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# Trauma at the Limit: Bearing Witness to the Impossible of Survivor Testimony

Travis J. Hall

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TRAUMA AT THE LIMIT: BEARING WITNESS TO THE IMPOSSIBLE OF  
SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Travis J. Hall, M.A.

December 2015

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Travis J. Hall

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TRAUMA AT THE LIMIT: BEARING WITNESS TO THE IMPOSSIBLE OF  
SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

By

Travis Hall

Approved November 20<sup>th</sup> 2015

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## ABSTRACT

# TRAUMA AT THE LIMIT: BEARING WITNESS TO THE IMPOSSIBLE OF SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

By

Travis J. Hall

December 2015

Dissertation supervised by Leswin Laubscher, Ph.D.

This dissertation explores what it means to bear witness to trauma at the limits of intelligibility. Faced by survivor testimony, clinical psychology finds itself caught in a double-bind between the lucidity of knowledge and the enigmatic horror of traumatic suffering. Despite this double-bind, bearing witness has nevertheless been guided by a promise that assumes an inherent intelligibility to survivor testimony and traumatic experience. Performing an analysis of intelligibility reveals that such an approach to witnessing privileges the structures of presence and immanence. A particular reading of the book of Job reveals an accusation: that clinical psychology participates in theodicy by reducing the excess of traumatic suffering to the Law. Given that this accusation rests on a disturbance that breaks with the structures of intelligibility, we continue to explore the concept of the aporia as well as its deconstructive implications for approaching survivor

testimony. Turning to the heroic interpretations of traumatic death and suffering offered by existential psychology, I argue that theodicy does indeed persist in our modern interpretations of traumatic suffering. Drawing on Levinas's analysis of pain, suffering, and death, we encounter the disastrous elements of trauma that reveal radical limits to intelligibility, demanding a rethinking of what it means to bear witness. Finally, the dissertation offers what it means to bear witness through the experience of tears, and of fear and trembling.

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Special recognition and heartfelt gratitude goes to my director, Dr. Leswin Laubscher. My failed attempts to find the words to express my feelings towards you at the culmination of the dissertation perhaps demonstrates that the aporia does not only relate to suffering but also to the bonds of friendship. Where words seem to fail to adequately acknowledge what one has received, I humbly express my gratitude for all of our conversations, jokes, and musings over the years. Thank you for believing in me during those moments when I had lost all confidence in myself. Thank you for helping me hold and honor the tension as I struggled to speak the unspeakable. Finally, thank you for insisting that I (finally) sign my name to this work in order to more fully bear my responsibility for this project to which I am most passionate. Granted the responsibility of my signature, this dissertation is not properly “mine”, as it bears the traces of your teaching.

I also want to acknowledge my parents, Chuck and Molly Hall, and my siblings Heather, Dan, and Sarah. I feel incredibly blessed to have such a loving and supportive family. Much of the credit for my accomplishments can be traced back to our familial bonds and to our experiences at Hillcrest farm.

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## Introduction

*Now Job had three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Namathite. When these friends heard of all the calamities that had come upon him, each of them left his own country to mourn with Job and to comfort him. They met at an appointed place and went on together. When they arrived and saw Job from a distance, they could barely recognize him. They cried out, and tore their clothing, and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat with him for seven days and seven nights. And no one said a word, for they saw how great his suffering was.*

- Job 2:11-13<sup>1</sup>

The story of Job is one of the most famous accounts of traumatic suffering. As the story goes, Job is a man of “perfect integrity”, a man who enjoyed a loving family, sustained prosperity, and good health: a man who, through no fault or sin of his own, loses everything in a disaster of catastrophic proportions. The lasting power and import of Job’s story could easily be motivated by a characterization of Job as an archetype of the survivor, if by archetype one means an organizing figure that demonstrates essential structures that illuminate the truth of trauma. That may well be, but I propose that we also tend to think of Job akin to a traumatic ghost who refuses to rest in peace, and not (just) because we have yet to satisfy his lament (Why me? What have I [we] done to suffer so? Why would God permit suffering at all?): but rather because Job demands an infinite and impossible justice, the echoes of his mournful imperative heard in the traumatic suffering that faces us on all sides. These voices call out to us, haunt us, expose us to that which resists our grasp, and draw us out from the familiar security of hearth and home. Job’s friends are similarly called from the comfort and security of their homes to do something, anything, to comfort their friend in his time of need and despair. Job’s friends come because they

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical citations refer to Stephen Mitchell’s (1979) translation *The Book of Job*. Harper Perennial: New York, NY.

love him, because they care. Like them, we too come from all over - we too come in response to suffering because we care. But as psychologists, social workers, or health care providers of various sorts, we also come to suffering, and heed the call of those who suffer, precisely prepared with specialized knowledge and techniques. Yet, our knowledge and education notwithstanding, we are often silenced, just like Job's friends; we are often lost for words in the face of trauma and suffering, in such overwhelming excess of reason or calculus. The address of the suffering other, Job's address, exposes us as it does him – it lays bare the burden of a responsibility beyond my consent or acknowledgment.

As psychologists we approach the suffering other anticipating what we will encounter by our knowledge, by our understanding, and by our expertise. We approach with a *promise* to make Job's suffering intelligible, or at least to learn from it. But Job, once familiar to his friends, has now been made strange, frightfully uncanny, both recognizable and not. A radical disturbance is afoot or has been wrought. We encounter a disaster, we are in the midst of a disaster, and we are claimed by a disaster, the knowledge of which reveals the very inadequacy of knowledge. We do not *grasp* Job's suffering as much as we are *exposed* to it; it touches us, but we do not touch back - we cannot get it in our grips. As Caputo (1993) reminds us, the disaster is to have lost one's guiding star [a *dis* (ill) + *astrum* (star)], to wander in the starless black of night. And again, not unlike Job's friends, in the face of such unknowing, we too turn to our rituals of mourning – we seek some guidance, which is to say, knowledge, in the accumulated ways and wisdom of our group and community. Perhaps, even, we are aware of a shift that occurs here: concerned for our friend, seeking to comfort our friend, oriented towards the other in our reaching out to him, faced as we now are with the enormity of the disaster, our

rituals serve as well to comfort *us*, to provide *us* with solace and shelter, and in so doing to reach out, and away, from the other.

And then, thereafter: silence. Interminable. Aporetic silence, which is not simply the absence of speech, the harmony between something and nothing, but rather a silence which gestures to an enigmatic limit. This silence reveals the double-bind that claims Job's friends: they must bring their knowledge to bear on his suffering and yet they are also obligated beyond knowledge, to *bear witness* to the excess of his suffering that exceeds comprehension. This is not to say that Job's suffering is simply beyond the powers of their vision and grasp, but rather that traumatic suffering reveals a radical obligation that issues from a signification that is otherwise than knowledge. Perhaps better stated, it reveals a double-bind and, in being doubly obliged, we are all Job's friend.

### **The Double-Bind of Survivor Testimony:**

This dissertation emerges from the conviction that there are dimensions of suffering that push theory and knowledge to the limits of their intelligibility. While these features may not be exclusive to traumatic suffering, the limits of intelligibility are often powerfully experienced when reading the testimonies of trauma survivors. The voices that issue from the experience of combat, torture, genocide, from state sanctioned and man-made mass death, challenge the lucidity of theory that promises to render the horror of trauma intelligible. This dissertation is therefore primarily concerned with what it means to bear witness to trauma at the limits of intelligibility, to the moments where intelligibility is, or at least appears, impossible. By choosing to focus on "trauma at the limit", this project cannot help but begin in the middle of a double-bind to which Cathy Caruth (1995) provides an initial and cogent description:

But the study and treatment of trauma continue to face a crucial problem at the heart of this unique phenomenon: The problem of how to help relieve suffering, and how to understand the nature of this suffering, without eliminating the force and truth of the reality that trauma survivors quite often try and transmit to us. (p.vii)

Humankind has struggled for millennia with the suffering we now refer to as trauma, and clinical psychology has clearly made important contributions from its specialized and particular approach to the issue. Despite the progress and successes it claims however, clinical psychology remains challenged by the stories and accounts of survivors of man-made mass death and trauma – so called “witnesses” whose “testimonies” have been scrutinized by a wide range of scholars, scientists, and psychologists who have all brought their respective learned and professional methods and theories to bear on those accounts in an effort to extract some degree of intelligibility from them, to *account* for them in explanation and understanding, in other words. But as Caputo (2004) points out, the traumatic past is haunted by voices that demand a justice that no intelligibility can deliver. The stories, the testimonies these survivors offer is of a history which Caputo describes quite poetically as written in “prayers and tears”; and as such, as tears and prayers challenge the clear and the accessible – perhaps even the “scientific” - explanation, so too the field of traumatology, and the dark shadow of the Holocaust especially, continue to shake the intellectual foundations of modern thought; of all thought.

In his recently published book *Witnessing Witnessing*, Thomas Trezise (2013) points out that the field of Holocaust studies is entering an unprecedented phase as the *living* memories of survivors is flickering and will soon fade in the eclipse of mortality: survivor experience will soon be contained entirely within the archive. In response to this growing awareness, there has been a dramatic emphasis on collecting and preserving survivor testimony over the past three

decades, which Trezise (2013) diagnoses as the “anxiety of historical transmission”. However, Trezise (2013) astutely points out that the dangers signaled by this anxiety cannot be assuaged by merely archiving survivor testimony alone, but rather demands a reckoning with the profoundly complex issues surrounding the *responsibility of reception*:

Yet transmission has as much to do with reception as with production, and anxiety is a feeling that pertains to the uncertainty of the future—in this instance, a future in which the fate of Holocaust survivor testimony will depend entirely on its reception by those who ‘were not there’ (p.1)

This deceptively simple observation does not only concern those who study and interpret Holocaust survivor testimony, but raises questions at least as old as the Book of Job regarding the manner in which one is *bound ethically* or *obligated* in being *addressed* by the survivor. In response to these questions, one encounters the often invoked but rarely scrutinized concept of *bearing witness*. In the moving essay titled, *Why I Write: Making No Become Yes*, Elie Wiesel (1985) confesses, “I never intended to be a philosopher, or a theologian. The only role I sought was that of witness” (p.13). In traumatology and the Holocaust in particular, the survivor as witness has been a dominant theme to which preeminent scholars such as Terrence Des Pres (1976), Dori Laub (1992), Shoshana Felman (1992) and Giorgio Agamben (1999) have offered profound and thought-provoking insights. However, forced now to reckon with the dawning of an age where all that remains of the survivor as witness will be their archived testimony, entrusted to people who “were not there”, it is imperative that we shift the question of what it means to bear witness to those of us who did not see with our own eyes the horror in question. While the historical brink upon which Holocaust testimonies now rests powerfully highlights the disturbance of these questions, they are relevant to testimonies from other forms of state-

sanctioned violence such as combat, torture, and genocide that will soon, if not already, exist only in the archive. Widening the scope of these questions beyond the Holocaust is not to deny the singularity of traumatic events and the important differences between them. Trauma certainly cannot be de-politicized by removing it from the web of contexts in which it occurs in order to discover some supposedly trans-historical and/or trans-cultural universal essence. However, if one grants that limits of intelligibility were powerfully revealed by the Holocaust, are we not confronted by this limit in the traumatic violence that rages into the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Looking back on the prayers and tears of the past, do we not find instances of trauma at the limit haunting the intelligibility of history? Given that psychological theories of trauma share in the responsibility for the fate of survivor testimony, we must ask the question, what does it mean for the clinical psychologist to bear witness, particularly at the limits of intelligibility?

Psychologist and Apartheid scholar Leswin Laubscher (2010) offers an initial point of departure for our understanding of witness and witnessing as it is commonly understood, by turning to our familiarity with the term in our legal and juridical categories. The witness is typically regarded as a person who experiences, or is at least present, during an event in question and, by virtue of their firsthand knowledge, is able to offer testimony to its “truth”. Often regarded as evidence, Laubscher (2010) points out that the testimony of the “eye-witness” is granted particular esteem by its capacity to render the truth intelligible.<sup>2</sup> As exemplified at the Nuremburg trials, this notion of (eye)witness is readily applicable to the survivor, highlighting the belief that their testimony contains the capacity to represent the truth of what happened. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Laubscher (2010) notes that sight enjoys a hegemonic privilege in the hierarchy of the senses regarding knowledge, which he criticizes in a manner resonant with the work of Levinas, Derrida, and Caputo. This privileging will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter

not surprising, therefore, that clinical psychology often turns to survivor testimony in order to investigate and discover the truth of traumatic experience so that it becomes known and understood. However, moving from the “truth” offered by the survivor to the “truth” offered by psychological theories of trauma complicate the notion of witness considerably. Put another way, translating or representing the truth of the survivor into the truth of psychological theory and psychological terms, prove to be a thorny undertaking.

The psychologist is typically fated to a late arrival; called to the scene of trauma only after the violence has already taken place. Like a detective who is called only after the crime has been committed, the clinical psychologist is charged with picking up the pieces to understand and to heal an already shattered world. Given this belated relationship to the traumatic event, the psychologist is not a witness in the manner in which the survivor is witness. Continuing to borrow from legal descriptors, the psychologist is more akin to an “expert witness” who, unlike the eye-witness of the survivor, offers testimony in the form of a sophisticated and authoritative opinion. As a credentialed expert, Laubscher (2010) argues that the clinical psychologist as witness illuminates and “brings to sight” an intelligibility that evades the obvious, offering a more penetrating view of the event or experience in question. To bear witness as an expert, such as a clinical psychologist, is to deliver on a promise that has already been made but yet to be fulfilled.

Holocaust scholar Geoffrey Hartmann (2002) points out that the legitimacy of academic disciplines has long been granted by a promise of intelligibility and this is clearly the case for clinical psychology regarding psychological trauma. This includes the descriptions of what it means for the clinical psychologist to bear witness. For example, psychologist and psychoanalyst Nancy R. Goodman (2012) writes in her book *The Power of Witnessing: Reflections*,

*Reverberations, and Traces of the Holocaust*, “Witnessing is a powerful force that allows massively traumatic experiences to become *known* and *communicated*” (p.3, my emphasis). As a modality of knowing, this characterization of witnessing assumes an inherent intelligibility to what is being witnessed. To bear witness to survivor testimony, according to Goodman, is to discover its intelligibility as a form of knowledge, capable of being communicated in a commonly shared language. Clinical psychology, broadly defined as the integration of science, theory, and practice to understand, predict, and alleviate maladjustment, disability, and discomfort as well as to promote human adaptation, adjustment, and personal development, continues to evolve in accordance to the promise of intelligibility.<sup>3</sup> The sub-specialty of traumatology has inherited the debt of this obligation, and despite its vast theoretical and methodological diversity, the study of psychological trauma is nonetheless united by its legitimating promise.

The invocation of bearing witness does not simply refer to epistemological discovery, but as both researcher and clinician, the psychologist is called upon to apply expert knowledge in the service of *healing* these traumatic wounds. In her analysis of Albert Camus’s *The Plague*, Shoshana Felman (1992) suggests that the selection of a physician as narrator reveals the act of bearing witness to be intimately bound to the healing of traumatic suffering:

Camus’ choice of the physician as the privileged narrator and the designated witness might suggest that the capacity to witness and the act of bearing witness in themselves embody some remedial quality and belong already, in obscure ways, to the healing process. (p.4)

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<sup>3</sup> This definition of clinical psychology is taken from the Clinical Psychology Division (12) of the American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org/divisions/div12/aboutcp.html>

Bearing witness to trauma and survivor testimony as physician or psychologist consequently not only concern the discovery of intelligible truth in the manner of a “scholar-expert” say, but also invokes the “healer-expert”, so to speak, in the vitally important aim that is healing or “curing” the survivor from his or her traumatic wounds. Both instances, inasmuch as we can separate them, are reliant and dependent on an understanding, if not explanation, of the trauma. Indeed, as the physician of psychological injuries, the imperative of bearing witness goes to the heart of the psychologist’s clinical activities as well as his or her scholarly pursuits. As we will see in the next chapter, the act of bearing witness and the promise of intelligibility are understood at the very least to be complementary, if not synonymous, obligations of the clinical psychologist. Bound to the promise of intelligibility, bearing witness is a response *par excellence*.

However, traumatic suffering continues to pose profound challenges to the promise of intelligibility as Hartmann (2002) points out, referencing Holocaust studies specifically: “...the scholars most deeply involved often admit an ‘excess’ that remains dark and frightful, while they continue to generate explanatory hypotheses” (p.4). This excess exposes the psychologist to trauma at the limits of intelligibility and knowledge. Taking a brief moment for reflection, and to relate to the previous observations more directly and experientially, perhaps readers may acknowledge instances of this “excess”, sometimes also referred to as the unspeakable, the incomprehensible, as evil, or as Colonel Kurtz utters at the end of *Heart of Darkness*, “the horror, the horror”. In our everyday lives, do we not shake our heads in stunned silence and disbelief when we read the obituaries of murdered children, hear eulogies given by grieving parents, the unsettling silence of communities in tatters? When we read the words of women who survived the rape camps of the Bosnian war or listen to a mother choke up while reading the suicide note of her son destroyed by multiple combat tours, do we not find the clarity of our

vision clouded by the welling up of tears? Are we not faced by this dark and frightful excess in the testimonies that cry out from Rwanda, Darfur, Syria, and the killing fields of Cambodia? Do we not continue to struggle with the limits of “truth” and “reconciliation” from the ghosts of South African Apartheid? Have we discovered yet the intelligibility of the horror recalled by the atrocities of the Gulags of the former U.S.S.R? The horror of My Lai? The War on Terror? Guantanamo Bay? The list of disasters goes on and on.

Perhaps one has been exposed to this limit in therapy sessions when what traumatized patients have expressed to us seems to overflow, even shatter, our theoretical frameworks. I imagine that many of us can resonate with the response of Job’s friends who, at least temporarily, know not where to go or how to proceed in the face of a disaster.

The crisis of intelligibility following the trauma of the Holocaust arises, however, not only from a question as to the features or dynamics of trauma “itself”, but also from a shift in epistemological assumptions between “modern” and “post-modern” modes of inquiry - a shift that has largely been ignored in clinical psychology. For these disasters do not only call into question *what* we know about traumatic suffering, but rather more radically call into question the assumptions regarding *how* we know, what it means to know. For many disciplines, Rosenau (1992) points out, the faith in knowledge championed by modernity has been profoundly shaken in the wake of horrors of the twentieth century:

Modernity entered history as a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality, but one can readily wonder whether that promise has been sustained. As we in the West approach the end of the twentieth century, the ‘modern’ record—world wars, the rise of Nazism, concentration camps (in both East and West), genocide, world-wide depression, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Persian Gulf, and

a widening gap between the rich and the poor—makes any belief in the idea of progress or faith in the future seem questionable. (p.5)

Confronted by the testimonies of survivors, the clinical psychologist seeking to bear witness is consequently challenged not only by *what* he or she hears, sees, or understands, but also *how* he or she hears, sees, or understands. The promise of intelligibility that has long guided what it has meant to bear witness must be reexamined, as we may have missed - in assuming the totality of intelligibility regarding traumatic suffering - what is most vital to bearing witness and the responsibility of reception in being addressed by the survivor.

