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Hermeneutics from the Margins: Provisional Notes

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I am concerned here with the predicament of a person unable to feel at home in her own concepts, given that historically these concepts were forced upon her by a colonizing power. If the goal for such a person is to overcome her predicament through intellectual means, then one way of doing so would involve developing, at least as propaedeutic, a hermeneutics which would allow her to understand the extent to which her existing concepts bear the alienating traces of the conceptual vocabulary wrought in the lopsided colonial encounter. Alternatively put, the task would be to identify those of her existing concepts, if any, that in some way cannot be subsumed under the concepts of the colonizer. In this essay, I outline a hermeneutical strategy—which I call “hermeneutics of residue”—that might, in part, be suitable for accomplishing this task. This strategy requires that, in reading the colonizer’s textual tradition, the colonized/ex-colonized person must heuristically presuppose that her current concepts are entirely determined by this tradition unless these concepts can be shown to resist such determination on reflective-systematic grounds. I take this hermeneutical orientation to form part of the larger endeavor to explore the possibility of a philosophical hermeneutics from the perspective of those who suffer from discursive marginalization; and to investigate if the resulting hermeneutics is subsumable under the existing hermeneutical theories in the Western philosophical discourse, or if it requires a category of its own.

In the first section, I articulate the problem for which the hermeneutics of residue is the solution: the victim of colonization—call her the “post-colonial self”—unable to feel at

home in her own concepts.¹ In §2, I suggest a way of resolving this difficulty. I argue that, given the particulars of the post-colonial situation, the post-colonial person can gain insight into this situation, at least in part, if she takes as her point of departure the general philosophical view that the self analogically apprehends the other. I indicate that Husserl's social ontology provides a useful elaboration of this view (§2.1); and argue for why this social ontology is relevant for overcoming post-colonial conceptual alienation (§2.2). I then offer, in §2.3, a hermeneutical strategy consistent with this social ontology, the hermeneutics of residue. In this section, I show that residue hermeneutics does not fall squarely under the ambit of two influential contemporary hermeneutical approaches—the hermeneutics of tradition, and the hermeneutics of suspicion.

1. The problem

Consider the following vivid description of the state of mind of the post-colonial self:

Do you feel that your own people and country are somehow always positioned outside the mainstream? Have you ever felt that the moment you said the word 'I', that 'I' was someone else, not you? That in some obscure way, you were not the subject of your own sentence? Do you ever feel that whenever you speak, you have already in some sense been spoken for? Or that when you hear others speaking, that you are only ever going to be the object of their speech? Do you sense that those speaking would never think of trying to find out how things seem to you, from where you are? That you live in the world of others, a world that exists *for* others?" (Young 2003: 1).

This passage describes the existential, political, and discursive marginality of the post-colonial subject. Such a subject is existentially marginal, because it matters little "how things seem to her." She is politically insignificant, given that she must submit to the interests of others. Most importantly for my purposes here, she is discursively marginal.

¹ Although I take the description of the general predicament of the victims of colonization from the existing discourse of postcolonial theory (§2), I employ the term "post-colonial" (with a hyphen) to distinguish my overall project from this existing discourse. In doing this, I am neither accepting nor rejecting postcolonial theory. Instead, I am merely bracketing, primarily due to the constraints of space, the question of locating the argument of this paper in relation to the sophisticated debates in postcolonial discourse.

For even in uttering the subject word “I,” she does not “feel” like the “subject of [her] own sentence.” Instead, it seems to her that she has “in some sense been spoken for,” that the words she uses belong to someone else. If concepts are words, as some Anglo-American philosophers have asserted, then this means that the post-colonial self feels unable to take ownership of the concepts that she employs in her daily life. This feeling of what one may call a “conceptual alienation”—or not feeling at home in one’s own concepts—seems particularly problematic, since it seems to require people to cast all their thoughts and desires, which are unique to their situation, into a set of concepts that may contain little or no link to this situation.

It can be said that conceptual alienation remains a factor in post-colonial societies well after these societies have achieved political independence from the colonizer (Young 2003: 99). As the lure of cultural nationalism in many of these societies demonstrates, the political ouster of the colonizer does not suffice to erase the problem and trauma of colonialism. Academic discourse in these societies also remains pre-occupied with documenting the effects of colonialism. The present essay is a provisional contribution to this highly differentiated academic discourse in which an attempt has been made in general to address the problem of colonialism through intellectual means.² I address the problem of the conceptual alienation of the post-colonial self—the inability to take ownership of her concepts—by offering a hermeneutical strategy that would allow us to “recognize otherness or the alien in oneself (or one’s own)” (Dallmayr, in Michelfelder and Palmer 1989: 92). More precisely, in what follows, I provide a way of discovering traces of colonial otherness in the concepts which the post-colonial self might employ in her daily life.

2. Notes on the hermeneutics of residue

To accomplish the task of isolating the nature of her conceptual alienation (§1), the post-colonial self must first decide on a social ontology. How should the post-colonial self represent the colonizing other? It could be said here that, roughly speaking, the choice is

² This includes the discourse of postcolonial theory, which emerged primarily in the Anglo-American academic world, but also the many approaches to this question originating in a variety of disciplines in the ex-colonies. I am discussing the social ontologies and hermeneutical strategies implicit in the key “theoretical” works on this topic in the context of India in a longer work.

between two opposed social ontologies—let us call them the “analogy view” and the “differentiation view.” Both these views attempt to provide an adequate ontological description of the way the existent human self represents the existent human other. In the analogy view, the self represents the other by privileging its similarities rather than dissimilarities with the other. Conversely, in the differentiation view, the self privileges the dissimilarities over the similarities in representing the other. In this section, I briefly outline Husserl’s social ontology as a version of the analogy view, and argue that the analogy view can serve as the basis for understanding, at least in part, the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized (§2.1). Subsequently, in §2.2, I argue for the relevance of the analogy view in the case of the post-colonial subject looking to overcome her conceptual alienation via intellectual means. Finally, in §2.3, I articulate a hermeneutical strategy—the hermeneutics of residue—that becomes plausible if we presuppose the analogy view, and show how it can be classified neither as hermeneutics of tradition nor as hermeneutics of suspicion.

