it is the project of being its method in seriousness while denying that this amounts to a project.

The maturity of human sciences, then, could not consist of their becoming “hard” in this sense. Either hardness is the fantasy of human projects seeking to regard themselves as if they were divine, or hardness is a quality of sciences that are eternal and could not be brought forth by human agency because they precede human agency. At most, the “hard” human sciences would be the application of methods delivered from above and passed on like scripture. But to be scientific, such an endeavor would have to have an account of itself: that is to say, there would have to be a studied account of why it is that the applications of these methods ought to be regarded as scientific and valid. Proponents of “hard” sciences tend to take what is, ultimately, an anti-scientific view: they regard those sciences as valid on the basis of faith, and not even a critically-derived faith of the sort that Kant sought to clear the decks for.

We may note here that because science is conducted by human beings, the human sciences serve an indispensable role for science in general, since the evaluation of scientific endeavors is in the end a question of the study of human beings. To fulfill such a role, the human sciences would be responsible for the imaginative act of re-evaluating scientific methods and
seeking out possible alternatives, including those that have yet to be conceived. Rigidity, in such an effort, would amount to a form of prejudice. The effort to assert some sciences as “hard” amounts to an effort to place them beyond scientific scrutiny. Maturity in the human sciences is incompatible with such an abrogation of responsibility. Indeed, what might be at issue for some proponents of scientism is simply a desire to evade realities about the natural sciences that the human sciences might reveal, or some such realities they have already revealed.

In short, science is an endeavor conducted by subjects, and though its regulative ideals call for a relationship to the evidence in which the whims of the subject ought to fall by the wayside in favor of a critical apprehension of the object, this simply cannot amount to the eradication of the subject. The ideal of science, in short, is not fulfilled by the attainment of a pure and unblemished objectivity.\textsuperscript{21} Rather, such an ideal ultimately calls for something rather different: namely, knowledge that achieves intersubjective validity. The desire for “hard” science may function as a desire to evade the intersubjective responsibilities lying at the heart of scientific endeavor. Science brings one into a world of accountability, for which a multiplicity of subjects is necessary. \textit{Pure} objectivity would amount to the scientist’s being “accountable” to transcendental criteria of validity, but without any point from which one could be held to account – what would be needed to verify one’s meeting such criteria, in short, would be the expressed approval of God. The nature of criteria that transcend human agency is that they can only be apprehended evidentially by human subjects, for human subjects are not divine – they must be conscious of transcendental dimensions of reality, rather than possessing them \textit{a priori} through omniscience. Scientific accountability, like all forms of accountability, stems from the achievement of intersubjectively meaningful criteria, and the elaboration of such criteria – not

\textsuperscript{21} For a classic and extended examination, see Cassirer (1923), especially chapter VI.
only by a subject alone but also by subjects engaged in vulnerable processes of discovery and debate – is one that calls for responsibility. The desire for the purely objective, then, is a project of bad faith, abjuring the evidence of scientific subjectivity in order to evade the anguished apprehension of critical responsibility.

b. Desire for the Ideal Object

The eradication of scientific subjectivity is not the only manner in which a science could be conceived of as “hard.” An alternative: to find the hardness of the sciences not in the method or demeanor of the inquirer but rather in the metaphysical essence of the object of inquiry. As against the “radical objectivity” discussed above, this fetish regards sciences as hard insofar as they reveal what may be termed an object whose characteristics perform a radical transformation of the subject that apprehends it. Let us call this object the “Ideal Object,” with the capitalization denoting an intrinsic irony: namely, as we will see, the Ideal Object is strictly speaking neither ideal nor an object.22

What are the metaphysics of the paradigm of the Ideal Object? The notion of the Ideal Object grants that consciousness is condemned to its subjectivity, and many objects will simply fail to be grasped because their constitution renders them imperceptible or inapprehensible to the scientific subject. However, a peculiar kind of object comes, under some conditions, to appear: the Ideal Object, whose metaphysical properties mean that in its being perceived, a

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22 Note also that by “Ideal Object” I do not imply any relation to the notion of “ideal objects” in the sense of being imagined, as opposed to real, objects, which is used by Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schütz, etc. For the purposes of this study, our use of “ideal” (and its capitalized variant here) is restricted to the normative sense; to describe that which exists only in ideas as opposed to in reality, we will use “irreal” or “imaginary,” as appropriate.
transformation is *a priori* affected in the perceiver. The impact of the Ideal Object is to make the subject that perceives it, in doing so, in some sense relieved of its subjectivity.

The philosophical problem with the Ideal Object is thus quite simple: it suggests a subject that, having apprehended this peculiar object, would in some sense cease to be fully subjective. In other words, its effect would be to substantialize the subject, such that it was imbued with an “objective” substance. But this simply raises the same problem as did the desire for the purely objective: it would make the subject into something other than a subject.

A clarification may be in order here, given our study’s Sartrean account of consciousness. If consciousness is a being-for-itself, then it is such that it is what it is not and is not what it is. The proponent of the Ideal Object could maintain that in making the subject “what it is not,” this is fine, since the subject is consciousness and hence is what it is not. In other words, if subjects are free, then it should follow that subjects are free to become objects; therefore, the scientist is a subject who should seek to find that object which would relieve her or him of subjectivity. The problem, though, is that the for-itself is condemned to its freedom; freedom is a transcendence, but freedom is also the facticity of that transcendence, and it thus constitutes a limit of that which can be transcended. I cannot transcend my freedom toward, as it were, a free unfreedom. Now, the key point about the freedom of the for-itself is that it may still attempt to accomplish that which could not be accomplished. The consequence, as we have seen, is the project of freedom to transcend freedom by becoming the being-in-itself-for-itself. This project is condemned to failure, as Sartre maintains, because it constitutes an impossible synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself, though as Beauvoir clarifies, such condemnation need not imply gloom and doom, for it is in the project of directing oneself toward such an impossible ideal that an existence secretes its essence. That essence, we may say, is evident from a perspective of alterity: the for-itself
realizes a being-in-itself-for-others by way of its project toward impossible ideals. The irony is that, from the perspective of others, the outcome of such a project may be the fulfillment of ideals, since the other may apprehend the meaning of these projects in terms of realizable ideals. In short, the defense of the subject’s taking on responsibility for the impossible ideal it desires is that through this absurd project, she or he may meet the needs for which another shall hold him or her accountable.

Does Beauvoir’s position provide sufficient defense for the project of science as a search for the Ideal Object, or Ideal Objects? In a word, no – or, at least, from the vantage of the question of mature science, the answer must be no. If it is true that the naïve pursuit of the Ideal Object may be generative – that this useless passion proves “useful” from the meaningful judgment of other perspectives, applying other criteria – it does not follow that the mature scientific project should pragmatically accept such pursuit as a mark (much less cornerstone) of rigor. What makes the pursuit of unrealizable ideals useful is that in their failure, they provide evidence for the apprehension of realities that the naïve endeavor had failed to apprehend. In other words, the failure in pursuit of unrealizable ideals creates the conditions under which realizable ideals may be articulated. The proffering of the Ideal Object by naïve sciences can thus be worthy of qualified celebration, but it is not thereby true that such sciences are mature. Maturity demands that sciences take responsibility for their limits and limitations. Maturity, in short, demands responsibility for overcoming naïveté.

The desire for the achievement of “hard” sciences by way of the apprehension of the ideal object thus diagnostically is only a minor deviation from the desire for the purely objective. It is a bad faith evasion of an evidential accounting of the scientific subject to evade the anguish of responsibility for articulating criteria of scientific accountability. It pursues this through a
search for non-persuasive evidence – for the Ideal Object is “evidence” that transcends persuasiveness, insofar as it would not persuade the consciousness that apprehends it but rather facilitate that subject’s transcendence beyond consciousness.

Science as the pursuit of the Ideal Object is thus immature in general, but we may raise as well the special problem of the relation between this immature model and the human sciences. If science is understood in these immature terms, then many will jump to a further conclusion: that the human sciences simply could not be scientific. In other words, it is maintained that science apprehends objects, but such objects, for the endeavor to be properly scientific, would have to have the nature of the Ideal Object. Hence, science on such a view is only that project of examining Ideal Objects. The problem, in short, is the human being is regarded in terms of its lack of Ideal Objecthood; hence, the human sciences become a conceptual impossibility.

Our discussion of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in chapter 1 points already to the shape of much of the conflict. There is, in short, a temptation to assert that the proper objects of the sciences are those which, in being apprehended, facilitate the apprehension of natural law, that is, of laws to which there could be no exceptions. Human life, insofar as human freedom is evident or apparent, constitutes a problem for such a view, since one would have to explain such freedom away in order to make human life a proper scientific object. That is, because the sciences are a project of apprehending that which is determined without exception, then it will either have to be admitted that human life transcends that which science may account for or that science need bracket the evidence of human life in order to discover those foundational elements of reality that, once examined, will demonstrate that the human world is mere illusion, epiphenomenon of a deeper reality. Human existence is thus regarded as a problematic appearance that the sciences will have to eradicate in order for them to be truly scientific.
We have already noted the folly of this outlook in chapter 1, insofar as it posits an untenable presupposition – the possibility and necessity of apprehension of exhaustive and exclusive natural laws – as an *a priori* given of scientific inquiry. There we affirmed the position of Ernst Cassirer that science demands not a metaphysical determinism but a methodological one. What science demands is accountability to scientific criteria, and the project of articulating such criteria is an intersubjective one that determines the *meaning* of scientific criteria for scientific communities. Determining the meaning of scientific criteria does not determine the exact relationship between such criteria and reality – for science defines its relationship to reality, which requires defining what reality means *for science* but does not mean that science determines what reality *is*.

To appeal to the desire for the Ideal Object in order to place human beings outside the purview of scientific inquiry thus constitutes two evasions of scientific responsibility. The first is, simply, that it asserts false standards of scientific accountability in order to evade anguished responsibility for studying human life. This carries the perverse but occluded consequence of degrading scientific practice as a whole by making it look away from what is evident through examination of a human world. The second is that it would seem, as well, to prevent scientific examination of the human activities constituting the sciences – that is, it would preclude the scientific study of scientists as a source of knowledge for the refinement of scientific criteria, methods, and mechanisms of accountability. This makes questions of scientific method devolve, ultimately, into *a priori* assertions about the capabilities of scientists as human beings, or into non-scientific conclusions derived from partial and typically provincial empirical observation of human life. What the notion of the Ideal Object offers, ultimately, is relief from the anguish of pursuing scientific examination of scientific examination.
Here we may note some peculiar dimensions of such evasions if we examine them in light of extant social realities. Recall our discussion of problems of coloniality as they relate to anthropology and philosophy in the Introduction. For many, the legitimacy of colonial projects is tied up in the notion of Europe as icon of enlightenment by way of its scientific achievements. Fallacies abound, and there are far too many unpack here. But we may proffer a reductive sketch in order to articulate the thematic essence of such positions, even if such a sketch would be inadequate to the refutation of any given proponent of such fallacies. The sketch of the general tenor of such positions is as follows: Europe distinguished itself from all other civilizations by finding, simply, science; science is a European invention. The pivotal moments point to figures like Nicolaus Copernicus and Isaac Newton, and their advancements led Europe to authentic scientific practice by way of the proper study of natural law. In short, they apprehended an Ideal Object: namely, the Physical Object. Physics thus set afoot “Science,” a pure and unblemished product of the European intellect. Other Ideal Objects would emerge: the chemical as the Chemical Object, the organism as the Biological Object, etc.

Could Europe, in turn, apprehend Ideal Objects to set afoot the human sciences? Here the distinction between the humanitas and the Anthropos would be determinative. Anthropology could emerge as the science that apprehends, as it were, the Savage Object – the pseudo-persons operating according to deterministic laws of culture and custom. Such an approach would thus exclude the humanities, which would study European cultural productions as products and emblems of human freedom, hence, as matters of inquiry that transcended the capabilities of Science (implying to some the need to supplement Science with the humanities and to others the inferiority and ultimate irrelevance of the humanities). But then again, while the humanitas might through poetic and literary expression transcend causal determination, it would not follow
that all aspects of their lives would do so. Thus, the human sciences beyond Anthropology would be possible if Science were to apprehend laws governing principles of human institutions and exchange, such that, for instance, the Economic Object could be uncovered and set afoot Economics as a “hard” discipline, a Science of the necessities of human commodity exchange. Eventually fields like Political Science and Sociology could be offered as Scientific modes of apprehending those laws of institutions that supervened over human acts.

The philosophical problems dealt with thus far, not only in this chapter but in the study as a whole, should suffice to indicate the errors and bad faith that saturate the position here sketched, though there is, of course, much else that could be said. The point was made simply in W.E.B. Du Bois’s long-unpublished 1905 paper, “Sociology Hesitant” (2000). An approach to science necessitating the apprehension of law meant that sociologists, instead of beginning by studying human beings, first had to articulate those entities that could be regarded as the Ideal Objects for inquiry. Hence, what was posited was Society, an entity whose amenability to deterministic law was regarded as a priori given in spite of the fact that it would appear to be composed of acts by human beings whose deeds were contingent. Along this path, Du Bois lamented, “were we well started toward metaphysical wanderings—studying not the Things themselves but the mystical Whole which it was argued bravely they did form because they logically must” (Du Bois, 2000: 39).

It is not difficult to understand, given the trajectory of Du Bois’s life and career, why he would come to apprehend these peculiar problems. What he had discovered was that Sociology, in studying black people, had begun with a particular metaphysical presupposition: that the black person was a problem person, rather than a person who faced problems (Du Bois, 1898; L.R. Gordon, 2000b). In other words, Sociology apprehended the black as an Ideal Object, that is, as
The Negro – an Object whose attributes sufficed to remove any doubt about the Objectivity of the Scientist apprehending it. In short, Du Bois’s commitment to black liberation led him to the pursuit of scientific rigor, and this pursuit in turn led him to a discovery of the fraud of Science on the model of the Ideal Object. As Ronald Judy puts it,

Du Bois knows that the formation of an objective field of analysis, and the application of knowledge to the facts of that field in the form of action, does not derive from purely logical or methodological sources but can be understood only in the context of material social processes. For Du Bois, not only are facts products of complex social and historical processes, but science as a particular activity is a moment in the social process of production and is not self-sufficient. (Judy, 2000: 28)

To take responsibility for these social and historical processes, then, was an urgent matter for Du Bois. For Du Bois, “if we would solve a problem, we must study it, and … there is but one coward on earth, and that is the coward that dare not know” (1898: 23). To solve scientific problems – as those that arise through the production of Science as a fetish object – requires the courage to study the matter, to take responsibility for elaborating more rigorous criteria for inquiry. In short, Du Bois was committed to the project of the maturation of the sciences, human and otherwise.

Given the contours of our sketch, we can see why the critical work called for by Du Bois would stimulate the cowardice of many daring not to know. To expose Science to critical scrutiny would be to attack the legitimacy of a colonial world order, never mind that many of those actually engaged in scientific inquiry, whose work was appropriated as evidence of the virtues of Science, neither regarded their activity as Science as such, nor feared such critical interrogation, nor were so mystified as to regard the sciences as a European endeavor. In other words, Science played such a powerful legitimating role to Eurocentric human projects and institutions that many “needed” not to know of the difference between Science and science, even
if many scientists were perfectly amenable to such knowledge. We can thus relate our sketch to Sylvia Wynter’s notion of the Western episteme being a product of a secularizing or “degodding” (Wynter, 2003) of the episteme of Christendom. If Euro-modern colonialism was, in its initial stages, legitimated on theological grounds – an extension, as it were, of “divine right” to the colonial periphery – then the contradictions broached by genocide, enslavement, and hyper-exploitation in the name of religious conversion engendered a turn to alternative modes of legitimation on secularized terms. A problem, though, is that such degodding is in crucial senses de dicto but not de re; that is, if “God” is bowdlerized from the canon of colonial justifications as Christendom becomes Europe, it does not follow that the function of “God” has vanished from the latter set of justifications. Europe had found another “God,” and it happened to find it, as it were, staring back at it in the mirror – though a mirror of the funhouse sort, whose distortions are affected in order to facilitate the appearance of a desired self-image. Hence, Science on the model of the Ideal Object could play the functional role of God, transforming the status of the European subject from human to divine, and doing the same for Europe’s project of colonization. Thus, Science on that understanding offers relief from the anguish of articulating meaningful criteria through which European projects could be held accountable.

c. Desire for the Eradication of Objects

The above sketch suggests the shape of a fetishized Science serving, ultimately, as factotum for colonial projects. An error involved there could be termed, invoking Wynter, the over-representation of Science as if it were science. On such a schema, evidence of science’s virtue is taken as evidence of the virtue of Science, and, ultimately, Europe or coloniality at
large. It follows, then, that Science may become an object of decolonization. The model suggested by Du Bois is one in which Science is decolonized in order to arrive at science. But another model is possible: one which regards the decolonization of Science as necessitating the obsolescence or eradication of science. Such a model, we may say, is a form of naïve decolonization.