Expounding on her analysis of the physician as key-witness in *The Plague*, Felman (1992) raises the question of a scandal between the imperative of bearing witness and the eruption of suffering from a radically incurable wound:

But the presence of the doctor as key-witness also tells us, on the other hand, that what there is to witness urgently in the human world, what alerts and mobilizes the attention of the witness and what necessitates the testimony is always, fundamentally, in one way or another, the scandal of an illness, of a metaphorical or literal disease; and that the imperative of bearing witness, which here proceeds from the contagion of the plague—from the eruption of an evil that is radically incurable—is itself somehow a philosophical and ethical correlative of a situation *with no cure*, and of a radical human condition of exposure and vulnerability. (1992, pp.4-5, author's emphasis)

If the capacity to heal rests on the capacity to know, which implies the intelligibility of the illness or wound, what happens if and when we are confronted by the “situation with no cure” or, stated otherwise, by trauma at its disastrous limit? What does it mean for the psychologist to bear witness when survivor testimony exposes the scandal, perhaps the obscenity, of the promise of

intelligibility? How is the psychologist to interpret the moments in survivor testimony that inspire adjectives such as the impossible or the unspeakable? Could it be that the address of the survivor and the responsibility of reception scandalizes the promise of intelligibility, gesturing to a feature of bearing witness that is not simply knowledge otherwise, but perhaps to an obligation that is otherwise than knowledge?<sup>4</sup>

What happens when the promise of intelligibility is brought to bear on testimonies of trauma at the limit, such as when Auschwitz survivor Wiesel (1985) writes,

No, I do not understand. And if I write, it is to warn the readers that he will not understand either. ‘You will not understand, you will not understand’ were the words heard everywhere during the reign of night. I can only echo them...Even if you read all the books ever written, even if you listen to all the testimonies ever given, you will remain on this side of the wall... (p.13, my omission)

Or as Sobibor survivor Chaim Engel (2000) writes,

I believe the story really cannot be told...Why? Because—I am not so strong in the language to explain it, but even the one who is strong in the language, he knows the expression, has the talent and everything—he still cannot tell the whole story. It is just impossible. (p.220)

Or, challenging those of us who place value on the meaning and healing of dreams, Vietnam veteran and author Tim O’Brien (1975/1999) writes,

Do dreams offer lessons? Do nightmares have themes, do we awaken and analyze them and live our lives and advise others as a result? Can the foot soldier teach anything

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<sup>4</sup> The phrasing of this sentence is deliberate, and prefigures a distinction Emmanuel Levinas (1974/1998) makes between “being otherwise” and “otherwise than being”. This distinction, along with other features of Levinas’s philosophy will be discussed in greater detail later in the dissertation.

important about war, merely for having been there? I think not. He can tell war stories.  
(p.32)

How are clinical psychologists to respond to this “truth” of survivor testimony which gestures towards the impossibility of truth, at least as it is contained in the intelligibility of a theory or a scholarly “understanding” of trauma? What is one to do, caught in this most serious of double-binds?

On the one hand, it is entirely possible to say there is nothing else to say, as scholar or psychologist, or to invoke a wholly mystical transcendence upon the horror of trauma at the limits. For example, filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, after participating in the French resistance during World War II, spent the following decade interviewing hundreds of Holocaust survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders for his epic documentary film *Shoah* (1985). A recognized expert, he was invited to the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis to speak about a film regarding the psychology of an infamous Nazi physician. Here he unleashed condemnation on what he called the “obscenity of understanding”

This is what I called the obscenity of the project of understanding—and more than this, it is not only obscenity, it is real cowardice, because this idea of being able to engender harmoniously, if I may say so again, this violence, is just an absurd dream of non-violence. It is a way of escaping; it is a way not to face the horror. And this escape has become now a fashion, more and more. (1995, p.207)

The intelligibility promised and delivered by our theories of trauma, for critics such as Lanzmann, is an obscenity by refusing to acknowledge the incomprehensibility of the horror of the *Final Solution*, an obscenity to which clinical psychology would not be exempt. However, and on the other hand, it is impossible to entirely abandon the powers of comprehension. A deep

appreciation for Lanzmann's passionate criticism notwithstanding, responding to the address of survivor testimony is more complicated than simply professing to not understand (which Lanzmann claimed was his "iron law" during the making of *Shoah*), for such a claim invariably remains founded upon an intelligibility that has already passed through the gates of knowledge. One cannot flee the double-bind by claiming not to understand, which is to understand all too well what one claims is incomprehensible.

To simply claim that trauma imposes no limits to the promise of intelligibility is to ignore powerful elements of survivor testimony. However, to simply claim that trauma is a horror beyond understanding is untenable because such a claim invariably already rests on a particular understanding of trauma. In *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive*, Agamben (1999) suggests that one should not resolve the double-bind before getting underway, but rather to respect its tension by attempting to tolerate its paradox: "Some want to understand too much and too quickly; they have explanations for everything. Others refuse to understand; they only offer cheap mystifications. The only way forward lies in investigating the space between these two options" (p.13). Or, as Lawrence Langer (1991) reports from the Fortunoff Video Archive: "'You won't understand' and 'you must understand' are regular contenders in the multiple voices of these testimonies..." (p.xiv).<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation attempts to take up Agamben and Langer's challenge, situating itself firmly within that tension. Truth be told though, this dissertation received its marching orders

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<sup>5</sup> In an endnote to his essay *Useless Suffering* (1982/1998), Levinas cites Maurice Blanchot speaking precisely and powerfully to this double-bind. "How can one philosophize, how to write in the memory of Auschwitz, of those who have said to us sometimes in notes buried near the crematoria: 'Know what has happened,' 'Do not forget,' and, at the same time, 'you will never know'? I think all the dead of the Gulag and all the other places of torture in our political century are present when one speaks of Auschwitz" (p.241 n.7).

much, much earlier, right there in the company of Job's three friends, caught in a double-bind, under the weight of a double-obligation.

## Chapter I: The Structures of Intelligibility

*Even before the technical ascendancy over things which the knowledge of the industrial era has made possible and before the technological development of modernity, knowledge, by itself, is the project of an incarnate practice of seizure, appropriation, and satisfaction. The most abstract lessons of the science of the future will rest upon this familiarity with the world that we inhabit in the midst of things which are held out to the grasp of the hand. Presence, of itself, becomes the now.*

- Emmanuel Levinas  
*Transcendence & Intelligibility* (1984/1996)

If we are to explore what it means to bear witness to trauma at the limit, we must first explore the phenomenology of intelligibility, the promise of which has exerted profound influence over the interpretation of survivor testimony. In order to understand the ways in which clinical psychology's approach to bearing witness is indebted to intelligibility, we turn to the analysis offered by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. According to Levinas, intelligibility reigns in all forms and experiences of signification, from the basic awareness of a consciousness that is always conscious of something<sup>6</sup> to the highly nuanced and penetrating knowledge offered by scholarly and scientific research. The notion of intelligibility, Levinas (1985/1998) points out, has been predominantly organized around the structures of visibility, granting privilege to the capacities of vision and to the knowledge derived from the act of seeing:

The sphere of intelligibility—of the meaningful—in which everyday life as well as the tradition of our philosophic and scientific thought maintains itself, is characterized by vision. The structure of a *seeing* having the *seen* for its object or theme... is found in all the modes of sensibility having access to things. (p.159, author's emphasis)

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<sup>6</sup> Consciousness finds itself already bound up in the promise of intelligibly insofar that consciousness is always conscious of something that signifies and is, therefore intelligible. The promise of intelligibility is not an action one takes, but rather is always already bound up with subjectivity.

Recalling Laubscher's observation regarding the hierarchy of the senses related to definitions of bearing witness, Levinas argues that the act of intelligibility is akin to a great eye carrying out the activity of seeing, and thus what is intelligible necessarily conforms to what is seen, to what is visible. The structure of visibility reigns in all things intelligible. But it is not the eye and vision that alone grants access to the intelligibility of the world, but also the hand and knowledge or knowing gained through *grasp*. Levinas remarks that intelligibility and knowledge is characterized as a seizure by way of the act of grasping: "Thought, *qua* learning, requires a taking, a seizure, a *grip* on what is learned, and a possession. The 'seizing' of learning is not purely metaphorical" (Levinas, 1983/1998, p.125). Intelligibility is defined by an engagement with the world that flows through our visual and tactile conceptual channels, necessarily adhering to the structures of visibility and of tactility, as capable of being *seen* and of being *grasped*.<sup>7</sup>

The privileging of vision and grasp regarding intelligibility is reflected by simple everyday affirmations such as "I see what you mean", or "I get what you are talking about". What is regarded as intelligible necessarily conforms to vision and grasp. In a pithy summary of Levinas's analysis of intelligibility, Adriaan Peperzak (1993) states, "Eye and hand, optical and grasping gestures, dominate our contact with things... They are present—even verbally—in its ideas, con-cepts, con-ceptions, visions, com-prehensions, per-spectives, views, etc." (p.162, my omission). Fundamental to the legitimacy of psychological research is the notion of "evidence", from the Latin *e + videre* meaning "from sight", that must demonstrate, from the Latin *monstrare* "to show", that which it proclaims to have made intelligible. The promise of intelligibility is a promise to illuminate the world, to bring the object of study to light so as to be available to the gestures of vision and grasp. Levinas (1947/2001) reveals that the promise of

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<sup>7</sup> Levinas (1984/1996) is emphatic on this point: "These metaphors are to be taken seriously and literally" (p.152).

intelligibility is an appropriation through light, approaching all it encounters as phenomena, meaning that which appears or is seen:

Whatever may be the physico-mathematical explanation of the light which fills our universe, phenomenologically it is a condition for phenomena, that is, for meaning...Light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us. Property constitutes the world; through light the world is given and apprehended. (p.40, my omission)

Light is the condition for meaning. Framing trauma as a phenomenon, and thus belonging to a world of light and structures of visibility, is fundamental to clinical psychology, as Cahill & Foa (2007) clearly point out; “For any theory to provide an adequate psychological account of PTSD ... First, it must address the *phenomenology* of PTSD” (p.55, author’s emphasis). Having noted that trauma poses a challenge to intelligibility by a certain limit and absence, it is in fact precisely there, such as when survivor testimony resists the illumination of our theories, gesturing to placement beyond vision and grasp that the promise of intelligibility operates quite markedly. It is in fact the response to a disturbance to the order of light; it is in fact precisely at this limit where the promise of intelligibility is made.

The predominant approach of clinical psychology to the disturbance of trauma is to regard it fundamentally as an epistemological problem, which is reflected by Sandra L. Bloom’s (2009) opening remarks in her chapter on trauma: “You cannot begin to solve a problem unless you have correctly identified exactly what the problem is” (p.145). Framing the double-bind of trauma as fundamentally an epistemological problem unifies the different theoretical paradigms that make up clinical psychology regardless of whether it is described in terms of cognition, physiology, behaviorism, humanism, existential-phenomenology, or the unconscious. However,

as Levinas points out, the disturbance of a problem already participates in the discovery of a solution, the promise to make a system of knowledge more refined and comprehensive:

The discordance that may be produced within this order proposes itself as an invitation to the search for a new order in which this first discord would be resolved: the discordance becomes a *problem*. The science of yesterday, before the new facts today, thus makes its way towards the science of tomorrow. (1965/1996, p.68, my emphasis)

The paradigm of the problem, as we will see, preserves a phenomenological structure on both sides of the double-bind, which guarantees a potential reconciliation in that its disturbance remains accessible to the grasping and seeing gestures of knowledge.

The promise of intelligibility pledged when facing trauma at the limit is then, and therefore, inextricably bound up with the *problematic*. To begin exploring this word and its conceptuality, I invoke philosopher Jacques Derrida's (1993) analysis which begins by referring to the etymology of the problematic as a *project*, as a task which one "poses" or "throws out in front of oneself" (p.11), in Greek as *pro* (forward) + *bellein* (thrown) and Latin as *pro* + *iacere*. A problem is, therefore, something I possess as one of my projects, as a task I actively take up and take on. It is important to note, as Derrida (1993) points out, the simultaneity of the problem and the project: there is not first a problem, to which one then responds with a project. Rather, as soon as a problem is identified as such, the activity of the project has already begun. As something I possess, a problem is always already engaged as a project. Having recognized trauma at the limit as a problem, it belongs to the inventory of projects taken up and taken on by clinical psychology. If it is granted that the notion of a project is an inherent dimension to the significance of the problematic, we ought to continue by asking, what is this project's task and what does it accomplish?

In order to respond to these questions, we must examine the situation in which a problem occurs. According to Derrida (1993, p.11), there is a problem “as soon as the edge-line is threatened”, by which he means as soon as there is an attempt to go beyond a limit or boundary, such as the limits in understanding and finding meaning in survivor testimony. Derrida (1993, p.11) immediately follows this up with, “And it is threatened from its first tracing”, by which he means that as soon as one encounters a limit *as a limit*, the project of its overcoming is already underway. Just as the framing of a question always already informs its answer, the problematic as a project always already implies its solution, threatening to overcome the disturbance of the limit. Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927/2010) provides succinct remarks on the relationship between a problem and a solution when he writes, “Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided by what is sought” (p.4). To formulate a question already implicitly structures the solution prior to knowing the specific answer. As Heidegger (1938/1977) goes on to point out elsewhere, “Explanation is always twofold. It accounts for an unknown by means of a known, and at the same time it verifies that known by means of that unknown” (p.121). The promise of intelligibility is a project that seeks to seize that which remains outside or “other” in relation to the order of the phenomenon. The structures of intelligibility are inevitably affirmed and verified approaching the double-bind as a problem, revealing the harmony between the known and the supposed unknown of trauma at the limit. By revealing that the problematic has its solutions built into its very structure, Derrida and Heidegger reveal that such a disturbance is not a barrier to the pursuit of intelligibility sought by scientific and scholarly research. On the contrary, the problematic is in the service of psychology’s project/promise by containing psychological trauma within the borders of the closed system of intelligibility. Approaching the double-bind of

survivor testimony as a problem threatens to overcome every limit by affirming that all that is encountered can be appropriated and known.

Revisiting Bloom's (2009) argument that one begins solving the problem of trauma by knowing exactly what the problem is, we now know that in fact one begins much earlier, which is to say as soon as there is a problem. Tracing the boundaries of the disturbance of the double-bind as a problem means that it is simultaneously framed in such a way that its limits are always already "threatened" of being overcome; the problematic has, to some extent, already invited and comprehended its solution. This is not to say that the encounter with the problematic is not frustrating or difficult, but it nevertheless swims with the current of the project of knowledge in that it affirms the very structures that make intelligibility possible. Indeed, there is an inherent optimism to the notion of the problematic for as soon as one has a problem, the triumph of the solution can already be heard. The overt tones of optimism can clearly be heard in clinical psychology, such as when renowned traumatologist Bessel Van Der Kolk (2010) cheerfully proclaims

It is likely that a quarter century from now we will look back on our current knowledge of PTSD with a combination of bemusement about how little we once understood, and a sense of awe about the brilliance of the clinical and scientific observations that for more than a century have helped our knowledge to gradually become more and more refined.  
(p.32)

This optimism is guaranteed insofar that even the most profound and complex problems are framed within the realm of the possible, accessible to the grasp of knowledge. Thus the promise of intelligibility is always made in good faith. A problem is the project of overcoming a

conditional obstacle on the road to intelligibility, a road that nevertheless continues on towards its ultimate destination.

**Immanence:**

From the perspective of intelligibility, trauma, as both a phenomenon and problem, belong to a world of immanence. Levinas applies the concept of immanence to identify and describe the assumptions regarding the intelligibility and the development of knowledge in the modern age. Drawing on the previously cited descriptions of vision and grasp, Levinas points out that these modes of apprehending the world rest on things being given<sup>8</sup> so as to be available to the gestures of knowledge. Data, the most fundamental concept of research, (from the Latin *datum*, meaning “given”), relates to the object of study as being given over to the inquiries of science. Briefly stated, immanence refers to the assumption that every encounter and every signification, even in their obscurity, is “given”, available and accessible to the gestures of knowledge, to seizure and appropriation. For Levinas (1975/1996), intelligibility refers to a world of immanence insofar that nothing remains exterior or beyond the (potential) grasp of knowledge: “Nothing can happen and nothing could have happened without presenting itself, nothing could be smuggled by without being declared, without being shown, without being inspected as to its truth” (p.134). Immanence refers to the totality of structures whereby everything and everyone can, potentially, be known, including the disturbances signified by epistemological problems.

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<sup>8</sup> Levinas is critical of this generosity, particularly regarding Heidegger’s “*es gibt*” of Being where Dasein is the receiver of gifts in the form of a world. Levinas contrasts the generosity of being with the horror of the *Il y a*, which he describes as anonymous, neutral, and indifferent. The benevolence of Being in Heidegger too closely resembles the benevolence of God, defended by Job’s friends. Matustik (2008) points out that Levinas re-opens “the wound of our age by raising anew Job’s fundamental question” when Levinas writes, “It is no longer Leibniz’s question of why is there something rather than nothing? But why is there evil rather than good?” (p.24)

Peperzak (1993) remarks that for Levinas, Western thought's ideal is the integration of everything within the totality of knowledge, an ideal that is only possible through immanence. If we continue with Levinas's analysis of immanence, we discover that it consists of two intertwining structures, that of presence (manifestation) and the present (temporality). As a phenomenon and/or as a problem, trauma is invariably regarded as belonging to the here-and-now, privileging that which is illuminated in the present: "The term present suggests both the idea of a privileged position in the temporal series and the idea of manifestation...a presence to the gaze and to speech, an appearing, a phenomenon" (Levinas, 1965/1996, p.66, my omission). Any and all phenomena, by definition, refers to a manifestation in space and time. Defined by the gestures of grasp and vision, the object of knowledge necessarily conforms to the structures of present/presence. Immanence means that all that signifies invariably is a reference to these structures. Disturbances, such as traumatic suffering, nevertheless take place in the here-and-now of immanence. Trauma is often framed as a locale, such as when Goodman (2012) refers to the Holocaust as a "dead space" whose intelligibility remains obscure and terrifying. Despite the obscurity and terror, this disturbance as a "space" maintains the possibility of access by virtue of its manifest presence. Consequently, Goodman describes the act of bearing witness as the psychologist and survivor visiting the "place" of Holocaust trauma, a locality in the present. Dori Laub (1992) similarly argues that bearing witness to survivor testimonies requires visiting the place/space of trauma: "The listener to trauma needs to know all this, so as to be a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone" (pp.58-59). As a manifest location present to the gestures of knowledge, trauma belongs to the empire of immanence.

Turning our attention to the temporality of immanence, Levinas (1985/1998) points out that intelligibility is inextricably bound up with the “now” of the present: “But once that step is taken, intelligibility and intelligence—being situated in thought, understood as vision and knowledge — consist in privileging, in the temporality of thought itself, the present in relation to the past and the future” (pp.160-161). Briefly stated, Levinas is highlighting the fact that the grasp of intelligibility cannot see or come to grips with that which does not share the same order of time, and therefore it privileges only what it can access in the omnipresence of the cotemporaneous now. Levinas (1984/1996) argues that intelligibility views time beyond the present as mere “temporal failures” that must be remedied by re-presentation. Intelligibility can only regard the past as a bygone present, which allows for this time gone by to be “re-presented” and made available by the powers of history and reminiscence. The future is the not-yet but soon to be present, which can be “re-presented” by forecasting and anticipating potential possibilities. The promise of intelligibility synchronizes the past and the future to the tune of the present by gathering temporality around the anchor point of the psychologist, whose knowledge stakes its claim in the present, thus marking off and defining the past and the future. Intelligibility references the power to re-present traumatic suffering and therefore nothing can, in an absolute sense, be lost to the past. Granted the powers to recover the past are limited, but nevertheless what is in question at one time belonged to the present. A brief example of this temporal privileging of the present in traumatology can be seen in the introduction of Herman’s (1997) seminal book, *Trauma and Recovery*, when she argues that the first step in studying trauma begins by gathering the past to the present: “...we have been cut off from the knowledge of our past. Like traumatized people, we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future. Therefore, an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering

history” (p.2). Framed as simply a bygone present, the traumatic past invariably remains capable of being represented, and thus available to gestures of knowledge. “Representation is the very possibility of a return, the possibility of the always, or of the presence of the present” (Levinas, 1975/1996, p.133). Indeed, many psychologists are interested in survivor testimony as representations of the traumatic past available in the present, and therefore available to research and inquiry. As a phenomenon, trauma is present (manifestation) in the present (time) and is thus immanent. Knowledge is an appetite that seeks satisfaction through appropriation, a satisfaction that is granted only by immanence.

What are the implications of this Levinasian analysis of intelligibility and immanence for our effort to give countenance to the suffering of trauma at the limit? Simply stated, immanence admits no limit, no constraint, is subject to no law (nomos) other than the law it gives itself (auto) because it appropriates all it encounters to its fundamental structures. The Levinasian concept of the Same is synonymous with immanence in that both refer to homogenous structures between knowledge and that which is encountered, making up a totality whereby nothing is “other”. Nothing remains foreign in a world of immanence because any alterity or otherness has been reduced to the structures that allow it to be appropriated as knowledge. The intelligibility of every signification remains possible insofar as it is available by being present. In his remarks on the “autonomy” of Western thought, Levinas (1951/1993) writes,

Perceived in this way, philosophy would be engaged in reducing to the Same all that is opposed to it as other. It would be moving toward an *auto-nomy*, a stage in which nothing irreducible would limit thought any longer, in which, consequently, thought, nonlimited, would be free. (p. 91, author’s emphasis)

Immanence refers to a limitless autonomy as no limit could be imposed outside or beyond knowledge. There may be conflict within this autonomy, but every disturbance is much like a civil war between citizens; there is no threat from the barbarian outside the borders of the empire. As Peperzak (1993) remarks, the law of immanence is its own law, given to itself by itself and recognizes no limit that would be foreign to its structures, namely the present and presence of phenomena: “The reduction of all alterity to the reflexive identity of a supreme consciousness is the ideal of autonomy, the legislation of the Same” (p. 45). The autonomy of immanence is maintained even when faced with the disturbance of the problematic for, as a project of knowledge, it is self-contained within an intelligibility that incessantly returns to itself. Furthermore, any promise or obligation would be self-imposed insofar that any imperative must first be appropriated and approved by knowledge. The promise of intelligibility is the pursuit of autonomy, to be bound first and foremost to knowledge gained through immanence.