2.1 *The analogy view*

I take Husserl’s social ontology to instantiate the analogy view.³ The goal of Husserlian phenomenology is to describe the representations of the “transcendental ego” by bracketing the philosophical question of whether the subject can represent the object in its ultimate reality (Husserl 1999: §11, 26). This forms the first step towards ultimately classifying these representations into universal typologies (ibid., §13, 29-30). A description of how the transcendental ego experiences the “alter ego” is part of this larger project. To explicate the ego’s experience of the alter ego, Husserl reduces the transcendental ego to its “sphere of ownness” by bracketing out all representations that are “mediately or immediately” associated with another subjectivity. The bracketed out representations include not merely the actions of all alter egos, but also products related to them—for instance, cultural objects like books, tools, etc. (ibid., 92). Reduced in this fashion, the transcendental ego consists of “what is peculiarly [its] own,” and includes (a) fields of sensation relating to its animate body (e.g. sensory bodily sensations), and (b) its

³ Since Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* is supposed to contain the summary statement of Husserl’s views in the “middle period” of his work as a philosopher, I rely on this text to delineate his view of how the human ego represents the human alter ego.

awareness of being a “ruling and governing,” i.e., an awareness of its ability to initiate spontaneous activity (ibid., 95-97). Husserl describes the ego’s experience of the alter ego from the perspective of this reduced ego, the “sphere of ownness,” in the following way.

(1) The ego experiences the alter-ego through a “mediate intentionality...[or] appresentation (analogical apperception)” (ibid., 108). Specifically, the ego apprehends the body of the alter ego as animate in analogy with its own animate body, and does so non-inferentially, i.e., “not as a thinking act.”⁴ Similarly, the ego appresents the ruling-governing of the alter ego in analogy with its own ruling-governing (ibid., 119).

(2) The “here” of the ego does not represent the “there” of the alter ego by reducing it to its own “here.” Instead, it can only apprehend the alter ego in a non-originary manner, that is, through a “certain mediacy of intentionality” (ibid., 109): “as if I were standing over there, where the Other’s body is” (ibid., 123). Husserl characterizes this feature of the appresentation of the other as a “fusion,” or an “assimilation” of a “there” to a “here” (ibid., 118).

(3) The ego’s appresentation of the alter ego forms the basic building block to describe the nature of intersubjectivity. The intersubjective world has three features. First, it consists in a multiplication of alter egos such that each ego appresents other egos, represents other egos appresenting other egos, and is itself appresented by other egos. Second, the intersubjective world is constituted when to each representation as it exists in the sphere of ownness (= excluding the alter ego) is added the sphere of appresentation (= including the alter ego). When the latter is fully superimposed upon the former, the “world of men and culture” comes into being (ibid., 125). Third, the ego can describe the intersubjective world as common to all egos for the following reason. I as ego appresent all alter egos as having a sphere of ownness. All alter egos have an awareness of the world in their sphere of ownness. This awareness is similar to my own awareness of the world, except that I apprehend the world of all my potential and actual alter egos from the perspective: “as if I

⁴ “[O]nly a similarity connecting with my primordial sphere, that body over there with my body can serve as the motivational basis for the ‘*analogizing*’ apprehension of that body as another animate organism” (Husserl 1999: 111).

were seeing the world from their perspective.” Therefore, the reduced ego apprehends an objective world that is common to all potential egos.⁵ Similarly, the “zero member” or “zero personality” representing a culture analogically apprehends via empathy the “zero member” or “zero personality” representing every other culture (ibid., 134-35).

From (1)-(3), it follows that Husserl explicates the ego’s experience of the alter ego on three different levels: the primordial level on which the reduced ego appresents the alter ego as possessing an animate body, and the capacity for ruling-governing; the intersubjective level, or the inclusion of all actual or potential alter egos; and the cultural level consisting of shared ideals. This social ontology is consistent with the analogy view, because, on each of the three Husserlian levels, the ego represents the alter ego in analogy with itself, i.e., by privileging continuities with the alter ego rather than the discontinuities. This does not mean the absence of difference between the ego and the alter ego, because the alter ego is always “there” to the ego’s “here.” It also does not imply any reductive assimilation of the alter ego by the ego. Instead, it means that similarity must be privileged if we wish to describe in a phenomenologically accurate manner the ontological structure of the ego’s representation of the alter ego.

§2.2 Post-colonial conceptual alienation and the analogy view

I now show how the analogy view relates to the conceptual alienation of the post-colonial self. If the post-colonial self feels alienated from her own concepts, and if she wishes to escape this predicament, then she must start with discovering the particular concepts that alienate her. This would require a measure that would allow her to sift out the alien from the non-alien in her concepts—i.e., what in her concepts can be seen as somehow belonging to the colonizer culture. However, to undertake this task, the post-colonial self must decide on whether to represent the colonizer’s concepts in terms of the analogy or the differentiation view (or perhaps, in some way, both). In what follows, I argue that presupposing the analogy view can clear up a new philosophical space for thinking about

⁵ “[T]he multiplicity of the Other’s world is given as oriented peripherally to mine, and is thus a world, because it becomes constituted with a common Objective world immanent in it, and the spatiotemporal forms of the Objective world functions at the same time as a form that gives access to it” (Husserl 1999: 134; also 130).

the relationship between the perpetrators and the victims of colonialism, without denying that the differentiation view may also have its own strategic advantages.