What does such naïve decolonization put forth as its model of what comes after science? It posits the notion that the absence of the Ideal Object implies the absence of objects altogether. Hence, what would come after science would be human inquiry without any objects. We have already established the basic folly of such efforts. If consciousness can be characterized as a subject directed towards objects, then the removal of objects amounts, simply, to the absence of the subject. This implies the absence of consciousness, and, hence, the impossibility of human inquiry.

Some variants of this naïve decolonization would more or less accept the consequence that the absence of objects implies the absence of subjects, announcing, in short, the death of the subject. Agnes Heller offers a simple diagnosis:

No autopsy has yet been performed on the thing or concept termed subject, though its demise is taken as a matter of fact by many students of philosophy. Actually, the concept ‘subject’ is polysemic to an extent that it lends itself easily to verbal and conceptual manoeuvring. No wonder then that readers and interpreters are often guilty of being parties to mistaken identity. (Heller, 1990: 61)

In short, the death of the subject is announced as a matter of equivocation. Hence, one can cut off the head of the Subject in theory, so to speak, without actually eliminating any subjects; it is, parallel to the degodding central to narratives of colonial justification, a beheading de dicto rather than de re. But the recourse of those avowing a post-subjectivity would be simple: this
charge merely accuses them of failing to apprehend the subject objectively, which carries no weight, since they have already rejected objectivity.

Thus, the crux of the matter lies with the refusal of the object. The rationales are many, but for our purposes we may focus on a central feature. What we have termed Science is accused of fabricating its purchase on reality by appeal to the Ideal Object; but the Ideal Object has not facilitated such purchase, which implies, in short, the absence of what many would term “objective reality.” For some, this points to a purely subjective apprehension of reality, while for others it would point to something transcending even subjectivity insofar as it would call the dismissal of the objective reality of the subject.

Here we may note that the assault on “objective reality” may simply be misguided. Objects are that which appear through a relation with subjects, and objectivity as a regulative ideal of inquiry is that which emerges through intersubjective projects of furnishing criteria of scientific accountability. Reality, if it is that which such inquiry seeks to apprehend, is apprehended through objects. The nature of consciousness of objects, as discussed in chapter 1, is to transcend what is evident toward that which transcends the evidence. What consciousness finds beyond the evidence itself, as Sartre puts it, is being. If reality is defined as this being, then we note that reality is that which emerges beyond the objects of consciousness, and hence “objective reality” would appear a misnomer insofar as it would make reality the objects themselves. We could go further, as well, by distinguishing being from reality, insofar as being is the product of consciousness as a transcendence, and we may say that reality is that which transcends even this transcendence: in other words, consciousness can refer to a being that isn’t
there, or can render a being what it is not, but consciousness cannot make reality other than what it is – that is, when consciousness is mistaken about reality, this does not alter reality.  

What would seem to be at issue, then, is not a problem with objects (other than the problems already evinced regarding investments in revealing the Ideal Object) but with the matter of how consciousness relates to reality. We have seen already that the relationship between consciousness and reality is a contingent one. Consciousness includes consciousness of the irreal, and the irreal requires no particular prior relationship to reality. What one discovers in the irreal may share essential features with reality, or it may bear little or no resemblance whatsoever – hence, the irreal may apprehend the unreal. Yet to speak of apprehension of the unreal is also to raise the matter of apprehending the unreal as unreal. In other words, if the irreal facilitates the imaginary, it does so through consciousness not only of the imagined but also of imagination. The nature of consciousness is that it is consciousness of consciousness, such that though both the imagined and the real are present through objects of consciousness, consciousness is conscious of the difference between the real and the imagined by virtue of the fact that it is conscious of the imagination of the imagined. The loophole, as it were, is that consciousness of imagination may be merely pre-reflective, which opens the door to projects of bad faith through the repression of evidence that what one regards as real is rather what one has imagined or vice versa.

Various forms of what we have termed naïve decolonization, though, persist essentially through an advocacy of modes of human inquiry in which the meaningful distinction between the

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23 We could clarify this point with regard to the seeming exception that the mistake constitutes part of the reality of consciousness, but this does not change the account as given, insofar as the reality of consciousness already includes the transcendental possibility of its being mistaken about reality, including the reality of consciousness.
real and the imaginary is elided. The consequence is a method, in short, of play. The imagination, we have seen, involves a mode of play. Mature reason, though, was articulated in terms of a relation to such play, rather than as a method governed by play. It is thus distinct from a method of play. A method of play denies its responsibility for the distinction between the imaginary and the real, and a variety of other meaningful distinctions fall by the wayside in turn: in such a method it is play, ultimately, that determines the domain(s) of its playing. Hence, such play may fundamentally suspend commitments to distinguish claim from argument, thought from opinion, reasoned conclusion from asserted belief, and so on. What emerges is a project of elaborating meanings without a commitment to coherence. In short, it evades conditions under which human inquiry could be held accountable, and, further, it evades responsibility for articulating meaningful criteria through which accountability would be possible.

Of course, a consequence is that naïve decolonization under such terms could not coherently be regarded as decolonization. This is fitting, since genealogically, the forms of naïve decolonization through the rejection of science (as distinct from the rejection of Science) under consideration here have predominantly not emerged from colonized peoples. That is to say, these naïve decolonizations find their locus of enunciation in the global north, in Europe and North America, under a variety of signifiers but most commonly through some affiliation, if loose, to a particular sign: the “post-,” as in post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-humanism, etc. This is not to say that these have not meaningfully been taken up by many colonized peoples, but it is to call into question whether and to what degree such engagements have engendered actual decolonization, even if at only at the level of epistemic decolonization. The key referent here is the “post-colonial,” which is given a peculiar meaning. Though the “post-colonial” can meaningfully be linked with certain commitments, the problem is that, under these terms, it
ultimately is not linked to a meaningful and coherent commitment to decolonization. The reason is simple: colonialism and coloniality are objects, and decolonization requires a relation to those objects; the post-colonial, if founded on a repudiation of objecthood, preempts theoretical commitments regarding such a relation.

Thus the “post-” functions, ultimately, in a manner akin to Science: it opposes itself to the “hard” of Euro-modernity, but achieves its “post-modern” status in the same way that Euro-modernity achieved its “post-God” status: through a repudiation rather than a cessation of function. The “post-” – which, for our purposes, we may as well call the “post-object” – functions as the useless passion recommended to a variety of human projects once colonialism becomes shameful to Euro-modernity. It is immature. It can be useful, as can all useless passions, insofar as its failures are apprehended by others, and such apprehension engenders the articulation of novel projects and ideals. But its immaturity prevents its own realization of this usefulness, for such apprehension would require taking the post-object as an object of meaningful critical inquiry, and the post-object rejects such a possibility a priori. Hence, it can only be useful insofar as a reckoning with its failures inspires human beings to grow up and move on.

II. Apprehension of Structures of Relation

a. Realities of Relation

Our reflections thus far suggest the possibility of scientific maturity, as well as the possibility that human life can be the object of mature sciences. How, then, should the human sciences relate to this object? In light of the problem suggested by the above exploration of the
desire for “hard” sciences (or Science), we may proffer a simple and initial answer. The desire for “hard” sciences stimulates an effort to evade the simple reality of scientific endeavor: that it is a relation between those who study and their objects of study. It is, at base, an evasion of relationality. Mature human sciences call, then, for scientific endeavors that do not shy away from examination of the relation between the subject and object at hand. Among a variety of other implications, this suggests that mature human sciences require a perspective on the objects of the human sciences such that the human sciences could study the human sciences – and, indeed, do so rigorously.

Our argument in this section can thus be summarized very simply: it is an argument for what Peter Caws terms structuralism:

Structuralism is a philosophical view according to which the reality of the objects of the human or social sciences is relational rather than substantial. It generates a critical method that consists of inquiring into and specifying the sets of relations (or structures) that constitute these objects or into which they enter, and of identifying and analyzing groups of such objects whose members are structural transformations of one another. (Caws, 1988: 1)

As a philosophical position, the key word here is reality: the view is not simply the pragmatic perspective that the human sciences may presume to study their objects as relations rather than substances. In other words, one could adopt structural methods without a commitment regarding their relation to reality. Our concern, though, is the matter of mature human sciences, and we have seen that the problem of merely supposing (or presupposing) the justificatory grounds of one’s method invites the possibility of immaturity if one denies or represses responsibility for the evaluation of those grounds. Hence, our concern is not to demonstrate that structural methods have their uses; it is, rather, to establish why structuralism is needed for mature human sciences.
Why, then, this position on the reality of the objects of the human sciences? Reality, we have said, meaningfully transcends consciousness. Karl Jaspers writes,

We call reality that which is present to us in practice, that which in our dealings with things, with living creatures, and with men is resistance or becomes matter. We learn to know reality through our daily association with people, through the handling of tools, through technical knowledge, through contact with organized bodies of men. …But by its very nature the knowledge of reality transcends the immediate interests of practical life. (Jaspers, 2003: 74)

The issue, in short, is that reality is present to us in practice, but such practice does not apprehend reality in its totality – including, even, scientific and theoretical practice, which may illuminate reality without thereby providing knowledge of reality as a whole; the search for the complete and total apprehension of reality, Jaspers argues, is fallacious. After all, such would require a practice the product by which one would come to transcend practice. Lewis Gordon, evoking Jaspers, puts the matter thusly: “Reality is all that transcends thought without loss. What this means is that although we can think of reality, that thought itself cannot encompass all of reality” (L.R. Gordon 2006: 46).24

It might be suggested, then, that humility is in order: to adopt a position on the reality of the human sciences and their objects would be folly. Yet such counsel confronts two problems. The first, as laid out above, is that maturity requires a position on reality – that is to say, mature human sciences must be able to give an account of their relation to reality, and an account cannot be given without saying something about reality. If reality is what transcends thought without loss, it does not follow that one cannot meaningfully or accurately think about reality, and the move to nullify one’s responsibility for doing so would be immature. The second is that to say

24 A similar position, the depth and complexity of which precludes simple restatement here, is given in Cassirer (1923, especially pp. 271–346).
that reality transcends consciousness does not imply that there is no reality of consciousness. We have seen that a reckoning with the reality of consciousness is necessary for a mature perspective on the subjectivity of scientific inquiry. Now we must account for its implications on the objects, not of the sciences in general but of the human sciences in particular.

The simple point is that the human sciences require an effort to engender knowledge of human reality. Consciousness, as our study would seem to demonstrate throughout, is an essential feature of human reality. A temptation for evasion enters here, as one might maintain that consciousness exhausts human reality. Consciousness, though, is embodied, and though many make the error of opposing consciousness to body, the simple point is that the reality of a body transcends the reality of the consciousness that is there embodied – in other words, my body is more than just my consciousness. If I study elbows, although such study is consciousness of elbows, it is a study of more than just those dimensions of the elbow that constitute consciousness. Temptation for evasion emerges, again, here, for one could seek to study elbows to the exclusion of consciousness. Our point is not that one cannot do so but rather that such study is ultimately beyond the domain of the human sciences. The concern of the human sciences is not with the flesh and bone of the elbow as such but in how the elbow functions in relation to the human consciousness that animates it. The anatomist may be indifferent to whether the token of the type “elbow” under examination is attached to a living human being or a corpse; for the human scientist, the difference is crucial.

Thus, the reality at issue for the human sciences can neither exclude consciousness nor be exhausted by it. In short, it is a reality that calls for an examination of the relationship between consciousness and that which transcends it. This means, inter alia, that the human sciences are tasked with learning about the reality of how consciousness relates to reality – and, indeed, of
how consciousness relates to the reality of consciousness. Our language here already reflects what has been established earlier in our study: that consciousness is a relation, a here in relation to a there. Hence, to study consciousness as part of human reality requires the apprehension of a relation. This entails not simply apprehending a science of that thing which is conscious but of that which it is conscious of, and again, the implication would be that one seeks not the simple reality of the latter as it is independently of such consciousness, but in terms of the relationship between its consciousness-dependent realities (that is, how it appears through the relation) and its consciousness-independent realities (that is, those elements of its reality that a given consciousness has “lost”).

In short, because human consciousness is essential to human reality, and such consciousness is relational, it is relations that the human sciences must apprehend. Properly speaking, this implies the human sciences would be indifferent to how objects of human consciousness “really are” beyond that consciousness – in other words, the human sciences are interested in the meaning of the constellation Orion to human beings, but uninterested in how those celestial bodies produce light, how that light is transmitted to earth and at what rate, etc. But there is a contravening factor here, because other sciences may inquire into precisely those phenomena. Insofar as those other sciences are human projects, then the question of how human consciousness relates to such findings (as well as the question of how human consciousness achieved such findings) does arise for the human sciences. This highlights what is crucial: the matter of how consciousness relates to consciousness, even if this matter is “immaterial” in the physical sense, is essential to the human sciences. The human sciences, then, must study the relation between relations, and an apparently infinite regress that follows: the relation amongst
those relations, then the relation amongst those relations, and so on. The infinity of this task is, of course, in keeping with our general position on what maturity demands.

\[ b. \text{ Function and Objectivation} \]

An objection might easily arise at this point. If consciousness is a relation, and consciousness is essential to human reality, then the human sciences need to study the reality of such relations. But characteristic of such consciousness as well, as we have already argued, is freedom. Freedom implies contingency, which means that the relational objects that the human sciences apprehend could always be otherwise. If they could be otherwise, then the coherence of the endeavor is radically called into question. Freedom can be whatever it wants; hence, the human sciences could do little more than take note of the happenstances engendered by human contingency.

We note here a fallacy already refuted earlier: freedom means that one can try to be whatever one wants, not that one will succeed. Freedom confronts options, and both those options and their viability are subject to constraint. The name for such constraint is facticity. Human reality is a transcendence of its facticity, but it is not a radical transcendence of facticity – for that would make possible the escape from freedom, and even at the extreme, we find that suicidal acts when successful end the period of one’s freedom but are not an escape as such, insofar as one must choose the act and hence did not escape that choice (and, indeed, a failed suicidal act is no end to freedom at all).
One of the elements of this facticity worth examining: that freedom manifests through *doing*. In other words, consciousness is a relationship insofar as consciousness *constitutes* a relation. We have already noted in the Introduction that the nature of such constitution, as well, involves both the productive and the reproductive: on the one hand, consciousness is conscious of a world whose constitution precedes the activity of consciousness, such that consciousness reproduces relations already constituted; on the other hand, freedom implies the transcendental possibility that what consciousness does may not only renew the constitution of the world but reform it – may, in short, invent new modes of relating to the world (a consequence of which, ultimately, is a reinvention of the world itself). The type of relation that consciousness is can thus be described as a *functional* one.

We note, again, the matter of the being-in-itself-for-itself and the useless passion. Existence lacks being and hence desires to be, setting afoot a failed project of trying to be. Consciousness can thus assert itself as the function that it is not; in bad faith the liar may tell herself, “All I’m doing is speaking the truth.” But if freedom means I may assert myself as the function that I am not, we confront the reality that my doing so has, as it were, another function. From the perspective of another (whether concrete or through reflection as alter ego) my deeds may have functions other than intended. We need not dwell on further elaboration here, as these matters have been demonstrated in chapter 2 at length through the explication of cleavages between action, behavior, and character. The meaning of what I do implies doings beyond those intended, even as these latter may include or even clarify the intentions they transcend.