Levinas and Derrida provoke a line of questioning that challenges whether or not a double-bind defined by immanence can truly be a double-bind at all. Can the encounter with limits of intelligibility in survivor testimony be best understood as unfolding within the totality of immanence? Or could there be an encounter with a limit whose disturbance fractures the totality of immanence, gesturing to a force that issues from beyond the autonomy of knowledge? Furthermore, we must ask whether the disturbance of this force is to be found only in the “data” of survivor testimony, or could the mere fact of being addressed by the survivor reveal an imperative, a sense of being bound or obligated, exposing psychology to something not only otherwise, but more fundamental, than knowledge and intelligibility? It is far too early to answer these questions now, for no doubt these concepts have not been adequately explored and remain too far removed from the concrete suffering described by trauma survivors. Therefore, we return

now to the book of Job to further explore and evaluate the promise of intelligibility in relationship to traumatic suffering through the position taken by Job's three friends.

## **Chapter II: Trauma Before the Law: Theodicy & Psychology**

*Perhaps the most revolutionary fact of our twentieth-century consciousness—but it is also an event in Sacred History—is that of the destruction of all balance between Western thought’s explicit and implicit theodicy and the forms that suffering and its evil are taking on in the very unfolding of this century.*

- Emmanuel Levinas  
*Useless Suffering* (1982/1998)

The book of Job is one of the oldest testimonies of traumatic suffering and many survivors, regardless of religious orientation, find powerful resonances with Job’s lament. Indeed, if one were to imagine Job walking into a psychologist’s office in the present day and describe the circumstances of his “symptoms”, the most appropriate diagnosis would likely be that of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. It may seem logical to begin our interpretation by focusing on Job as a victim of trauma given the similarities between him and more contemporary survivors. Approaching Job’s testimony as containing an intelligibility that would illuminate the truth of traumatic suffering would certainly be fruitful and consistent with the promise of intelligibility. However, if we engage with the book of Job to illuminate what it means for the clinical psychologist to bear witness (particularly to trauma at the limit), it is not enough to simply focus on Job as a trauma survivor. We must also ask ourselves, “Who represents the clinical psychologist?” Philosopher Philippe Nemo (1978/1988) points out that Job’s friends are not bystanders or mere acquaintances; rather they possess specialized knowledge regarding suffering and thus represent the “experts”. I wish, therefore, to first draw our attention to the approach and position not of Job but rather to his three companions.

In traditional society like Job's where science hardly evolves, old men are the counterparts to the scientists of our societies. They have accumulated great learning and experience, and therefore, not only must they be addressed with esteem and consideration, but their views and their directives must be studied as the most authoritative. (Nemo, 1978/1988, p.46)

Job's companions represent clinical psychologists at least insofar that they bear similar responsibilities, and that their opinions carry similar authority in their respective societies. If it is granted that the clinical psychologist is regarded as an expert by virtue of culturally recognized and valued credentials such as degrees, certifications, and licenses, these friends of Job are similarly respected by the culturally valued credentials of their age and position: "We are old; our beards are white; we speak with the wisdom of age" (Job 15:10). Despite possessing drastically different credentials within drastically different epistemologies, clinical psychologists and Job's friends are both legitimated and bound by the same promise of intelligibility. And like Job's expert friends, psychologists are uniquely called to bring this promise to bear on the horrific violence and suffering left in the wake of traumatic disasters. Job's friends, like clinical psychologists, find themselves caught in a double-bind when faced with Job's lament. On the one hand, they bear the responsibility to understand and to heal the suffering of their friend, yet on the other hand, they must reckon with the force of his suffering that, at least for seven days and nights, overwhelmed their powers of comprehension.

Emerging from this double-bind is perhaps what is best known from the book of Job, the passionate debate between Job and the expert opinions of his three friends. Job's lament breaks the seven days and nights of silence, as he beseeches God to damn the day of his birth, despairingly crying out, "My worst fears have happened; my nightmares have come to life.

Silence and peace have abandoned me, and anguish camps in my heart” (Job 3:25). As a devout man, Job led his life according to the divine law which had bestowed his existence with meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. However, notwithstanding the benefits he enjoyed up until this point steering so faithfully by this divine compass as he has, his life had now inexplicably run aground, into a disaster of traumatic proportions. Job desperately seeks to know and understand the reasons for his suffering which, once intelligible, would presumably make his affliction at least bearable – it would have a meaning. Job pleads, “Oh if only God would hear me, state his case against me, let me read his indictment. I would carry it on my shoulder or wear it on my head like a crown” (Job 31:35). But Job’s disaster remains beyond his comprehension, without meaning or justification - disturbing as a devastating rupture in the divine ordering of the world. Job’s testimony narrates a suffering which exceeds the intelligibility offered by his God, a God that has guided him his whole life, and by whose measure he lived his life. Yet, Job’s trauma now is beyond calculation: “If ever my grief were measured, or my sorrow put on a scale, it would outweigh the sands of the ocean: that is why I am desperate” (Job 6:2-3). Borrowing Caruth’s (1995) phrasing, the “force and truth” of Job’s testimony gestures towards an experience of trauma at the limit, calling into question the justice and intelligibility of divine law. Traumatic suffering, at least for Job, appears unavailable (perhaps radically so) to the grasping, seeing, and appropriating gestures of knowledge.

Enter Job’s friends, who – by their age, wisdom, and authorial status - are expert in comprehending and explaining the order of the world as their God willed and structured it. By that understanding, they refuse to accept that Job’s suffering lies beyond or outside the intelligibility offered by divine law. Philosopher and historian Susan Neiman (2004) identifies the response of Job’s three companions as one of the earliest origins of theodicy, the systematic

justification of God: “Theodicy, as systematic justification of suffering, and of God’s goodness in the face of it, originated not with Leibniz but with the oldest book of the Bible—in the person of Job’s friends” (p.291). The theodicy of Job’s friends leads them to believe that Job is mistaken in claiming that his suffering exceeds the intelligibility of a divinely ordered universe: “God never betrays the innocent or takes the hand of the wicked” (Job 9:17). Rather, they claim that Job’s suffering is intelligible within the law and can be integrated within the divine order. Traumatic disaster and suffering does not gesture towards that which is otherwise than the intelligibility promised by divine law, but it is rather the result of transgressing the law. In response to Job’s complaint that his suffering reveals the God to be unjust, his friends reply,

You say, ‘my conscience is clear’; you think that your life is spotless. But if God were to cross examine you and turned up your hidden motives and presented his case against you and told you why he has punished you—you would know that your guilt is great.  
(Job 11:4-6)

Sin is the diagnosis offered by the three friends, the cause of his suffering, and it follows logically from this conclusion that the healing remedy is to be a prescription of prayer and atonement: “You will pray, and he will hear you; he will grant you whatever you wish. Everything you do will succeed, and light will shine on your path” (Job 22:27-28). The talents of these experts are not limited to the comprehension of Job’s suffering (sin as transgression of divine law), but extend to the techniques of healing. Theodicy contains the double-bind of trauma within the power of the divine, arguing that Job’s suffering is intelligible and, in the light of the divine, can be integrated into the order of the world. Since Job challenges the justice and intelligibility of the divine law, his friends regard his testimony as blasphemy which, as sin, serves only to perpetuate his suffering.

Job, however, refuses to accept the formulation of theodicy offered by his friends. Job not only maintains his innocence, but also challenges the law that has handed down his traumatic sentence: “I am guiltless, but his mouth condemns me; blameless but his words convict me” (Job 9:20). It makes sense that because Job refuses to accept the verdict, diagnosis, or judgment of his three friends, he also rejects their remedies, based as they are on his presumed fault or guilt before divine law. The consolations offered by his companions through prayer and atonement are intolerable to Job: “How hollow then is your comfort! Your answers are empty lies” (Job 21:34). While the consolations of theodicy may be tempting, Job continues to testify to the incomprehensible dimension of his experience, no matter what the consequences. “He may kill me, but I won’t stop; I will speak the truth, to his face. Listen now to my words; pay attention to what I say. For I have prepared my defense, and I know that I am right” (Job 13:15-18). Indeed, Job’s argument is more about the rejection of theodicy than describing traumatic suffering and therefore his testimony is inseparable, albeit in opposition, from the position of theodicy. If the echoes of Job’s lament continue to haunt the testimonies of traumatic suffering, does that not suggest that theodicy persists even in our modern scientific age?

The relevance of the book of Job for understanding how clinical psychology has approached the double-bind of trauma testimony becomes dramatically apparent in the discovery that the position of theodicy persists, even in some of our most modern theories of traumatic suffering. It may be difficult to see at this point how a position of theodicy can possibly inhabit the modern and scientific enterprise of clinical psychology. However, by briefly exploring the history of the relationship between Western thought and the book of Job/theodicy, we may discover that the justification of the Law, divine or otherwise, has been maintained despite the challenge of trauma at the limit.

### **A Brief Hermeneutic History of Job:**

As a story of psychological trauma, the book of Job has a relatively short history, not least because clinical psychology is a relatively modern enterprise. Prior to psychological interpretations of suffering, the book of Job was read as the problem of evil and addressed as such primarily by clergy, theologians, and philosophers. For many contemporary academic disciplines, especially those - including psychology – that add some or other descriptor of science to their disciplinary definition, the concept of evil is often avoided due to its moral and religious metaphysical “baggage”. However, the problem of evil remains linked to traumatic disasters, even in our secular age, as human suffering continues to call into question our understanding of the world. “The problem of evil can be expressed in theological or secular terms, but it is fundamentally a problem about the intelligibility of the world as a whole” (Neiman, 2004, pp. 7-8). Despite the uneasiness surrounding the concept of evil, Matustik (2008) points out the term continues to be invoked in response to atrocities such as genocide, combat, and torture because “...the secular mind-set has at its disposal no name for this type of injury” (p.24, my omission). The problem of evil therefore remains relevant for the study of psychological trauma insofar as it is part and parcel of an experiential and meaningful psychological reality, as well as for its linkage to psychological trauma and the radical limits of knowledge revealed by human suffering.

According to Neiman’s (2004) historical analysis, the earliest interpretations of the book of Job by traditional or “pre-modern” readers tended to side with the position taken by the three friends. As such these formulations are of a theodician and theistic sort, offering providential readings of varying sophistication, ensconced in the fundamental belief that Job’s suffering could be rendered intelligible within a divine or cosmological order. While this view may at first

glance seem antiquated and even offensive to our modern ears, we should not make the mistake in believing this version of theodicy as a response to human suffering is no longer held in contemporary society. For example, evangelist Pat Robertson abhorrently suggested that the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010, killing thousands of men, women, and children, was the result of “Haitians” having made a “pact with the devil” to which their suffering was divine retributive justice. Similarly, influential evangelist John Hagee attributed Hurricane Katrina, which killed close to 2000 people and left thousands more homeless and devastated, to God’s punishment for sexual immorality, specifically the celebration of “gay pride”. And, just recently in the aftermath of the Supreme Court declaring gay marriage legal across the United States, tens of thousands of commentators on social media offered, and even prayed for, divine retribution of the fire and brimstone sort in response. Views such as those held by Hagee, Robertson, and their believers explain suffering by accusing victims and the dead of sinfulness, whether by their own doing or their association to a group, clan, or nation. These may be shocking and infuriating views for many of us who might consider them echoes from earlier and more “primitive” times. Yet Neiman (2004) convincingly argues those earlier readings were also more nuanced and complicated; for example that even as early interpretations of Job reflected the wider perspective that suffering could be contained within the divine ordering of the universe, often viewed as punishment for transgression(s) against God, the limits of understanding traumatic suffering resulted from the limits of understanding the divine, leaving the Law of God intact.

This approach to the book of Job and suffering went relatively unchallenged in Western thought until the year 1755 when a massive earthquake struck the city of Lisbon, killing thousands of men, women, and children. As Neiman (2004) points out, earthquakes have metaphysical resonances, and Lisbon marked a crisis resulting from the shockwave of so many

innocent dead to the traditional understanding and interpretations of human suffering. The explanation that people suffer due to religious sin or cosmological necessity was no longer tenable after Lisbon. Out of this crisis Neiman (2004) notes there came a dramatic shift in the interpretation of the book of Job, one which saw readers align not with Job's friends who offered theodicy, but rather with Job himself: "Sometime during the Enlightenment, commentators stopped looking for ways in which Job's torment could be justified... Earlier writers identified with Job's friends, the theodicy makers who found justification. Later ones identified with Job, who found none" (p.17, my omission). Perhaps the most famous of writings that marked this shift was Voltaire's (1756) *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster, or on the Axiom 'All is Well'*, a scathing criticism of theodicy's efforts to provide a horizon of intelligibility to such horrific suffering.<sup>9</sup> Having previously enjoyed a certain legitimacy granted by a seemingly intelligible frame, theodicy now found itself caught in the scandal of being unable to deliver on the promise of such a containing intelligibility. Intellectual thought now faced the imperative and the challenge for and of a different approach to suffering, or rather to a knowledge of suffering, which is also to say for a knowledge of the book of Job.

Neiman (2004) describes the response of intellectual thought after Lisbon as "an attempt at maturity", which marked the beginning of a more "modern" reading of Job. Seemingly abandoning theodicy, Western thought now placed its hopes on science and Reason, supplanting religion as the predominant paradigm for understanding the world. Religion could no longer deliver the intelligibility of disasters, and therefore new disciplines such as Enlightenment medicine and science set out to address the problem of human suffering. Where religion had failed in its obligation to intelligibility, modern science started to lay claim to expertise regarding human suffering. By the time we get to the twentieth century, Neiman (2004) remarks that for

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<sup>9</sup> Voltaire's poem is a direct criticism of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who first coined the term theodicy.

the most part, intellectual thought "...saw no future for theodicy and barely noticed its past. What had functioned as starting point for most philosophical speculations about appearance and reality, reason and right, became an embarrassing minor anachronism" (p.289). As modern thought distanced itself from religion, theories that promised to make suffering such as Job's intelligible were purged of the theodicy of the past, represented by the three companions. Theodicy was regarded as a relic, an intellectual fossil from a primitive time that had little use or relevance for modern interpretations of the world. Certainly it makes sense that clinical psychology with its ambition to an empirically rigorous and evidentiary-based science, combined with a hostility towards religion going as far back as Freud, has found theodicy repugnant and worthy of dismissal.

While psychology may resonate with the three friends' obligation to respond to Job's suffering, surely the interpretations from our modern scientific enterprise will have little or nothing to do with religious theodicy. By framing Job's suffering as a form of anxiety and a manifestation of psychopathology (not as sin), psychology assumes that we have also rejected the theodicy inherent to the religious point of view. Our formulations and techniques of healing are founded on science, not religion. Consistent with Neiman's analysis, Nemo (1978/1988) writes,

The view of the friends—Job suffers because he has sinned—is presented as the *religious view*. This fact alone invites us to assume, in line with our modern way of thinking, that the technique we employ in the task of interpreting anxiety has already ruptured all ties with such a religious viewpoint. As Job himself is a sharp critic of it, moreover, we think we recognize an ally in him (if only an inadvertent one) of our modern atheism". (p.44, author's emphasis)

In an age ushered in by the death of God, was it not inevitable that theodicy would share the same fate? And if theodicy has indeed died along with God, must we admit that Job's lament ceases to be relevant for the study of psychological trauma? Have we not already learned the lesson contained in the parable of Job by moving from a religious to a secular and scientific interpretation of suffering? Can we finally declare that Job's ghost, which haunts the theodicies of the past, has finally been laid to rest by having heard and responded to his powerful testimony?

No one can deny a certain progress accomplished by the shift from religious to psychological interpretations of traumatic suffering; however, this does not necessarily mean that the dangers of theodicy have entirely been avoided. For many survivors and scholars it is all too apparent that theodicy has survived the death of God and continues to influence our understanding and response to traumatic suffering. Levinas (1982/1998) in particular issues a sobering warning in the midst of an intoxicating optimism and hubris of modern science that promises to render human suffering intelligible:

It is impossible, in any case, to underestimate the temptation of theodicy, and to fail to recognize the profundity of the empire it exerts over humankind...It has been, at least up to the trials of the twentieth century, a component of the self-consciousness of European humanity. It persisted in watered-down form at the core of atheist progressivism, which was confident of the efficacy of the Good that is immanent in being and destined to visible triumph by the simple play of the natural and historical laws of injustice, war, misery, and illness. (p.96, my omission)

The suggestion that theodicy continues to exert influence over the approach to traumatic suffering must be taken seriously when evaluating psychology's approach to the double bind of

survivor testimony. Turning to a closer reading of Nemo's (1978/1988) *Job and the Excess of Evil*, we find a reading of Job that refuses to exonerate modern approaches to suffering from theodicy; instead, it accuses psychology in particular of perpetuating a theodicy similar to that of the three companions.

### **Nemo's Accusation:**

The modern psychological interpretation of the book of Job does not refer to sin or divine justice, but rather views his suffering as a "psychopathological crisis"; as a particular form of anxiety. Indeed, the diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is classified as an anxiety disorder in the DSM-IV-TR.<sup>10</sup> While the interpretations of traumatic anxiety vary across theoretical orientations within psychology, the field is nevertheless united by approaching Job's suffering as a psychological phenomenon within the grasp of our investigative methods and theories. Having discarded religious interpretations, psychology views Job's suffering as a distinctly psychological reaction, understandable and explainable by evidence accumulated from rigorous scientific experiments and methods, theories and hypotheses. Nemo (1978/1988), however, dares to ask whether modernity's shift from religious to psychological interpretations of suffering is sufficient to distinguish contemporary trauma theorists from Job's three companions: "Do we dare to believe that Job's response to his friends no longer concerns us, we who are modern (pp.43-44)?" Nemo's accusation rests on the argument that the reading of Job as a psychopathological crisis fails in and of itself to avoid the dangers of theodicy. Despite appearances, Nemo claims that there remains a powerful link between modernity's psychological interpretations of Job's suffering and the theodicy of the three companions:

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<sup>10</sup> Nemo's interpretation of this anxiety cannot be reduced to a list of psychological symptoms as is found in the DSM-IV-TR, but rather carries fundamental philosophical and existential implications.

What we shall discover ... is an almost perfect *homology* between the enterprise of the three friends, its religious connotations notwithstanding, and *technique in general* as the universal program designed to remedy human frailty and the ills besetting it. (p.44, author's emphasis)

By introducing technique, not religion, as the essence of theodicy, we can no longer rest assured that the death of God meant the death of theodicy. Technique, according to Nemo (1978/1988), "...sets the world aside as a domain for the operations of the human will" (p.44). Technique approaches the world as containing an immanent intelligibility that can be discovered, known and, once in possession of this knowledge, bend to human reason and agency as to its relation to the intelligible organization of the world. While this brief description refers to "technique in general", Nemo (1978/1988) points out that this perspective is fundamental to many contemporary fields of study, such as the "techniques" of physics, the "techniques" of biology, the "techniques" of the social sciences. However, Nemo is especially interested in the "techniques" of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and clinical psychology as they are uniquely authoritative in the realm of human suffering such as Job's, supplanting the authority previously occupied by religion:

This includes the most modern manifestation of technique, the now 200-year-old ambition of intervening with the 'human' itself, with the human spirit and the secret in the human heart, for the sake of mitigating all those evils which, prior to the last two centuries, had found their best refuge in religion. (p.44)

Thus, what Nemo draws our attention to is the shared foundation of technique that lies under psychology and the approach of Job's three friends. Nemo renews the relevance of Job's testimony for clinical psychology in the midst of and despite the development of scientific and

empirically supported responses to traumatic suffering. Could it be possible that there lurks a theodicy in the manner in which modern psychology takes up the promise of intelligibility, particularly in its application to the double-bind of survivor testimony?