Husserl does not directly address the question of how the ego might represent the alter ego as possessing concepts. One way of answering this question consistent with Husserl's approach is as follows. For Husserl, the ego, on the primordial level, represents the animate body and the ruling-governing of the alter ego by analogy with its own animate body and its ruling-governing respectively, i.e., non-inferentially via empathy. Concepts, Husserl says, are "primal instituting[s]" that are actively constituted for the sake of ordering the perceptual universe (classifications, typologies, relations, etc.) (1999: 111). Since concepts play a role in actively ordering experience, they must belong to the ego's capacity for ruling-governing. If we accept Husserl's analogy view, then the ego's attribution of conceptuality/concepts to the alter ego must take the form: "as if I were employing concepts (or that particular concept) over there, where the other is employing concepts (or that particular concept)." Further, on the intersubjective level, the ego would presumably represent many versions of the same concept. Finally, on the cultural level, the zero ego would represent the zero alter ego in the form: "as if I were to hold this shared idea there where the alter ego is."

Therefore, within a Husserl-type analogy view, the ego would attribute conceptuality to the alter ego in analogy with its own ability to institute concepts on each of the three Husserlian levels—primordial, intersubjective, and cultural. However, if the ego must analogically apprehend the alter concepts, how does it differentiate its own concepts from alter concepts? The difference, in my view, lies in the ego's representation of the alter ego as the irreducible "there." At any moment, the ego can reduce the alter ego into a pure "there" on each of the three Husserlian levels. For instance, the ego would represent the alter ego as radically dis-analogous from itself if the latter were to threaten it, etc.

Now, if the post-colonial self aims to separate the alien from the non-alien in her concepts, would it be appropriate for her to presuppose the analogy view, in which case the ego must analogically appresent the concepts of the alter ego? This question can be answered in the affirmative. In what follows, I show that if, in general, a *human* ego is to represent a *human* alter ego, and if we desire to describe the structure of this representation

in an ontologically justifiable way, then the ego must presuppose, at least in some measure, the analogy view, even if the ego wishes to represent the alter ego in terms of some extreme version of the differentiation view. I justify this general claim by analyzing two examples in which the colonizing ego represents the colonized alter ego in terms of the differentiation view, and showing that in both of these cases the analogy view must be presupposed in some measure. The significance of this claim is as follows. If we are able to establish, in general, the claim that even radical versions of the differentiation view must involve the analogy view to some extent, then we can say that, in reading the colonial archive, the post-colonial subject must employ the analogy view if she wishes to describe her ontological predicament vis-à-vis her colonial heritage in an ontologically accurate manner.⁶

Consider the following example from the colonial literature in which the colonized native is often characterized as immature, barbaric, developing, and primitive.

The notion of the African as minor...took very strong hold. Spaniards and Boers had questioned whether natives had souls: modern Europeans care less about that but doubted whether they had minds, or mind capable of adult growth. A theory came to be fashionable that mental growth in the African ceased early, that childhood was never left behind” (Nandy in Gandhi 1998: 32).

This passage consists of two instances. (a) The soul-possessing European ego represents the African alter ego as soul-less. (b) The European ego with an “adult” mind represents the African alter ego as having a mind incapable of “adult growth”—so not really possessing mind proper. In both (a) and (b), it may seem that the ego is presuming the differentiation view, of privileging difference over similarity. However, I contend that this positing of difference can be analyzed as presupposing the analogy view in both these cases.

Consider (b) first: the ego denying mental growth to the alter ego. The alter ego could have had a mind, or robust conceptuality (ruling-governing) if it had developed in

⁶ Since my aims are philosophical here, I am not delving into the various historical responses of the colonizer towards the colonized, and vice versa.

the “normal” ego way. How is such a representation possible? Making the claim that the alter ego fails to reach the “normal” presumes that the alter ego follows the initial steps of mental growth like the ego, but, unlike the ego, it is unable to take the final step required for mental maturity. In other words, for the European ego, the “there” of the African alter ego means: “as if I were employing concepts like a child there where the African alter ego stands.” However, in making such a claim, the ego must presuppose that the alter ego possesses the same general pattern of physical, and, for the most part, mental growth as it itself does, which means that it must represent the alter ego in analogy with itself. The dis-analogy between the ego and the alter ego with regard to the extent of mental growth, therefore, seems to presuppose that the ego analogically appresents the alter ego. This, in turn, shows that the analogy view seems to capture a part of the ontology of a circumstance that, on first sight, seemed like a straightforward instantiation of the differentiation view. Naturally, this does not mean that the differentiation view cannot also throw light on some aspects of the situation, but it does mean that the analogy view captures some part of the social ontology implicit in the way the ego represents the alter ego in this example.

Now consider (a)—the European ego’s denial that the African alter ego has a soul. If we stipulate that the “soul” is the capacity to rule/govern, the ego’s denial of soul to the alter ego implies a denial of the whole capacity to rule/govern.⁷ This instance is more radical than the denial of mind in (b), where the African was at least allowed the capacity to rule/govern even if a diminished one. If the alter ego lacks a soul, then the ego cannot say of it: “as if I were ruling/governing (= employing concepts) over there.” Therefore, (a) seems to posit difference in a more radical way than (b), and would appear to be best analyzed in terms of the differentiation view. But here too I think that the positing of difference presupposes the analogy view for the following reason.

For Husserl, analogical appresentation is the special way in which humans apprehend each other, and must be distinguished from the human apprehension of inanimate objects and animals. The case of animals is complex, because they are closer to humans. However, inanimate objects must always be analyzed in terms of the differentiation view. If this is the case, then in (a), the soul-possessing ego can deny soul to

⁷ I am aware that the terms “mind” and “soul” have several meanings in both early modern and modern philosophy. Here I am distinguishing these terms in a stipulative way.

the alter ego only if it represents the alter ego as non-human. For, given that analogical appresentation relates to human-human representation, if the ego does classify the alter ego as “human,” its denial of soul to the alter ego must have its basis in the analogical appresentation of the alter ego—presumably analogical appresentation of the body of the alter ego. In other words, even if the ego differentiates itself from the alter ego by denying the latter all ruling/governing (or conceptuality), this differentiation must still rest on its analogical appresentation of the alter ego’s body if she classifies the alter ego as “human.” On the other hand, if the ego denies humanity to the alter ego, then it cannot analogically present the alter ego, in which case the latter would be no different from inanimate objects. Thus, the human ego’s denial of conceptuality to another human alter ego must presuppose an element of analogical appresentation (presumably, the alter ego’s body in [a]). From this one can conclude that, as in (b), in human representations of other humans, the ego’s representation of the alter ego must include a dimension of analogical appresentation, even if the ego represents itself as starkly different from the alter ego. As I have said, this does not mean that the differentiation view is false, but that the analogy view does capture an aspect of the ontology of humans representing other humans.