The function of my deed, of course, could be understood by another as a one-off occurrence, a random act, so to speak. Yet here the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz (1967) is instructive. My acts have meanings within the social world. The social world is saturated with
the natural attitude. Hence, my fellow inhabitants of the social world, in the natural attitude, transcend the evidence of my act toward meanings whose intelligibility would require the presupposition of their non-random character. In short, in the natural attitude, I interpret the acts of those around me in terms that would be intersubjectively meaningful, and those around me in turn do the same for my acts. The meaningfulness of the social world is a product, we may say, of subjects who together constitute shared criteria for the interpretation of social acts – constitution, again, that has its elements of renewing prior meanings but with the possibility of generating novel ones, as happens, for instance, with neologisms. The social world is thus saturated, in short, with objectivations: the meaning of acts is given and taken, as it were, through terms whose meaning can be understood “objectively,” that is, through the apprehension of intersubjectively meaningful criteria.

Action, in such a context, is ambiguous in the sense suggested by Simone de Beauvoir (2000). The meaning of my act may be infused with a variety of personal intentions that do not become sufficiently evident to others, even as others apprehend sufficient evidence of my act to meaningfully describe them in terms of objectivations. The objectivations, hence, do not necessarily exhaust the meaning of my act, and perhaps on principle it would be impossible for them to do so, though for our purposes, the key point is that it would be impossible for any given objectivation to exhaust the meaning of my act. This can be illustrated by noting the temporal character of objectivations: while they are perhaps most at home in the quotidian apprehension of the present, they are not restricted to the present apprehension of the present. Hence, the meaning of my acts now will be subject to objectivations whose meaning has yet to be constituted. The photograph I took of myself in 2003 did not then carry the meaning of “selfie,” even if witnessed by or conveyed to others; but “selfie” is now a common objectivation of the social world, and it
could be unproblematically applied now not only to the style of photograph I took in 2003 but to my act of self-photography as well.

This suggests a factual limit for my acts. No matter which acts I choose, they still have a function for others; they are still subject to objectivation, to projects of rendering their meaning coherent. That objectivations are capable of incoherence is true, but of course, it is contingent whether they will be coherent or not, and some form of coherence is the end toward which they are directed, even if it does not follow that objectivations seek a knowledge that is both coherent and exhaustive. I cannot make a choice that would deprive my acts of function or meaning, for such a choice would be understood by others as indecisive, or rude, or willfully deceptive, etc.

One way to explain the ambiguity of my acts, then, is in terms of their anonymity. A condition of their meaningfulness is that their meaning transcend those dimensions that are significant because it is this individual, me, doing them; my acts, insofar as they are done by me, are also done by someone. Care should be taken to avoid conflating this “someone” with an “anyone,” for anonymity is not identical with universality. For instance, roles function through a logic of anonymity: the tasks and duties associated with a role are adequate for anyone fulfilling the functions of that role, even though not everyone occupies any given role. The point is that anyone who could fulfill such a role will, in so doing, become someone fulfilling it. That my acts are also someone’s acts means that they are meaningful beyond what is known of me. And even what is known of me is transcended toward knowledge of a significance that is, in some sense, impersonal: the meaning of Nelson Mandela’s acts transcend their individuated biographical
significance, taking on meanings relevant to the question of a national hero’s acts, or a freedom fighter’s acts, or a politician’s acts, etc.25

Freedom, thus, is no impediment to the relational apprehension of the meaning of human acts, for their contingency is not radical but rather is circumscribed by facticity, and that facticity means that they always bear some degree of intelligibility within what Caws calls “signiferous systems.” Signiferous systems both yield significance and carry significance (Caws, 1988: 184), which, in our terms, means they are constitutive of meaning both through its production and its reproduction. The reproductive element suggests something crucial, which was already central to our examination in chapter 2: as an actor in a social world, when I act, I do so in relation to the meanings my acts may have for others. This implies neither that I have complete (or even adequate) knowledge of the meanings my acts will have or come to have for others, nor that I only act on the basis of such meanings. But it does imply that my actions presuppose some degree of relation to others, though again, the presupposing may involve varying degrees of overstating, understating, and misinterpreting the expected meaning of my acts for others. In short, I know that my acts will reproduce elements of social meaning that precede them, even if such knowledge is typically pre-reflective.

The consequence, then, is that the human sciences, in order to apprehend the social world through which human acts take on their relational status, has to apprehend these systems of objectivation. Such apprehension, as Schütz notes, is profoundly multifaceted:

All cultural Objectivations can … be interpreted in a twofold manner. One interpretation treats them as completely constituted objectifications as they exist for us the interpreters, either now, as contemporaries in the present, or as coming later in history. These objectifications can be described quite simply or

25 For further discussion of anonymity, see Natanson (1986).
can be subjected to theoretical elaboration as objects of essential knowledge; that is, one can study the state as such, art as such, language as such.

All these products can, however, be treated as evidence for what went on in the minds of those who created them. Here highly complex cultural objects lend themselves to the most detailed investigation. The state can be interpreted as the totality of the acts of those who are oriented to the political order, that is, of its citizens; or it can be interpreted as the end result of certain historical acts and therefore itself as a historical object; or it can be treated as the concretization of a certain public-mindedness on the part of its rulers, and so forth. (Schütz, 1967: 136)

In short, mature human sciences demand the apprehension of signiferous systems whose objectivations both have to be made evident in order to interpret their meaning to social actors as well as to inquire into what those objectivations make evident about those actors and their shared projects of yielding and carrying forth meaning. In other words, the human sciences are responsible for understanding the reproductive function of social meaning that precedes and constitutes human acts, and the human sciences are also responsible for studying the productive function of human acts insofar as these acts together constitute a human world. Mature human sciences are thus responsible for the world, both in the world’s role as condition for the meaning of acts under study and in the world’s status as product of acts worthy of study insofar as they produce those meanings.

An example of what this responsibility entails, as well as its relation to our initial concern with the question of the human sciences’ capacity to apprehend human needs, becomes clear if we note the distinction made by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann between objectivation on the one hand and reification on the other. Objectivation is a quotidian dimension of a social world. But reification transcends mere objectivation:

Reification is the apprehension is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products.
such as the facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world. ...

It will be clear from our previous discussion of objectivation that, as soon as an objective social world is established, the possibility of reification is never far away. The objectivity of the social world means that it confronts man as something outside of himself. The decisive question is whether he still retains the awareness that, however objectivated, the social world was made by men—and, therefore, can be remade by them. In other words, reification can be described as an extreme step in the process of objectivation, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable, inert facticity. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 89)

Reification, in short, is a form of bad faith: human authorship of the human world becomes “lost to consciousness,” though here we may say so not in the form of its being absent to consciousness but rather its being evaded as an object of reflective consciousness. The relationship of objectivation to reification parallels that of freedom to bad faith: the former presents the transcendental possibility of the latter, though as such whether the former begets the latter is a contingent matter. A social world needs objectivations; without these, it fails to have the function of a social world. Reifications, though, masquerade as if they were necessary objectivations, as if these particular objectivations were needed. And even there, what is implied is a sense of “need” masquerading as if it were not itself an objectivation; reifications seek to occlude their status as objectivations altogether.

If mature human sciences are ultimately responsible for the project of distinguishing human needs from human desires, and the larger project of apprehending the human world in a spirit of critical good faith, then the human sciences confront peculiar responsibilities with regard to reification. The human sciences need to study and understand reifications at the basic level insofar as these are a subset of objectivations: they need to be apprehended simply because one
does not understand the human world if one does not understand those reifications that shape its system of meanings. Yet this means, as well, that the human sciences are responsible for distinguishing reifications from mere objectivations: which features of a human world bear the pragmatic mark of objectivation without constituting an evasive relation to the human agency underlying such objectivation, and which do not? But then there is a further layer, namely, the matter of why *these* dimensions of a human world have been reified – that is, any given reification raises the question of why *it*, in particular, was reified. This raises the question, in our vocabulary, of what it is that stimulates the bad faith evasions underlying reifications in general. And of course, to raise that question is also to bring forth another: why are *these* objectivations reified but *those* ones aren’t? That is, reification is a matter of comparative inquiry. Such comparison involves a primary level: within this society, why are these things reified and those things not? It also involves a secondary level: across societies, which things are typically reified and which things are not? That, in turn, raises the question of examining the conditions that yield the typicalities, the conditions that yield atypicalities, and the conditions that yield cases whose peculiarities transcend ideal-typification. We could go on, but the point should be well established by now: the matter of apprehending the significance of reifications is an infinite task for the human sciences, and maturity demands just this infinite responsibility.

A brief example to illustrate the point. One of the objects that have proven particularly problematic to the human sciences – and in a myriad of multifaceted ways – is race. The by now familiar claim is that race is a social construction. We note here the triviality of such a claim: indeed, race is a social construction, in the same way that all objectivations are socially constructed. To be an eliminativist about objectivations is to seek, unwittingly or not, to eradicate a necessary condition for meaning. The more salient point, then, is that race is a
reification. The significance of race’s being a reification is that the human sciences are thus responsible for the laundry list and ultimately infinity of tasks indicated by the previous paragraph. Race and racism need to be interrogated as forms of bad faith, and, indeed, not only forms of individual but institutional bad faith (L.R. Gordon, 1995a 45–48; L.R. Gordon, 1995b: 21–24), as their reified status suggests. However, apprehension of their significance could not stop at the question of establishing that they are reifications and hence forms of bad faith, for reifications and bad faith are typical of human communities. Hence, the question of what makes their ordinariness extraordinary needs interrogation. For instance, reification, as a transcendental possibility of objectivation, would thus be a transcendental possibility for forms of anonymity. But race is no mere structure of anonymity, insofar as it begets what Lewis Gordon terms a perverse anonymity: “to be seen in a racist way is an ironic way of not being seen through being seen. It is to be seen with overdetermined anonymity” (L.R. Gordon 1995b: 58). Anonymity as a reification is typical, as when human societies forget, for instance, that it is only through human choices that they have militaries, police forces, financiers, etc. But racism as a perversion of anonymity presents specific problems for which the human sciences bear peculiar responsibility. Why did these perversions arise?

Such questions call, ultimately, for a relational study, because to study race is not merely to study the transcendental possibilities for racial discourses, despite much work based on a presumption to the contrary. Hence, if race represents a form of bad faith, then the facticity that stimulates it needs to be studied. Here, the method of existential psychoanalysis put forth by Sartre is useful, insofar as it helps elucidate the human meaning of the desire for bad faith as an evasion of responsibility. But a rigorous diagnostic transcends these dimensions alone, insofar as to study race means one must study the contexts of colonization, the rise of a global system of
commodity exchange and capitalist production, its relation to pre-existing signiferous systems in Europe, in Africa, and elsewhere, their imbrication in questions of gender, theology, sexuality, etc., and so on. Then recursively at each of these levels the existential psychoanalytic problematic can be raised again, insofar as each presents the transcendental possibility of a regional project of flight from existence toward being.

Such work is an infinite task. But the alternative – a human sciences with finite, circumscribed responsibilities – is, to employ reasonable criteria, undesirable. We need more. The problem, of course, is that from the standpoint of a subject desiring to elude the anguish of such responsibility, a delimited notion of the human sciences is wanted (and perhaps regarded as needed). Hence, we may proffer an existential psychoanalytic reading of those who regard the claim that race is social construction as a meaningful conclusion to inquiry rather than an initial step. “Race is a social construct” is itself, ultimately, an objectivation. But in many of its usages, it has the function, as well, of reification: it is as if human beings did not have any agency in announcing it as such, or, more to the point, if it is admitted that human beings realized that race is socially constructed, it is occluded or denied that there are many more realizations that are possible. Indeed, to study race requires studying just this sort of second-order reification, the reification of the status of the first reification (and, indeed, the same could and would be true were there to be third- and fourth-order reifications, and so on). Why does the repetition of race’s status as reification receive so much more airtime, as it were, than the implications this should entail for mature inquiry? This is a question that mature inquiry must take up.

Indeed, in light of our discussion of naïve decolonization above, we should note one perverse consequence of these naïvetés. The post-modern brings with it a repudiation of standards of rigor and merit. Where the post-modern is seen as a necessary antidote to
reification, the consequence is an eradication of meaningful standards. A problem, as Gordon has argued, and in line with our discussion of Deloria in the Introduction, is that immature members of oppressed communities come to be regarded as “authentic” expressions of the experience of oppression. Regarding the perspectives thereby conveyed as expressing the truth (often conceived exhaustively) of oppression is then taken as a necessary antidote to the hegemony of racist criteria of objectivity. Indeed, the degree to which such expressions are immature is taken to indicate the greater degree of their authenticity, meaning that the claim is implicitly advanced that people whose oppressors regard them as immature (and justify their oppression on these grounds) can overcome such oppression by choosing to be immature (L.R. Gordon, 2005). This is, in short, the post-modern as an evasion of responsibility for overcoming oppression, and the maturity of human sciences calls not only for them to take responsibility for overcoming oppression, but for them to examine why and how such evasions have come to prominence.

III. Forging and Suspending Disciplines

a. Responsibilities for Discipline

The tasks of the mature human sciences are thus infinite. Some may take this as implying, then, that those tasks should be transdisciplinary, taking this term to imply their status beyond disciplinarity altogether. On such an interpretation, transdisciplinarity would have the same meaning as non-disciplinarity. In other words, if the tasks of the mature human sciences are infinite, then it may seem as if discipline could function only as an unnecessary impediment. Such a position is mistaken.
To discipline, in its simplest meaning, is to teach. Our examination of the social world suggests the impossibility of one who is not taught. To exist meaningfully in a social world is to learn its objectivations, and although much of this learning may be in some form auto-didactic, it is highly probable that the bulk of it will be the product of projects of instruction by others. Indeed, even the autodidact learns from materials forged by others, so even that which is merely apprehended through observation is nonetheless apprehended out of materials bearing some implicit pedagogical directives. For a social world, as a system of signiferous systems, is a bearer not only of the conditions for intelligibility but also of mechanisms for intelligibilizing.

A simple point, then: outside of the most naïve forms – which are beside the point insofar as we are examining the demands of mature human sciences – human inquiry takes place on the grounds of some prior modes of disciplining. That there are matters of degree is obvious, as the modes, manners, efficacies, and urgencies shaping such disciplining are contingent. A basic problem for the proponent of non-disciplinarity, then, is that this may function as a stimulus to (or product of) bad faith. Non-disciplinarity may be, in short, an appeal to an unattainable innocence, an evasion of the anguish of taking responsibility for understanding how one has been disciplined and, indeed, for the possibilities of how one could become better disciplined.

We can thus proffer a truer, or at least more desirable, conception of transdisciplinarity: transdisciplinarity means that one is responsible for tasks lying beyond the scope of one’s avowed discipline(s) and for tasks for which one’s disciplining heretofore may be inadequate. But we note that transdisciplinarity so conceived is insufficient for the maturity of human sciences. The reason is, simply, that it denotes responsibility for what lies beyond one’s disciplining, without addressing the matter of responsibility for one’s disciplining and discipline(s) as such.
Disciplines are objectivations. Human beings bring them into the world and, indeed, human beings can affect their desuetude and obsolescence, their transformation and amalgamation, and so on. For the inquirer who has been disciplined, the discipline is constitutive, simply, of the world as the inquirer apprehends it. That the inquirer may have multi- or inter-disciplinary identities or inclinations may complicate but not abolish this structure of constitution. The inquirer, in doing the productive work of scientific endeavor, is implicitly engaged in the reproductive labor of maintaining the discipline. Here, again, such reproduction may beget its transformation; both those who are especially rigorous and those who are especially lazy will have the effect of queering their discipline in some fashion or another, for better or for worse. The simple fact remains, then, that all modes of human inquiry on some level constitute the reproduction of a world. Maturity, we have seen, demands responsibility for the world. How, then, to take responsibility for one’s discipline?

An answer is suggested here by returning to the relation between objectivation and reification. Many disciplines are reified; they are regarded as if beyond human agency. A consequence, as Lewis Gordon (2006) has argued, is disciplinary decadence, in which the discipline regards itself as eternal or self-sufficient. A consequence is an occlusion or even disavowal of the relationship the discipline bears to reality. Responsibility for one’s discipline(s), then, suggests that one must take up the task of countering such reification. This would take two basic forms. The first, simply, is reconstructive. It requires the effort of studying one’s own discipline in order to discern how its reifications have been affected, how they can be dismantled and overcome, and which alternative conceptions of the discipline are possible, and out of these, which are most desirable. As already suggested, this would involve meta-scientific responsibility: one must inquire into one’s world of inquiry, as it were. The second would
involve a project, ultimately, of abolition: if the roots of a discipline prevent its refashioning into a form conducive to maturity, then one may simply have to undertake the project of demonstrating its reifications and intransigence and going through the hard work of persuading others to denude the discipline of its power. Yet such efforts would not suffice, for, in the end, to tear down a discipline still leaves the matter of constructing alternatives.