To respond to the preceding question, let us return to Job's three friends. Nemo (1978/1988) first examines the intentions of the three friends, which he considers to be well-meaning and sincere, highlighting that, despite what actually occurs, they did not arrive with the intent to pick a theological fight with Job in the middle of his darkest hour. While it is easily lost in the intense and, at times, acrimonious debate, Job's companions do not view his disaster as an opportunity to debate God; rather they care deeply about their friend, and they are clearly moved by his suffering: "They have come, not to debate, but to 'pity and console', to *do something*" (Nemo, 1978/1988, p.47, author's emphasis). Nemo's observation of their good intentions should stay our condemnation of Job's three friends, regardless of any revulsion – "scientific" or otherwise - to theodicy. In this regard we should have no difficulty aligning ourselves with the intentions of Job's friends, for as clinicians, we too "pity and console" and make an effort to "do something" that alleviates the suffering of our patients. Like Job's friends, we do not come to the therapy room to debate our theories with our patients, but rather to bring our theories to bear on their suffering in the service of knowledge and healing, and as an expression of our care.

The interventions of experts are not arbitrary, but are grounded in their particular understanding of the world. Psychologists and Job's friends may be linked by the intention of "doing something" but when we examine their specific interventions, the similarity seemingly disappears. Given that Job's friends formulate his suffering as sin according to the religious point of view, it follows, therefore, that what they offer are religious remedies: "If I were you, I would pray; I would put my case before God" (Job 5:8). "You will pray, and he will hear you; he will

grant you whatever you wish. Everything you do will succeed, and light will shine on your path” (Job 22:28). Nemo (1978/1988) argues that the friends offer prayer and atonement not simply because they believe in God or because they believe it is morally right in an absolute sense. Rather, Job’s friends offer religious remedies because they believe in the healing power of God, and they desperately want to help their friend whose suffering is so very great. Nemo sympathetically portrays the friends not as zealots of a particular ideology, but rather as caring healers who draw upon their theoretical paradigm to assist their friend. While we can certainly be critical of the inadequacies of their religious theory, theodicy, and treatment, Nemo’s convincing analysis leads to the acknowledgement that the intentions of Job’s friends are undoubtedly good.

Nemo follows up on this point by stating that Job’s friends initially describe God in “...entirely classical fashion, as something beyond thought” (p.49). Stated otherwise, the friends appeal to God as transcendent, beyond the human powers of comprehension. However, their responses to Job’s testimony reveal a decidedly sophisticated and learned knowledge of the Divine force that organizes the world into coherence. This knowledge serves as the foundation and justification of the remedies offered to Job. Based on the descriptions of God provided by the three friends, Nemo (1978/1988) argues that the assumption that what is most significant to the position of Job’s three friends is God, or even religion, is superficial and incidental to the more fundamental belief in the totality of an organizing “power and order”. This power and order reveals the world to be inherently intelligible, its structures being available to the sight and grasp of experts. By virtue of it being accessible, these structures necessarily participate in the immanence described earlier by Levinas. Job’s three companions approach traumatic suffering based on the intelligibility provided by this power and order, and respond accordingly and expertly.

Nemo distills from the religious descriptions and prescriptions offered by the three companions that the entity of God is but one manifestation of a broader and more fundamental force he calls “the Law”. As such, what is at the heart of theodicy is not necessarily God, but rather “the Law” (and upon which technique is based):

God becomes the principal component, or motor, of a mechanism which can be described with a good degree of precision. This mechanism is the order of the workings of the world, of things and humans. One knows, on the basis of a consensus tried and tested by generations, that when human beings do such-and-such, everything works according to order, and that when they do not do such-and-such, disorder sets in, and with it misfortune. That which needs to be done is recorded in the Law. And the Law foresees the consequences of transgressing its prescriptions...*One could replace ‘God’ by ‘Law’ at any given moment, and this would not change anything in the order or parts of the mechanism* (pp. 52-53, my emphasis).

Technique, the application of knowledge predicated on an intelligible coherence of the world, is made possible only by “the Law”, for the “God” of theodicy is but one name for the totalizing intelligibility of the world. What is revealed by Nemo’s analysis is that what is at stake in the heated exchange between Job and his companions is not “God” in an absolute or even religious sense, but rather it is over the intelligibility of suffering at its disastrous and traumatic limit.

From the standpoint of the three friends, Job’s suffering stems from failing to see how it fits within the divine (and intelligible) ordering of the Law. This is not to say Job’s friends believe that horrible events never happen, but rather these horrible events nevertheless fit within the order and power of the Law. Once it is discovered just how suffering fits within the Law, as sin or psychopathology, technique can be applied to mitigate suffering and increase prosperity.

The application of technique returns one to the providence of the Law. For Job to claim that his suffering is beyond the Law is regarded as a sure sign (or symptom) that he has transgressed. Job's thoughts regarding his suffering are considered to be distorted, unable to accurately understand his situation, and therefore perpetuate his suffering by creating an obstacle to perceive and live according to the law that his friends see so clearly. Given this formulation, Job's friends offer him their "techniques" because, as Nemo (1978/1988) points out, "Every technician knows: one does not master the world except by respecting its Law..." (p.56, my omission). Thus suffering is the result of transgressing the Law, which also means that suffering invariably contains the lesson of the Law, offering the promise of a redemptive, healing return. As technicians, Job's friends encourage him to heed the lesson his suffering is trying to teach: "You are lucky God has scolded you; so take his lesson to heart. For he wounds, but then he binds up; he injures, but then he heals" (Job 5:17-18). When one is able to master "technique" and live according to the Law, one prospers. If one blasphemes by refusing to live according to the Law, calling the Law into question, one invariably suffers.

They (Job's friends) are the specialists of this view and they put it to work as a technology founded on a knowledge of rules and conduct... With this assortment of 'technical' procedures ready to hand, the friends intend to 'save' Job, not in an absolute sense, but in the sense of pulling him back from making a bad move, so that he may rejoin the world in its order and stop 'blaspheming'. (Nemo, 1978/1988, p.64)

By refusing to accept the Law as just, Job becomes an outlaw, outside the law, resistant to technique, failing to acknowledge and accept trauma within the power and order of an intelligible world. Job's refusal challenges the justness of God/Law: "He has punished me for a trifle; for no reason he gashes my flesh... I am guiltless, but his mouth condemns me; blameless,

but his words convict me” (Job 9:17, 20). However, Job’s lament is interpreted by his friends as further evidence of his transgression from the Law: “This is what happens to the godless; this is the sinners doom” (Job 18:21) The experts beg their friend to abandon his erroneous complaint and repent, which would offer relief by returning his suffering to the intelligibility of the Law: “Come now, repent of your sins; open your heart to God. Wash your hands of their wickedness; banish crime from your door. Then your soul will be pure; your heart firm and fearless” (Job 11:13-15). What is of utmost concern for the three companions is not the sin they believe led to Job’s traumatic disaster, for everyone sins and sins can be forgiven. Rather, what the experts believe is most urgent to remedy is Job’s insistence that his suffering is impossible to integrate within the intelligibility and justness of God/Law.

Job, as it is well known, rejects this formulation and refuses the remedy: “I swear by God, who has wronged me and filled my cup with despair, that while there is life in this body and as long as I can breathe, I will never let you convict me...” (Job 27:6). Job does not reject God/Law altogether, rather he questions his/its justice. For Job’s friends, God/Law *is* justice, but Job’s testimony reveals a radical tension between the Law and justice. Job’s testimony does not simply call religious interpretations of suffering into question, but rather the entire enterprise of technique based on the Law, any totalizing power and order that claims to wholly render traumatic suffering intelligible. Hence Job’s testimony is an instance of trauma at the limit insofar that it cannot be understood as a deficient grasp of divine Law. Job’s testimony is not simply a refutation regarding the integration or synthesis of traumatic suffering into the religious framework of his three friends’, but a refutation to the immanent totality of *intelligibility in general*. Job’s testimony reveals the scandal of the promise of intelligibility, that scandal of the injustice of the Law when faced with the disaster of traumatic suffering.

Recalling that what links trauma at the limit and evil is the challenge to the comprehensibility of the world, Nemo (1978/1988) provides a summary of the manner in which theodicy reconciles the double-bind of survivor testimony to a single obligation to the Law:

Let us take up the problem one more time. Job wants to articulate the horror of evil. This horror he attributed the wholly Other, to a madness that ravages every order. Technique presents itself. It claims he is mistaken, because, from where he stands, like a cog in the world-mechanism, he cannot perceive the order which contains him. If he could perceive the order in all its dimensions, in the complete transparency of its structure, it would not occur to him to say what he says. Contrary to what he thinks, evil is located well within the order. The impression of madness which he receives from his confrontation with evil is itself utterly contained within the order; it falls frequently upon those who are suffering. (p.77)

Like Job, many survivors seek to articulate the horror of trauma through their testimonies, a horror often described as “Other”, as an excess or impossibility to intelligibility. Technique, however, necessitates that traumatic suffering be integrated within the Law, within an ordered intelligibility that seeks to contain the horror. Cognitive-behaviorism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and other theoretical paradigms all claim an understanding of the Law of traumatic suffering and offer techniques based on this knowledge. The horror of trauma is located well within the order, even if elements remain obscure and yet undiscovered. The limits of trauma’s intelligibility is not the limit of the Law, but simply our knowledge of the Law; leaving the justice of the Law intact.

Having removed religion from the essence of theodicy do we, returning to Nemo’s question, still dare to believe that Job’s testimony no longer concerns we who are “modern”? Or

could it be that we are still confronted by the laments of those who suffer and call into question the knowledge of a power and order that can contain the horror of trauma? Do we not find a modern manifestation of the Law in the assumed immanence that places clinical psychology's promise of intelligibility entirely within the realm of the possible? Or is it possible that we, like Job's friends, unwittingly and unintentionally participate in a theodicy by framing the double-bind of survivor testimony as problem/project? Could our theories of trauma continue to be haunted by the ghost of Job, by the ghosts of other traumatic disasters that refuse the order of the Law?

Returning to the double-bind, we discover that Nemo's description of theodicy merges with Levinas's phenomenological analysis of intelligibility. Job's testimony, like many survivors' testimonies, describe a horror that refuses comprehension, but to which we are nevertheless obligated to respond. However, as experts, we are also obligated to understand and apply our "techniques" based on this understanding in the service of knowledge and healing. Both clinical psychology and Job's friends approach this double-bind as a problem, reducing its disturbance and tension to the immanence of the Law. However, the problematic not only fails to account for a radical limit of intelligibility that goes to the heart of traumatic suffering, but also fails to acknowledge the scandal of the Law that does not, and cannot, deliver justice. The double-bind as problem is, in fact, no double-bind at all, for its tension is regarded as a clash of *homogenous forces*, a clash contained within the order of the Same. As Levinas (1965/1996) points out, when forces are homogenous to one another, the possibility of a reconciliation via integration is guaranteed and inevitable outcome; trauma disturbs but the Law prevails: "The disturbance, the clash of two orders, ends in a conciliation, in the constitution of a new order which, more vast, closer to the total, and in this sense ultimate or original, order, shines through

this conflict” (p.68). For Job’s friends, they deliver this conciliation by an appeal to God, whose power and order renders all things intelligible and just. The disturbance of Job’s suffering is merely conditional that, once returned to the divine order, will be quelled. For them, any limit to the intelligibility of Job’s suffering results not from something other than the Law, but rather results from the limits of one’s grasp of the Law.

Clinical psychology certainly acknowledges the disturbance of traumatic suffering and concedes limits to theories and techniques. However, like Job’s friends, psychology considers this disturbance to be merely conditional and, therefore, temporary. By regarding the double-bind as a *problem*, the twin structures of phenomenality (presence/present) organize both sides, revealing survivor testimony and the promise of intelligibility to be homogeneous. Despite an appearance of heterogeneity, survivor testimony and trauma theory are nevertheless reconciled by psychology based on suffering’s assumed immanence. When two opposing forces meet within the realm of immanence, Levinas (1965/1996) writes, “The two meanings glimmer in the same dawn, both turned toward the light... The difference between contents is not strong enough to break the continuous form, the unbreakable plot, in which this difference is still regulated” (p.72, my omission). The unbreakable plot of the Law, of immanence or the Same is inherent to both theodicy and psychology, and thus Job’s lament remains relevant to modern traumatology, particularly regarding the obligation of “bearing witness” to survivor testimony. The accusation that psychology engages the double-bind of survivor testimony in a manner similar to that of the three companions of Job cannot be dismissed simply by claiming that our scientific atheism exculpates our theories of psychological trauma from theodicy. Nemo (1978/1988) has convincingly argued that theodicy does not depend upon a religious belief in God, but rather in a

belief in an “unbreakable plot”, a totality of homogenous forces, in the power and order of the Law.

If it is granted that the response of Job’s friends does not originate in their religion, but rather their religion belongs to the broader category of the Law, it is possible for theodicy to have survived the death of God. For philosophers such as Nemo and Levinas, theodicy has indeed persisted in our responses to human suffering, even in our scientific and secular age. Just as there is nothing radically outside of the Law (“God”) for Job’s friends, there is nothing radically outside the Law (phenomenality) for psychologists. And if trauma conforms to the Law, technique promises to remedy suffering based on the knowledge of the Law. Therefore, Immanence is not only the unquestioned possibility of understanding, but also the possibility of repair and reparation. Technology, either moral or clinical, has always already reduced trauma to the Law, arguing that trauma fits within the order of the Same:

This mixture of remedies promises to be efficacious and that is techniques *raison d’être*...

Thus moral technology claims to have overwhelmed what was most serious in evil. The caesura separating the moment in which the ground of the world is still firm from the moment when it falls away like rotten floorboards is regarded by moral technology as a *problem that has been pinpointed, bypassed, erased*. (Nemo, 1978/1988, pp. 62-63, my emphasis)

Recalling Van Der Kolk’s optimistic promise of progress, clinical and moral technology certainly share a similar agenda. Like Job’s friends, we pity trauma survivors who testify to the incomprehensibility of their horror, for they cannot see the ways in which their suffering is intelligible. The “subjective” experience of a horror that is wholly other is trumped by our “objective” knowledge that necessarily conforms to the order of the Same.

Both theodicy and the promise of intelligibility approach the double-bind as being reducible to a single obligation, which is to the Law. To be sure, the relevance of the charges of theodicy for clinical psychology rest on describing a disturbance that is outside the Law, which is the task of the following chapter. However, the totality of intelligibility has been called into question by both scholars and survivors alike and it is based on these criticisms of intelligibility, immanence, and phenomenality that this dissertation seeks to offer a different reading of the double-bind and its consequence for what it means to bear witness as clinical psychologists. It is important to emphasize at the conclusion of this chapter that this dissertation is not the attempt to leap outside intelligibility and the problematic, nor is it an attempt to foolishly proclaim to have left behind the reliance on the phenomenal presence inherent to the grasp and vision of comprehension, as if such ambitions would even be possible. It may be that our being in the company of Job's friends is an inevitable scandal for clinical psychology, which is certainly not to treat the tradition of psychology's promise of intelligibility ridiculously or with pretension, with disdain as some inferior or deficient mode of engagement with psychological trauma.<sup>11</sup> Much to the contrary, I sincerely hope there is much in this dissertation that is intelligible. Yet it is not my ambition to put myself on a higher pedestal of good conscience by succeeding where others have failed in making good on the promise of intelligibility. Nor is it to demand an awed silence in the face of traumatic suffering to which every response is accused of sacrilege or obscenity. Rather, I simply want to take seriously the difficulties psychologists face when attempting to bear witness when confronted by the incomprehensibility of survivor testimony: not to claim to have the answers too quickly, not to reconcile too easily the unintelligible horror

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<sup>11</sup> Those familiar with Levinas will recognize this as inspired by Levinas's relationship with ontology: "The way of thinking proposed here does not fail to recognize being or treat it, ridiculously or pretentiously, with disdain, as the fall from higher order or disorder. On the contrary, it is on the basis of proximity that being takes on its just meaning" (Levinas, 1974 /1998, p.16).

that haunts these testimonies to the pacifying consolations of intellectual theory. Echoing Edith Wyschogrod (1998), this dissertation will argue that the promise of intelligibility need not disappear, but must be transformed when exposed to trauma at the limit.

**Chapter III:  
Aporia: The Word that Breaks with the Law**

*Technique transforms all things into objects which are integrated into the world, the closed horizon of technical operations. Closed: because it excludes, outlaws, the word that breaks with the Law.*

-Philippe Nemo  
*Job and the Excess of Evil* (1978/1988)

Let us survey the ground we have already covered. We began by establishing that the predominant notions of bearing witness in clinical psychology are legitimated by, and in service to, a promise of intelligibility. Despite the myriad of different theoretical perspectives within psychology, the promise of intelligibility nevertheless unifies the field. We then turned to Levinas's phenomenological analysis of intelligibility, which revealed that this promise privileges the gestures of grasp and vision, as well as the intertwining structures of presence/present that make up phenomenality. We highlighted from Levinas's analysis that Western thought is founded on the totality of immanence, or what he calls the order of the Same. Additionally, Derrida's analysis of the problematic revealed that this totality is unchallenged by the disturbance of the problematic because, as a project of overcoming limits of knowledge, it is actually in service to the promise of intelligibility. The previous chapters have argued that the logic of the problematic not only fails to call the Law into question but in fact affirms and enforces its authority. The second chapter introduced Job as a parable of traumatic suffering, and paid particular attention to the position occupied by his three companions, namely theodicy. A brief historical analysis pointed out that while theodicy had at one point enjoyed a privileged position in the understanding of traumatic suffering, this position is believed to have been abandoned in the aftermath of events such as the Lisbon earthquake, and the transition from a

medieval to a renaissance world, marking a shift from religious to more modern and scientific formulations. However, Levinas warned that the dangers of theodicy continue to persist even in our contemporary modern age, which led us to Nemo's accusation that modernity, and clinical psychologists in particular, continue to engage in theodicy based on our responses to traumatic suffering. Nemo removes religion from theodicy, revealing that what is really at issue between Job and his friends is the totality of the Law, linking theodicy to the totality of immanence inherent to intelligibility.

To challenge or accuse psychology of theodicy requires, however, a convincing argument that the testimonies of survivors issue a disturbance that exceeds the disturbance of the problematic; a disturbance whose excess breaks with the Law, shattering the totality of immanence, exposing the order of the Same to something wholly Other. Taking Nemo's reading of Job seriously, along with the critical analyses of Derrida and Levinas, we must explore the argument that survivor testimony, at least some aspect of it, issues a disturbing force that is *heterogeneous* to the order of the Same, outside and otherwise than the Law. The impossibility of reducing this signification of trauma to immanence and intelligibility exposes us to trauma at the limit, revealing the occasion where the tension of the double-bind is radically irreducible. It is too early to determine whether or not this radicalization of trauma's disturbance will exculpate clinical psychology from the charges of theodicy; however, if this radicalization allows us to hear the echoes of Job in the testimonies of more contemporary trauma survivors, it would have profound consequences for the promise of intelligibility and consequently for what it means to bear witness.

As a problem, survivor testimony is already a project for clinical psychology, meaning that its disturbance has already been appropriated by gestures of vision and grasp. Job's

testimony, along with that of other survivors, refutes the capacity to appropriate their suffering and the horror of trauma. Survivors testify to a disturbance that goes beyond the problematic, refusing to become a project of knowledge. But how does one describe a disturbance that goes beyond the intelligibility conveyed by its very description? Is it to claim that trauma is absolutely unspeakable and absolutely unknowable? Is it simply beyond words? Is trauma at the limit simply ineffable? John Caputo (1993) deftly reveals the absurdity of this claim when he writes, “By the time one has said that something is ineffable, or that one cannot say a thing, one has already been speaking for some time and one had already said too much” (p.75). Our desire to describe trauma at the limit is not the pursuit of the untenable argument that survivor testimony and trauma absolutely transcends any and all intelligibility and is simply unspeakable. An approach that refuses to understand out of reverence for the horror of trauma invariably leads to a different reduction of the double-bind than that of immanence, alleviating the tension which I explicitly wish to maintain.<sup>12</sup> One does not have to dismiss such excessive terms such as the “unspeakable” or “unthinkable”, rather our interpretations must preserve and endure the paradoxes of their very signification, paradoxes that clinical psychology has too often and too quickly reconciled. Trezise’s (2001) comments on the relationship between the unspeakable and the Holocaust offers a concrete example of this tension:

Clearly the verbal representability of the facts suffices, in and of itself, to disprove the claim that the Holocaust is *absolutely* unspeakable. But since verbal representation does not pertain to facts alone, their representability does *not* suffice to disprove *absolutely* the claim that the Holocaust is unspeakable. (p.41)

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<sup>12</sup> This would be my criticism of Lanzmann (1995) when he claims that to not understand was his “iron law” in the making of *Shoah*. While I appreciate his passionate criticism of understanding and representation, we are bound to it nonetheless, which is the inevitable scandal that I wish to acknowledge. Lanzmann’s iron law makes a problematic claim of transcending intelligibility: An iron law of not understanding as simply the negation of the law of comprehension is bound to the Law nonetheless.