If the analogy view does indeed capture one dimension of humans representing other humans, and if the post-colonial project is to sift out the alien colonizer traces in her existing concepts, then such a self must accept the analogy view, at least as one part of her analysis. In the case of the post-colonial self, this would require presupposing that the colonizer is a concept-employing human; and that, especially given the fact of colonial imposition, at least some of her existing concepts must be analogous to concepts in the textual tradition of the colonizing culture. So if the task for the post-colonial self is to identify the alien and the non-alien in her concepts, and if she must presume the analogy view on ontological grounds, then one part of her larger project must consist in reading both the textual tradition of the colonizer’s culture and the colonial archive, and documenting the extent to which her existing concepts are similar to the colonizer and colonial concepts on the primordial, intersubjective, and cultural levels.⁸ Performing this task would account for that dimension of the colonizer-colonized relationship that is best

⁸ I take colonizer texts to be the foundational texts of the colonizer’s culture. In contrast, colonial texts are texts produced by the colonizer in the colonial encounter.

analyzed in terms of the analogy view.⁹ Hence, if the post-colonial self wishes to separate the alien from the non-alien in her concepts in a holistic and rigorous manner, it will not suffice to focus on—perhaps even emphasize—merely the differences between herself and the colonizer. She must also accomplish the task of reading the colonizer and colonial texts in light of the analogy view.¹⁰ In the following section, I offer one hermeneutical strategy that seems appropriate for this task.

⁹ One could argue that the similarities between colonizer and colonized are trivial compared to the differences between them, that they make for very thin gruel. But this objection seems to prejudice the issue. In the emotionally fraught post-colonial context, positing difference from the colonizer seems to be the natural currency, and therefore similarities seem trivial. However, clarifying the similarities between colonizer and colonized can have several advantages. First, as I have argued in §2.1, differences only make sense in terms of the background of similarities. Therefore, clarifying the similarities help sharpen the articulation of differences. Second, assuming that the colonizer and colonized do influence each other, which is not an unfair assumption to make, the borrowing of concepts on either side would seem entirely inexplicable if we take the radical differentiation view. Consequently, the analogy view must form part of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, and therefore must be described. Third, if one wishes to understand the ontological structure of the post-colonial situation, ignoring similarities, even if they are thin gruel, would only mean getting the ontology of the situation wrong: one wants to understand one's situation in its entirety. Fourth, the similarities between the colonizer and the colonized may include common zero concepts like some sort of commitment to human cultivation. For example, in the Indian case, the attitude of the British Indologists, and the 19th century Indian curiosity/fascination with Western thought could be viewed as exemplifying, say, a common commitment to various shared ideals and modes of doing. If complex zero concepts can be seen, even *prima facie*, to be analogous across cultures in any way, then the question of similarities between the colonizer and colonized cultures must be explored in depth, even if only to respond to the question of whether or not they can be considered thin gruel.

¹⁰ It may be objected that my employment of Husserl's social ontology is suspect. Levinas claims that Husserl remains tied to Cartesianism, because he takes self-consciousness to be the starting point of his philosophy; takes knowledge as his goal; and speaks of ontology rather than ethics as first philosophy (1989: 78). For Levinas, ethics construed as "responsibility for the other" is prior to ontology. By contrasting it with Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death, Levinas makes responsibility for the other prior even to one's concern with one's own mortality. The fact, says Levinas, that the other is mortal somehow "calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business" (*ibid.*, 83). So ethics is prior to ontology. As Levinas says in *Totality and Infinity*, "If ontology—the comprehension, the embracing of Being—is impossible... it is because the comprehension of Being in general cannot *dominate* the relationship with the Other. The latter relationship commands the first. I cannot disentangle myself from society with the Other, even when I consider the Being of the existent he is" (Levinas 1961: 47). Whatever the merits of Levinas's own view, Levinas is certainly right that Husserl takes ontology construed as descriptive phenomenology to be prior to ethics, although Husserl did lecture on ethics. Heidegger provides a clearer statement of Husserl's primacy of ontology view. He says "He who truly knows beings knows what he wills to do in the midst of them" (1993: 92). Julien Young has interpreted this passage to mean that, for Heidegger, a "grounding in ontology" is "necessary to a genuinely authentic ethics" (2001: 26). More specifically, a "[p]roper knowledge of one's 'ontology' is no mere 'theoretical' accomplishment. It is, rather, also 'practical'. It bears in a decisive way, upon will and action" (*ibid.*). That is, being able to describe accurately one's situation brings to light how we should act in the situation.

If our problematic is the post-colonial predicament as it has been articulated in this essay, the primacy of the ontological view ought not to be displaced by the Levinasian position for two reasons. First, since the task for the post-colonial self is to describe the nature of her existing concepts, an ontological approach is necessary, if only for the sake of descriptive completeness. Second, given that the effects of colonialism come built in with the element of the "unethical," i.e., the violent and the tyrannical, it is best to include

2.3 Hermeneutics of residue

If the post-colonial self feels alienated from her own concepts (§2.1), and if she believes that one part of the larger project of overcoming this alienation involves demarcating the alien from the non-alien in her existing concepts by reading the colonizer/colonial archive on the basis of the analogy view (§2.2), then this project requires articulating a general hermeneutical strategy for reading this archive. In what follows, I outline one such strategy, which I call the hermeneutics of residue [(1)-(3)]. Subsequently, I locate this hermeneutical orientation in relation to the contemporary debate between the hermeneutics of tradition, and the hermeneutics of suspicion [(4)].