Indeed, even if an inquirer occupies a healthy, productive, and mature discipline, the responsibilities of the human sciences imply the need for projects to construct disciplines to address matters that need addressing. One may need to step outside one’s discipline if simply for the purpose of constructing disciplines so that others may take on tasks one has the maturity to recognize one cannot fulfill. This constructive work, as our account suggests, does not consist simply in designating a new area of study, as one might in decreeing: “I hereby inaugurate X Studies!” To inaugurate an area of concern is one thing; to elaborate meaningful criteria and useful objectivations is another. The simple way to put the matter is that such responsibility calls for constructing a disciplinary culture in which critical good faith is typical and bad faith atypical. That this is an arduous, anguished endeavor, an infinite task with relief scarcely ever in sight, is equally simple to state. Good manners would suggest here that I elucidate how to proceed through such difficult terrain through careful and thereby lengthy exposition; good manners would also recommend I stick to the pressing theoretical issues for the sake of brevity so that the reader may, before long, depart from out study and face the difficult task of addressing these matters as manifest concretely to her or him. Here, in anguish, I opt for the latter.
b. Responsibilities Beyond Discipline

If these issues speak to the question of responsibility for one’s discipline(s), we may now turn, finally, to the other dimension of transdisciplinarity: namely, one’s responsibility for transcending one’s discipline(s). An antidote to disciplinary decadence, as Gordon has contended, is the teleological suspension of disciplinarity (L.R. Gordon, 2014a, 2016a). We have already explored the notion of teleological suspensions in this study; put simply, the teleological suspension of disciplinarity involves going beyond the scope of one’s discipline or discipline in order to fulfill those aims that called for the discipline (and/or the inquiry) to begin with. In short, we are back to the issue raised at the outset of this chapter: the maturity of the human sciences demands more than the mere rigorous application of a given method, because the ends of the human sciences call for more than mere rigor. One can, of course, point out here that the project of rigorous human sciences calls for such teleological suspensions, and this reflects a basic point: the disciplines of the human sciences each erect a method or methods, but no such discipline or method could, even upon having its ideal conditions for rigor being met, be sufficient in itself for the rigor of the human sciences in general. This is so, among other reasons, because the objects of the human sciences include the human sciences themselves, and as such, insofar as each discipline is constituted by its peculiar array of objectivations, a self-sufficient discipline could only be the apex of the human sciences by way of evading their responsibility for critical self-evaluation.

What is called for in those moments of teleological suspension? What are the critical activities one must undertake? Here we note that part of the answer lies in human scientific practices lying beyond one’s extant discipline(s); there is, in short, more to study, and one is responsible for acquiring or fabricating the tools through which they may be studied. But another
part may prove more vexing to the human scientist in pursuit of maturity. For such a crisis calls, ultimately, for reason, and, indeed, for mature reason at that. That is to say, crises in the science ultimately call for the identification and examination of one’s presuppositions, for the process through which they may pass from presupposition to the reflectively supposed, and where one may evaluate the comparative merits of competing modes of supposing. The infinity of the tasks of the human sciences means that maturity therein calls, ultimately, for responsibility for mature reason, and the infinity of the tasks of the latter, it may also be said, demand mature human scientific inquiry insofar as the evaluation of reasoning calls, ultimately, for the study of acts of reason, embedded in a human world.

So, too, do we confront the matter that, just as the problem of mature action pointed to the issue of distinguishing wants and needs and, in turn, the importance of mature human sciences for mature action, the problem of the mature human sciences may point back to the problem of mature action. Responsibility for one’s discipline – for projects of its erection, its reconstruction, its suspension or even its abolition – ultimately extends beyond oneself; it is no solipsistic enterprise. It calls for engaged human action and for projects of shared responsibility to erect meaningful criteria of accountability. In the end, one must account for the fact that disciplines are institutions, and to take responsibility for them requires social action and not mere contemplation. This raises a further question for our inquiry. It would seem that for me to pursue maturity, I cannot do it alone. If that is true, is it possible to choose maturity, and how? Let us now turn to these matters.
Chapter 4:

Choosing Maturity

The nature of our inquiry is to explore the meaning of maturity in a human world, or, more particularly, the meaning of maturity as a human ideal. Our central problematic has thus concerned the question of anguish, since to confront maturity as an ideal or demand is to confront one’s responsibility for meeting that demand. The question of anguish in turn raises problems around desire, for if a human world is one shaped by ubiquitous expressions of an endemic desire to evade anguish, then certain tendencies infect both the positing of ideals and projects toward their fulfillment. If in anguish we confront the question of what it would mean to be mature and what it would take to accomplish it, we may in bad faith merely posit maturity in terms of an ideal that would be more readily articulated or fulfilled – or, more to the point, the idea of maturity that is posited may be posited out of a desire to evade anguish. In this study, we have thematized this in particular around issues of racism and misogyny as complexes of desire that may be read in terms of an evasive relation to anguish, and part of the apparatus of these forms of domination has been to proffer a counterfeit sense of maturity. Against these dynamics, the study has endeavored to offer a critique of the demands of reason, action, and the human sciences in order to suggest what maturity would mean in each of these contexts, while in the process suggesting that the struggle against those counterfeit senses of maturity is not merely accidental but rather essential to maturity proper.

A final issue remains to be dealt with here. The above case was made on the grounds, in short, that maturity as an ideal emerges from a human reality shaped by an encounter or series of
encounters with a radically expanded set of responsibilities. Hence, even if our study is correct in elucidating the meaning of mature reason, mature action, and mature human sciences, it is still open to an obvious rejoinder: immature reason is simply bad reason, immature action is simply bad action, and immature human sciences simply don’t merit being regarded as sciences. In other words, this objection raises the question of what is to be gained by referring to “maturity” if the components that make it up involve, simply, doing what is good or what is right.

Indeed, a more radical articulation of this objection lurks: Isn’t maturity something that just happens? In other words, in studying maturity as an ideal, we have been attempting to explore the meaning of the imperative: “Grow up.” Yet some might maintain that the imperative is simply bad advice, that the more apt counsel is a simple statement of fact: “Don’t worry, you’ll grow up.” Maturity, according to this line of thought, occurs whether we intend it to or not.

Against these lines of thought, this chapter will argue that maturity is indeed the product of choice and will endeavor to explore how it is chosen. In brief, this chapter will argue as follows. Maturity emerges out of a lived relation to values; it is a product of choices emerging out of a framework of actions within a field of shared values. Maturity as a value transcends personal maturity; in choosing maturity, it is not my maturity that is chosen. To value maturity is to value maturity per se, not to value merely the maturity of the individual who pursues it. Maturity is of public value. Immaturity, however, receives succor from the notion that values are ultimately private. The immature regards value as private in bad faith and, in turn, seeks to forge a world governed by the privatization of values. Privatization of value is, in short, an anti-politics; it colonizes shared human projects in the name of the primacy of individual desire. To choose maturity, then, is to commit to the building and maintenance of a mature world, and this
entails a struggle against the privatization of values and the colonization of politics. We may say this involves not merely political responsibility but responsibility for the political. The privatization of value, though, seeks to subvert such responsibility by offering paths for the fulfillment of individual desires. Maturity thus demands projects of liberation and decolonization through which responsibility for the political may be seized. Liberation and decolonization, though, offer no final answers: they create an opening for political life, but they do not provide a script for politics to follow. To choose maturity, then, is to pursue an anguished path to a destination that could not be fully defined in advance. To pursue maturity is thus to choose to value a commitment to building a world in which freedom may flourish through shared projects.

I. Could Maturity Be Chosen?

This work has examined maturity as a human ideal but faces the objection that maturity may be simply derivative, a merely apparent value that is ultimately epiphenomenal. Mature reason may simply be the product of one who wishes to reason excellently; mature action may simply be the product of one who has learned to be virtuous to an exemplary degree; mature human sciences may simply be the product of one who has pursued rigorous knowledge of humanity. In other words, a project need not posit the ideal of maturity in order to realize it. Its achievement may simply be incidental to human projects oriented by ideals that, though perhaps capable of being clarified through a discourse on maturity, transcend maturity and could not fully be grasped or explained by way of maturity. Hence, the objection goes, we could simply declare the idea of maturity as a meaningless curiosity, as something that is ultimately beside the point.
Two responses are in order. First, if the present study is the occasion for the acknowledgment that maturity can only be realized through projects whose aims transcend maturity, then this is no shortcoming of the study. An inquiry into maturity need not conclude that maturity is everything, nor that maturity is the soul of virtue, or the essence of rigor. The study does not hinge on the claim that maturity is the ideal of human life. Maturity, rather, is one among many ideals salient within human life, and as any given human project may reflect a variety of values, it would seem to follow that the extent to which any given project would be a reflection of maturity as its stated ideal would be at best ambiguous. Projects of maturation will always point beyond maturity to other values. This is necessary if we are correct in viewing maturity as a response to a radical expansion of responsibility. Even if I encountered a situation in which I were only responsible for maturing, to meet that responsibility would bring me into a world of additional responsibilities. Having fulfilled my burden, I would then be responsible for asking what else I should do. If all of this suggests that maturity is neither a final and self-sufficient end nor an unambiguous, stand-alone object of a singular pursuit, it does not follow that maturity is utterly irrelevant as a human ideal.

Second, it must be noted that there are those who appeal to maturity. It is a value that is espoused concretely by actual human beings. What are we to make of their appeal? Were we to conclude that maturity, properly defined, ultimately refers to something for which we need not assign a term – that it is a coherent but not useful concept – we would nonetheless have to account for why it is, despite those shortcomings, referred to nonetheless. A socio-existential diagnostic of the desire for a counterfeit sense of maturity has permeated our study, and this could be worthwhile even if all it accomplished were to give a diagnosis of those who appeal to the counterfeit ideal. That is, an examination of the ideal of maturity would be of use even if it
merely were to demonstrate a variety of ways that many disastrous human projects have been undertaken in the name of maturity, since “maturity” and its cognates can, simply, be understood in such a way as to imbue projects undertaken on their behalf with folly.

Here those with leanings toward post- or anti-humanism, as well as a variety of post-modernisms and post-structuralisms, could maintain that the present study is perhaps useful as evidence of why maturity is but a ruse, a projection of those who would like to maintain patterns of domination and unearned advantage. The problem, though, is that our diagnosis of counterfeit senses of maturity has required a demonstration of actual criteria for maturity, criteria through which one could make the judgment that projects saturated in racism and sexism in the name of “maturity” are, ultimately, immature. In other words, the present study does not warrant a rejection of maturity as a normative concept.

Here, though, we may encounter readers of a different stripe: those for whom our conclusions heretofore would warrant that one become a “deflationist” about maturity. The analogy here is to philosophical inquiries into the nature of truth, where one position that has been put forth (and, by now, with considerable variations) is that “truth” is a linguistically useful concept but that it is in the end semantically redundant: if one says, “I know p,” nothing is added by further saying, “I know that p is true.” From this perspective, it may be regarded as unnecessary or even mistaken to ruminate on the meaning of “truth” in human life, to consider it as a philosophic, scientific, or aesthetic ideal. We may thus, so the argument goes, deflate “truth” of its significance.26 An evaluation of truth deflationism is beside the point here, but what of maturity deflationism? Such a position could hold that while maturity, like truth, is an effective

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26 The literature on deflationary and deflationist accounts of truth is vast. For an overview, see Stoljar and Damnjanovic (2014). For critical commentary, see Bar-On and Simmons (2009) and Lynch (2011: chapter 6).
symbol through which to refer with brevity to a group of related ideals and/or accomplishments, it is ultimately beside the point and unnecessary – those ideals and accomplishments can be described more richly through other analyses.

Is “maturity deflationism” adequate to the description generated by the present inquiry? It may appear to be so in some important respects, but a source of its ultimate inadequacy may lie in a problem that has recurred throughout this study: namely, the distinction between signs and symbols. If it is granted that maturity is merely a sign – as concept reducible to rational definition, capable of analytic decomposition without limit – maturity deflationism may be tenable. But the misuses and abuses of the term and its cognates point to a further phenomenon: maturity as symbol that transcends the merely indicative. In short, maturity appears to possess symbolic power: there are those willing to act on the grounds of maturity who nonetheless could not proffer even a rudimentary definition, much less an analytically watertight definition. “Maturity” is a symbol, and symbols transcend the indicative capacity of signs – they indicate, but also go beyond indication. In logical terms, then, we may say that even if “maturity” is a well-formed formula, a semantic term that is no more and no less than ideally rational, we confront the problem of its pragmatic meaning as a symbol whose meanings to both speaker and audience tend toward transcendence of the semantic.

The point here is not that maturity is distinctively symbolic. The pragmatic dimensions of language suggest more generally that the semantic is always mediated by the vagaries of context, and, at a broader level of analysis, the paradox that the rational is attainable only through symbolic projects whose very nature is to transcend the rational. Maturity is but one of many symbols and symbolic complexes that is irreducible to the strictly semantic. That said, though, the discomfort that accompanies this irreducibility may be particularly acute in the context of
maturity. On this point, existential psychoanalysis is edifying. Recall that for Simone de Beauvoir (2000), the child is one who enters a world of ready-made values, in which adults symbolize the divine power to order the world. Such adults appear ambiguously as either the source of ready-made values or as the hermeneutic guarantors of ready-made values that transcend the adults’ own agency; in either event, they remain the practical source of such values (since even if the values lie beyond adult hands, their interpretation in concrete circumstances ultimately is a matter of adult responsibility) and serve as the media through which such values will be realized through demands imposed upon the child.

Such a child will, in time, face a demand presented as ready-made to a degree equivalent to all the others: namely, the demand to grow up, a demand that means not to achieve the maximization of the physical form but rather to become a mature human being, one worthy of the designation “adult.” The child is to live into this serious demand, to become like those god-like beings that tower above. And yet there is a seeming paradox: if the project of adulthood is a demand imposed upon the child, and if this “ought” implies a “can,” then why isn’t the child an adult already? Why is the child defined in terms of a lack of adulthood, at the same time that adulthood is the demand seemingly imposed on the child? The reconciliation of these contraries lies in the realization that the child is to begin the project of becoming adult while nonetheless lacking the capacity to be an adult. The child thus confronts in anguish the question: What would it take to become adult?

Here a variety of techniques are available to the child, but each of these paths sets the stage for a tragedy or misadventure of some sort. One such path is that of the child who simply asks, “What is an adult? How does one become an adult?” As we’ve seen, though, a cogent explanation of the demands endemic to adult life is often lacking in general, and an explanation
that is at once rigorous and readily communicable to a child may be off the table. The child given a rational but less-than-ideal explanation of adulthood may ultimately perform a rationalization of childish behavior and, if successful, build a world in which the meaning of maturity will be progressively impoverished.

A different path is that of the child who seeks to postulate an adult to model. However, such postulation must proceed without foreknowledge of *which* of the concrete adults in the child’s world best represents the abstract ideal of adulthood. The child who picks a model may pick an immature adult and live adulthood regarding the performance of a similar immaturity as if it were maturity. Even where a more mature model has been chosen, the reality that much of adult life is conducted beyond the child’s eyes will ensure that the child may, at best, apperceive and inferentially reconstruct the meaning of adulthood or, at worst, pursue an adulthood that is merely mythic because it has been erected on the basis of that snippet of behavior made evident to the child. Indeed, if the adult is conscious of being our child’s model, he or she may consciously distort the meaning of maturity for the child in order to rationalize his or her behavior.