Therefore, what we must discover is a description of a disturbance that preserves the tension of the double-bind based on the conviction that these paradoxes reflect something vital to what it means to bear witness to survivor testimony. We must push interpretations of the “impossible”, the “unspeakable”, the “unknowable” beyond the problematic to its limits without lapsing into the consolations of absolutes.

In order to describe a disturbance that exceeds the problematic without renouncing the dependence on conceptual grasp, we begin with Caputo’s (2000) suggestion that we seek concepts that are “...internally structured to point to their own inadequacy, concepts whose meaning is to say that what we are here signifying exceeds our grasp” (p.180). Thus our concept will highlight and endure the scandal of describing the indescribable, representing the unrepresentable, and speaking the unspeakable. In response to the limits of representation regarding violence and mourning, Judith Butler (2004) argues that we should not abandon representation all together, but rather we use representation to reveal the failure of representation: “There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give” (p.144). This does not give one license to reject images or representations outright (as if that was even a possibility); rather it is to offer an expression that maintains a hospitality to that which exceeds and de-centers the privilege of that which appears. “The critical image...must not only fail to capture its referent, but also *show* this failing” (Butler, 2004, p.146 author’s emphasis, my omission). The critical image, representation, or concept is to be turned on itself, betraying its own inadequacy when faced by a disturbance that radically breaks with the structures of intelligibility. By showing this failing, this signification bears the trace of the excess of what it signifies.

The critique of linguistic representation should not be construed as the limits of language to grasp some overwhelming external referent, to which an alternative word, concept, or language would grant pure expressive representation. Nor does this critique entirely deny reference by claiming that we are entirely confined within the boundaries of language. Rather, as Caputo (1997) remarks in his commentary on Derrida's deconstruction, we are seeking a hospitality towards what is other regarding language, signifying as non-representational and ethical dimensions of language. Guided by these caveats and suggestions, we now turn to the concept of the *aporia* to try and describe the disturbance of trauma at the limit. Such a disturbance would refuse to be appropriated by the project/problem of intelligibility and yet would not fail to signify despite breaking with the totality of immanence. This chapter is to be merely an introduction to the *aporia*; however its complexities and consequences will continue to unfold and be examined throughout the remaining chapters. It will be enough to treat the description of the *aporia* as simply a proposition, the relevance and merits of which will be ultimately determined in the following chapters.

### **The Problem of the Aporetic/the Aporia of the Problematic:**

Derrida (1993) confesses that the concept of the *aporia* came to him "...without really knowing where I was going, except that I knew what was going to be at stake in this was the 'not knowing where to go'" (p.12). It is this experience of "not knowing where to go" that Derrida takes seriously, an experience that is often discussed in what he calls a "rhetoric of borders". Previously, we determined that a problem arises when one encounters a border, an "edge-line" that must be overcome. When confronted with the problem of a border, such as one encounters the limits of intelligibility in trauma survivor testimony, one must determine the first "step" (in Derrida's French, *pas*) to take. The primacy of the step is found in most research methodologies,

including traumatology. Examples from previous chapters have been Bloom's (2009) first "step" of identifying exactly what the problem is, and Herman's (1997) first "step" of reclaiming the traumatic past in order to bring it to the present, as well as Cahill & Foa's (2010) first "step" of accounting for trauma's phenomenology. The problem of not knowing where to go is simply a matter of how to get there, what steps to take, which assumes the conditions necessary for "stepping", namely immanence, undoubtedly exists. Theodicy is being in "step" with the Law, technique as the engagement according the Law's justice and decree; The Law tells one where and how to step. The tracing of the edge-line as a problem also delivers the destination, as what is pursued always lies just on the other side of the border. Therefore, as soon as one has a problem, one always already knows where one is headed. When contained entirely within the framework of a problem, the experience of not knowing where to go is eclipsed by the project of discovering the passage necessary to overcome the impasse at the conditional limits of knowledge.

Derrida notes that the interpretation of borders, or perhaps better stated for our purposes, of limits, has been dominated by the paradigm of the problematic. Introducing the concept of the aporia to this rhetoric, Derrida is suspicious that the logic of the problematic fails to give countenance to something profoundly significant regarding the experience of the limit. Without dismissing the logic of the problematic, Derrida looks to the aporia from Greek *a* (non) + *poros* (passage or way) and French *a* (non) + *pas* (step), in an attempt to offer a more "enduring" description of the impasse at the limits of knowledge that does not immediately appropriate the experience as a project of knowledge. Taking the experience of not knowing where to go seriously, Derrida's aporia describes a disturbance which calls into question the possibility of the step insofar that the structures of immanence "deconstruct". Turning to a dense passage, Derrida

(1993) proposes within our experience of not knowing where to go there, we may encounter the impossibility of the step. The impossibility of intelligibility, and thus the limit of the Law:

It should be a matter of what, in sum, appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place *where it would be no longer possible to constitute a problem*, as project, or a projection that is, at the point where the very project or the problematic task becomes impossible and where we are exposed, absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis, without possible substitution, singularly exposed in our absolute naked uniqueness.... There, in sum, in this place of aporia, *there is no longer any problem*. Not that, alas or fortunately, the solutions have been given, but because one could no longer even find a problem that would constitute itself and that one would keep in front of oneself, as a presentable object or project, as a protective representative or a prosthetic substitute, as some kind of border still to cross or behind which to protect oneself. (p.12, emphasis in original)

*The aporia is not an impossible problem*, which would suggest the situation where the grasp of knowledge cannot gain access to the other side of some boundary or edge-line. An impossible problem maintains that what lies on the other side of the limits of knowledge still belongs to immanence, even in its obscurity. The topographical condition still exists, hence its disturbance only disturbs based simply on not yet gaining passage over some *conditional* limit, preserving the possibility of taking steps. *Rather the aporia is more radically the impossibility of the problem* whose structure and logic (if it even makes sense to continue to use these attributes) are so allergic to the conditions necessary for knowledge that its disturbance is a radically *unconditional* impossibility of knowledge. The aporia is an irreducible tension that emanates from the border between the possible and the impossible (im/possible).

The problematic results from an encounter with an obstacle along the path of intelligibility that is too difficult to surmount, but the path nevertheless continues. And given that the path continues, this disturbance is simply a matter of taking the right steps. Immanence is the possibility of taking steps, as a topographical condition granted by the presence of phenomena. The aporia, however, is the radically different condition of “There is no more path”, meaning the refusal of the totality of topology, presence, and immanence (Derrida, 1993, p.21). Regarding the problematic, Derrida (1993) points out that in addition to a project, its etymology also refers to protection: “...created by a substitute, a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate ourselves, or so as to hide sometime unavowable—like a shield” (p.11). Could it be that approaching survivor testimony has shielded us from the impossible of traumatic suffering? Has the pursuit of trauma as a problem closed our ears to what is most pressing in Job’s lament? If we hearken to only what we can appropriate, do we fail to give countenance to the aspects of traumatic horror that resist intelligibility?

Leaving the questions surrounding exposure, protection, and substitution in abeyance until later chapters, I wish to recall the scene from the book of Job that served as our original point of departure. We know that the three friends set out with the well-intended project of applying their knowledge and technique to the problem of Job’s suffering. Based on this project, we have heard in their formulations and prescriptions they offer Job the belief that his suffering adheres to the Law, which when stripped of its religious façade, resembles the enterprise of modern-day clinical traumatology. What I wish to draw our attention to from the scene of their arrival is the question of what is signified by the seven days and nights where there is naught but silence and mourning. How are we to interpret this moment in the story where the experts undergo the “experience of not knowing where to go”? What are we to make of this disturbance?

For it appears prior to the project of “technical operations”; the experts are met with an impasse where, at least for the moment, *they do not know where to go*. Is it simply the result of a failure of Job’s three friends to effectively engage the project of clinical traumatology? Is their mourning to be simply understood as an additional project, a different set of technical operations? Or could this moment signify that some aspect of Job’s suffering shatters the closed horizon of the Law where everything is or can be submitted and subdued via technique? Could it be that these seven days and nights signify the exposure to a disturbance whose horror leaves technique based on some organizing power and order in tatters? No doubt Job’s friends mourn, but does not mourning suggest that one is undone by grief rather than a project one takes up and takes on? In an eloquent description of grief and mourning, Butler (2004) argues that experience of grief as not knowing where to go reveal the limits of one’s autonomy:

I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one’s own deliberate plan, one’s own project, one’s own knowing and choosing. (p.21)

To be sure, Job’s friends recover their project, perhaps they recover by way of their project, but one can ask if this recovery is total? What would it mean to approach this moment in the text not simply as a problem, but as also containing the traces of an aporia? My interpretation, which is not only mine and certainly not the only interpretation, is that this scene signifies the aporia of not knowing where to go, an experience which Derrida (2001) argues is not to be forgotten and must be taken seriously. Commenting on the relationship between the aporia and the

interpretation of texts, Derrida (1995) describes language as being haunted by something otherwise than the knowledge gleaned from its reading:<sup>13</sup>

So this non-knowing...it is not the limit...of a knowledge, the limit in the progression of knowledge. It is, in some way, a structural non-knowing, which heterogeneous, foreign to knowledge. It is not just the unknown that could be known and that I give up trying to know. It is something in relation to which knowledge is out of the question. And when I specify that it is a non-knowing and not a secret, I mean that when a text appears to be crypted, it is not at all in order to calculate or to intrigue or to bar access to something that I know and that others must not know; it is a more ancient, more originary experience, if you will, of the secret. (p. 201, my omission)

The *heterogeneous* and *foreign* structure of the aporia breaks with the totality of immanence and the presence of the Same, gesturing towards a radical *alterity*. The aporia is not the “secret” of the text/testimony whose clandestine intelligibility simply waits patiently for the grasp of the psychologist beneath a shroud of encryption. The aporia is not a disturbance that issues from being severed from the intelligibility that hides or is obscured behind some barrier, like a locked door which demands a key that one does not possess. The aporia signifies the radical impossibility of intelligibility, disturbing from a place and time other than the present. The aporia is the unconditional lack of access that is structurally built into the disturbance itself.

It may be tempting to think of the aporia as simply the negation or antithesis of intelligibility according to an antinomian logic; to regard the aporia simply as outlaw, for that maintains an identity defined by the Law. To be sure the aporia is outside the Law, but one cannot simply invert the Law to understand the aporia. Levinas (1965/1996) points out that the effort to

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<sup>13</sup> Following this excerpt, Derrida describes that this structural non-knowing guides his reading and interpretation of the texts of the Holocaust survivor and poet Paul Celan, affirming the relevance of aporia for traumatology.

describe a disturbance that shatters immanence, namely the irrational, fails to effectuate a break from the power of the Law: “It is not as something irrational or absurd that disturbance disturbs. For the irrational presents itself to consciousness and lights up only within an intelligibility in which it ends by being situated and defined” (p.71). To situate the aporia as simply against the Law fails to produce enough distance from immanence to glimpse the impossible aspects of a disturbance. Therefore, introducing the aporia to traumatology is not the attempt to simply reduce the promise of intelligibility to its opposite, for that would remain in service to the Law. Invoking non-knowledge based on evidence that has already passed through the gates of knowledge nevertheless remains present in the present to the grasp of the psychologist.

It is essential that the disturbances that issue from survivor testimony are not categorically assigned as *either* the aporetic *or* the problematic, nor are disturbances contained within the dynamics of polar opposites. Rather than defining them as distinctly separate or oppositional forces, Derrida argues that the relationship between the aporia and the problem is best described as “installing the haunting of the one in the other” (1993), disturbing each other not only from without, but also from within. To clarify, clearly my dissertation is engaging in *the problem of the aporetic*, which as a problem, is a project I have taken up and taken on by grasping upon aspects of survivor testimony made present via immanence. I deal with the problems of trauma and survivor testimony that are present to me like everyone else. However, it does so by also taking into account *the aporia of the problematic*, the radical limit of the problematic when faced with the horrors of traumatic suffering. The effort to give countenance to the disturbance of survivor testimony belongs to and yet exceeds any and all projects - not by the limits of my capacities, but by an impossibility that nevertheless demands my response, to

which I am nonetheless obligated.<sup>14</sup> This is not to create a homogenized mixture of the problem and the aporia, but rather to endure the tension of their heterogeneity that exists not only from without, but also from within their respective boundaries. Stated differently, we seek heterogeneous force that haunts the Law, revealing the borders or limits of the Law. We seek what is otherwise than the Law within the Law. To be sure, we are obligated, bound to the Law. But if we discover a heterogeneous disturbance irreducible to the Law, we may find ourselves in a true double-bind in our promise of intelligibility.

Taking Job's complaint seriously means that we must not only respond to the problem of traumatic suffering, but also to the aporia of traumatic suffering. Having de-centered the primacy of the problematic, perhaps we may begin to hear the echoes of Job in the voices of testimonies that issue from the horrors of genocide, combat, and torture? What consequence does the (im)possibility aporia have for the reading and interpretation of these survivor testimonies? At first glance, it seems we have wandered into a contradiction that reveals the absurdity of the aporia; for if it is indeed a disturbance that breaks with the structures of intelligibility as radical non-presence, how can it be available to reading and interpretation by the psychologist? Even if one accepts the radical otherness of the aporetic, would one not also have to admit that such a disturbance would have to go unnoticed in being otherwise than knowledge? Is there not a glaring contradiction between claiming there exists a disturbance that breaks with the Law that makes knowledge possible and, at the same time utilizing that knowledge to make the very argument upon which the aporia rests? Have we unwittingly ended up affirming the totality of intelligibility, the limitless domain of the Law?

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<sup>14</sup> "I do not deny that philosophy is a knowledge, insofar as it names even what is not nameable, and thematizes what is not thematizable. But in thus giving to what breaks with the categories of discourse the form of the said, perhaps it impresses onto the said the traces of this rupture" (Levinas, 1982, p.108)

## **Deconstruction:**

Psychological research is often aimed at a gap in the scientific literature, a missing or obscure part of the system of knowledge. Researchers have consistently approached this gap as the quest to discover the missing piece, to fill the gap with knowledge gained via scientific discovery. The aporia raises the question to the existence of a gap that is not simply absent knowledge, but rather gestures to something otherwise than knowledge. Having proposed that survivor testimony exposes the psychologist to aporias, to the radical limits of knowledge, we are swept by the current into what has been closely associated with Derrida's philosophical corpus, namely "deconstruction". As will become apparent in later chapters, the relationship between deconstruction and the Law will have profound and far-reaching consequences for what it means to bear witness, but for now those questions will be held in abeyance. At this point, I simply wish to focus on Derrida's descriptions of deconstruction and their relevance for the interpretation of survivor testimony. It is important to point out at the outset that by invoking deconstruction I am not offering a method, a characterization Derrida has repeatedly denied. "Deconstruction is not a method or some tool you apply from the outside. Deconstruction is something which happens and which happens inside..." (1997, p.9). Deconstruction does not participate in the seeing and grasping gestures of knowledge, and therefore is not a project, activity, or an instrument one wields. It would be inaccurate to describe deconstruction as a "technique", especially given its relation to the Law. Therefore, the relationship between deconstruction and survivor testimony is not a series of skillful or courageous steps taken by the researcher. Deconstruction's *raison d'être* is not, according to Derrida, the reader: "Deconstruction is not a philosophy or a method, it is not a phase, a period, or a moment. It is something which is constantly at work and was at work before what we call 'deconstruction' started..." (1999, p.65). This is not to say that one

transcends the dependence on methodology by invoking deconstruction, and thus does not offer the exemption from rigorous methodological self-reflection. It does, however, complicate any blind adherence to methodology or technique that does not take into account its own limits.

One may already be wondering about the usefulness in bringing to bear such an approach to the reading of something as urgent and important as survivor testimony. What does deconstruction offer the study of psychological trauma? Derrida (1999) acknowledges that, based on certain criteria, deconstruction is itself impoverished from the start:

But I don't think that deconstruction 'offers' anything as deconstruction. That is sometimes what I am charged with: saying nothing, not offering any content or full proposition. I have never 'proposed' anything, and that is perhaps the essential poverty of my work. I never offered anything in terms of 'this is what you have to know' or 'this is what you have to do'. So deconstruction is a poor thing from that point of view. (p.74)

Despite being confronted by the crisis of "What to know?" and "What to do?" in the abyss of deconstruction's essential poverty, perhaps the anxiety allows us to glimpse the fuller gravity of the decisions we face, particularly as we respond to horrors of human suffering.

Technique, the essence of theodicy, regards all it encounters to be entirely within the power and order of the Law, which is to say within the *system*<sup>15</sup> of immanence. The promise of intelligibility is the pursuit of gaining access to the system, to know how it functions, and use this knowledge to guide how one lives. Deconstruction results from the impossibility of the system from closing in upon itself as a totality:

In that case deconstruction, without being anti-systematic, is on the contrary, and nevertheless, not only a search for, but itself a consequence of, the fact that the system is

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<sup>15</sup> The etymology of system from the stem of synistanai "to place together, organize, form in order," from syn-"together" (see syn-) + root of histanai "cause to stand" from PIE root \*sta- "to stand" (see stet).

impossible; it often consists, regularly or recurrently, in making appear—in each alleged system, in each self-interpretation of and by the system—a force of dislocation, a limit in the totalization, a limit in the movement of syllogistic synthesis. (Derrida, 2002, p.4)

The autonomy of the system “deconstructs” (not destructs) via exposure to a force that is “Other” than the system, revealing a limit to the system’s efforts at totalization. Under the auspices of the Law, clinical psychology has often approached survivor testimony in service to the system of traumatology, in order to expand or refine the system. As such, it is unable to give an account of, or offer countenance to, anything that radically resists this system (this is Job’s complaint), which is what Derrida refers as the “self-interpretation of and by the system”. The system is “autonomous” insofar as it obeys no law other than it gives itself. Similarly, the system is also auto-erotic, desiring only what it makes its own. The “system” is like Narcissus (who mistakenly believes the voice of Echo to simply be his own), unable to tear away from its own reflection and thus only ever encounters itself.

Deconstruction as a *search for the impossible* is certainly a way to approach the texts of survivors as long as one bears in mind that this search is itself a *consequence* of an exposure to the impossible that cannot be appropriated by such an activity. Deconstruction highlights the moments of “dislocation” or ruptures along the smooth surface of immanence. Stated differently, deconstruction is interested in when the Law is usurped by a force foreign to its sovereignty. Picking up the citation where we left off, Derrida (2002) goes on to argue,

Wherever I have followed this investigative approach, it has been a question of showing that the system does not work, and that this dysfunction not only interrupts the system but itself accounts for the desire of the system... Basically deconstruction as I see it is an attempt to train the beam of analysis onto this disjointing link. (p.4)

Derrida offers the sound and practical advice to train our beam of analysis onto the “disjoining links” or aporias of survivor testimony that *unconditionally* keep the “system” from closing. A deconstructive approach to survivor testimony takes seriously the experience of not knowing where to go, paying special attention to these moments in the text. Furthermore, a deconstructive approach does not immediately regard this experience as the encounter with a conditional limit, which would simply affirm the totality of possibility. Rather, as Caputo (1997) notes, perhaps the “least bad” definition of deconstruction is the “the experience of the impossible”, linking deconstruction to trauma at the limit. The fragment of the seven days and seven nights, on my reading, is precisely a disjoining link in the text of the book of Job.

