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Necrological Discourse: Necrological Identity

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Abstract

This paper explores the Lévinasian theory of identities enclosed within their own portraits. In struggling to draw the portrait of an adversary who abandons face-to-face discourse for a necrological discourse devoid of interlocutors, society finds itself perplexed and, perhaps, unable to calculate various factors that require inclusion within the portrait itself. Through the thinking of Emmanuel Lévinas, I will demonstrate the importance of not simply displaying the portrait of a necrological identity, which imposes a risk in depicting only a lingering insurgent, but taking the time to sketch possible portraitists and analysts who lead society to lifting the veil of a world that opposes reality and comprises only a reversed poetics of impersonal discourse. Inverted poetics do not harbor thinking, but a semblance of thinking unknown to its spectator, who is chained to a past that cannot bear the present or its future, but only its end.

Can society possibly exist in the face of a nihilism stemming from necrological discourse of profound uncertainties? When living people reside in the trace of history, which underscores human idealism and insulated acts only, intersubjectivity roams within a realm of a transcendence that cannot release itself without the non-mastering countenance in the identity of a just interlocutor. Therefore, I argue that lingering in the face of an impenetrable countenance of personal discourse releases a trace of the good, meaning that which provides a path out of instrumentality and into reflection by one who still returns to itself. Within the Hegelian and Lévinasian insights of this paper, I expose elements that lead a person to the trace of history, which absences history itself and presences necrological identities. I call for society to enter a place of cognizance in recognizing how to penetrate the enclosure of such identities encased within their own portraits.

Introduction

Identification of the present I is the most robust essence in the origin of identity. In Lévinasian theory, the present I in conversation with the face of the human other and of a just interlocutor does not alter the I. However, problems arise when a face “in the trace of the utterly bygone, utterly passed absent” withdraws into the depths of the necrological I (Lévinas 1986, 355). Therefore, it is from this Levinasian insight that perspectives of the necrological identity reach their crux and clarity. Slavoj Žižek underscores that Nietzsche’s *God is Dead* is not the ultimate threat; instead, the real threat is when people see themselves as an instrument of God and embody full rights in exterminating the human other (2006, Žižek). In order to commit such atrocities as these, I assert that a person participates in necrological discourse taking on a necrological identity. When living people reside in the trace of history, which underscores only human idealism and isolated acts, intersubjectivity roams in a realm with conceptual interlocutors of dead discourse. Remaining in a transcendence that cannot release itself from the unreservedly past absence, a person risks the possibility of movement with no return to the present I without the non-mastering countenance of a just interlocutor. Can society possibly exist in the face of a nihilism stemming from necrological discourse of profound uncertainties? In struggling to draw the portrait of an adversary who abandons face-to-face discourse for a necrological discourse, society finds itself perplexed and, perhaps, unable to calculate various factors that require inclusion within the portrait itself.

Through Lévinasian concepts, I demonstrate the importance of not simply displaying the portrait of a necrological identity, which imposes a risk in depicting only a lingering insurgent, but taking the time to sketch possible portraitists and analysts, as Emmanuel Lévinas, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Jacques Lacan, who lead society to lifting the veil of a world that opposes reality and comprises only a reversed poetics of impersonal discourse. Inverted poetics do not harbor thinking, but an imitation of thinking, unbeknown to its spectator, who is chained to a past that cannot bear the present or its future, rather only its end. Therefore, I argue that lingering in the face of an impenetrable countenance of personal discourse releases a trace of the good, meaning that which provides a path out of instrumentality and into reflection by those who still return to themselves. Within predominately Hegelian and Lévinasian insights, I expose elements that lead a person to the trace of history, which absences history itself and presences necrological identities. I call for society to enter a place of cognizance in recognizing how to penetrate the enclosure of such identities encased within their own portraits. Comprehending three Hegelian concepts including the trace, the journey back to self, and desire, which Lévinas will extend and reverse, sets the stage on how people can become encased within their very portraits.

The Trace of History

The idea of the trace or tracing begins this discussion and can be seen in Hegel's example of the boy throwing stones into a river. The boy stands back admiring the "circles that trace themselves on the water, as an effect in which he attains sight of something that is his doing" (Hegel 1993, 36). The tracing is the presence of the absent rock; thus, the rock is both absent and present. Therefore, cognizing what is absent is just as important as its presence. Lévinas extends the trace to the idea that time is in the synthesis of the present, where "traces of the irreversible past are taken as signs that ensure the discovery and unity of a world" (1986, 345). In other words, the past cannot be retrieved to the point that it eliminates the face-to-face encounter of the human other. Time as synthesis of the present allows the boy to see traces of what he accomplishes at the moment of his action, the past is irreversible and a sign of his discovery unites him to the present. However, the past becomes the only present in a necrological discourse, what Lévinas terms as "impersonal discourse" (1998, 25). Thus, instead of admiring the synthesis of time within the trace of a present accomplishment that has the possibility of discovering or unifying the world, a person then, I argue, remains in an historical trace, reversing the absence of historical ideologies and isolated acts of that time period into the fully present. With the presence of impersonal discourse, necrological identity thrives, and thus, the understanding of Lévinasian "impersonal dialogue" requires analysis (1998, 25).