(1) The hermeneutics of residue takes as its point of departure, what Gadamer calls, the “living present” (Gadamer 2003: 368). For Gadamer, history must be written anew from the perspective of every new present (Gadamer, in Michelfelder and Palmer 1989: 24). For my purposes here, the “living present” is a set of discursive and institutional concepts from which the post-colonial self finds herself alienated. Since the task for the post-colonial subject is to demarcate the alien from the non-alien in her concepts, this emphasis on the “living present of conversation” as opposed to mere historicism seems justified. The reason is simply that post-colonial alienation remains a reality in the living present, and the goal is to overcome this alienation in the present for the sake of the future. Therefore, the living present can be taken as the point for departure if the goal of the post-colonial self is to discover the alien in herself. This does not mean that historicist accounts explicating the evolution of post-colonial concepts have no appeal. But it does mean that a historicist approach cannot be the only way of dealing with the after effects of the colonial encounter.

Husserlian ontological description as, at least, one starting point for inquiry for the following reason. It is reasonable to suppose that a methodologically rigorous ontology of this sort would manage to describe, at least, some aspects of the post-colonial situation. Of course, it could be argued that such a description could also be made available from the Levinasian perspective of the responsibility for the other. This is true, but even if such a description could be provided, given the diametrically opposed way in which Levinas and Husserl proceed, there is no reason to suppose, at least on pragmatic grounds, that the Levinasian description would necessarily displace the Husserlian one. *Prima facie*, it seems better to assume that the two descriptions would illuminate different aspects of the same reality.

(2) Concepts operating at the shared culture level, what Husserl calls “zero concepts,” and debates around these concepts in the public sphere must form the point of departure for a post-colonial self trying to ascertain the alien and the non-alien in her concepts. This is justified, because the method to be employed involves taking publicly-available concepts as they actually exist in a post-colonial culture, and then arguing for why these concepts are alien or non-alien for someone in this culture. Since it is the zero concepts that are taken for granted in the everyday, and given that our analysis must be communicable on the collective level, it makes sense to start with the existing zero concepts in a society. Zero concepts are often complex concepts in that they possess a variety of features. Like all complex concepts, they are, as Gadamer would say, “historically effected” (*Wirkungsgeschichtlich*), i.e., they have gained and/or lost attributes in the course of history, and present themselves as one particular conglomerate at an instant of time. If colonial imposition has been part of a historical trajectory, then the zero concepts would contain, in some combination, features from both the pre-colonial and post-independence phases of time. For instance, one could imagine a zero concept of the self as made up of bits from Kant and bits from, say, the Indian thinker, Sankara, at time *t*, and so on—what some might call “hybrid.”

While zero concepts make for the starting point of inquiry, the post-colonial self attempting to identify the alien in her concepts must not remain restricted to the zero level. A more holistic effort would require looking at zero concepts as they manifest themselves on the intersubjective and primordial levels. The analysis on each of these levels would include hermeneutical practices oriented towards reading key texts of the colonizer/colonial tradition that may have influenced the shape of zero concepts in a post-colonial culture. Which texts from the colonizer’s tradition must be chosen for analysis would depend on strictly pragmatic criteria given the task to be accomplished—in the present case, that which aids the post-colonial self to demarcate the alien in her living concepts. The specific questions, which researchers engaged in this project would ask, would also depend on this criterion. I now specify (briefly) the main questions that the postcolonial subject must ask on the three Husserlian levels, as well as the textual practice corresponding to each of these.

(a) On the primordial level, the ego attributes concepts to the alter ego via analogical presentation, “as if it [ego] were employing concepts there where the alter ego stands” (§2.1). Here, texts must be identified in which, historically speaking, a post-colonial self encounters a key text from the colonizer’s tradition, and engages with it. For instance, an orthodox Hindu grappling with the Millian notion of utility, or trying to understand the English notion of dignity, etc.

(b) On the intersubjective level, the ego must engage with many versions of the same concept in a discourse (§2.1). So the task on this level would be to unravel the multi-logue that may (and often does) characterize the historical evolution of the concepts currently existing in a post-colonial society, but from the perspective of how these concepts may have emerged in the context of the colonial encounter, and/or in the colonizer’s own textual tradition. This analysis would include texts embodying the textual and institutional debates that ensued with regard to a particular concept in the history of a post-colonial culture, say the concept of utility, or the concept of the self, etc. This constellation of texts would include originary texts from the colonizer’s tradition, but also texts forged in the colonial encounter.

(c) On the cultural level, the ego represents the zero alter ego of the colonizer culture “as if it were holding a particular zero concept there, where the alter ego stands” (§2.1). On this level, the aim is to ascertain the zero concepts of the colonizer/colonial culture in analogy with the existing (corresponding) zero concepts in the post-colonial culture. Further, one would also deal with the relationships between zero concepts taken as a whole in the post-colonial culture.

(3) The hermeneutics of residue is implicit in the way the analytical structure of inquiry has been formulated in §2.3(2). I have indicated that the post-colonial subject must analogically appresent the colonizer/colonial concepts from the perspective of her own living concepts on each level. This does not, however, imply that the inquirer must somehow underline the similarities between these two sets of concepts. Quite the contrary. Residue hermeneutics does not imply assimilation of one’s own concept to that of the alter

ego. Nor does it present such assimilation as normatively preferable. While it is true that the residue hermeneuticist would look for similarities between her concepts and that of the alter ego on the primordial, intersubjective and cultural levels, she does so with a radical openness towards discovering differences between her own concepts, and the concepts of the alter ego. This openness towards discovering discontinuities is not passive. Instead, it is the active preparedness to mark out differences on purely reflective grounds.¹¹