Alternatively, the child may seek to model all adults. But this strategy must proceed without a ready-made model for distinguishing which adult is “more adult” when their behaviors diverge. This child who attempts to discern or synthesize an abstract and thematic model while amidst a plurality of concretely available models – who seeks the type that transcends any available token – may be best off. But such a project is by no means immune to the problem of immature models because, on the one hand, the child may be surrounded by immature adults, and, on the other hand, the child surrounded by mature adults may nonetheless confront the skeptical problem of how it could know that any of them are actually mature. In any event, even
the child who undertakes the serious endeavor of synthesizing an ideal image of adulthood may, like Beauvoir’s “serious man,” experience growing pains and devastations that reveal the quixotic nature of the endeavor and engender an abrupt shift to nihilism.27

Indeed, the possibility of the turn to nihilism suggests another path. The child may simply regard the demand of maturity as incoherent, on the grounds that one who distinguishes between child and adult ought not demand of the former that it be the latter. The proximate outcome is an attitude of play. But even the child who pursues a model of maturity does so through play – by playing out certain values in order to set the stage for their later realization. Play has an implicit telos even where the one who plays is not reflectively conscious of this telos. But the child who altogether rejects the demand of maturity may thus give to her or his play an implicit telos of remaining immature. In other words, the rejection of the ideal as a child may facilitate the indifference to the ideal in adolescence or adulthood. Ironically, then, such a child does not escape the dynamic of modeling, for she or he may seek out immature adults in order to model them in the implicit name of becoming an immature adult. Indeed, the child who rejects the demand of adulthood altogether may, upon eventually perceiving the demands of adult life, quickly recant and become devoured by a spirit of seriousness, an infantile performance of adulthood.

Each of these children under consideration, then, confronts maturity as a symbolic demand that could not be met without risking the infection of an adulthood to come with patterns of immaturity. The child cannot, in short, simply choose and execute an ideal form of the ideal. This, however, does not negate the meaningfulness of maturity. Here Søren Kierkegaard’s

27 Beauvoir (2000: chapter 2). For further discussion, see “Value as Public,” below.
closing thoughts in *Fear and Trembling* (1983) are instructive. Heraclitus famously contended that one could never cross the same stream twice. Some of his followers went further: this, they concluded, meant one could not cross a stream at all. But this is folly: that a movement cannot be made twice does not imply its impossibility altogether. For Kierkegaard, the movement of faith is a movement beyond the understanding; it is a teleological suspension of reason. Maturity, as our discussions of reason, action, and the human sciences have indicated, demands a teleological suspension of rationality (though not of reason). That the child cannot make this movement without sowing the seeds for future patterns of immaturity does not imply that the child cannot make this movement altogether: each child must, without clear and comprehensive guidance, interpret and fulfill the obscure demand of maturation. Each must, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon (1963: 206), apprehend the meaning of this mission out of relative obscurity and either fulfill or betray it.

Here we may point out the error in those who maintain that maturation “just happens.” It is true that maturation frequently occurs without reflective consciousness of maturity. However, it does not follow that no maturation involves reflective consciousness of maturity; that would be to suggest that all of those who have been told to grow up and did eventually do so did it by either ignoring the command or by felicitously failing to apprehend it as an object of reflection.

Moreover, for those who do mature without reflecting upon the meaning of maturity, is it the case that this is something that “just happens,” that it is merely the manifestation of an inner nature lying in wait? The problem with such thinking is that it regards the human being as if it were a substance rather than a relation. Even if we think of maturation in the context, say, of a piece of fruit, such maturation occurs through a relation with its environment. Ripeness is a process brought about when conditions are sufficiently warm and/or sunny. A cold and dark
environment will not mature an avocado or banana. Within a human world, it is true that
maturity as a demand or symbol may in many contexts take on an implicit rather than explicit
presence. But it does not follow that maturity is, then, merely “natural.” Maturity is brought
about because a human world creates the conditions for its realizations: a world need not tell a
child to “grow up” if the conditions for the child to successfully confront an expanding set of
responsibilities are present. In other words, that the child does not choose his or her maturity
alone does not entail that maturity is natural or not chosen. Parents and teachers choose to foster
the maturity of offspring and students; communities and institutions choose to create conditions
that facilitate maturation. In short, it is bad faith to deny that there is an entire world of human
choices that can hasten or delay or support or retard a human being’s maturity.

This highlights a point that our above discussion has yet to account for: that maturity as
an ideal is not only that obscure ideal toward which the child must make a leap beyond the
purely rational. Adults are not necessarily mature. Indeed, an adulthood entirely ensconced in
immaturity is not only possible but, under certain conditions, highly probable. And a human
being who appears to have achieved maturity is by no means guaranteed to retain that apparent
maturity, for maturity remains a metastable characteristic produced through acts, and self-
imposed immaturity is a necessary possibility for an existence lived through acts. Should I today
manifest what maturity demands of me, the problem is that tomorrow’s demands may simply
require more of me, and my failure to meet the continuing expansion of my responsibilities
means I may, then, manifest immaturity in new ways. The adult, thus, is not one who has arrived
at maturity as a final destination but is, rather, one who confronts the ongoing demand to choose
maturity through a variety of acts. The tragedy of the child is that children must make the
movement toward maturity as a leap of faith; the child does not fully apprehend the meaning of
adult responsibility. The tragedy of the adult is that adults often must make the movement toward maturity knowing full well the anguish that adult responsibility entails.

An obvious problem, then: what happens to the prospects of maturity if adults seek to create a world that will facilitate their immaturity?

II. Value as Public

a. Immaturity and Projects of Private Value

It is on the basis of childhood, Beauvoir (2000: 35) warned, that so many adults lead infantile lives. The child is relieved of anguish for her or his world by a root reduction in responsibility. The desire to retain this relief manifests in clinging to a counterfeit image of adulthood – namely, the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of seriousness, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this work, is bad faith with regard to axiology: it is a denial that one is responsible for interpreting, articulating, discovering and inventing values. To be serious is to regard values as radically transcendent: they are immutable features of the world that I inhabit, and I thus confront them as ready-made demands, rather than demands that I am responsible for elaborating. By contrast, to take seriously means to regard a value as binding, and maturity is compatible with taking seriously. But the spirit of seriousness is a project of being serious, and hence disavows itself as taking values seriously, since it regards itself rather as indisputably and irrevocably taken by values, as absorbed in and possessed by values that lie beyond choosing.

The path of seriousness, though, is not the only path through which a human being may disavow the anguish of responsibility for values. One such path is that of what Beauvoir terms
the sub-man, the human being who seeks to defer responsibility for valuing to others. Such a person seeks an absolute leader in order to reduce one’s responsibility merely to following. That one must still choose a leader remains a problem for the sub-man, but the sub-man develops techniques for regarding the chosen leader as one whose leadership is shrouded in inevitability. Another such path is that of the nihilist. The nihilist negates the values of value; values are regarded as wholly interchangeable to the point of indifference. No value is more valuable than any other for the nihilist, so the usefulness of value itself can be radically disavowed and in turn be taken to legitimate the nihilist’s flight from the anguish of valuing. The embarrassment of the position lies in the contradiction that the nihilist finds value in nihilism. Nonetheless, though, nihilism can flourish within an ecology shrouded by seriousness, for the investments of the serious prevent their engagement with the nihilist’s philosophical contradiction. That is, in a world saturated with the project of seriousness, the nihilist’s prime opponent will not be one who insists on the agency of valuation but rather one who insists on the axiomatic self-evidence of the values of the serious. These appeals the nihilist can trenchantly disarm, especially since the nihilist has often first undertaken the project of a serious life and only later, upon experiencing disaster, abandoned it; the nihilist is intimately familiar with the failings of the serious. But though the nihilist’s source of embarrassment may remain untouched within a serious

28 For this and the other paths discussed below – the serious man, the nihilist, the adventurer, and the passionate man – see Beauvoir (2000: chapter 2). I use the term “man” and its gendered pronoun correlates here with purpose but also with reservation. One reason is that to say simply “sub-person” and “passionate person” has the limitation of not connoting the adult status of these persons; yet to say “sub-adult” or “passionate adult” would introduce other confusions, since Beauvoir here intends to describe forms of adult immaturity that make the uncomplicated use of the term “adult” here impossible, in addition to the lexicographical leap such a translation would imply. For another, Beauvoir’s arguments in The Second Sex (2011) give some reasons to believe that her existential portraits of the sub-man and passionate man are, it could be said, existentially masculine. A consequence is that a portrait of “the sub-woman” or “the passionate woman” may, on that account, ultimately show a different type than is shown in the portraits here of the sub-man and the passionate man. The same goes for our use of Sartre and Beauvoir’s notion of “the serious man.” Our discussion of a world constituted through the shared project of passionate men in the latter sections of this chapter, in turn, could be taken to suggest reasons why this existential masculinity may be crucial to Beauvoir’s account.
environment, it points to a lacuna common to the projects of the sub-man and the nihilist. Each disavows responsibility for valuing even though such disavowal is drenched in valuation. In that sense, the form of bad faith involved for the sub-man and the nihilist is, like that of the serious, rather obvious: it is a flight from freedom by way of denying that one is free to value.

A different path is that of the adventurer: the adventurer, as illustrated by Beauvoir, is one who finds value in the exigencies of a spontaneous life. For the adventurer, it is not the destination that brings value but the journey itself. This would appear antithetical to the serious. The serious person gives life over to a supposedly foreordained telos; the value of an act is dissolved in that absolute end (or absolute set of ends) that it is to serve. The adventurer denies the telos its absolute value: the telos has only that contingent value that derives from it having set in motion the venture. The end is thus disposable; it is ultimately subordinated to the freedom of movement, the buckling of swashes, and the unpredictable play of an encounter with an open world. The adventurer, though, has an ecological relationship to the serious that is similar to that of the sub-man and the nihilist. The adventurer posits the freedom to adventure as the unconditioned end of human life (or at least of a human life); the serious, though, do not find such positing as troubling as the position of the nihilist. For the serious, the adventurer is a useful idiot: the adventurer may be put to work, and even if the adventurer finds the value of such work in the doing, the serious is happy to have such a person in service of the ultimate accomplishment. That the adventurer could, in principle, refuse to serve the serious is indubitable. But having posited the adventure as end-in-itself, the adventurer’s primary grounds for such a refusal would be if the serious were to prohibit the voyage. On the contrary, the serious is eager not only to permit but also to finance the adventure. The adventurer, though
antipathetic to the serious, lacks the responsibility for values through which an oppositional stance could emerge, and hence becomes not their opponent but their factotum.

The final path of this type elucidated by Beauvoir is what she terms the passionate man. The passionate man values intensely: he devours the world through investing it with his desire. He seeks out objects to regard as valuable, and, indeed, he prefers those objects that are less valued by others, for this value can then be his more fully. He may find somebody to shower with affection, to dote upon, to adore and pamper. Yet such affection is not about the value of the one he desires. Rather, it is about the value of his desire. In other words, should he become infatuated with a woman, the proof of her value is to lie not in this or that aspect of her – it is to lie in the very fact of his infatuation. He brings value to her. Indeed, to the degree that it is her that is the source of her value in this equation, it is typically so by virtue of the fact that others don’t value her in the way that he does. But isn’t this simply love? Does not love require that one find in another what all the others do not? This is true so long as it is recognized that this formulation involves what others fail to apprehend in the beloved. In other words, the privacy of a human relationship may reveal what is beyond the perception of the public in general, and the lover’s project of responsibility to the beloved brings out what might otherwise be overlooked or undervalued. The passionate man, though, is not consumed by a project to reveal what is valuable in the beloved; he is, rather, concerned with asserting the value of the lover – that is, the value of him as lover. For him, it is his passion that is the source of value, and, indeed, his passion is value simpliciter.

What do the adventurer and the passionate man have in common? For each, value lies in their endeavors; they are thus opposed at a primary level to the spirit of seriousness. Yet at a secondary level, their attitude betrays the axiological irresponsibility characteristic of
seriousness. The spirit of seriousness, as we have seen, is a species of bad faith: it is flight from freedom and the anguish that accompanies it. The adventurer and the passionate man, ultimately, share in this bad faith by means of elevating themselves to a de facto position of source of serious values. In other words, for the adventurer, an endeavor is valuable because it brings adventure to the adventurer, and the adventurer’s experience of adventure serves as an unconditioned end. For the passionate man, the source of value lies not in what he sees but in the fact of his seeing it; the object is essentially indifferent, for it is the subject that is the wellspring of significance. In other words, whereas the serious person takes the inherited ready-made values of a social world too seriously, the adventure and the passionate man take themselves too seriously.

On this point, the adventurer and the passionate man have an available defense against the charge of bad faith: if bad faith is a flight from freedom, then they are innocent, for their projects reek of freedom. The adventurer does go hither and thither in search of unknown pleasures, does exhaust himself in the freedom to act, to impose one’s will upon the world; the passionate man does seek out a human world, does engage humanity, does seek to penetrate human existence with his peculiar mode of seeing. Yet such freedom is ultimately grounded in a concealed denial: it conflates the value of one’s freedom with the value of freedom in general. A human struggle, on Beauvoir’s account, is one in which the commitment to shared values means that a group of fellows are willing each to sacrifice individual ends to a common cause. The adventurer, in contrast, pursues a voyage in which, in the end, it is indifferent whether it shall affirm these or those values or whether it shall support or crush human beings engaged in valiant struggle. This is why the paradigmatic case of the adventurer is the explorer in the service of a colonial empire: the value of unknown encounters trumps the values of those who will be encountered, and hence the nullification of the latter is regarded as beyond reproach. The human
appreciation of beauty, likewise, though it manifests through the eyes of a beholder, apprehends value that transcends the act of beholding. An excellent artist transforms our aesthetic understanding; an excellent art critic does the same, for what they draw out are artistic criteria that have yet to be explicated. But the passionate man is merely parasitic on the public apprehension of value: it is the strawman against which he may assert his fallacious value, the background of appreciation that he may disavow in order to appoint himself as the appreciator nonpareil. What the adventurer values is his or her radical freedom to gallivant indifferent to its ramifications for others; what the passionate person on Beauvoir’s model values is his or her radical freedom to proclaim as valuable without being responsible for shared articulations of value.

Beauvoir’s point, in short, is that what is valued by these two types is their individual freedom rather than freedom itself. This returns them to the core of the seriousness they at first appear to renounce. They are, in the end, evading the anguish of what a commitment to value freedom entails. The philosophical puzzle Beauvoir was there seeking to address was how it is that freedom can at once be a description of human reality – and not simply what human beings are capable of but rather what they are condemned to – but also a normative ideal within human reality. An exposition of her solution is beside the point here, so let us focus on why it is that the attitudes elucidated are symptomatic of immaturity. If maturity involves a radical expansion of human responsibility, then it is clear how a denial of axiological responsibility may be immature. The spirit of seriousness is immature because it regards axiological responsibility as ultimately lying elsewhere; it asserts that the buck stops over there. The adventurer and the passionate man, by contrast, regard the buck as stopping “here,” but they do so by means of an ossification of the “here” that renders it a “there.” It is in the end a denial of their capacity to value otherwise.
b. Value's Necessary Transcendence of the Merely Private

Valuing is a consequence of freedom. To choose is to encounter a plurality of possibilities. That such possibilities are not necessarily equal means that one is responsible for which one chooses, and this responsibility implies a responsibility for how the act of choosing implies or articulates the relative value of possibilities. A freedom thus must saturate its world with value. But bad faith is a flight from freedom, and thus is in some sense intrinsically a flight from value. This is why a project of bad faith must, in order to become enduring, infect itself with some variety of seriousness, for in the end bad faith only works if it is serious about being bad faith. If bad faith is flight from the unpleasant reality of anguish toward a comforting illusion, then it must affirm the axiological necessity of its prioritization of comfort over reality in spite of the contingency of this preference.

But if valuing is a consequence of freedom, does it follow that each of us may now say “My values are a consequence of my freedom?” Two problems emerge. First, values as a consequence of freedom are not so through the province of my freedom alone. That is, if it is granted that my freedom is necessary for me to have my values, it does not follow that it is sufficient or determinative. My values derive from freedoms, but not from my freedom alone. It is through the relation between my freedom and that of others that my valuations arise. This dialectical relationship may be one characterized by near-uniformity or utter enmity; it may be mediated by institutions provoking consensus and ossification or by institutions provoking dissension and spontaneity. Whatever the case, it is through a relation to a world rich not only with possibilities but also with others who similarly face possibilities that I achieve my axiological impositions. What I shall value may not arise out of the spontaneous will of the
isolated individual, for I am capable of individuation in the first place by virtue of my already being situated as one amongst others.

This leads to the second problem: my freedom does not merely bring my values to the world. It brings values into the world and in so doing it constitutes the world in its axiological richness; it marks and stains the world with its valuing, and hence the moment my values are brought to existence through my acts they transcend their “my”-ness. Having brought valuation to the world, whatever may be my spark of originality or inauguration, it is at least to some degree dissolved into the warp and woof of a world that transcends me. It would be more apt, then, to say that my freedom demands of me acts and positions through which my valuing will be manifest, but that valuing is to an important degree “of my world” both prior to and after those acts of mine through which my valuations emerge.