Lévinas declares that when people cannot attain a "person-to-person discourse," then they become enclosed within their own portraits (1998, 25). The just interlocutor who functions as mediator is now reduced to concepts. In other words, a discourse "without interlocutors" comes into play, whereby "impersonal reason" subdues the external just interlocutor, in what Lévinas calls a "necrological discourse" (1998, 25). In this instance of reversible poetics, people reduce themselves to the "legacy of man, absorbed by the common patrimony" (Lévinas 1998, 25). In other words, people transform into the necrological identities of dead ancestors and reduce themselves to the past defeats and achievements of the ideologies from their patrimonial descent, reflecting only upon dead deeds. Lévinas asserts that each one as such evolves into "a dead soul" (Lévinas 1998, 25). Herein lies the danger of extremism reduced to dead deeds; extremists associate themselves with necrological interlocutors reduced to concepts, for the just interlocutor has no place in reversible poetics of nonthinking. Thus, when concepts alone dictate, what Lévinas references as the "guilt and innocence" of historical events and deeds, then without a just interlocutor, the concepts of past injustices and ideologies fester to the point of changing people's vision to see the present other as the responsible party of past injustices and the enemy of their specific ideologies. Therefore, I posit that if a just interlocutor is not present, then travesty occurs, as necrological discourse reigns and allows a person to believe he or she has committed a justifiable murder of the other, the other who has played no part in that particular historical happening. Going one step farther, these dead souls prey on the extremely impressionable young men and women, who are discontent with their present place in society, and convince them that all humans outside their conceptual world of dead discourse are enemies. Such allurements encourage young consenters into the dangers of a necrological world of solipsism. Therefore, Hegel's journey to notion is essential in realizing how people can stay within their ideological frames of necrological identity.

The Journey Back

Examining Hegel's journey in the unveiling of consciousness itself begins the first stages of sketching Hegel, the portraitist and analyst. Hegel asserts "the animation and life of spirit alone is free infinity; as such, the spirit in real existence is self-aware as something inner, because in its manifestation it reverts into itself and remains at home with itself" (1975, 154). In Hegel's return to Spirit, or Mind, external restraints cause the spirit to reach beyond from the depths of itself where its home resides in order to encounter the negative of the world and comprehend that particular negativity regarding the situation or circumstance. The spirit then reverts back to itself having understood that it must find mediation through the negative encounter in order to return to the positively free inner self in its consecrated chamber, reflecting untainted freedom. Hegel believes such freedoms as lifting oneself up and superseding the boundary allow the best of the thesis and the best of the antithesis to cancel what was and synthesize a new becoming. For Hegel, this freedom simulates autonomous existence of new capacities germane for all human beings.

However, Hegel warns "only the present is fresh, the rest is paler and paler" (1975, 608). In other words, make sure that human beings can take themselves back to the authenticity of themselves regarding the present and not bygone days; for the negation of spirit, spirit encountering the negative and returning back to itself, can also become a stagnant journey, wherein the individual resides within the negative and cannot find the path back to its reflected self. Hegel states Geist must be "presented to itself as its own object" and then find and reflect upon itself (1975, 14). In other words, he stresses that thinking outside of the self in connections with the external world, recovers part of the self in the ultimate goal of self-consciousness. Thus, I assert that if Spirit does not present to itself its own object, meaning a matter or entity, but presents dead matters or entities from bygone days, then risks become evident; for people may not be capable of grasping the negative within the journey back to authentic spirit and become encased within their own portraits. Hegel's journey is a lengthy and arduous dialectical journey; and even though he provides insight in cognizing why Spirit can roam in a lost state of possible no return, he does not, however, chart a designated map for individuals in reaching that journey.