If the ego is oriented towards systematically marking out the similarities between its own concepts, and the concepts of the alter ego on the primordial, intersubjective, and cultural levels; and if, despite this orientation, which is purely heuristic, an irreducible conceptual residue emerges as an incommensurability;—then this residue can be seen as the primordial conceptual ownness in the living present of the ego, here the post-colonial ego.¹² The residue marks the difference between the “here” of the post-colonial ego-concepts, and the “there” of the concepts of the colonizer alter-concepts. But this difference is not merely presumed or asserted. Given that the residue hermeneuticist orients herself to emphasizing (methodologically) similarity between her own concepts and that of the alter ego, while remaining actively open to marking out the conceptual differences on purely reflective grounds, the residual conceptual difference, when and if it does appear, must be seen as reflectively achieved.¹³ For this reason, residue hermeneutics can provide a rigorous foundation for gaining knowledge about the nature of our own concepts, which can then form the basis for creating new concepts. In the post-colonial context, such a reflective-systematic inquiry may even reveal that concepts, perhaps whole

¹¹ Leela Gandhi points out that many postcolonial theorists have drawn on the Hegelian master-slave paradigm to grapple with the post-colonial predicament. Hegelian social ontology is not inconsistent with residue hermeneutics to the extent it remains restricted to the colonized person’s “struggle to free himself” from an “externally determined definition of self” (Gendzier, in Gandhi 1998: 16). However, a residue hermeneuticist would be more sympathetic to Leela Gandhi’s own view that postcolonial theory must not merely “reveal the colonizer and the colonized [as] a historical incarnation of Hegel’s master and slave” (ibid., 31), but must accomplish more than that. For Leela Gandhi, this means documenting the “slave’s refusal to concede to the master’s existential priority” by putting the poetic/creative imagination in the service of social change (ibid.). Residue hermeneutics also points in a direction beyond Hegelian social ontology, but instead of placing the locus of emancipation in poetry as Leela Gandhi does, it draws a link between reflective hermeneutics and emancipation.

¹² The term “residue” here does not mean some sort of leftover in a pejorative sense. In fact, this residue could form the basis for answering important normative questions about what sorts of concepts might be appropriate in the post-colonial context.

¹³ I employ the term “reflective” to mean “all things considered judgments.” My employment of this term has nothing to do with the much-debunked notion of instrumental rationality associated with the Enlightenment.

conceptual schemas, which are thought to be alien at particular historical junctures may not be alien at all or turn out to be alien in surprising new ways.

In sum, if we assume that intellectual self-determination involves, at least in part, reflectively understanding one's own nature as a subject belonging to a particular history, then residue hermeneutics could be seen as one strategy within the discipline of philosophy consistent with this notion of intellectual self-determination. Post-colonial societies are often rife with discursive and physical violence. In these societies, the tendency is to view one's concepts as unique, and somehow untouched by colonialism. Adopting residue hermeneutics is one useful way of rigorously describing the nature of post-colonial concepts, because it allows for residual conceptual difference between the post-colonial and the colonizer concepts on strictly reflective-systematic grounds. The need for this descriptive rigor can be justified on purely pragmatic grounds. The post-colonial self cannot hope to fulfill the goal of feeling at home in her concepts if she either does not investigate or mis-describes the nature of her existing concepts. The reason for this is as follows. In several post-colonial societies, the goal is to create reflectively new concepts suited to the particular realities of these societies—concepts which the post-colonial self can take ownership of. But this normative aim cannot be achieved unless such a self resolves to describe the true nature of her existing concepts, because without this knowledge she may never be able to sift through the good and the bad in her colonial legacy with the requisite confidence.

(4) Lastly, I locate residue hermeneutics in relation to the contemporary debate between the hermeneutics of tradition, and the hermeneutics of suspicion. I do this for two reasons. First, by showing that residue hermeneutics does not fit neatly on either side of this key contemporary debate in philosophical hermeneutics, I indicate provisionally that a hermeneutics suited to the particularities of the post-colonial situation may require a category of its own. Second, I take this comparison between residue hermeneutics and other hermeneutical theories as an occasion for further spelling out the nature of residue hermeneutics.

In "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," Paul Ricoeur examines the opposition between Gadamer's "hermeneutics of tradition" and Habermas's critique of

ideology approach (which Ricoeur describes as “suspicious,” and which Gadamer calls the “hermeneutics of suspicion”) (Ricoeur 1990: 312).¹⁴ Rejecting this opposition, Ricoeur argues that these two hermeneutical theories can be reconciled with each other. He claims that each theory speaks from a different place, but “each can recognize the other’s claim to universality in a way which marks the place of one in the structure of the other” (ibid., 209). In what follows, I present Ricoeur’s characterization of the opposition between the hermeneutics of tradition and the hermeneutics of suspicion, and show that residue hermeneutics does not belong squarely on either side of the opposition [(a)-(f)]. Subsequently, I will discuss Ricoeur’s reconciliation of these two approaches to the extent it is similar to the way residue hermeneutics might reconcile these approaches [(g)].

(a) Gadamer holds that “history precedes me and my reflection” (Ricoeur 1990: 303), and therefore positively values tradition over judgment. Habermas views tradition negatively as “merely the systematically distorted expression of communication under unacknowledged conditions of violence” (ibid., 299), and so emphasizes reflection over institutional constraint (ibid., 317). A residue hermeneuticist would accept Gadamer’s view that we belong to history before we belong to ourselves. However, unlike Gadamer, she would not positively emphasize tradition over judgment. As Ricoeur points out, Gadamer thinks that tradition gives us not merely our problems, but also the solution to these problems. For a residue hermeneuticist working in the post-colonial context, this is not viable, because her historically effected consciousness has been marred by colonial imposition, and has left her feeling alienated from her own concepts. Therefore, contra Gadamer, she cannot accept in any straightforward way that the solution to her problem will come out of her tradition. But neither must she necessarily hold like Habermas that her tradition is merely a set of concepts that have been violently imposed on her, and therefore must be entirely jettisoned. For there is no reason to believe, *prima facie*, that she might not feel at home in some of her colonially-inflected “traditional” concepts. Consider, for instance, the fact that many people in India consider English to be their first language.

¹⁴ I have chosen Ricoeur’s text in the interests of brevity. It offers a clear summary of the hermeneutics of tradition and hermeneutics of suspicion, apart from offering a way of reconciling the two.