In an ode to obligation that references Kierkegaard, Derrida, and deconstruction, Caputo (1993) describes a position in relation to the system that will guide our approach in the following chapters. Caputo describes himself as a “supplementary clerk”, whose job is not to offer a philosophical “system” that seeks to account for the essence of human existence through mighty concepts such as “Spirit” or “Being”. Rather, as a supplementary clerk, Caputo writes that he is afforded the luxury to collect “scraps” of experience that are excluded, neglected or allergic to the systems that already exist. Instead of boldly going where no one thinker has gone before, Caputo takes as his humble occupation to follow behind the great thinkers of philosophy to simply gather the little scraps to which we are nonetheless obliged but have, for one reason or another, gone without countenance. Caputo (1993) writes,

... I am no hero, no fearless explorer of unknown lands, no swaggering venturer on uncharted seas. I think myself rather as rowing a small boat some distance behind, sticking close to the shores in case a storm blows up, in waters where great and mighty vessels have first shown the way. (p.1)

Following Caputo's "method", this dissertation is not so ambitious as to come up with a comprehensive "system" or theory of trauma. It is certainly not an effort to combine systems to produce a grander, more comprehensive system such as the bio-psycho-social paradigm. As a supplementary clerk, I am interested in the scraps of testimony that, for one reason or another, fail to be accounted for by the system, by the Law.

If the system is the Law, and the aporia is outlaw, then it follows that it is in the scraps of testimony that that we may find traces of the aporia. Examining the scraps of survivor testimony that are left in the wake of the great and mighty thinkers on trauma, we may find ourselves confronted with trauma at the limit. Consequently, being exposed to trauma at the limit reveals the demand for a radicalization of the double-bind of survivor testimony that will have profound consequences for what it means for the clinical psychologist to bear witness. But where is one to begin? What is the first step in seeking to remark on the experience of the impossibility of taking steps? We again take our cue from the book of Job, beginning with the arrival of the three friends to the disastrous scene of suffering. However, in light of the aporia and of deconstruction a new interpretation emerges, one that offers a different beginning than having already placed Job's suffering as an unquestioned possibility for the promise of intelligibility. Caputo (1997) offers a moving initiation which, like the book of Job, begins by the *impossible*:

Let us begin by the impossible, not with the impossible, as with some initial object of inquiry or interrogation judged to be impossible but by the impossible, jolted or shocked by it into action. Let us allow ourselves to be engaged, impassioned by the impossible, set in motion by something that shatters the assured horizons of possibility that jars us off dead center (p.161).

It is not despite the impossible but rather it is in the name of the impossible that we now turn to the aporias of death in survivor testimony.

## Chapter IV: Death & the Death of Others

*To some, the testimony of survivors may seem a tribute to the life-force and written proof that moral heroism is redemptive even in Nazi death camps; but to others, bearing witness means simply homage to the dead, a recognition that during the period of history we call the Holocaust the human spirit faltered, and the human body, bereft of support, succumbed to an annihilation it no longer had the power to prevent.*

-Lawrence Langer  
*Versions of Survival* (1982)

*I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. This is an uncomfortable notion of which I have become conscious little by little, reading the memoirs of others and reading mine at a distance of years. We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the "Muslims", the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception.*

-Primo Levi  
*The Drowned and the Saved* (1988)

At the conclusion of the famous Holocaust memoir *Night*, Elie Wiesel is recovering at a hospital following his liberation from the death camps. Hovering between life and death, Wiesel finally brings himself to look into a mirror and pens these final words: "I had not seen myself since the ghetto. From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me" (1985, p.119). What do the testimonies of survival reveal about the relationship of life and death in the context of traumatic violence that sought to degrade and destroy human existence? What does it mean for the clinical psychologist to bear witness to the specter of death that haunts the testimonies of survivors? Can the clinical psychologist, in good faith, promise to render the confrontation with death intelligible and/or meaningful? Or could it be that these testimonies confront clinical psychologists with an instance

of trauma at the limit, exposing us to the aporia at the boundaries of life and death? In Charlotte Delbo's (1995) *Auschwitz and After*, the survivor "Mado" laments,

Here I am, dead like the others. My voice gets lost. Who hears it? Who knows how to heed it? The women, my companions, also wanted to return to deliver their message. All the deportees wanted a chance to say what they had to say. Am I alive when there is nothing I can say? Alive when my voice is choking? *The very fact we're here to speak denies what we have to say.* (p. 257, my emphasis)

How is the psychologist to respond to the living survivor who testifies to being dead? To the survivor whose body has become a corpse? If the psychologist relies on the testimonies of survivors to understand and "bear witness" to the relationship between death and trauma, how does one interpret the impasse of a living voice that chokes on the articulation of death?

In his critique of Holocaust deniers, philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1983/1988) points out that they seek to invalidate the claims by survivors who speak to a horror that is beyond intelligibility, a horror that is impossible to grasp or see. The response to this impassioned paradox to testify to that which is unspeakable is neutralized by the following argument:

Should the victim seek to bypass this impossibility and testify anyway to the wrong done to him or to her, he or she comes up against the following argumentation: either the damages you complain about never took place, and your testimony is false; or else they took place, and since you are able to testify to them, it is not a wrong that has been done to you, but merely damage, and your testimony is still false. (p.5)

For deniers there is no impossible wound of trauma, merely damage which can be made intelligible. However, as we have seen, for many well-intentioned people there is no room for the

impossible. If clinical psychology wishes to avoid a manner of response that deprives survivors of legitimated means to register the aporia of death (which consequently subjects them to a second wave of victimization by accusing their testimony as being false) we ought to seek interpretations that do not reconcile the paradox of death in survival.<sup>16</sup> For if the very act of speaking denies what survivors such as “Mado” are compelled to say, is speaking about “my death” even possible? Can the relationship to death ever entirely or properly be “mine”?

Additionally, it is not only “my death” that haunts the testimony of survivors, but also the death of others. As Terence Des Pres (1976) points out, survivors often speak as a “we” rather than an “I”. Speaking to the relationship between the living survivor who testifies and the dead, Primo Levi (1988) writes in *The Drowned and the Saved*: “We who were favored by fate tried, with more or less wisdom, to recount not only our fate but also that of the others, indeed of the drowned” (p.84). Similarly, Wiesel (1985) argues that to be able to testify by virtue of having survived entails a solemn duty to the dead: “This sentiment moves all survivors; they owe nothing to anyone; but everything to the dead” (p.13). While this obligation to speak on behalf of those who have died indeed moves many survivors, many are also painfully aware of an unbridgeable abyss between the survivor and the silenced, between the living and the dead. Despite the power of their narratives, survivors like Levi (1988) emphatically argue that any testimony on behalf of the dead is invariably limited to the perspective of a third party: “The destruction brought to an end, the job completed, was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to describe their own death... We speak in their stead, by proxy” (p.84). No steps lead

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that one remain silent as Lyotard (1983/1988) argues that silence, whether it be indifferent or reverent, is not an adequate response to the experience of survival: “Not to speak is part of the ability to speak, since ability is a possibility and a possibility implies something and its opposite... To be able not to speak is not the same as not to be able to speak. The latter is deprivation, the former negation”. (p.10)

to the intelligibility of *their death as their death*, only interpretations made by one who has not died.

The promise of intelligibility encounters a radical limit not only with death, but with the death of others. Echoing similar sentiment, WWII veteran Charles Felix (1995) offers testimony to the impossibility of conveying the pain of death that surrounded him in the Pacific theater.

...And the comrades you left behind  
Remember them in the mud and wire  
They can never tell now,  
Did it pain to die?

I can't tell you how.  
For youth's song was never sung for them.  
I don't know their pain either,  
For I never died before. (p.95)

Many clinical psychologists who study massive trauma are similarly moved by a debt to those who have died, and attempt to give countenance to those who have been forever silenced in our interpretations of traumatic disaster. However, we cannot and should not sidestep the complicated question of "Who can speak for the dead?" For if we are to speak for the dead, on behalf of the dead, do we not risk appropriating the otherness of their spectral address to the familiar language of the living? Can we ignore the abyss that separates the drowned from the saved when attempting to account for the dead through the words of those still alive? If not, are we not equally guilty if we choose not to speak and remain silent, faced by their spectral address?

### **Man's Search for Meaning:**

Perhaps no other theoretical orientation within clinical psychology has devoted more attention, and granted more significance, to the meaning of death than existentialism. This philosophical tradition rose to prominence within psychology largely due to Viktor Frankl's

(1984) *Man's Search for Meaning*<sup>17</sup> whose central theme is neatly summarized in the preface by Gordon Allport: "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering and in dying" (p.11). Published shortly after the end of World War II, Frankl introduces psychology to "logotherapy" through his experience of survival during the Holocaust and there is perhaps no other book that exerts greater influence on interpretations of trauma and survival within clinical psychology.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, many psychologists approach the interpretations of survivor testimony as the search for meaning behind the horrors of trauma. This pursuit of trauma's meaning does not only serve academic ends, but is considered by many to be vital to the healing process. For example, according to Janoff-Bulman & Berg's (1998) chapter *Disillusionment and the Creation of Value: From Traumatic Losses to Existential Gains*, traumatic experience throws one into an existential crisis which affords the opportunity for existential gains via meaning-making:

This process of meaning-making and the creation of value ultimately transforms the traumatic victimization for many survivors. Their experience is no longer regarded as wholly horrible, but now has *redemptive and instrumental worth*. The victimization is regarded as a *teacher, providing important lessons and benefits* (p.44, my emphasis)

We have heard this response before, from the mouths of Job's three friends: "You are lucky that God has scolded you; so take his lesson to heart. For he wounds, but then binds up; he injures, but then he heals" (Job 27:18). For Janoff-Bulman & Berg (1998), trauma shatters naïve

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<sup>17</sup> Originally published in 1946 as *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (A psychologist experiences the concentration camp), the first English version was titled *From Death-Camp to Existentialism* (1959), which was later revised and enlarged to become *Man's Search for Meaning*.

<sup>18</sup> There has been controversy over some of Frankl's claims. Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer (1982) and historian Timothy Pytell (2000) argue that Frankl portrayed logotherapy as arising out of his camp experience, despite evidence that these ideas were present prior to his internment. Additionally, Pytell (2000) argues that Frankl misrepresents the length of his time at Auschwitz despite claiming his experiences as essential to understanding survival.

assumptions regarding the benevolence and safety of the world, revealing reality, revealing the Law. Trauma is overwhelming only if one refuses to learn the lesson of the Law. Once one has accepted that their victimization fits within the Law, the Law bestows value on one's existence. The companions make the accusation that Job suffers because he is not heeding the "lesson" contained within his suffering that is offered by the Law/God.

However, as Wyschogrod (1985) points out, man's search for meaning may no longer be adequate for reckoning with the horrors of state-sanctioned and unprecedented man-made mass death that erupted in the middle of the twentieth century:

For meaning can only be created when what is radically new appears in the context of what is most familiar, the taken-for-granted continuities of interpretation that stand fast for us as a horizon for further experience and its integration into the already accepted significations that guide the life of society. (p.1)

Can psychology continue to rely on existentialism's taken-for-granted continuities of interpretation that have long provided the horizon for the meaning of death when exposed to the horrors found in places such as the death camp, the battlefield, or the torture chamber? Or could it be, as Wyschogrod (1985) avers, that the disaster of traumatic death confronts us with something so profoundly disturbing that we can no longer pursue death's meaning from within our traditional frameworks of signification?

Invoking the concept under scrutiny, Frankl reminds his readers that he is not just a psychiatrist, but also a survivor, and as such, "I also bear witness to the unexpected event to which man is capable of defying and braving the worst conditions conceivable." However, given the fact that roughly only 60,000 people survived (and many who did were not as optimistic and self-congratulatory as Frankl) Auschwitz while an estimated 1.1 million people perished, such a

claim seems absurd.<sup>19</sup> Yet psychology persists in privileging testimonies that champion heroic overcoming and ignore the “outlaw” scraps of testimonies too ugly, too disastrous, for the noble act of bearing witness. They are forgotten, or even worse, ignored. Recalling Caputo’s method for the supplementary clerk, the great ships of Frankl, Yalom, Stolorow, and Heidegger are sailing heroically into the abyssal seas of death. I am not so heroic, not so courageous. I am content to row my small boat in their wake, picking up the scraps of survivor testimonies on death that, for whatever reason, are not given countenance.

In his review of commentary on Holocaust experience, Langer (1982) writes, “The language of heroism is incommensurate with the experience of annihilation, but in the absence of a more adequate idiom, commentators continue to rely on its code words” (p.10). Nowhere is this more true than in the romanticism of existential psychology that continues to rely on a language of heroism for their interpretation of the relationship to death, including traumatic death, despite powerful testimonies to the contrary.

Erich Maria Remarque’s (1928/1958) dedication of his famous war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* warns his readers,

This book is neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try to simply tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped the shells, were destroyed by the war.

Framing the experience of death as a heroic adventure is a deeply ingrained tradition within Western culture and, as Terence Des Pres (1976) points out, the highest reverence is often reserved for versions of death that preserve a triumph of the human spirit. Citing Christ,

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<sup>19</sup> In response to Frankl’s claim to have borne witness to heroics exemplified by himself, Pytell (2000) writes, “But for anyone familiar with Holocaust literature this surprisingly optimistic (and self-congratulatory) response to the horrors of Auschwitz is unsettling” (p.281).

Socrates, Achilles, and the Unknown Soldier as prime examples, Des Pres (1976) argues that the heroic interpretation of death enjoys such a profound cultural privilege that it is rarely questioned, while other relations to death, such as mere survival, are unsatisfying and frequently regarded as suspect. According to Des Pres (1976), the reason heroic interpretations of death have come to enjoy such predominance has less to do with reckoning with testimonies of survival and more to do with the relief it bestows upon those of us who were not there and are yet still called to bear witness to the disaster:

We may find, in the end, that the hero's death is appointed—that one of the functions of culture is to provide symbolic systems which displace awareness of what is terrible, and that through death the hero takes upon himself the condition of victimhood and thereby grants the rest of us an illusion of grace... The problem now is that symbolic manipulations no longer work. Death and terror are too much with us. (p.5)

Despite the fact that death and terror are indeed too much with us, we may be surprised to find that existential psychology's search for meaning continues to elevate heroic illustrations of the relationship to death over and against uglier and more disturbing confrontations with death and terror. Perhaps we may even begin to hear the echoes of Job in some of our most contemporary theories of death and trauma to discover a theodicy long thought to have been expunged from clinical psychology.

### **The Authenticity Paradigm:**

Wyschogrod (1985) points out that the predominant tradition that governed the meaning of individual death and dying in Western culture prior to the horrors of the twentieth century, rested on the belief that a "good death" was the measure of a good life. The notion of a "good death" does not refer to the specific cause of death, but rather to the manner in which a person

understands and relates to the undeniable finitude of their existence that culminates in death. The vulnerability inherent to a finite existence can certainly be a source of profound pain and terror, but how one confronts the anxiety of death has profound implications for the quality of one's life. The "good life" only becomes possible through a non-evasive reckoning with the anxiety of finitude long before physically dying. Wyschogrod labels the tradition which posits a reciprocal relationship between the manner in which one confronts death and the "good life" as the "authenticity paradigm". Central to this paradigm is the appropriation of one's own death in life: "Dying acceptably is only possible if death has become ingredient in life itself long before life is extinguished. Life in turn can be lived with integrity only if death is already accepted as inseparable from it" (Wyschogrod, 1985, p.2). The authenticity paradigm exerts profound influence on the interpretations of death in clinical psychology, and for the existentialists in particular. However, as I hope to demonstrate, the authenticity paradigm participates in a heroic theodicy that risks marginalizing aspects of survivor experience and testimony. The critique of theodicy is not intended to entirely deny the insights offered by the authenticity paradigm, but rather to analyze its privilege in the interpretations of death and its relevance to understanding the aporias of traumatic death.

Turning to the recent work of one of the most renowned authors in existential psychology, we find clear evidence that the authenticity paradigm continues to hold sway over the meaning of death. Irwin Yalom (2009) argues while the physicality of death may bring about the end of our existence, the anxiety in being faced by the inevitability of death saves us by rendering our lives meaningful. Consistent with Wyschogrod's formula, Yalom (2009) argues, "Staring into the face of death, with guidance, not only quells terror but renders life more poignant, more precious, more vital. Such an approach to death leads to instruction about life"

(p. 276). According to Yalom, the confrontation with death invariably contains the germ of an “awakening experience”, the revelation of one’s responsibility and freedom regarding their existence, even in the aftermath of “cataclysmic traumatic events”. Psychologist and psychoanalyst Robert Stolorow (2007) offers remarkably similar iterations of the authenticity paradigm, arguing that traumatic experience plunges one into a confrontation with death that ultimately reveals “perspective” and “a sense of what really matters” (p.45). Like the mythological phoenix that rises from the ashes of mortality, existential psychology argues that a meaningful existence rises out of the confrontation with my death.

There is perhaps no greater or more influential articulation of the authenticity paradigm than Martin Heidegger’s, particularly in *Being and Time* which is directly cited by both Yalom and, to a greater extent, Stolorow.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to make several remarks on Heidegger’s philosophy in order to highlight some of the inherited assumptions that serve as the foundation for existential psychology’s interpretations of death. The explicit task in *Being and Time* is to formulate a fundamental ontology by renewing the question, “What is being?” In his approach to this question, Heidegger does not merely focus on the manifestation of “being” as a noun, but also on the often overlooked significance of “being” as a verb (is) in an effort to bring into focus our pre-conceptual understanding of the fundamental structures of existence.

Heidegger argues that this pre-conceptual comprehension of being is so intuitive that we often neglect its complexities and become too narrowly concerned with specific entities. “But already when we ask, ‘what is being?’ we stand in an understanding of the ‘is’ without being able to determine conceptually what the ‘is’ means (Heidegger, 1927/2010, p.4). For Heidegger, there

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<sup>20</sup> One should not take the interpretations of Heidegger offered by Stolorow and Yalom as authoritative given the lack of scholarly analysis and neglect of vital elements to *Being and Time*. Despite these significant departures, Heidegger and existential psychology are nevertheless linked by the heroic appropriation of death under the banner of authenticity.

can be no knowledge of anything, let alone being, without an existing subject to whom what it means “to be” is disclosed and is a matter of concern.<sup>21</sup> It is, therefore, the existence of this subject to which what it means “to be” is implicitly understood but nevertheless obscured that becomes the focus of Heidegger’s philosophical analysis.

In order not to go too far afield into the profound complexities of Heidegger’s ontology, it will suffice to turn to Simon Critchley’s (2009) succinct summary of *Being and Time*, which brings us immediately to the theme of death:

That is, what it means for a human being to be is to exist temporally in the stretch between birth and death. Being is time and time is finite, it comes to an end with our death. Therefore, if we want to understand what it means to be an authentic human being, then it is essential that we constantly project our lives onto the horizon of our death, what Heidegger calls ‘being-towards-death’.

To exist, for Heidegger, is to always already be confronted (and thus constituted) by the finitude imposed by death as the possibility and inevitability of my non-existence, which does not await my acknowledgement or choosing. Given that existence is finite from its very inception, we confront death long before actually dying and thus our lives unfold in the shadow of our mortality. Following Heidegger, the existential approach to death accepts the brute fact of mortal finitude as a fundamental structure of human existence and subjectivity. Existential psychology moves beyond the narrow biological perspective that views death as merely the cessation of life processes and beyond the view that death is an external event that occurs at the end of one’s life. Rather, death, as the finitude of existence, is fundamental to human existence and experience.

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<sup>21</sup> In *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents* Levinas challenges Heidegger’s assumption that one cannot speak of existence without an existent, marking a fruitful departure to the *il y a*.

Existence, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, is always already being played out on a stage set by death.

This inherited understanding of finitude provides the foundation for the interpretations of death offered by existential psychology. For instance, Yalom (2009) opens his book by stating, Self-awareness is a supreme gift, a treasure as precious as life. This is what makes us human. But it comes with a costly price: the wound of mortality. Our existence is forever shadowed by the knowledge that we will grow, blossom, and, inevitably, diminish and die. (p.1)

Proceeding from the belief that existence is constituted by the inevitability of our non-existence, Yalom rejects any claims that would blunt or deflect the sharp point of our finitude as mere consolations. Directly referencing Heidegger, Stolorow (2007) makes a similar argument that death does not arrive at the end of selfhood, but rather is always already woven into the very fabric of human subjectivity: “As such, death always already belongs to our existence as a central constituent of our intelligibility to ourselves in our futurity and finitude” (p.35). Without the limits of finitude imposed by being-towards-death, human existence would be an infinite expanse, unrecognizable and devoid of any meaning or significance. Thus both authors accept Heidegger’s notion of being-towards-death insofar as one cannot talk about life in the absence of death; one cannot speak of existence outside of the horizon of eventual non-existence.