Desire and Symbolic Deconstruction

In drawing the portrait of Hegel regarding the encasement of self, I assert that contemplation on desire and need begin to map a path for reaching the journey to thinking. Hegel's master-slave is, perhaps, the key example of his dialectic, whereby neither character can become themselves without their opposition. The master needs the slave for enjoyment of the slave's labor; the slave needs his or her work because it frees the slave to make external what has come from within the inner spirit. Recognition of the other is acknowledged. Hegel insists that if one of the adversaries slays the other, "he can no longer be recognized by the other" (1969, 14). However, if within the fight for recognition both adversaries "perish in the fight," consciousness is annihilated (Kojève 1969, 14). Thus, Hegel deduces from his theory that the desire for both master and slave to live will result in their need for each other; but Lacan asserts that Hegel falls short in thinking he has measured desire to the correct level of assessment. According to Lacan, Hegel believes the desire of the master in relation to the slave stands resolved. Lacan insists that Hegel's view needs reassessment, as the master's position does not adduce the appropriate relation to desire through "an original relation to the assumption of death" (1998, 255). Thus, Lévinas emphasizes not only does society need to draw the portraitist, but it needs to "psychoanalyze the psychoanalyst" (1998, 25). Therefore, analysis of Lacanian desire and its depth proves necessary.

For Lacan, the problem lies in desire within the relation to death. According to Lacan, the unconscious desire's voice is low, but its insistence is "indestructible" (1998, 255). Therefore, I ask when people reduce themselves to past accomplishments, ideologies, and dead deeds, do their necrological identities take on what Lacan references as the "sufferings of neurosis and psychosis" (2003, 624), which then become their institution for the passions of dead souls? Lacan states when "psychoanalytic scales" tilt, they threaten "entire communities," producing a blueprint for "the deadening of the passions of the city" (Lacan 2003, 624). For my argument, with only an interlocutor reduced to the concepts of a reversible past, concepts promote the need for dead souls to exterminate any present passions of society in order to keep their necrological identities within the trace of history that nurtures impersonal discourse to the point of safe passage to past eras of their choosing.

Psychoanalyzing Lacan as the psychoanalyst is critical in unearthing his layer of understanding desire so as to cognize why and how people can become trapped within their own necrological identities. Lacan's concept of desire is comprehending desire not as a craving but as capricious and voracious (1998, 278). Authentic recognition of the I and comprehension of its underlying aggressors become vital for the conscious I to function properly in order to comprehend the torment of neurosis as a danger to other and the whole of society; for torment feeds neuroses (Lacan 2003, 624). Lacan asserts society must find a mode of "symbolic reduction" to institute a "genetic order" in the buttresses of the conscious I, so the conscious I can detect the return of its unconsciousness in a "more archaic stage" of alienation and paranoia against a presupposed enemy (2003, 623). Therefore, Lacan warns that society needs to recognize existentialism has instigated "subjective dilemmas," as the personality who can only "realize itself in suicide" through the satisfaction of the "Hegelian murder" (2003, 624). In other words, no recognition occurs because all are murdered. In cases such as these, I assert that not only does society have the potential to see only a lingering insurgent upon viewing the Media portrait of the necrological identity, that of the murderer, but also the tendency to misrecognize a living necrological identity, which stands before them, because their own present I cannot come to fruition due to the façade of what Lacan calls "the illusion of autonomy" (2003, 623). No self-consciousness is the Hegelian terror. I highlight the tendency in which members of society look for mundane impressions of freedom causing unconsciousness to err in recognition. Thus, humanity is at a crossroads in need of the deconstruction of desire through symbolic meanings.

In examining a symbolic reduction of desire, Lacan posits his idea of focusing on the "object that causes" desire, and not the object of satisfaction (Lacan 1998, 195). However, the movement of the drive focuses in the creation of itself, and in its connection to all other drives. For example, the subject, divided at birth by drives, solidifies into a signifier, a signifier for an additional signifier, and still another, in other words, as many signifiers as drives. Thus, Lacan asserts the unconscious unlocks and locks itself, but its essence is to mark the time in which the subject is born "divided" (1998, 199). Therefore, Lacan states the innovative painter has the potential to construct a dialogue of symbolic reduction, which can transform the fragmented self into an image (1998, 106). To clarify, the artist equates a delusion to the object, as *Trompe l'oeil* of painting in deceiving the eye, yet not interchanging with the gaze seems momentarily to be something other than what it is. According to Lacan, "*trompe-l'oeil* is the soul" (1998, 112). Thus, both physically and symbolically viewing Kurt Wenner's street fresco, *Dies Irae*, brings to the forefront the object of cause rather than satisfaction, due to the absent gaze. Lacan reveals that the "object of the drive" positions itself as a "headless subjectification" (1998, 185), as is evident in the bottom and top of the fresco revealing the very meaning of the work, day of wrath. With headless persons functioning as misplaced objects, yet existing in the drive, sadistic desire proves to survive in a crowd of configurations as neuroses through portraiture of a symbolic portrayal.