(b) For Gadamer, history is the tension between the self (the point of view of the reader) and the other (text of the past) (Ricoeur 1990: 310). Habermas works with the notion of “interest”—in whose interest was/is tradition? Like Gadamer, residue hermeneutics involves beginning from the living present and interpreting past texts in light of the present point of view. While a residue hermeneuticist will not deny that texts are often based on interests, she does not view texts merely in light of the interests they may have served historically. Unlike Habermas, her task includes marking the interestedness of texts in a systematic manner, but without making her whole interpretive orientation revolve around it.¹⁵

(c) Gadamer aims at a “contemporary reinterpretation of cultural tradition” through the human sciences (*ibid.*, 312), while Habermas works with the social sciences to explicate “institutional reifications” (*ibid.*, 312-13). The task for the post-colonial residue hermeneuticist is to classify what is or is not alienating in the concepts of her living present, and she aims at such classification in all aspects of culture, including “institutional reifications.” Thus, she takes as her ambit the broader domain of culture rather than Habermas’ narrow institutional domain. This makes her approach closer to that of Gadamer, except that she does not take the “reinterpretation” of tradition as her goal.

¹⁵ It may be argued that residue hermeneutics is apolitical, but this is not the case. It is certainly true that residue hermeneutics has little to do with political activism or politically-oriented methodological partisanship. However, it is political to the extent that it is an attempt by the post-colonial subject to recover from the colonial experience. As an intervention within the discipline of philosophy, and so part of the larger multi-disciplinary effort of intellectual self-determination in the post-colonial context, it is not inconsistent with more avowedly political means of overcoming the post-colonial predicament. In fact, nothing prevents the residue hermeneuticist from identifying with certain ways of being political in the existing discourse of postcolonialism. For instance, politics for theorists like Leela Gandhi does not mean following the logic of “repression and retaliation” (Gandhi 1998: 124). Nor does it mean any oppositional politics that essentializes the colonizer and the colonized, including Edward Said’s creation of the “racist Westerner” (*ibid.*, 79). It also means eschewing the “generalizing tendency that all colonial texts are repressive” (*ibid.*, 154). Instead, for Leela Gandhi, if the postcolonial intellectual has a “political vocation,” then it is a “commitment to a dialogue between the Western and non-Western academics” within the framework of a “democratic colloquium” (1998: 63). Further, residue hermeneutics would also follow postcolonial thinkers in rejecting cultural nationalism, because they find its “centralizing hegemony” problematic (Young 2003: 113). Finally, a residue hermeneuticist would be sympathetic to the construal of politics as achievement of what Young calls “self-government,” which involves overcoming the structures of domination in post-colonial societies. Young himself conceives of postcolonial politics as a “transformational politics dedicated to the ending of inequality and colonialism” (*ibid.*, 114).

(d) For Gadamer, misunderstanding is merely an “inner obstacle to understanding,” while Habermas articulates a notion of ideology as the “systematic distortion of communication by the hidden exercise of force” (ibid., 313). Since the residue hermeneuticist is concerned with the pragmatic task of isolating the extent of her alienation from her own concepts, misunderstanding, even misidentifying, a text is a practical problem for her, and requires a practical solution. Consequently, unlike Gadamer, she would be neutral on the question of whether misunderstanding can be resolved through the operations of the understanding itself. At the same time, she would recognize the systematic distortions and silences in colonizer/colonial texts without reducing all textuality to ideology.

(e) The hermeneutical task, in Gadamer’s view, is to figure out the ontology of the “dialogue which we are” (ibid., 312), and his hermeneutics is geared to the present understanding of ourselves. On the other hand, Habermas’s project is “emancipatory.” It is ‘future-directed’ in the sense that he articulates the “regulative ideal of unrestricted and unconstrained communication which does not precede us but guides us from the future point” (ibid., 313). Here the post-colonial residue hermeneuticist can be seen as belonging to both sides. Her aim is Gadamerian to the extent she wants to understand herself in the present. But it is also Habermasian, because she possesses a future-oriented regulative ideal: replacement of alienating concepts with a set of concepts in which she would feel at home. So her project is to understand her past through the perspective of the present for the sake of creating a particular sort of “emancipation” in the future.

(f) According to Ricoeur’s Habermas, Gadamer mistakenly “ontologized hermeneutics,” which means that Gadamer insists on “understanding or accord, as if the consensus which precedes us were something constitutive, something given in being” (ibid., 318). For Habermas, self-reflection is not founded on prior consensus, for what is prior is “broken communication” (ibid., 320). Hermeneutics of residue is an “ontologized hermeneutics,” but not in the Gadamerian sense. It places no emphasis on consensus. The task for the residue hermeneuticist is to describe the alienating traces that the colonizer’s conceptual imposition has left on her present concepts. In this project, there is no presumption of consensus, but merely the assumption that such an inquiry, or reading of one’s own history

from the perspective of one's living present, can be undertaken. Similarly, unlike Habermas, the residue hermeneuticist would not begin with the presumption of "broken communication" between her present self and her textually constructed past, but would be actively prepared to document the breakdown in understanding wherever necessary. In fact, one could argue that the hermeneutics of residue sidesteps this antinomy between "consensus" and "breakdown" in an innovative manner. The residue hermeneuticist combines an emphasis upon identifying the similarities between her own concepts in the living present and the colonizer/colonial concepts, but with an openness to positing difference between these two sets of concepts on reflective-systematic grounds (§2.2). Her emphasis on similarity makes her broadly Gadamerian, except that unlike Gadamer she does not defend consensus or similarity as the only correct way of reading alter ego texts. Instead, her stress on similarity is a methodological move, though rooted in the structure of the representational relationship between the ego and the alter ego, and must always be accompanied by an active openness towards the breakdown of consensus. The residue is the breakdown of consensus. But positing this residue can be justified only if the residue arises on reflective-systematic grounds, i.e., after a concerted attempt has been made by the ego to prove the similarities between her concepts, and that of the alter ego.¹⁶

(g) From (a)-(f), one could conclude that residue hermeneutics can be classified neither as hermeneutics of suspicion nor as hermeneutics of tradition. I now discuss two ways in which Ricoeur reconciles the hermeneutics of tradition and the hermeneutics of suspicion.