Having established that existence is finite, what quickly becomes the primary concern for the existentialists is not death *per se* (which they already understand to be the eventuality of non-existence), but rather the relationship to death. The emphasis placed on the anxiety over finitude brings us to the second theme inherited from Heidegger’s notion of being-towards-death. For Heidegger, anxiety is not simply one emotion among others, but is rather the fundamental

attunement of existence.<sup>22</sup> While anxiety is fundamental to Heidegger's entire ontological project, it features prominently in his understanding of the relationship to death. "Thrownness into death reveals itself to it more primordially and penetratingly in the attunement of anxiety" (Heidegger, 1927/2010), p.241). Stolorow's and Yalom's interpretation of Heidegger leads them to argue that the relationship to death is indelibly marked by a particular kind of existential anxiety, the meaning of which is often avoided or obscured.<sup>23</sup> The significance of existence is bestowed by our mortal anxiety in that we will eventually be severed from all that we hold dear; our loved ones, our projects, our world, even ourselves. Finitude is not only the line that gives existence its form, but also reveals existence as matter of fundamental concern via anxiety. The anxiety inherent to finite existence has garnered much attention among psychologists, particularly clinicians who treat psychopathology. Yalom (2009) describes death anxiety on a spectrum ranging from placid contemplation of one's finitude to the sheer terror of traumatic suffering. However, neither Yalom nor Stolorow regard this anxiety as simply a symptom of disease. Rather, consistent with the existential tradition, both authors approach the pain and suffering of death as revelatory of something profoundly important for the possibility of the "good life".

What exactly does the anxiety over death reveal about human subjectivity and existence?

According to Heidegger, the anxiety of being-towards-death reveals my eventual non-existence as my ownmost, nonrelational and insuperable possibility. Heidegger describes our everyday

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<sup>22</sup> For Heidegger, this anxiety does not refer to a specific entity or situation in the world (which is the derivative experience of fear), but rather refers to "nothingness and nowhere" of being-in-the-world itself.

<sup>23</sup> Despite Yalom's and Stolorow's claims that their work is supported by Heidegger's philosophy, Heidegger disavowed being an existentialist and specifically stated that his remarks regarding ontological anxiety does not refer to the fear of one's demise (1927/2010,p.241). Yalom and Stolorow fail to address Heidegger's distinction between the fear of death versus the anxiety of-being-towards-death. The neglect of the fundamental ontological difference outlined in the very beginning of *Being and Time* inevitably leads to an unfortunate misrepresentation of Heidegger's work.

engagement with the world as participating in a variety of socially determined possibilities in a commonly shared world. The only possibility of my existence that is not socially determined is my death, a possibility that cannot be shared or taken on by anyone else except me. No one participates in my death except for me, revealing the singularity of my existence. Being-towards death reveals the radical singularity of existence insofar as death is a possibility that no one can assume but me, just as no one can live my life but me. Death individualizes the significance of existence for the subject in that no one can die in any other's stead, a fact that is powerfully revealed by anxiety. Critchley (2009) provides a clarifying description of the experience of Heidegger's ontological anxiety when he describes the radical singularity revealed by death.

Everyday life in the world is like being immersed in the sea and drowned by the world's suffocating banality. Anxiety is the experience of the tide going out, the seawater draining away, revealing a self stranded on the strand, as it were. (www.theguardian.com)

The anxiety experienced in the confrontation with one's own death singles individual subjectivity out from the faceless crowd of the "they", revealing the fundamental concern and responsibility for one's own existence. For Heidegger, death seeks me out in my individuality, lifting me from the masses by virtue that no one can take on my death for me. Anxiety serves to reveal the radical singularity of an existence inscribed with the finitude of being-towards-death, reveals the ultimate possibility of "my death" which bestows my subjectivity and my selfhood.<sup>24</sup> It is the ultimate possibility of my death that provides the horizon in which all other possibilities are taken up.

With direct reference to being-towards-death, Stolorow (2007) argues that the impact of psychological trauma produces an affective state that bears a close similarity to the central

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that for Heidegger, this anxiety is not something that one "has", but rather it is constitutive of subjectivity.

elements of Heidegger's description of anxiety. Based on his phenomenological descriptions, Stolorow writes that the profound sense of alienation and solitude experienced in the wake of trauma results from the painful awareness that "my death" cannot be borne by anyone else and thus the experience of my finitude becomes insulated from human dialogue as it has no relational home. Traumatic experience for Stolorow serves the same function as Heidegger's anxiety insofar as it reveals the relationship between life, death, and human subjectivity, a relationship that is often obscured in everyday life. "As a result, the traumatized person cannot help but perceive aspects of existence that lie well outside the absolutized horizons of normal everydayness" (Stolorow, 2007, p.16). What the traumatized person is able to perceive, according to Stolorow, is the existential meaning of finitude; death is the ultimate possibility that is singularly and uniquely "mine". In a similar tone, Yalom argues that the confrontation with death invariably contains the potential for an "awakening experience" that assigns the fundamental existential project of appropriating one's life through an appropriation of death. Yalom (2009) describes the confrontation with death as a form of "existential shock therapy" that initiates the challenge of the "good life" only through mastering death: "You are prompted to grapple with your fundamental human responsibility to construct an authentic life of engagement, connectivity, meaning, and self-fulfillment" (p. 34). With direct reference to Heidegger, both Yalom and Stolorow argue that the anxiety from the confrontation with death is revelatory of existential truths, most notably that all possible projects of existence are derivative from the ultimate possibility of impossibility, namely my death.

Out of the anxiety of being-towards-death emerges a fundamental fork in the existential road. This brings us to the two modes of relating to finitude, which is the final argument inherited by existential psychology from Heidegger's philosophy. Continuing to draw on *Being*

*and Time*, the existentialists argue that it is not uncommon for people to find ways to deny or evade the heavy burden of one's own death. Heidegger argues that average "everydayness" is marked by a denial of "my death" insofar as one relates to "death" as it is mediated by socially determined meanings belonging to "the they", the faceless crowd. In our average everydayness, we are only able to relate to death as something that happens to everyone in general but to no one in particular, especially myself. This "idle chatter" regarding death functions to tranquilize the profound anxiety inherent to finite existence by dispersing the staggering weight of the fundamental responsibility for the singularity of my death as "death in general". The unique concern for "my death" as my utmost and ownmost possibility is evaded by reference to "death in general", an abstract event that happens to the human species, but whose individual meaning and existential implications are nonetheless obscured. This "inauthentic" relation to death flees from the anxious responsibility of appropriating one's own death by deferring to socially determined meanings of death. *"The they does not have the courage to have anxiety about death...Entangled, everyday being-towards-death is a constant flight from death...reinterpreting it, understanding it inauthentically, and veiling it (Heidegger, 1927/2010, p.244, emphasis in original). By fleeing from the anxiety of our finitude, the profound and reciprocal relationship between life and death, between Being and nothingness, is covered over and forgotten in the inauthentic relationship to death.*

While Heidegger is critical of this evasion and its consequences in a philosophical register, both Stolorow and Yalom point out that the inauthentic relationship to death plagues psychology and psychotherapy. Yalom argues that, "History teems with examples of the variegated ways we deny death" and he singles out psychology and psychotherapy as being especially guilty of avoiding death. (p. 275). Stolorow argues that our everyday engagement

with the world naively operates according to predictable and stable constructions he calls the “absolutisms of everydayness” that cover over the existential lessons that can be learned from the confrontation with death. Both authors are sympathetic to the pain and suffering that results from the confrontation with death, particularly in the instances of trauma, but the evasion of the anxiety over our inherent finitude has serious consequences. Drug use, dissociation, and a variety of other psychological symptoms can be deployed to temper the anxiety of being-towards-death, but obviously nothing can cure the inherent finitude of our existence, and thus one becomes alienated from one’s own selfhood. Decisions, relationships, and activities under the spell of an inauthentic relationship to death are divested of their value and hold no uniquely personal significance. Recalling the recipe that states death must be ingredient to life, inauthenticity denies the possibility of the good life by foreclosing an authentic relationship to my death. “...The more un-lived your life, the greater your death anxiety. The more you fail to experience your life fully, the more you will fear death” (Yalom, 2009, pp.49-50, my omission). The inauthentic relationship to death is the evasion of the anxiety that reveals the uniquely singular significant of “my death” and the failure to seize upon “my death” as the ultimate of my possibilities. The inauthentic relationship not only fails to grasp the meaning of death but also perpetuates the suffering left in the wake of the inevitable confrontation with our finitude

Authenticity, on the other hand, is the relationship that not only holds its ground when confronted by death, but seizes, appropriates, and ultimately submits finitude to the mastery of “my death”. Instead of evasion, Heidegger describes the authentic relationship to mortality involving the resolve to anticipate the inevitability of “my death”. This as all the possibilities that make up existence are derivative of the ultimate possibility of impossibility, of the possibility of my eventual non-existence where all possibility will cease to be. As Critchley’s analysis of

Heidegger suggests, existence requires the possibility of impossibility, just as force requires the harmony of some opposing resistance.

...anticipation does not passively await death, but mobilizes mortality as the condition for free action in the world... It is only in being-towards-death that one can become the person who one truly is. Concealed in the idea of death as the possibility of impossibility is the acceptance on one's mortal limitation as the basis for an affirmation of one's life.

(Critchley, 2009)

This is precisely what Stolorow takes from Heidegger in his theory of trauma. Trauma, according to Stolorow, involuntarily plunges one into “authentic” being-towards-death that is painful and, at times, unbearable. However, if one can muster the “anticipatory resoluteness” described by Heidegger, Stolorow believes that trauma bestows existence with meaning and purpose. Citing his authorship on trauma as exemplary, Stolorow claims, “Might this enduring project exemplify an authentic resoluteness brought forth in me by my seizing upon my experience of traumatic loss and the particular form of being-toward death that accompanied it” (p.46)? The authentic relationship to death is the heroic adventure of courageously and unflinchingly staring into one’s own finitude.

With these interpretations of death we have now come full circle back to the authenticity paradigm previously defined by Wyschogrod. Before turning to our critical analysis of the authenticity paradigm as it relates to theodicy and trauma, it is important to make some final remarks regarding Heidegger’s method that has been unassumingly inherited by existential psychology. As previously mentioned, Heidegger attempts to reawaken the question of being to formulate a fundamental ontology. Therefore, instead of merely an “existentiell” or “ontic” inquiry regarding specific determinate things that are (being), Heidegger pursues an “existential”

or “ontological” inquiry into the fundamental structures of existence (Being). The purpose of this fundamental ontology is not to study this or that specific being, but rather to inquire into the larger question of what it means for a being to be. Heidegger considers his ontology fundamental because the structures of existence, or Being, undergird the various specific ontic domains of knowledge referring to beings. Despite the brevity of this summary, what is important for our purposes is the general sketch of Heidegger’s method. As Wyschogrod (1985) points out, Heidegger was aware that any ontological project will invariably be rooted in the examination of specific ontic clues, and thus the kinds of clues one chooses undoubtedly influences the trajectory of analysis.<sup>25</sup> What we must bear in mind is that the clues Heidegger chooses do not come from the limit situations of traumatic suffering, but rather they have been gathered from the “average everydayness of existence”.<sup>26</sup> According to Wyschogrod’s (1985) analysis, the clues Heidegger describes from the “average everydayness” reflect a world that possesses a “...materially rich and complex structure that is dense with social exchange” (p.158). This immediately should raise the question as to whether interpretations of death, rooted in clues taken from the “average everydayness” of a materially and socially rich world are relevant for interpretations of the relationship to traumatic death. Wyschogrod (1985) argues that, “If one begins with the necropolis of the twentieth century, the ontic clues are different from those Heidegger chooses”, and therefore radically alters our understanding of the relationship to death (p.173). Yet both Stolorow and Yalom assume that the conclusions regarding authenticity and death would remain the same even if they began with the radically different ontic clues from

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<sup>25</sup> “This means that the ontic clues, the clues taken from Dasein’s usual comportments, are the root from which ontological analysis grows: the transcendental framework arrived at depends upon our preliminary observations of Dasein’s comportments, because these fundamentally affect the course of our inquiry” (Wyschogrod, 1985, p.155).

<sup>26</sup> “The manner of access and interpretation must instead be chosen in such a way that this being can show itself to itself on its own terms. And furthermore, this manner should show that being as it is *initially and for the most part*—in its average *everydayness*” (Heidegger, 1927/2006, p.16).

scenes of trauma.<sup>27</sup> Is the death that lurks in our “everydayness” the same as state-sanctioned traumatic death? Is the dying from illness or accident the same as being selected for abject degradation and annihilation? This is not to discount the pain of death and loss, but rather to pose the question of whether interpretations of death that are rooted in everydayness are adequate for describing the death encountered through atrocity.

**Authenticity & theodicy.** The overtones of a heroic theodicy can be heard as soon as one reads the title of Yalom’s book (2009) *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*. Yalom is inspired by Francois de La Rochefoucauld’s maxim: “You cannot stare straight into the face of the sun, or death”, which speaks to the impossibility of a relationship to death based on sight, at least directly. For Yalom, however, this maxim merely serves as the antagonist for the heroic adventure of overcoming the problem of the terror of death. For by the time the reader gets to the end of Yalom’s book, the impossibility of staring into the face of death has been confronted, struggled with, and finally, overcome. Yalom dismisses La Rochefoucauld’s maxim as a “folk belief” that fails to courageously and authentically understand the meaning of death. Citing his own courage, Yalom proclaims, “I would recommend staring into the sun to no one, but staring into death is quite another matter. A full unwavering look at death is the message of this book” (2009, p.275). Utilizing all the gestures that Levinas pointed out - grasp, sight, seizure - death is reduced to the immanence of the present. Nothing of death remains beyond the harmonious totality of being and nothingness. In a similarly self-congratulatory manner, Stolorow (2007) champions his own response to traumatic experience as demonstrating the value in his argument: “Might this enduring project exemplify an authentic resoluteness brought forth in me by my seizing upon my experience of traumatic loss and the particular form of authentic

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<sup>27</sup> By framing “trauma” as a universal structure of existence the existentialists are unable to account for a death that is traumatic: “The universalization of trauma is, in that way, a denial of what in trauma is traumatic” (Horowitz, 2009, p.40).

Being-towards-death that accompanied it?” (p.46). Appealing to the “might thoughts” of philosophers to ponder death, both Yalom and Stolorow recommend that it is only through an authentic contemplation of death that the good life becomes possible. However, there is much lost from the experience of death to its contemplation, as Wyschogrod (1985) points out; “Death has become tamed death, the subject of moral reflection. As thought content, death has its *nomos* and, thus transformed, loses its sting” (p.4). Subject to moral reflection, death conforms the Law, obscuring the more radical disturbance of the *aporia*.

The authenticity paradigm reveals the Law of death. Like Job’s friends who claim God is beyond all intelligibility and yet know his Law so very well, existentialists claim that death is nothingness of which they claim to know a great deal despite death being “nothing”. Similarly, just as Job’s friends apply technique based on the Law of God, existentialism applies technique on their understanding of the Law of existence, namely the nothingness of death. The interpretations offered by Yalom and Stolorow can be read as treatises of how to live life according to the Law revealed by death. Just as Job’s friends render traumatic suffering intelligible before divine Law, so too the existentialists render death intelligible before the Law of finite existence. Both Yalom and Stolorow argue that one only suffers death by failing to appropriate it as one’s own, and thus also failing to appropriate life as one’s own. Guided by Heidegger’s notion of finitude, both Stolorow and Yalom argue that vitality and mortality go hand in hand. To demonstrate how the terror of death contains the “lessons” of how to live the good life, Yalom cites literary figures such as Dickens’s Ebenezer Scrooge or Tolstoy’s Pierre Bezukhov as prime examples of the awakening experience that reveals life’s true value and meaning. However, as Langer (1982) points out, the link between vitality and mortality was destroyed in the conditions of horror from the Holocaust: “Affirming life in the face of death is

more eloquent than relevant to the threat of extermination in the gas chamber, though as long as we think of the Holocaust merely as another kind of dying, we will continue to approach it with such conventional language” (p.14). But it is precisely the conventional language of heroism and authenticity that existentialism uses to describe traumatic death. For what about the dead? Where was their “awakening experience”? Or are their experiences discounted from discussions on traumatic death, the only ones who truly experienced it? Existentialism relies so heavily on a language of rebirth following the brush with traumatic death that they often forget the dead, whose silence ought to sober any celebration of survival: “A language of rebirth that hurries into the future with paying homage to these ghosts from the past serves neither truth nor the spirits of the dead—who cannot speak for themselves” (Langer, 1982, p.15). Does authenticity bear witness to the experience of death? Or does authenticity contain the same habit for opium as religious theodicy that existentialism claims to have kicked?<sup>28</sup>

Reducing death to the totality of immanence, its disturbance is available as the subject of moral reflection. One could reason, based on existentialism’s logic, the more robust one’s intellect for contemplating death, the better one is able to tame its disturbance, which is exactly what Yalom and Stolorow imply. One can refer to Nietzsche, Heidegger, or a long line of literary heroes to find examples of how to courageously face death head-on. Jean Améry, tortured by the SS prior to being interned at Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Bergen-Belsen, was no stranger to Yalom’s philosophical and literary heroes. In testifying on death, Améry (1980) refutes existentialism’s romantic appeal to the aesthetics of art and literature:

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<sup>28</sup> Yalom is particularly critical of religious consolations while completely ignorant to the fact that he recapitulates the very paradigm he is critiquing. As Levinas (2000), argues, this atheism is merely a reverse dogmatism: “For the reduction of death to this dilemma of being or nothingness is a reverse dogmatism, whatever the feelings of an entire generation suspicious of the positive dogmatism of the immortality of the soul, considered as the sweetest ‘opium of the people’”. (p.8)

The first result was always the total collapse of the esthetic view of death...For death in its literary, philosophic, or musical form there was no place in Auschwitz. No bridge led from death in Auschwitz to Death in Venice. Every poetic evocation of death became intolerable, whether it was Hesse's 'Dear Brother Death' or that of Rilke, who sang: 'Oh Lord, give each his own death'...After the esthetic view of death crumbled, the intellectual faced death defenselessly. (pp.16-17, my omission)

Do we dare say that Améry's did not possess "the mighty thoughts" that Yalom champions? Or do these mighty thoughts shrink to the point of being irrelevant in attempting to bear witness to traumatic relations to death? Despite claiming to have confronted the "darkest fears" in his "unwavering look at death", Yalom (2009) refuses to take seriously the collapse of an esthetic view of death, and thus never dares venture beyond the consoling embrace offered by the authenticity paradigm. As Langer (1982) poignantly argues, turning to literary figures can too easily be put in the service of obscuring the traumatic reality of the horror of places like Auschwitz:

Confronted with the idea of tragedy, the imagination instinctively retreats to that long roll call of literary figures who achieved status and stature even in defeat. But the victims at Auschwitz faced a different kind of roll call; unlike the regal heroes of tragedy, they possessed neither power nor freedom of choice. (p.10)

However, the retreat from survivors such as Améry, does, and continues to be, looked over in preference for dubious tales of heroism. As we will see in the next chapter, traumatic figures such as the "musselman" reveal the woeful inadequacy of the authenticity paradigm for traumatic death.

In his rigorous critique of Frankl, Langer (1982) argues that one of the reasons *Man's Search for Meaning* has enjoyed such popularity and attracted so many defenders is that it champions a notion of freedom that many find appealing. However, Frankl's (and subsequently Yalom, Stolorow, and much of the existential tradition) description of this freedom does not hold up to the disaster of the Holocaust. Regarding Frankl's insistence on preserving an area of freedom even in the camps, Langer (1982) points out, "But his language blunts the menacing blade of atrocity and simplifies the threat of extermination into a conventional encounter between the free heroic spirit and human mortality" (p.18). We can hear evidence of this inheritance in Yalom's notion of freedom so radical that it borders on the ridiculous. Yalom's unwavering belief in human freedom, will, and agency leads him to the following conclusion: "You and you alone are responsible for the crucial aspects of your life situation, and only you have the power to change it. And even if you face overwhelming external restraints, you still have the freedom and the choice of adopting various attitudes toward those restraints" (p. 100). However, Yalom refuses to admit that what is precisely traumatic about trauma is that it reveals the limits of freedom, and the destruction of the simple moral categories of everyday life. Unable to cope with disaster, and disastrous victims, the rhetoric of heroism rides roughshod over survivors whose testimony offer less consoling versions of survival, as Langer points out:

By circumventing the death encounter in favor of spiritual heroism, Frankl avoids the difficulty of altering his reader's consciousness so that it can contend with the moral uncertainties of the Holocaust...It comes as no surprise to the reader, as he closes the volume, that the real hero of *Man's search for Meaning* is not man, but Viktor Frankl (1982, p.24).