Lacan asserts that in fantasy the unperceived subject remains present in any way the fantasy dictates, by dream or day-dream. However, when perversion comes into play, or the reverse effect of fantasy, the subject does not establish the function of the object but defines him or herself as object when confronted with divisionism. In viewing the street fresco, the viewer has a symbolic opportunity to see the lost journey in searching for the present I, as well as an image of the

necrological identity as object of sadistic desire. Lacan asserts that seeing oneself comes back to the subject, while hearing oneself goes outward toward the other. Equally important to Lacan, the ears of the unconscious are the only cavity that cannot be sealed. Since the unconscious unlocks and locks itself, marking the time of divisionism of the self within the drives can provide a pathway for the subject to see itself apart from the drives; yet how does society reach the opening in keeping people from allowing the possibility of necrological identities? If hearing oneself goes out toward the other, then Lévinas' discussion on desire and need follows the trace of the human face as expression, displaying the importance of extending outward to a face-to-face encounter of personal discourse with the human other.

The Trace of the Other

In continuing to draw the portraitist and psychoanalyze the psychoanalyst, Lévinas, in opposition to Hegel, argues that "work does not proceed from need;" instead, "need is the return" to self (1986, 350). In Hegel's return, Lévinas claims "absolute thought" returns to self: "the identity of the identical and the non-identical in consciousness" reveal self-identification as "infinite thought," but devoid of the other (1998, 137). To clarify, need unlocks a world "for-me," while desire constitutes "the need of him who has no more needs," in other words, does not crave after self (1986, 350). Desiring another comes to fruition in a person on the opposite side of everything possibly lacking or satisfying him or her. Lévinas deduces that the movement toward the other does not make a person complete or content; instead, the relationship with the other draws people into questioning themselves, excavating themselves, while continually uncovering new resources for themselves (1986, 350, 351). Desiring the human other does not fulfill a person's desire, rather "hollows it out," while nurturing that person with "new hungers," thus revealing desire as "goodness" (Lévinas 1986, 351). The other is presented in the context of the "cultural whole," while the appearance of the whole is lit by the "light of the world" (Lévinas 1986, 351). This light is each person's own cultural resourcefulness, "the corporeal, linguistic, or artistic gesture," articulating and revealing (1986, 351). The presence of the other comes as a face, alive and in the present, expressing him or herself and accelerating through the very "plastic essence" of itself (Lévinas 1986, 351). The first stage of discourse for Lévinas is the face of expression. However, Lévinas counsels that when a face enters a person's world, then it imposes on that person a responsibility not to become deaf or forget the "wretchedness" associated with that face; thus, consciousness of that person is not called into question, rather a question is put into place of consciousness (1986, 352).

In other words, Lévinas asserts that a "confused consciousness," meaning concealed prior intentions returning from consciousness, is not action but "passivity" (1986, 142). Bad consciousness is "without intentions, without aims," without contemplation of itself and a "presence that fears presence," fears the persistence of the "identical, stripped bare of all attributes" (Lévinas 1998, 143). In other words, before any wrongdoing, bad consciousness timidly withdraws into unconscious identity so as to delay any confirmation of the return to its self-identity. The unconscious identity becomes passive from the very beginning. Thus, passivity must be placed into question, not as inactivity, but as discourse, expression, and gesture. Therefore, when I am face-to-face in expression with the other, responsibility calls me and demands my regard for the other; indifference cannot take place because of the risk of death for the other. For Lévinas, the questioning of passivity of the other begins the process among members of society in "inter-human" relations with their "neighbor," constituting meaning (1998, 146). The Lévinasian just interlocutors may fear the other, fear the death of the other, and mourn their own deaths, but when fear returns to itself, it does not cause anxiety for their death. "Ethical awakening and vigilance" come to fruition from such "affective turbulence" (1998, 146). Therefore, the just interlocutor is a crucial component to intersubjectivity.

For Lévinas, the function of a just interlocutor is paramount, for discourses between the I's as "respondent and responsible" constitute the meaning of "interindividuality" (1998, 26). Lévinas asks a poignant question of how people can see themselves as faces. Since the face is expression for Lévinas, he states that what "escapes understanding" in a person is the being itself (Lévinas 1998, 9). Thus, an interlocutor, the just voice between self and other, is an essential person outside the realm of the framed self. Lévinas believes "exteriority without violence is the exteriority of discourse" (1998, 22). Violence negates individuality and possession induces denial; but Lévinas asserts that in this situation of violence and possession, members of society have not looked solely at the face of the other being. Therefore, to be in a "relationship with the other face to face – is to be unable to kill" (Lévinas 1998, 10). At this point, Lévinas asserts discourse begins and leads to the trace of the good.