First, Ricoeur argues that the Habermas-type critique of false consciousness can form part of the Gadamerian framework. According to Ricoeur, Gadamer's notion of the understanding requires opening oneself to the text. In doing so, the self is "enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds in which interpretation unfolds," and the self is

¹⁶ Historically speaking, it has been said that the universalizing/colonizing grand narrative of Western modernity saw little value in the cultures of the colonies. Many postcolonial theorists have responded to this denigration of their cultures through a "defiant invitation to alterity or 'civilizational difference' [which] carried within it an accompanying refusal to admit the deficiency or lack which is, as we have seen, the historical predicament of those who have been rendered slaves" (Gandhi 1998: 20). The residue hermeneuticist would have no trouble accepting the notion of cultural difference if this emphasis on difference is not rooted in some sort of defensiveness engendered by the hurt of the colonial experience, or based on any kind of oppositional politics that flirts with irrationalism. In fact, residue hermeneutics provides a framework in which cultural difference could be articulated, except that this difference must be achieved on reflective-systematic grounds.

introduced to “imaginative variations of the ego” (Ricoeur 1990: 327). In these variations, the critique of the illusions of the self emerges. Therefore, Ricoeur says that the critique of false consciousness can be a part of the Gadamerian framework. Broadly speaking, the post-colonial practitioner of residue hermeneutics takes a similar approach. She opens herself up to the colonizing/colonial archive, and hopes in this way to acquire a set of insights that will allow her to recognize the alienating aspects of the concepts that she employs in her lifeworld.

Second, with regard to Habermas, Ricoeur says that critique is not the first or last instance. Even if institutions are distorted, the hermeneutics of tradition can inform the hermeneutics of suspicion to the extent humans can “project [their] emancipation and anticipate an unlimited and unconstrained communication only on the basis of a creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage” (ibid., 329). This, Ricoeur says, would have to be done via a reading of the past, since someone who is unable to reinterpret his past “may also be incapable of projecting concretely his interest in emancipation” (ibid.). Further, Ricoeur contends that critique is also tradition, because one always speaks from a place in tradition. So there is no conflict between tradition and emancipation (ibid., 332).

For the residue hermeneuticist, there is no conflict between tradition and emancipation either.¹⁷ She agrees that critique always occurs from a place in tradition. She attempts to read the past from the perspective of the living present, which allows her to critique her present for the sake of a better future. This may, in part, involve, as Ricoeur says, a “creative reinterpretation of [her] cultural heritage.” However, as opposed to the ideal offered by Ricoeur here, the post-colonial residue hermeneuticist does not think that emancipation must necessarily involve such a re-interpretation of her cultural heritage, or that such a re-interpretation is the only path to emancipation. For her, the task is to understand, in Gadamerian vein, the dialogue that she is, i.e., to explicate the alien and the non-alien in her existing concepts, and she seeks to accomplish this goal by inquiring into whether or not any residual difference exists between her own living concepts, and that of the colonizer/colonial tradition. The residual difference, if it exists, will then form the basis for a normative evaluation regarding the sorts of concepts the post-colonial self would like

¹⁷ Also see 2.3(e) above.

to possess in the future. This overall process may or may not involve a “re-interpretation” of her cultural heritage.¹⁸

3. Conclusion

I have argued that if we accept that the post-colonial self suffers from conceptual alienation because the origin of her concepts is imbricated with the colonial encounter, then one way of overcoming her alienation would be to distinguish the alien from the non-alien in her concepts. I showed that one way of accomplishing this task would be to adopt a hermeneutical strategy based on Husserl’s social ontology, in which the post-colonial self must stress the similarities between her existing concepts and the corresponding concepts as they occur in the colonizer’s textual tradition out of which her existing concepts can be said to have emerged, unless incommensurable difference between these two sets of concepts can be demonstrated on reflective-systematic grounds. In this essay, I have outlined the hermeneutics of residue in a provisional manner. A fuller defense of this interpretative strategy requires a deeper engagement with the discourse of philosophical hermeneutics which I am undertaking elsewhere. The outcome of this inquiry is significant for addressing normative questions relating to the post-colonial situation.¹⁹

¹⁸ One could argue that residue hermeneutics is vulnerable to Derrida’s criticism of Gadamer—that Gadamer’s hermeneutics ends up denying the radical otherness of the other, or, as Derrida puts it, it is responsible for “covering up of otherness” (Derrida, in Michelfelder and Palmer 1989: 119). This criticism is similar to Levinas’s critique of Husserlian ontology as “neutralizing the other,” and “removing it from its alterity” by “cognizing” the other (Levinas 1961: 43-44). Gadamer rejects Derrida’s criticism by arguing that his notion of understanding is modeled on conversation. Since conversation is the back and forth between the self and the other, it must have its own logic which is irreducible either to the self or the other (Gadamer, in Michelfelder and Palmer 1989: 119). The post-colonial residue hermeneuticist also need not accept Derrida’s criticism for the following reasons. First, in describing the otherness or the alien in herself, the post-colonial residue hermeneuticist must avoid solipsism—reducing the other to oneself—for the following reason. She must read the colonizer/colonial archive correctly if she wishes to describe the residue in an accurate manner. However, any solipsistic subsumption of the other to the self would make this impossible, because such a reading would be clearly partisan, and therefore lack comprehensiveness. Second, given the ontological situation of the post-colonial residue hermeneuticist, reducing the other to the self in a way that does violence to the other is hardly the danger, because the “other” here is the colonizer/colonial text that has contributed to the existing post-colonial world-view. The real danger is that the post-colonial self will not be able to demarcate the boundaries of the categories of “self” and “other,” and therefore not be able to make explicit the alien in her concepts.

¹⁹ A part of this essay was presented at the conference “Rethinking Svaraj” at the Manipal Centre for Philosophy and Humanities in January 2015. I am grateful to the participants at the conference for their questions and comments.

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