Value, then, is in a crucial sense public. Could it be private? Here a parallel to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famed argument against the notion of a private language (1958: §256–384) is evident. A language is by nature communicative. Communication involves both the one who communicates and the one to whom such communication is directed. This does not nullify the possibility of communicating only with oneself – that is, of being the sole performer of both roles, the exclusive giver and recipient of meaning. But once it is established that communication has its audience, the criteria for who may inhabit such an audience become an issue. If I may be the audience of my communique, it is not by virtue of the identity relation between communicator and audience, for if that were sufficient, we are simply at the level of pre-communicative apprehension of meaning. Rather, I may be my own audience by virtue of my communication meeting the conditions of communicability. In principle, that I could be its audience implies its capacity for having an audience. I could try to maintain that only I could
truly understand it, but the problem is that I would have to articulate why it is that I am the only audience adequate to the task. In doing so, I will have to elaborate criteria through which the understanding of the communique could be possible. It is true that under a given set of conditions, I may be the only one who can understand. If I were to have spent years inventing a system of encryption, for instance, when I debut it today I may rightly hope to be the only one capable of decrypting the message I’ve sent with it. But sufficient evidence of the system allows it to be understood by others; it is not *on principle* only knowable by me, but rather happens to circumstantially only be known by me. If I were to assert that my auto-communicative “language” were *necessarily* to have only me for its audience, I would simply be denying the contingent possibility of communicating the functioning of the language to another.

A “private language,” then, is oxymoronic. So too is the notion of private value. The structure of value is public, which is not to deny the role of the private actor in the proceedings, but rather to emphasize the intrinsic relationship between private acts and public values. Chapter 2 of this work argued that the structure of accountability is public and in crucial senses anonymous, whereas the anguish of adult life consists in part in the fact that the private responsibility for evaluating my acts cannot be dissolved into mere public accountability for my behavior. Human reality is shaped by the ultimate inescapability of responsibility for self-evaluation, no matter how exonerative the world’s attitudes toward one shall be. This means that my angst, my ennui, my rage, my guilt, my schadenfreude may be *kept* private – I may value the acts of myself and others through projects of thought, reflection, and emotional experience that I opt not to share. But that I opt out of sharing them does not negate their capacity to be shared. That I could share them, that I could communicate them to others, renders them structurally public even if my practices of confidentiality shall confine their contents to my privacy.
There is a further matter here as well. Suppose I manage to keep an array of valuative attitudes concealed from others. Does it follow that my endeavor to conceal is itself concealed from others? No, for that would at least require another project of concealment. The irony of my project of privacy is that it discloses the value I place upon my privacy. Even if I take leave of my society, if I venture unannounced to a desert island never to return, the issue remains that my absence is evidence of my desire to flee. The evidence of my valuing is public. It doesn’t follow that such evidence is, in each case, publicly available in such a way as to be conclusive – that is, it is not the case that the evidence of my values is always and everywhere sufficient for any observer to draw rigorous conclusions about my values. But this is no support for the position that values can be private, for the same problem arises should I reflect on my values. My values are not ubiquitously and permanently present to myself as fully evident and unambiguous. The ambiguity of my own values to me has the same structure as the ambiguity of my values to others. My values are not a substance internal to me and hence epistemically accessed by an a priori fiat. This, in short, is the basis of psychoanalysis: a lack of mental health can be grounded in an inadequate apprehension of the values that shape my acts. In therapy, a therapist apprehends evidence of my valuing that may, from my perspective, be blocked, repressed, or insufficiently reflected upon.

We may thus put the matter in this way: my acts reflect values, and these values transcend me. To the extent that we may speak of “my values,” we are speaking of the values implicit in my choices, rather than a set of substances possessed in my core. It would be better to say that there are values that I am rather than that there are values that I have. This would mean I am these values not in the sense that they determine me in advance, but rather in the sense that I am them through my acts, which means both that my acts now may initiate new values and
reconfigure old values as well as that I confront “myself” as a constellation of values manifest through my previous acts for which I remain accountable.

c. Maturity and Reflective Responsibility for Values

If this is the case, then it could reasonably be suggested that I am accountable not for my values but instead for my acts. Are values, then, mere epiphenomena to my acts? Here an insight of Ernst Cassirer is instructive:

In the play of a child we find [the power of invention and the power of personification], but not [the power to produce pure sensuous forms]. The child plays with things, the artist plays with forms, with lines and designs, rhythms and melodies. In a playing child we admire the facility and quickness of transformation. The greatest tasks are performed with the scantiest means. Any piece of wood may be turned into a living being. Nevertheless, this transformation signifies only a metamorphosis of objects into forms. In play we merely rearrange and redistribute the materials given to sense perception. Art is constructive and creative in another and a deeper sense. A child at play does not live in the same world of rigid empirical facts as the adult. The child’s world has a much greater mobility and transmutability. Yet the playing child, nevertheless, does no more than exchange the actual things of his environment for other possible things. No such exchange as this characterizes genuine artistic activity. Here the requirement is much more severe. For the artist dissolves the hard stuff of things in the crucible of his imagination, and the result of this process is the discovery of a new world of poetical, musical, or plastic forms. To be sure, a great many ostensible works of art are very far from satisfying this requirement. It is the task of the aesthetic judgment or of artistic taste to distinguish between a genuine work of art and those other spurious products which are indeed playthings, or at most “the response to the demand for entertainment.”

…Play gives us diversion and recreation but it also serves a different purpose. Play has a general biological relevance in so far as it anticipates future activities. It has often been pointed out that the play of a child has a propaedeutic value. The boy playing war and the little girl dressing her doll are both accomplishing a sort of preparation and education for other more serious tasks. The function of fine art cannot be accounted for in this manner. Here is neither diversion nor preparation. …The enjoyment of art does not originate in a softening or relaxing process but in intensification of all our energies. The diversion which we find in play is the very opposite of that attitude which is a necessary prerequisite of aesthetic contemplation and aesthetic judgment. Art demands the fullest concentration. As soon as we fail to concentrate and give
way to a mere play of pleasurable feelings and associations, we have lost sight of the work of art as such. (Cassirer, 1944: 164–5)

Forms are laden with value; they point to consciousness of value. Through artistic forms, consciousness of beauty becomes possible – they facilitate valuative consciousness. The artist is thus one who works in the domain of reflective consciousness of value, in much the same way as the philosopher, the political theorist, etc. This engenders a mode of artistic “play” inasmuch as the artist may suspend certain adult attitudes that may otherwise prevail; the artist has to suspend many of the serious ways of relating to the world in order to achieve creative modes of perceiving, of representing, and of developing aesthetic forms.

The child at play, though, is not as such suspending received forms in order to push beyond them. Rather, the child at play is in the process of developing consciousness of value. Through play, the child at once discovers and produces a capacity to imagine and the capacity to evaluate that imagination. The child through play implicitly poses the question: what do I want to imagine? The ongoing emergence of imaginative scenarios and relationships allows this desire to manifest, transform, and eventually become conscious of itself. The propaedeutic value thus lies to a large extent in establishing the child’s reflective relationship to value.

We may here note that the propaedeutic value of the child’s play is itself ultimately public. It produces a human being, and the value of that human being is value is realized through communities in a human world. So too for the artist, who is given license to suspend certain modes of relating to reality in order to discover others. Artistic license suspends accountabilities at a lower order in order to fulfill a higher accountability. The artist encounters public modes of accountability, and fulfillment thereof engenders a greater license to abandon the serious aesthetic conventions that might otherwise obtain. The child is given the domain to play for a similar reason but with a different structure of responsibility and accountability. The child plays
without accountability; the play is understood to be his or hers, and it is only when it spills across the borders of its proper domain that it becomes an issue for the adult world to police. A more complicated matter comes about when children play together, in which case the propaedeutic function demands a shared accountability in order to develop a social capacity for shared consciousness of value. Because this involves the coming together of the domains of various children, accountability becomes an issue, as in the imperative to “play nicely.” In the main, though, play is free of such accountability and experiences responsibility only in the private mode of self-satisfaction – a child confronts simply the responsibility to use play to achieve what it wants. Yet this does not mean that the value of such play is private. A society that does not enable children to play in this manner is ultimately depriving itself of a future: it is undermining the accountability of future generations by removing the means by which it will achieve reflective consciousness of value. Play develops the child’s consciousness of responsibility to values in order to make public accountability for value possible.

It may thus be said that even if values are manifested through acts, one’s responsibility for one’s values is not entirely limited to acting well, since one activity through which values may be made manifest is reflection upon values. In reflective consciousness of value, I apprehend the relation between desire and action and the relation between different desires or varieties of desire, or the constitutive aspects of complexes of desires, etc. The child encounters a propaedeutic reflection on value through play, whereas the artist, the intellectual, the judge, and others are figures for whom such reflection is the essence of the social role that structures their overall relationship of accountability to a wider world. The aesthetic judgment of the artist and the theoretical discernment of the political theorist both serve the function of helping a society to better understand the meaning of the values it has already articulated as well as to better realize
the project of synthesizing those values it now lacks. The activity of the artist and the theorist, though, does not reside only in the domain of reflecting on the society’s values or on the typical and anonymous structures of valuing that compose its everyday reality. Ultimately, the theorist and artist face a responsibility for evaluating their own modes of valuing, for their role requires a critical faculty; the theorist whose views of society are infected, say, with the theorist’s narcissism may produce generative ideas for the society, but the theorist’s accountability to the society demands a self-critical approach. Hence, accountability implies a responsibility that is realized through private reflection. But even then, though private reflection on the part of the intellectual or artist is desirable, the reality is that the evidence of her or his complexes of desire may be more readily apprehended from a public perspective: to work in public is to create public evidence of one’s values, and, for example, the narcissism of a writer may be far more apparent to readers of the writer’s works than to the author him or herself.

Value, then, is public. Accountability implies a responsibility for values that brings one into a social world. That world is ultimately accountable for producing human beings capable of being held accountable. The world is thus responsible for producing responsibility for value. The shift from a merely private sense of responsibility to a public sense of accountability is characteristic of the burden implied by maturity in a human world; private responsibility is insufficient for a mature person. Hence, the value of maturity lies in the public realm: maturity produces accountability to a greater world, and though maturity may have value for me in private, it is through an achievement whose value transcends my private appreciation of it. For me to value my maturity is thus for me to value something that portends value that transcends me. We thus return to the issue for Beauvoir regarding the value of freedom. For Beauvoir, it is immature to value my freedom as against the freedom of others. It is an evasion of responsibility
to other freedoms and the anguish of the accountability that accompanies such responsibility. So, too, would it be immature for me to value my maturity as against the maturity of others. To value maturity is to commit myself to something more than the mere project of my own maturity. Such value does imply that I ought to pursue my own maturation; to affirm the value of maturity in others while neglecting its implications for my own conduct would be an immature relationship to my affirmed value. To value maturity is thus not to value my personal maturity but rather to pursue my personal maturity in order to realize a commitment to human maturity tout court.

What, then, if one inhabits a world that affirms the value of maturity for some but not others? Maturity may demand, in short, that one corrects the mistaken understanding of maturity this implies. Before turning to the question of what corrective action may become necessary, let us first flesh out an illustration of what a world shaped by such a deleterious conception of the value of maturity would look like.

III. The Privatization of Value

a. The Colonization of the Political

The question of when a human being is to be regarded as an adult rather than a child is one with a plurality of answers. Some answers are distinctively legal, some distinctively social; some are relevant to particular relations, e.g., that between parent and child, teacher and student, seller and buyer, etc. Indeed, each discipline of the human sciences, for instance, might have a somewhat varying sense of the bounds of childhood and the status of adolescence: psychology may ultimately have mental capacities of various sorts in mind when discussing childhood, whereas sociology may adjudge maturity in terms of being conventionally recognized as an adult
with regard to particular institutional roles. Indeed, within cultural anthropology, there is a clear extent to which a universal answer may be impossible, for the distinction between adult and child varies across cultures, as well as across historical periods, and the cultural anthropologist may be invested in respecting and upholding such differences rather than in synthesizing their apparent commonalities into a larger pattern. Within legal studies, the positivistic answer is clear: the difference between a child and an adult depends upon the jurisdiction, and even there matters are complicated, since within many jurisdictions ambiguity rules the day; this may particularly be the case when, as explored in chapter 2, adult standing implicitly varies along lines of class, gender, and race.

That each jurisdiction has a different account of the criteria to employ to determine adulthood is unsurprising in light of what is at stake. Although a variety of social and legal issues are impacted by how adulthood is defined, one of essential relevance is the question of when a society regards individuals as possessing political responsibilities and powers. That a child is not generally viewed as being capable of political accountability and hence not worthy of political power is pretty close to a cultural universal; that there is much at stake in allocating such powers suggests why, even though there will be many commonalities across cultures in defining adult status, the exact definition of political adulthood within each culture is essentially a cultural particular.29

Yet if political status as an adult is subject to the whims of each cultural particularity, another issue comes to the fore. Adulthood need not be defined by age alone. This is unsurprising, as it is not time as such but rather maturity that is at issue. A polis may demand that

29 I here use the notions of cultural particulars and cultural universals in the sense argued for by Kwasi Wiredu (1997).
those it empowers in the political realm be mature. The attitude of a polis in this regard may echo the saying that “age is just a number.” But this is no easy matter, for if age is insufficient, then other criteria must be proffered. Rituals may be called upon to resolve the matter – an individual’s maturity may be tested through their ability to successfully perform rites of passage. But modern institutions for the organization of human life may be largely incompatible with ritualistic passage to adulthood as administrative criteria, and, in any event, modern institutions may come under such conditions to define such rituals in essentially bureaucratic form, as in the notion, say, that attaining one’s driver’s license is a rite of passage.

Each society, then, faces the question of whom to regard as mature in order to be conferred with political responsibilities. If the issue is stated this way, though, it raises a further concern. We are not dealing with age as such but with criteria for maturity. The problem is simple: a society may regard some human beings as a priori incapable of maturing. Misogynistic societies may regard women as intrinsically infantile; white supremacist societies may regard people of color as eternally childlike. Although these issues are often inseparable from vexed debates around the criteria for citizenship, the issue is not one of citizenship per se: there may be, as has typically been the case in the modern disenfranchisement of women, a denial of political rights to legally-recognized citizens.

A simplistic way of viewing the matter is that it is one of power: those with power employ their power in order to maintain it. But note that this argument would appear less compelling if made about the distinction between adults and children as such. If the adults of a non-racist, non-sexist society simply avow that political responsibilities are properly adult responsibilities, it is not obvious that this is a power ploy. Rather, the argument can be made that this is about valuing maturity: a society that values maturity may shield children from
responsibilities that could crush or traumatize them and may instead create the conditions under which they could pursue maturation in order to be functional adults. The racist and sexist exclusions, though, while doubtless reflecting imbalances of power, involve abuses that merit reflection in their own right. Simply put, to regard some human beings as perpetually immature—and to make such a requirement essentially non-evidential—is not merely dehumanizing but also may smack of immaturity in its own right. That is to say, the ascription to some of \textit{a priori} immaturity may imply \textit{a posteriori} the immaturity of those doing the ascribing.

One way to conceptualize this immaturity is by attention to the nature of politics. Here Hannah Arendt’s account in \textit{The Human Condition} (1998) is illustrative. For Arendt, politics refers to the domain of human action as against the cyclical and reproductive process of labor and the end-directed activity of work. Action on this account is unpredictable; it is neither repetitive like laboring tasks (feeding, defecating, cleaning, etc.) or unidirectional like work (construction, art, science, etc.). Action, because it involves the interplay of human freedoms, means that one cannot have foreknowledge of outcomes. There is thus an intrinsic vulnerability in action: what I do is, in the end, always to some degree at the mercy of what others shall do. But the advantage of such vulnerability is that it tests me: it exposes me to an uncertain and expanded responsibility to others that goes beyond the mere performance of a defined role. For Arendt, the political is thus the domain in which “Who I am” can be disclosed, rather than “What I am.” “What I am” at the first level – the mere fact of my humanity – is disclosed prior to my activities, and “What I am” at a second level – my performance within a finite role, e.g., as a cook, as a carpenter, etc. – is disclosed independently of political life. “Who I am,” though, is a value-laden matter that transcends mere fulfillment of ready-made values. It does not work within the framework of existential seriousness, for what seriousness prescribes ultimately is the
work of fulfilling pre-given ends. “Who I am” emerges out of action that must confront the anguish of my having to choose to be valuable to a world of others. My valutative choices are exposed to public evaluation. If maturity is an anguish-riddled project of responsibility to and for my world, then the political is the realm in which maturity would be most evident.