The Call to the Trace of the Good

To comprehend Lévinas's theories regarding desire as the good, the eyes of the ego search in the external world for a covenant of peace, a search for eyes of the external other who will look upon the ego and "awaken responsibility" in the external other (1998, 208). Lévinas argues that "all love-unless it becomes judgment and justice- is the love of the couple," a closed society of privilege and preference (1998, 21). A society of two resists "universality," (1998, 20); but for Lévinas, the "morality of respect presupposes the morality of love" (1998, 21). In other words, Lévinas indicates that love of the couple "blinds respect" in regards to the third party, and is a "pious intention oblivious to real evil" (1998, 21). Being a third party, an intruder on the intimacy, evolves into a daunting task. Lévinas asserts that the absolute interlocutor is a person

who maintains justice and turns the face toward the interlocutor. According to Lévinas, “faces are masks,” thus, society should look behind the masks to the “clockwork and microscopic springs of souls” (1998, 24). Perhaps, Dostoevsky captures this symbolism best in the words of the Elder, “a man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie...does not discern truth...ceas[es] to love...and in his vices reaches complete bestiality” (qtd. in Dostoevsky 1990, 44). A glance into the microscopic soul brings to light the full extent of necrological discourse and its identities. Thus, in embracing the thoughts of Lévinas, people cannot “let the other die alone,” for this desire is the good for humankind in making a path out of instrumentality into reflection for the other who will still return to the conscious self (1998, 105). Asymmetry is significant for Lévinas and composes the second important aspect of love, the realization of forgiveness.

Lévinas states “the I capable of forgetting its past and renewing itself” frees itself through forgiveness...since the only victim of the act consented or was able to consent to forget it” (1998, 19). Lévinas believes dialogue can “recover forgiveness” (1998, 9). The just interlocutor reminds the ego of human frailty and that anger and resentment can lead to hatred of self and other. Hatred in its essence is murder, as hatred ingests self and other. Relinquishing anger and resentment balances the asymmetrical act of hate. Spinoza believes “hatred vanquished by love passes into love; and love is thereupon greater, than if hatred had not preceded it” (Russell 1945, 580). Society may ask how this concept of forgiveness is possible when people are asked to bear insufferable loss through an unjustifiable, senseless act of murder?

Lévinas states, “there is a certain measure of violence necessary in terms of justice,” for societies need the necessary positions of judges, institutions, and the state (1998, 105). For Lévinas, totality insists upon an autonomous being controlling another, but “if violation of one free being by another is injustice, totality can be constituted only by injustice” (1998, 27). In other words, people cannot forget such acts of violence, of senseless waste; it will remain with them because grief affects them to the core of being. However, people can relinquish anger or resentment and free themselves from deterioration of such injustice. Nurturing the other for empowerment in love as justice and forgiveness helps the human other stride toward Lévinas’s theory that “injustice cannot be achieved in the society of love” when forgiveness invalidates it (1998, 27). The just interlocutor can aid in the process of looking upon the eyes of the human other and searching in the external world for “a vow of peace” (Lévinas 1998, 208). A search for peace will “awaken responsibility” toward the trace of the good in keeping the human other from falling prey to the necrological world of identities.

Conclusion

Returning to the driving question of whether society can possibly exist in the face of nihilism stemming from the necrological discourse of uncertainty takes society to the place of examination in the residency within the trace of history. In the unreservedly past absent, human idealism and isolated acts lead to necrological identities at the risk of permanent inclusion. Sketching the portrait of Hegel and his concept on the trace create an image of the Lévinasian theory that impersonal discourse breeds dangers in the present from dwelling within dead deeds that produce dead souls. Hegel’s journey back to self in its possibility of a stagnant journey clarifies how people can become stalled within their own portraits. Analyzing Lacan’s extended view on desire and in probing its depth of existence offers insight to the divided self, its sufferings of neurosis and psychosis, while revealing that symbolic portrayal allows for an image of recognition of the unconscious. With the extension of the trace to the other, the journey back to self with the inclusion of the other, and desire as goodness for the other, Lévinas reveals that a face-to-face encounter brings forth a series of questionings in probing the necessary elements for ethical awakening and awareness. The just interlocutor and the faces of expression, gesture, and personal discourse begin the path that transfers the good to the human other for hope in existing in a world of uncertainties. Lévinas awakens this world to “the insomnia of the psyche before the finitude of being, wounded by the infinite, is moved to withdraw into a hegemonic I” (1998, 222).

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