For Arendt, the political is the realm of freedom and equality: one emerges in public as an equal to one’s fellows. Yet children do not emerge in public from the moment of birth: their maturation, as the shared etymology of “pubic” and “public” suggests, was in the Greek model Arendt explores a prerequisite to such appearance. They are to be cultivated in private – a position of central importance to Arendt’s writings on education and related controversies – as preparation for public life. But so, too, are those who labor regarded as anathema to the political: Arendt notes with approbation that in antiquity slaves were not to be seen in public. The slave, on this account, was one who was incapable of overcoming natural scarcity, and who as such was to remain in the deprived realm of labor and be excluded from the liberatory realm of action. The same held, essentially, for women. In short, the women and the slave were regarded as naturally outside the realm of the political, as is abundantly clear in Aristotle’s writings. These are, then, people for whom “What they are” suffices; the question of “Who they are” could not arise. Within this framework, the ability to develop a human personality – to mature into a character capable of valuing and being valued by others – is for them nullified and verboten; they are what they are and that’s all that they are. They are thus to be regarded as servile by necessity; it is only those men who conquer natural scarcity through “pre-political violence” that count in public, and while the private spheres they domineer over may nourish boys into manhood, they do not present a path forward for women and slaves.
In terms of valuing maturity, this would appear to produce a schizophrenic relationship. On the one hand, the political persists as a space within which human values can develop, be contested, extended, creolized, struggled for, re-articulated, and so on. The political does not subordinate human societies to a given telos. Rather, it puts the responsibility upon them to constantly invent and re-evaluate; it is a space for not only the maturation of the individual but also the maturation of the collectivity, the maturation of the state, of the civilization, etc. The pre-political privacy of youthful development is not a suspension of this commitment to maturity but rather could be seen as its highest embodiment: it is precisely because of the overwhelming anguish of political responsibility that propaedeutic and preparatory periods are warranted. On the other hand, though, there are two clear problems. First, no value is placed on the maturity of women or slaves; were these people to mature, it would be irrelevant. This is not to say that such a society would not like to see such people become better at their tasks: they would like there to be excellent laborers in their midst. But this is a matter of valuing service, not maturity. Second, it raises the problem of whether such an arrangement undermines the maturity of those who are deemed worthy of public and political life.

With regard to this second problem, we may move from Arendt to the thesis of Carole Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* (1988). For Pateman, analysis of modern institutions in terms of a social contract is fundamentally mistaken unless attention is paid to the way in which this would require a prior contract for the subordination of women. Women’s disenfranchisement and subjection to regimes of economic, social, and sexual terror is not an aberration or mere democratic deficit but is rather fundamental to the arrangement that births contractualism. In short, the social contract between men is agreed upon to maintain the steady functioning of a prior sexual contract; the social contract works to get men to “play nice” with each other as
individuals so that they may continue to abuse and dominate women as a group. But if this is so, the parties of the sexual contract are men; women are merely the object defined by the contract, rather than subjects who agree to it. The sexual contract is for Pateman, therefore, a slave contract. And, Pateman argues, this is the same contract that is essentially constitutive of the modern slave trade and the *terra nullius* mode of legitimizing European colonialism. These are grounded in the logic of a contract *amongst those who dominate* to regard the dominated as outside the realm of contractual consent. It is a “consent for us” rooted in the nullification of “consent for them.”

The problem can thus be formulated in the Arendtian language in this manner. In making the polis a vehicle for rendering the dominated “What they are,” the polis becomes a means of the dominator’s assertion of a “What we are.” The dominators dip their pens in political ink to make the anti-political move of rendering the majority of humanity outside the political. For the “pre-political violence” that affects the slave contract is not some conflict between a crafty and powerful master and a dull and powerless slave-to-be; rather, it is a routinized structure of violence (though imagined as legitimate and hence regarded as mere “force”) that is underwritten politically. It is a public determination of what is to be regarded as private. Now, that itself is no violation: we have seen that the public is responsible for determining the standards of maturity that define at what point an individual passes out of private stewardship and into public accountability. But if the maturation of the dominated is outside the realm of what the public values, then a similar defense cannot be advanced; ultimately, it is not a choice in favor of maturity. Yet this is precisely the defense from the standpoint of the dominators: they regard the dominated as intrinsically incapable of maturing. Such regard, though, is ultimately impervious to evidence: it involves an indifference to the reality of adult women and slaves and the maturity
that may be evident in their conduct. The question may be posed to the men who insist on such a structure: why aren’t you willing to meet such people in the vulnerable, unpredictable public realm, to learn “who they are” as you show them “who you are”?

There is a further dimension in which this pattern of domination is ultimately anti-political. If the political is to transcend work, then what to make of the slave contract as a form of political work? The slave contract can function as the posited end of political life. Is this not simply the structure of the “rise of the social” that alarmed Arendt, or, in the terms of Beauvoir, a subordination of human responsibility for values to the spirit of seriousness? The maintenance of the slave contract is the work that the social contract has cut out for itself. The dimensions of political life that display an attention to human potential and that undergird the freedom of human maturation are undercut; the political becomes, above all else, the means to extend and normalize the terms of domination. The political becomes work. And, indeed, the primary purpose of such work may be to procure labor. Does not, then, the maintenance of a slave contract degrade the political to the level of deprivation that, on Arendt’s account, it is defined against? And, in so doing, it would appear that the dominating class is guilty of a plain-faced evasion of responsibility for laboring. This is accomplished by establishing the political as the domain of the masters in the same way that the parent establishes the domain in which the child may play, although with the difference that, as it were, here the children themselves establish the playful domain. Are not these inversions and evasions of responsibility immature?

b. The Serious World of Passionate Men

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Although these issues may be thematized in terms of a subordination of the political to seriousness, there is a sense in which they also evoke Beauvoir’s portrait of the passionate man. Ultimately, the dominated is to be valued not for what is valuable about them but for what the dominators value in them. Their value is established not by who or what they are or do, but rather the investment of value in them by the dominators. The passionate man exits the world of the serious in order to find value only in his own private acts of valuing. But if this is a flight of bad faith, its manifestation is erected on a bedrock of institutional bad faith: the serious world may license the passionate man to have these or those passionate attachments. The passionate man in this sense is no artist, for while the artist is licensed to make a public contribution by way of suspending serious requirements that may obtain for other individuals or endeavors, the passionate man is licensed to suspend such requirements merely in order to fulfill his private desires. Where the intervention of the serious world becomes necessary is in order to furnish objects whose public value is understood as being reducible to their private value to the passionate man. This is the logic of the sexual contract: it affirms that a woman’s value rests in her value to a man. Decorum amongst men is preserved in part by erecting a general understanding that the value of an ordinary woman ought to be confined to the domain of a man rather than be the public possession of all men. Thus, the slave contract produces not merely the spirit of seriousness or the passionate man, but instead what may be termed the serious world of passionate men: it is a world in which value is the private reserve of the passionate man, and the domain of public accountability and political responsibility is given over to the serious project of building a world in which the passionate man may thrive.

If the political then becomes the work of building the serious world of passionate men, then the problem of immaturity is deepened. It is not only that the slave contract is a product of
immaturity or that it retards the maturation of a society or polis. Rather, it is also that a counterfeit standard of maturity is proffered. Political life becomes reserved, in essence, to the passionate man whose “maturity” is evidenced by his participation in the project of building the serious world of passionate men. In other words, his maturity is to be seen in the fact that he is willing to fight for the rights of other passionate men. But if the passionate man is, in reality, the apotheosis of immaturity, then the mark of “maturity” in such a world becomes a willingness to defend the extension of license to the most immature.

There is, though, one further mark of maturity operative within this logic. If the passionate man is licensed to dominate, then those he dominates are ultimately regarded as his. He has a right to them; they have no rights against him. Whatever they have, then, is understood as being gifted: it is only out of the master’s generosity that they live, that they eat, that they have shelter or some semblance of human relations. The structure of possession here is best epitomized through the notion of a peculium. The peculium in Roman law emerged as the counterpart to dominium, a term that – deriving from the root dom, referring to house (as in “domestic,”) – was first used to refer to slaves and later generalized to mean simply property. The master (or lord, dominicus) owned his dominium. The slave that was his dominium could, in turn, be allocated certain possessions – for instance, livestock, or a plot of land, or another slave, etc. Such allocation, though, has a tenuous status; whatever is the slave’s peculium remains the master’s dominium. The peculium thus does not have the properties of public value: it cannot be exchanged on the marketplace; it is the slave’s only for as long as the master chooses to regard it as such. It is revocable. This, though, was not only the type of property made available to slaves within the master-slave relationship, for it was also the type of property made available to women and children by the paterfamilias. And though the term “peculium” comes by way of
Roman law, the practice is one that, according to Orlando Patterson’s sociological study, has been universal across all systems of slavery (Patterson 1982: 182–6). Without doubt, similar results could be uncovered with regard to the prevalence of the peculium within misogynistic or patriarchal societies.

Why bother with the peculium if, in short, the slave contract already recognizes one’s dominance? The slave contract concerns the legitimacy of domination to third parties: it ensures that the society licenses the domination. It is true that the peculium can bolster efforts toward legitimation, yet at the same time, such extra legitimation may simply be unnecessary in the great majority of cases. But between the first and second party – that is, between dominator and dominated – the peculium plays a vital role: it creates a system of incentive for the dominated. Because the dominator typically wants the dominated to labor on his behalf, or at least behave in some pleasing fashion, the dominator must be able to corral the dominated’s freedom in service of his desired ends, and although the iron fist of coercion will be readily available in such cases, the velvet glove of the peculium may quite often be more effective or expedient.

If in such contexts the proffered political ideal of maturity is the dominator, what is the ideal of maturity that is put forth for the dominated? In short, it is the idea of the happy slave: the dominated person who does as asked in pursuit of modest and revocable peculiar possessions. The happy slave is the one who is “mature” enough not to ask for more and not to be discouraged when receiving less than was promised. The happy slave is “mature” enough not to seek liberation, for liberation would by definition mean the loss of the peculium. In short, the happy slave is supposed to value the peculium more highly than freedom itself. The happy slave is thus not without responsibility – indeed, brutal, blood-curdling responsibility to please the
master. But the happy slave is relieved of the anguish of political responsibility; such matters are for someone else, and the happy slave may take comfort in being relieved of such duties.

The ideal of the slave contract is thus a world of passionate men and happy slaves, wherein the former work and the latter labor in order to fulfill the serious project of the maintenance of their world as such. Value within such a world is a private endeavor: the passionate man has his passions, and the slave has her peculia. The anguish of responsibility for valuation in the vulnerable world of the interplay of freedoms is nullified: the slave is consigned to the vulnerability of a supposed unfreedom, whereas the passionate man lives a licensed invulnerability to the valuative demands of others. Such invulnerability is only abridged by the serious project of keeping the endeavor afloat for a world of passionate men, whose claim to mastery is regarded as ready-made and God-given.

The realization of such an ideal would be a radical commitment to immaturity. In a world saturated by such a commitment, is the pursuit of maturity possible?

IV. Liberation as Maturation

a. Emancipation, Manumission, and Liberation

In the nineteenth century, “emancipation” began to be used to refer to the abolition of slavery. In the Roman vernacular from which the term comes, however, emancipation was not used with reference to slaves. Rather, emancipation occurred when a minor passed into legal independence from the paterfamilias. The equivalent for slaves would be manumission, though whereas emancipation was taken to reflect a normative path of maturation from dependence to independence, manumission was regarded as the master’s gift. That the master would be willing
to “give” such a gift is unsurprising, since the slave laboring under knowledge of manumission’s eventual possibility is surely more likely to obey than the one who regards manumission as an impossible prospect, and since the society that can point to its manumissive practices can more easily maintain the claim that its system of slavery is humane. Indeed, manumitted slaves would quite frequently return to work for their previous masters or subsist under some other schema of dependence on the former master; the cost to the master of manumission was minimal, and the benefit profound.

On such a model, the child “earns” emancipation simply for having attained adulthood. It is understood as the fulfillment of a right that was held in trust until the point of maturity had been reached. Manumission, by contrast, is no fulfillment of a right. It is seen, rather, as the master’s forfeiture of a right, a generous act that no deed or achievement of the slave could obligate the master to undertake. There may thus be something of a problem afoot if in modern times “emancipation” is used to refer to what amount to acts of mass manumission. Where the former masters lose their right to the slave as chattel, there is often at once a set of circumstances wherein the accessibility of the former slaves’ labor is maintained or even enhanced while the claim that these former slaves owe a debt of gratitude to their emancipators becomes a definitive and foundational dogma. The problem, in short, is that where the nullification of prior slave contracts is affected, the structure of the privatization of value may be retained. On our schema, the nullifiers may simply become the successive generation of passionate men, and what is offered the former slaves and their descendants is not political power but instead novel forms of the peculium.

Such was, for instance, the worry of He-Yin Zhen, the Chinese anarchist feminist who wrote in the early 20th century. For He-Yin, the problem of the liberation of women was that
there were many who were all too happy to “give” women their freedom. This she termed “passive liberation” (2013: 59–64). Such freedom, though, typically would have at least one of two deleterious consequences. On the one hand, most who would be so “freed” would be returned to situations of domination; they would still be oppressed as women, but with the expectation that they would express an eternal gratitude for whatever marginal changes to their circumstance were enacted (and, indeed, such gratitude would mean not protesting whenever more oppressive conditions would be ushered in, for, after all, shouldn’t they just be happy things aren’t as they were before?). On the other hand, those who would genuinely be freed from oppressive circumstances would be so by means of being put in position to oppress others. They would be women “liberated” to oppress the poor, or “liberated” to be masters of war.

In short, once one has become dominated, the model of emancipation is inadequate. Emancipation works in a context in which one is waiting for one’s rights. Domination refers not to the delaying of rights but to the denial of rights. To wait for the denial of the denial is insufficient, both because the denial of a denial is not a full-throated affirmation and because the denial of a denial does not negate what is lost or eroded while waiting. Emancipation is an achievement of one who has steadily gained, as when a child earns domains of independence in adolescence and finally gains a total independence through adulthood; manumission is a “gift” to the one who has steadily lost, and the gift of being accountable for oneself in a degraded state may ultimately amount to no more than having responsibility for one’s oppression imposed upon oneself.

In contrast to the logic of emancipation and manumission is liberation. Liberation, He-Yin argued, is no gift; it is freedom fought for and taken, not freedom received. For liberation truly to be liberatory, it must not be the “passive” liberation in which the dominators cede
privileges to the dominated but rather “active” liberation in which the dominated are the agents of liberation. So, too, for He-Yin, was it impossible for liberation to mean that I fight to end my oppression. No: liberation is a fight against oppression, full stop. It is a commitment to human values in the face of dehumanization. To He-Yin, this meant that one cannot achieve women’s liberation through the social, economic, or political elevation of women. Rather, women’s liberation was liberation: it demanded the abolition of class and private property; it demanded a commitment to dismantle militarism. Women’s private possession of a greater share of power is not liberating but incriminating; it elevates one to the level of co-oppressor. Women’s liberation is rather, then, a project towards the realization of public values and toward the rejection of a society premised ultimately on deference to the violence undergirding structures of domination.

On this point, He-Yin is in line with and anticipates the work of Frantz Fanon, for whom liberation was no gift but rather the struggle to realize a new humanism against the decadent values forged by coloniality. The colonizer fights liberation with brute force on the one hand, but also fights on the other hand with the imperative that the liberatory struggles be “non-violent.” Yet the logic of colonialism is to regard the colonizer as legitimate: it is shrouded in the seriousness that fights to the death for the right of the passionate colonizer to own the land and whatever natural resources and human beings inhabit it. Hence the demand of “non-violence” is ultimately a demand to accept colonization, for decolonization – since it regards the colonizer’s possession of the land as illegitimate – is regarded as intrinsically violent, no matter how passive the activities or demonstrations of those who stand for it (Fanon, 1963: 35–67). The push for “non-violence” ultimately concerns neither strategies nor tactics but rather counsels the colonized simply to accept what the colonized gives them. It is a call to cancel liberation in favor of a reformed peculium.
One such peculium, as Fanon pointed out in his essay “Racism and Culture,” (1967b: 39–44) is the notion of “native” culture itself. In the initial moment of conquest, the colonized is to be taken as so inhuman that it ought to be negated and replaced with the culture of the colonizer. But as the dialectics of struggle and international legitimacy evolve, eventually the colonizer comes to recognize the culture of the colonized as legitimate, though with caveats. Such a culture is to be imagined on the model of a pre-colonial cultural and it is to be apolitical. In short, the colonizer is “gifted” the possession of a cultural past that has been stripped of any transformative or evolutionary capacity. It is a “zombified” culture, a walking dead whose purpose is neither to erect an equality between colonizer and colonized nor even to provide the colonized with the means to politically self-determine on the margins of a colonized center. Rather, its purpose is to maintain intact a system of colonialism. Its ideal, in short, is the production of happy slaves.

What happens to a zombified culture, though, when people commit to liberation? Fanon’s *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, published in English as *A Dying Colonialism* (1964), suggests an answer. Cultural zombification produces attitudes often derivative of a mythic past whose purpose is to maintain colonization. It is true that such attitudes are subject to contestation in processes of creolization that may undermine this project; it is also true, however, that such zombification, typically backed in full by the coercive apparatus of the colonizer, may often be quite effective. The effectiveness of this endeavor depends, in short, on the degree to which the colonized regard the cultural attitudes as “their own,” as an oasis of possession and self-determination in a desert of powerlessness. At stake is whether the colonized invest in the possession of this peculium to the degree that they are willing to accept continued colonialism as part of the bargain. In the Algerian case, Fanon identified attitudes towards women and the veil, towards technology, towards family, towards medicine, and towards European minorities as the
peculiar possession of a zombified culture. In each case, he demonstrates that the struggle for
decolonization and liberation meant that people undertook the painful process of leaving these
possessions behind. Decolonization demanded maturation; it required a critical attitude toward
values, a willingness to sacrifice what one had become passionately attached to.

For Fanon, this meant a following step: the pursuit of a national culture. National culture
would not be the resuscitation of pre-colonial culture – for, indeed, in Algeria as in most cases of
colonization, the borders of the colony simply bear no resemblance to the borders of a nation
preceding colonization. Rather, it would be the process of developing a critical relationship to
values through which a *polis* could emerge. Jane Anna Gordon (2014) interprets Fanon’s
argument in light of its relation to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion of the general will. The
contrasting notion of a “will in general,” as the aggregate of private desires, would suggest the
political as ultimately directed toward a foreordained end; the will in general is the serious
project of erecting a state that serves private interests. The general will, though, means a
commitment to the public and political process of articulating, inventing, and re-inventing the
values and symbols that bind the polis and that give rise to national projects. The private
comforts of a zombified culture are clear: it is quite easy to be contented with the belief that this
part of the world reflects “my” values. But the fight for national culture reflects an anguished
project to bring about the political where it has been nullified and absent. It represents a move
from what may be termed political responsibility to responsibility for the political: political
responsibility demands that I do something in service of the extant political demands of my
society; responsibility for the political demands that I – and we – work to bring about the
conditions under which political responsibility may emerge. Political responsibility is present in
the serious world of passionate men: each passionate man, and each happy slave, may face the
demand of keeping the boat afloat. But responsibility for the political demands a step outside, a radical and anguished leap into a vulnerable and unpredictable future. To choose maturity demands just such a leap.

b. *Anguished Decolonization*

To choose maturity means to value maturity, and maturity as a value pushes beyond the individual. It is thus a value that is inextricably political. Immaturity may thus manifest as a project of anti-politics insofar as it utilizes the political sphere in order to undermine the conditions for politics. Where those conditions are undermined, maturity demands a fight to bring them forth. Even where the conditions for politics are extant, though, maturity demands a fight to maintain them; the collapse of politics through its subordination to regimes of private value ultimately undermines commitment to maturity as a value and to the institutions that facilitate maturation.

On this account, it could be said that such an anti-politics is colonial, and here not in the narrow sense of colonialism as the sovereign control of one nation over foreign territory but in the broader sense in which one faction subordinates another to its own ends. A systematized misogyny, for instance, is a colonial relationship, as the parallels between He’s feminist theory and Fanon’s anti-colonial thought suggest. This would seem to suggest not only that liberation is a process through which individuals and groups may seize the conditions of their maturation, but also that maturity may demand projects of decolonization more generally. Of course, felicitous circumstances would mitigate such a demand: where nothing is colonized, there is nothing to decolonize. Then again, the absence of colonialism does not absolve such responsibility
altogether, for to value maturity would still mean to commit oneself to preventing colonization from arising.

Where colonialism is encountered, though, maturity as a value makes projects of decolonization imperative. Here we may note a distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Let us say that colonialism is the active utilization of institutions to subordinate one group to another. Coloniality is the system of values and beliefs that are called forth in the attempt to legitimate colonialism. A consequence is that where colonialism subsides, coloniality may remain: projects that take back institutions, land, resources, and human lives from human control may not, in so doing, cancel and totally nullify all of those values that served colonialism. Even where many such values are singled out, refuted, and overturned, others may lie dormant, ready to facilitate projects of re-colonization and neocolonialism when the conditions are ripe. This is why the question of national culture was of crucial importance to Fanon. A nation that could not take responsibility for forging values of its own would be vulnerable to reconquest. Without well-ordered public values that could coordinate social and economic action under a sense of the common good, coloniality – as a tendency toward the privatization of values – could manifest through the subordination of communal needs to the co-optative projects of neo-colonialism, which offer the fulfillment of private wants by selling off those resources that serve public needs.

The distinction between colonialism and coloniality, then, suggests a multiplicity or ambiguity at the heart of projects of decolonization. On the one hand, decolonization calls for diminishing and overthrowing the power of the colonizer: it seeks to end colonialism as a system of institutional control. This requires an oppositional stance that may be termed “anti-colonial.” Anti-colonial commitments seek to mobilize people against colonial structures of power. Revolutions for national independence are, of course, anti-colonial in this sense. But even after
independence is achieved, anti-colonial commitments remain salient, for independent states nonetheless demand anti-colonial commitments to prevent neo-colonial structures of power from dominating the new state.

On the other hand, decolonization also calls for a revolution in values that will eradicate coloniality. For lack of a better term, this can be termed the “decolonial” as opposed to the “anti-colonial.” But in this sense, both the “decolonial” and the “anti-colonial” refer to different components in of the broader umbrella of decolonization. While the anti-colonial is necessary to oppose and diminish colonial power, the decolonial is necessary in order to prevent the post-colonial from recapitulating the values of coloniality. In this sense, in light of the above analysis, the decolonial plays the role of overturning the subtle ways in which a colonized social world is saturated with efforts toward the privatization of value. For even if the colonizer is deprived of power, should the new state proceed along the lines of value-privatization, it will merely replace a relation of external colonialism with a form of internal colonialism.

Unsurprisingly, then, there is much overlap between the anti-colonial and the decolonial, for the acts that undermine the colonizer are at once acts that revoke the license to colonize but also acts that explain and legitimate such revocation. The revolution at the level of power is, in general, also a revolution at the level of values.

However, it does not follow that decolonization is as simple as pursuing the tidy synthesis of the anti-colonial and the decolonial. There are times when effective opposition to colonial power calls for the temporary suspension of debates over values; some moments call for action, and such action may at times have to bracket the decolonial project of critical reflection. Yet so, too, does the decolonial require at times the suspension of the anti-colonial: if the colonization of values yields patterns of hate and resentment, then the overcoming of coloniality
may call, eventually, for projects of reconciliation and forgiveness. A basic problem here is that
decolonization as a broad project offers no easy answers: it does not, as it were, supply the rules
of when one must suspend the decolonial in favor of the anti-colonial or the anti-colonial in favor
of the decolonial. To pursue decolonization is to confront the anguish of always being
responsible for how one or one’s collectivity decolonizes. Indeed, such anguish is profoundly
collective: any “we” of decolonization confronts it as an open-ended project for which there is no
final and infallible blueprint provided in advance. Maturity demands that one not seek to evade
such anguish by finding easy answers, by taking on a serious commitment to always favor the
anti-colonial over the decolonial or vice versa. To overcome the privatization of value is to fight
for a world of responsibility, not, as such, to fight for a world in which all is resolved and good
has defeated evil. To choose maturity, in the end, thus is to choose to take on an anguished
responsibility for the world – a world that can only be “mine” insofar as it is also “yours,” and,
hence, “ours.”
Conclusion

Maturity arises out of a confrontation with a radical expansion in responsibility. It is achieved through projects that take on such responsibility without evasion. This involves the erection of criteria for accountability, but even here, the danger of immaturity – through the project of the spirit of seriousness – lurks, for one may turn to accountability in order to evade responsibility. Maturity is thus an infinite task of building meaningful structures of accountability while taking responsibility for the inevitable limitations of any such structure, a taking of responsibility that neither nullifies one’s accountabilities nor nullifies one’s responsibility for building other such structures, ones that would move one and one’s communities closer to meaningful ideals but that would not, themselves, be without limitations. It is also the anguished task of trying to live up to the array of accountabilities to which one may reasonably be held, by oneself and by others, despite the impossibility that the mutual fulfillment of all such demands would entail. Maturity calls, in short, for hard decisions, and the courage to make such decisions without delusion or dilution, that is, without the project in bad faith of evading the anguish that maturity demands.

A final reflection is called for. If this is what maturity is, is maturity desirable? By appearances, a simple initial answer might come to mind: namely, “Hell no!” If this is what maturity demands, it is easy to understand why one might, simply, prefer to ignore it. It is thus no difficult matter to understand why much immaturity abounds. Our description of anguish suggests a preliminary diagnosis that the desire for immaturity is of a piece for the desire to be
without freedom. A freedom need not desire to be free. Freedom brings with it responsibility that one may want to evade. This stimulates bad faith, a “Hell no!” in the face of freedom. A desire for immaturity may arise as an extension, insofar as maturity brings with it anguished responsibility.

A problem, though, is that this “Hell no!” represents, unfortunately, an immature apprehension of the meaning of desirability. That which is desired, as John Stuart Mill (1998) famously noted, is not necessarily desirable and vice versa. If I don’t desire maturity – indeed, if I desire immaturity – it does not follow that maturity is undesirable and immaturity desirable. For Mill, the matter of whether one opts for that which is desirable over that which simply happens to be desired is linked to a “sense of dignity” (1998: 57) that distinguishes the more advanced from the less advanced. The dignified pursue their happiness, and happiness is a matter of the desirable, and not that which is desired per se. Those with such dignity would appear for Mill to be those who, possessing the “maturity of their faculties” (1975: 11), merit the liberty to chart their own course toward happiness. Does maturity contribute to happiness, rendering it desirable? To pose the question points to an intrinsic problem, insofar as Mill’s schema implies that the achievement of maturity is prerequisite for the evaluation of happiness and desirability. Leaving the rest of Mill’s normative commitments to the side, on this point we may concur, at least if what is at stake is a rigorous judgment about desirability. To evaluate the criteria for the desirability of values and ideals requires, ultimately, a critical and reflective project of inquiry, of examining what is supposed and presupposed, of comprehending how their articulation and institutional realization would relate to other human institutions and realities, of examining the possibilities for proffering meaningful articulations and being able to act out of regard for the values thus articulated.
We thus apprehend a basic problem: to even evaluate the desirability of maturity may require maturity. An immature response awaits: accuse the endeavor of circularity and be done with it! But to take responsibility for the project of articulating, defending, and living values that are ultimately worth articulating, defending, and living requires, in the end, an apprehension of the value of maturity.

Is there an alternative to maturity and immaturity? There is. Simply put, the alternative is perfection. Perfection, on such terms, also bears another name: innocence. For to be perfect is never to have erred, never to have done wrong. But here we reach an intractable limit, for much hinges on whether the criteria for perfection and innocence involve, as well, the requirement that one never have caused harm. Maturity, I have argued, requires taking responsibility for harms inflicted even by one’s righteous acts; to be right does not exonerate one for the harms one’s right acts have brought about. Even one who has never done wrong is neither innocent nor perfect if the standard at issue is whether one has caused harm. If it is true that we ought to regard perfection or innocence as superior to maturity, then it is also true that we still remain responsible for engendering maturity among those whose perfection has been corrupted or whose innocence has been lost. For my part, I think the matter is simpler. I think the proper conclusion to be drawn from this study is that we, as inhabitants of a human world, ought to value maturity over perfection and ought to value maturity over innocence.

A reason for this can be put simply: an innocent adult is, in a human world, an oxymoron. The simple reason is that the adult is one who not only brings novel acts into the world but who also reproduces a world that precedes her or him. The adult is responsible for the world. This is no mere guilt by association, nor is it a form of original sin. It is, simply, constitutive culpability: as its inhabitant, I am responsible for the world’s failings. As it has fallen, so too am I fallen. The
mistake made by many, though, is to take this fallenness as an exhaustive ontological characteristic. This is an error. That I have fallen does not entail that I may not get back up again, nor does it mean that I may not rise or even soar. More to the point, our having fallen does not prevent our bouncing back, our ascent, our gliding through unforeseeable heights. Maturity means I am responsible, in short, for all of it. I am responsible for the world. My innocence goes by the wayside. This, though, I am ready to accept. For the stakes are too high; to cling to innocence as an unconditioned good is, simply, the infantile attitude of the spirit of seriousness.

Some would here maintain that, if I choose responsibility for the world, then I ought to pursue perfection over maturity. After all, why take responsibility for a fallen world when I could, instead, build a perfect one? A basic problem, though, consists in the realizability of perfection. As ours is ultimately a philosophical study, we may bracket the issues here of empirical probability and focus on the matter of conceptual possibility. The human world is a world of contingency. Contingency and perfection, as our discussion of theodicy suggests, face a conceptual incompatibility. The contingent is that which could be imperfect. If it is admitted as possible that one could bring about a perfect state of the world, there remains the matter that the world transcends any of its given states. The world is in flux, and whatever in it becomes permanent only attains its permanence through the enduring efforts of contingent actors to maintain states of affairs that could be otherwise. To be responsible for a perfect world is thus to be responsible for the unattainable. It is to desire the status, in short, of the in-itself-for-itself; it is a useless passion.

Is maturity a useless passion? Here we reach a paradox: maturity is an ideal, and ideals, Sartre informs us, are of the ontological shape of the in-itself-for-itself. But maturity as we have articulated requires not only consciousness of its meaning as an ideal but reflective
consciousness: in other words, maturity requires the apprehension of that evidence that would imply its unattainability. If maturity is a useless passion, it is also responsible for learning that this is the case. So, too, does maturity confront another responsibility: a responsibility for meeting normative criteria that lie beyond it. In other words, if maturity is a useless passion, it is useless passion that takes seriously its need to make itself useful for other purposes, and, indeed, for the critical evaluation of these other ends.

The knock upon maturity is thus simple: it seems too difficult to attain. Things would be easier if we didn’t have to bother with it. We have already indicated that to choose the easy in the face of difficult responsibilities is a form of immaturity. Thus, the matter is a simple one. Maturity represents an existential choice; one may choose its pursuit or not. It is difficult to articulate values that would fully justify the choice of maturity without appealing, ultimately, to criteria that maturity recommends. To choose it may thus present the possibility, in some sense, of absurdity, for one may not be able to make the choice of maturity understood to one who rejects it. It would seem, thus, to be a passion. We may thus seek counsel in Kierkegaard:

Whatever one generation learns from another, no generation learns the essentially human from a previous one. In this respect, each generation begins primitively, has no task other than what each previous generation had, nor does it advance further, insofar as the previous generations did not betray the task and deceive themselves. The essentially human is passion, in which one generation perfectly understands another and understands itself. For example, no generation has learned to love from another, no generation is able to begin at any other point than the beginning, no later generation has a more abridged task than the previous one, and if someone desires to go further and not stop with loving as the previous generation did, this is foolish and idle talk. (Kierkegaard, 1983: 121)

Maturity may amount to no more than passion; this, though, raises the question of whether maturity is, in some sense, in service of the essentially human. To abandon the project
of valuing maturity may be to abandon the project of valuing humanity. How to conclude, then, but by announcing to the reader what should by now be obvious: that I choose to be passionate about maturity.
Works Cited