The authenticity paradigm acknowledges no moral uncertainties, for the Law reveals that death is either courageously faced or evaded. Hence, the authenticity paradigm sits in judgment based on moral categories that are shattered by the disastrous element of trauma.

The economic exchange between the encounter with death and meaningful existence links the authenticity paradigm to theodicy through the belief that one suffers for something. Given that death is believed to reveal truths and prescriptions regarding human existence, one suffers but only insofar as one is unable to heed the lesson of the Law. The search for death's meaning, the ultimate achievement of the authenticity paradigm, promises a return that redeems suffering in the name of the Law. Death, despite its difficulty, promises progress by revealing the structures of existence toward which one can act accordingly. Referring to the appeal of suffering in the name of something, Levinas refers us back to theodicy: "This is pain henceforth meaningful, subordinated in one way or another to the metaphysical finality glimpsed by faith or belief in progress. Beliefs presupposed by theodicy!" (1982/1988, p.96). Theodicy reduces every disturbance to the intelligibility of the Law, including death. This presumption initiates an economic exchange between the experience of death and knowledge of existence, knowledge of the Law. Transforming traumatic death and suffering to meaningful existence demonstrates a strong kinship between the psychologists of existence and Job's friends.

**Chapter V:  
Trauma at the Limit: Death & Disaster**

*It is not with the nothingness of death, of which we precisely know nothing, that the analysis must begin, but with the situation where something absolutely unknowable appears. Absolutely unknowable means foreign to all light, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible, but where we ourselves are seized.*

-Emmanuel Levinas  
*Time and the Other* (1947/1987)

The problem of traumatic death, even as nothingness, even as the possibility of impossibility, is nevertheless contained within the totality of immanence, that is to say the Law. In a similar fashion to Job's friends who claim God is beyond knowing but yet speak to no end of his Law, death as nothingness may appear as an "impossibility", but ultimately and fundamentally is a possibility, something one can heroically take up and take on. This characterization of death, as Levinas (1993/2000) points out, fails to reckon with the disturbance of death that breaks with the structures of understanding and knowledge: "In philosophy, the relation with my death is described as anxiety and comes back to the comprehension of nothingness. The structure of comprehension is thus preserved in touching the question of the relation with my death" (p. 14). This is not to say there is nothing to be understood about death, certainly the authenticity paradigm offers compelling and valuable insights into mortality as a structure of existence. However, if one seeks to give countenance to the aporia of traumatic death, one must describe a relation to death that is not founded on knowledge but is fundamentally and radically otherwise than knowledge, breaking with the structures of comprehension.

For Levinas, the totalizing engagement with the world via knowledge indicates an essential solitude given that everything that is encountered becomes appropriated. If all I ever encounter is only that which I have made mine through comprehension, ultimately all I am ever able to encounter is myself. According to this logic, solitude could only be penetrated through a relation that is otherwise than comprehension. Suspicious of this totality, Levinas seeks within knowledge the encounter with a limit that results from something structured otherwise than immanence. This desire brings Levinas (1947/1987) to the experience of death and suffering:

This is when I come up against the problems of suffering and death. Not because they are very lofty themes, permitting brilliant and fashionable expositions, but because in the phenomenon of death solitude finds itself bordering on the edge of mystery. (p.41)

Unlike Heidegger whose philosophy begins with the average everydayness of existence, Levinas gets underway with the experience of death and suffering, which I believe is a more relevant starting point for the study of trauma.<sup>29</sup> Beginning on the “edge of mystery” (which I would call the *aporia*), Levinas offers a relationship to death and suffering that reveals an ethical, not heroic, adventure. The aporetic limits of death and suffering reveals the clinical psychologist to be bound to an obligation or promise that radically transforms what it means to bear witness.

### **The Passivity of Pain & Death:**

Suffering is never absent a body and yet bodily pain is noticeably absent in Heidegger’s understanding of death.<sup>30</sup> In a concise formulation of his disagreement with Heidegger regarding the relationship to death, Levinas (1947/2001) writes, “Death in Heidegger is an event of

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<sup>29</sup> The fundamental difference between Heidegger and Levinas is typically framed as ontology versus ethics, respectively. However, before contrasting their conclusions, it is important to recognize the differences in their points of departure, and in particular the experiences in which they root their philosophical analyses. For Heidegger it is average everydayness but for Levinas, however, it is the experience of death and suffering.

<sup>30</sup> “Heidegger’s analysis of death ignores the question of the body and does not break with the perspective of the primacy of things over persons but reinforces it” (Wyschogrod, 1985, p.163).

freedom, whereas for me the subject seems to reach the *limit of the possible* in suffering. It finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and in some way passive” (pp.70-71, my emphasis). As an object of contemplation, the existential angst or anxiety over one’s own mortality suggests that it is a site of activity, of possibility, for the gestures of comprehension and knowledge. In Heidegger’s view of subjectivity, every experience unfolds within the horizon of possibility (existence), a horizon made possible by the impossibility of existing, or non-existence, imposed by death. This supposed “impossibility” is nevertheless framed as the “possibility of impossibility” in Heidegger’s being-towards-death through which subjectivity comes into its own by seizing upon the greatest of challenges.<sup>31</sup> The economy of death is upheld as every possibility is only made possible by the eventual impossibility of non-existence. Having subdued the impossible via the possible, Heidegger’s relationship to death champions a supreme lucidity (death can be comprehended as nothingness) and a supreme virility (death is something I can take up and take on). The suffering of the anxiety of being-towards-death bestows subjectivity by virtue of the care and concern for one’s own being insofar as no one else can die my death. In this account, not even death can limit freedom and agency.

In *Time and the Other* Levinas (1947/1987), as promised, does not begin with “lofty themes” such as the existential angst that results from the banality of everyday life. Rather, Levinas turns our attention to “physical” pain, the pain of wound and of injury, of hunger and torture - physical pain as violence played out on the flesh of the body. Bodily pain that is remarkably absent from the existential analyses of death and trauma offered by Yalom and Stolorow. Does authenticity and being-toward-death hold up when one is under the lash or on the

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<sup>31</sup> “It is Dasein’s assumption of the utmost possibility of existence, which precisely makes possible all other possibilities, and consequently makes possible the very feat of grasping a possibility—that is, it makes possible activity and freedom” (Levinas, 1947/1987, p. 70).

rack, when one is hungry, cold and shivering, beaten and broken? Is the physical pain of traumatized flesh the confrontation with nothingness? Is physical pain, traumatic pain, a possibility for me to take up and take on? According to Levinas (1947/1987), physical suffering does not reveal the “nothingness and nowhere” of existence, but rather reveals that one is pinned to existence, “enchained”, “overwhelmed”, and “passive”. Physical pain plunges one into the full potential of the body’s vulnerable sensuality without the possibility of escape, such as when Job is afflicted with agonizing boils. When suffering plays out on the vulnerability of flesh, it is not as nothingness, rather it is, as Levinas (1947/1987) describes, just the opposite: “In this sense suffering is the impossibility of nothingness” (p.69). Death and suffering as the confrontation with nothingness not only fails to break with the totality of immanence, but more importantly, it does not account for the experience of bodily pain.

What Levinas (1947/1987) highlights in the experience of bodily pain and suffering is not merely its “content”, but more fundamentally the foreclosure of retreat: “In suffering there is an absence of all refuge...it is made up of the impossibility of fleeing or retreating. The whole acuity of suffering lies in this impossibility of retreat” (p.69). Physical suffering does not offer a possibility, not even the possibility of impossibility, but rather more radically it is the impossibility of possibility. The experience of being overwhelmed, enchained, regardless of how much one may wish to escape, reveals a radical *passivity*. Whereas intelligibility and comprehension were previously defined by the possibility of grasping or seeing, this impossibility of suffering is defined by *exposure*: pain touches us, but we do not touch back. Levinas describes the experience of pain and suffering as a “state of purity” insofar as pain is not grasped by thought or by any other active gesture, but rather signifies through the passivity of agony. The passivity of exposure is the impossibility of grasping, the impossibility of

intelligibility, signified in physical pain. This is not to say that there is nothing that can be grasped in the experience of physical pain. Rather, it is simply to highlight the passivity of the experience of pain.

The testimony of Jean Améry (1980) recounts the experience of torture at the hands of the SS prior to being imprisoned at Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald. A testimony whose palpable agony refutes heroism, theodicy, even intelligibility. A testimony that heaves under the experience of physical pain and torture. In addition to the threats and the beatings, Améry was subjected to torture of “strappado”:

In the bunker there hung from the vaulted ceiling a chain that above ran into a roll. At its bottom end it bore a heavy, broadly curved iron hook. I was led to the instrument. The hook gripped into the shackle that held my hands together behind my back. Then I was raised with the chain until I hung about a meter over the floor. (p.32).

Suspended by his arms twisted behind him, Améry was temporarily able to support himself, and from these agonizing moments he recounts, “All your life is gathered in a single, limited area of the body, the shoulder joints, and it does not react; for it exhausts itself completely in the expenditure of energy” (1980, p.32). In that moment, dangling, Améry’s entire existence has been reduced to flesh; to the muscle, ligament, and bone of his shoulder joints. Is there room to interpret this confrontation with pain unto death the nothingness of eventual non-existence? Is there room to advocate for an authentic seizing upon his physical pain? Suffering and physical pain is not the confrontation with nothingness, as is clearly the case for Améry. Levinas’s phenomenology of pain is supported by Améry’s testimony that indicates the impossibility of fleeing anywhere except the sensations in his shoulder joints, to anywhere other than the site of

torture, the vulnerable body. Suspended in torture, nothingness is impossible for Améry, an impossibility that signifies to the purity and passivity of pain.

Hoisted by his arms tensed and twisted, Améry's shoulders can no longer support the weight of his body, and he collapses into the abyss of excruciating pain:

And now there was a crackling and splintering in my shoulders that my body has not forgotten until this hour. The balls sprang from their sockets. My own body weight caused luxation; I fell into a void and now hung by my dislocated arms, which had been torn high from behind and were now twisted over my head. (1980, p.32)

The pain and injury to Améry's body is not the breakdown of equipment, like Heidegger's famous hammer, but rather it is flesh ripped asunder in searing, tearing pain. In this moment there is, via the vulnerability of bodily flesh, a shift from the virility of Heideggerian subjectivity to subjection, to the pure passivity of an undergoing. The agony of this passivity is described by Améry's testimony as he recounts in detail the impossibility of any heroic activity:

Whoever is overcome by pain through torture experiences his body as never before. In self-negation, his flesh becomes a total reality...frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that. (1980, p. 33)

Reduced to flesh, a radical passivity is revealed through the vulnerability of the suffering body in pain.

Later in his career, Levinas (1982/1998) returns to the experience of pain in the brief but dense essay *Useless Suffering*. Offering further analysis, Levinas acknowledges that suffering is similar to other sensations insofar that it belongs to consciousness as "psychological content". However, Levinas draws our attention to a contradiction within the psychological content of

suffering that is “in-spite-of-consciousness”, a “contradiction qua sensation”. For Levinas, suffering is unassumable by consciousness not simply because of intensity, a “quantitative ‘too much’”. Quantitative excess alone would not call into question the fundamental structures of immanence. Rather suffering is unassumable precisely because it is not grasped by consciousness, rather consciousness recoils from the pain of suffering. This limit is not a result of repression due to an excessive intensity of sensation, but rather suffering signifies the exposure to something structured otherwise than immanence, and thus unavailable to the gestures of grasp and seizure. “It is not only the consciousness of rejection or a symptom of rejection, but this rejection itself: a backward consciousness, ‘operating’ not as ‘grasp’ but as revulsion” (p.91). Like a hand that recoils from the heat of a flame, consciousness exposed to suffering is unable to grasp that which it undergoes. Intentionality plays no part in the experience of pain, one is not conscious of pain, one is fleeing from something of pain that is unknown, something incapable of being appropriated. Levinas’s account of the relationship between consciousness and pain helps explain in part the limits of language regarding the “unspeakable” invoked by survivors:

The denial, the refusal of meaning, thrusting itself forward as a sensible quality: that is, in the guise of ‘experienced’ content, the way in which, within a consciousness, the unbearable is precisely not borne, the manner of this not-being-borne; which paradoxically, is itself a sensation or a datum. (pp.91-92)

Signifying as the “unbearable”, suffering is not-being-borne by intellectual thought, but rather is a wound or tear in the fabric of consciousness that suffers. By virtue of being unbearable by thought, the possibilities for meaning and intelligibility reach their limit.

The search for meaning in survivor testimonies becomes complicated by the paradoxical experience of pain and suffering.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Levinas provides an account of suffering that gives countenance to the unconditional limits of meaning, intelligibility, and communicability. Améry, for instance, argues that it is futile to ask him to describe the pain of his torture:

It would be totally senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it 'like a red hot iron in my shoulders,' and was another 'like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head'? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turns on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. That pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. (1980, p.33).

The language of pain, screams and groans, crying and sobbing, a language of blood and tears, is an address from the victim that exceeds intelligibility. Confronted by this address, can we be sure that our obligation is a promise of intelligibility? To simply seek a better, more comprehensive and penetrating language to bring to light traumatic suffering? Or does the blood and tears of the suffering other's address reveal an obligation that is otherwise than knowledge, demanding something beyond what our knowledge can deliver. Wiesel (1986) also testifies to the limits of intelligible communication in an attempt to recount the experience of Auschwitz:

All words seemed inadequate, worn, foolish, lifeless, whereas I wanted them to be searing... Where was I to discover a fresh vocabulary, a primeval language? The language of night was not human, it was primitive, almost animal—hoarse shouting,

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<sup>32</sup>The experience of passivity should not be interpreted like other experiences, for there is in suffering a denial of the intelligibility implied by the term "experience"... "To say 'an experience of passivity' is only a way of speaking, for experience always already signifies knowledge, light, and initiative, as well as the return of the object to the subject" (Levinas, 1947/1987, p.70).

screams, muffled moaning, savage howling, the sound of beating. A brute strikes out wildly, a body falls. An officer raises his arm and a whole community walks toward a common grave. A soldier shrugs his shoulders, and a thousand families are torn apart, to be reunited only by death. This was the concentration camp language. It negated all other language and took its place. Rather than a link, it became a wall. (p. 2a)

According to Wiesel, testimony does not reveal or even hold the promise of intelligibility, but rather reveals a radical limit. This limit of intelligibility may reveal a dimension of language that is not simply the commerce of information, but rather speaks to the bonds one has for the other that is not founded on knowledge. Hence this limit or “wall” is not simply a problem to be overcome, but rather it is an aporia, an experience of not knowing where to go or what to say, to which we are nonetheless obligated to respond. Not despite this impossibility, but in the name of this impossibility, does the psychologist find themselves bound to respond and a response.

Confronted by the limits of knowledge to account for the experience of pain, Levinas (1982/1998) describes passivity as a vulnerability more passive than reception, even more passive than the opposite of activity: “In suffering, sensibility is a vulnerability, more passive than receptivity; an encounter more passive than experience...Suffering is a pure undergoing” (p.92). As a pure undergoing, traumatic suffering is the foreclosure of “options” such as heroic and unheroic, authentic and unauthentic. At the limit, traumatic suffering is not an “awakening experience” or a “search for meaning”, but reveals a radical vulnerability that marks a fundamental difference between Levinas and traditions that reduce every encounter with death and suffering as an adventure for some activity. Caputo (2004) deftly describes this difference between Heidegger’s authenticity and Levinas’s vulnerability that unfortunately also marks which testimonies get valorized and those which get ignored:

It is one thing to stand tall and take a beating, like a virile Heideggerian, but quite another to be beaten senseless, reduced to crying and sobbing, turned inside out from a subject to subjection, my activity thrown in reverse to passivity, which is what happens when suffering ‘attains its purity’.(p.98)

Far from being bloodied but unbowed, the vulnerability inherent to suffering reveals the limits of (heroic) activity.<sup>33</sup> It is precisely this radical passivity that links suffering and death, as Améry states: “Pain, we said, is the most extreme intensification imaginable of our bodily being. But maybe it is even more, that is: Death” (Améry, 1980, p.33). Death is not something by which I seize upon to make “mine”, but rather shatters my solitude as a rupture within the immanence of the Law.

Levinas (1993/2000) insists that the relationship to death is not founded on knowledge but he does not admit to an absence of a relationship. Guided by the vulnerability revealed through the experience of pain and suffering, Levinas (1947/1987) highlights the passivity in relation to death:

My mastery, my virility, my heroism as a subject can be neither virility nor heroism in relation to death. There is in the suffering at the heart of which we have grasped this nearness of death—and still at the level of the phenomenon—this reversal of the subject’s activity into passivity... to be the infantile shaking of sobbing. (p.72, my omission)

According to Levinas, the relationship to death is indelibly marked by emotion, but it is not the anxiety over nothingness that is fundamental. For anxiety disturbs, but it also nevertheless

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<sup>33</sup> Améry (1980) argues that his experience of torture was entirely unheroic and he is suspicious of accounts of torture where one heroically defies their interrogators by silence: “Yet it was not at all that I opposed them with the heroically maintained silence that befits a real man in such a situation and about which one may read (almost always, incidentally, in reports by people who were not there themselves). I talked. I accused myself of invented absurd political crimes, and even now I don’t know at all how they could have occurred to me, dangling bundle that I was” (p.36).

reveals; anxiety provokes the question of death but also promises its answer. This is the economy of death we heard espoused by the existentialists in the previous chapter. For Levinas (1993/2000), however, the relationship to death is signified by an “affectivity without intentionality” that disturbs without ever revealing, an emotional disturbance that is not simply the price of revelation, signifying as a question without response: “An emotion in the sense of a deference toward death; in other words, an emotion as a question that does not contain, in the posing of the question, the elements of its own response” (Levinas, 1993/2000, p.17).<sup>34</sup> Death penetrates my solitude as a rupture to immanence, imposing a fear and trembling before that which I cannot master or grasp. The significance of this fear and trembling will be explored in the next chapter, for it suffices to note this emotional disturbance results from beyond the solitude of knowledge. For Levinas, death reveals the passivity of the subject in that death cannot be appropriated; death is not a confrontation with the utmost of possibilities but rather is the exposure to something wholly other as the radical impossibility to possibility, the impossibility of intelligibility. “This approach of death indicates we are in relation with something that is absolutely other...my solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it” (Levinas, 1947/1987, p.74). Death is not, nor even can be, entirely or properly “mine”.

In his commentary, Caputo (2004) provides a succinct summary of Levinas’s argument that death puts the “I” in relation to something radically other than itself:

This still more disturbing thing about death is not nothingness about which we know nothing and which in any case would seem to promise a release, but, in virtue of the impossibility of nothingness...it is the experience of a still deeper vulnerability, of an

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<sup>34</sup> This directly challenges Heidegger’s notion that every seeking is guided by what is sought. Though the significance of death may signify as a question, it does not contain the promise of an answer.

exposure to something that absolutely eludes our grasp, something that for the first time broaches alterity, for it does not come from me, is none of my doing. (p.98, my omission)

It is in the exposure to death that we run up against the limit of the Law, against the limit of immanence via the aporias of death. In breaking with the Law, the economic exchange inherent to theodicy between death and knowledge, death and meaning, falters. It is with the impossibility of death and suffering to belong to an economy of redemption, of theodicy, that we encounter trauma at the limit as a *disaster*.

### **The Disaster of Useless Suffering:**

The impossibility of death and suffering brings us to Caputo's (1993) description of a disaster which, like theodicy, is an economic notion. However, unlike the exchange that occurs in theodicy whereby one who suffers gets something in return, the disaster refers to sheer cost:

A disaster is an economic notion. It refers to an unrecoverable loss. Disasters are events of surpassing or irretrievable loss. By irretrievable loss I mean wasting life, something that cannot be repaired, recompensed, redeemed. A disaster is a loss that cannot be led back into a gain... The disaster belongs to an economy of excessive cost, for which there is no compensating return. The disaster is an utter wasting, a sheer loss". (Caputo, 1993, p.29, my omission)

While I would not go as far to say that all trauma is a disaster, I would argue that trauma at the limit refers to a disaster, to the disastrous element of traumatic suffering. Caputo (1993) goes on to point out that disasters are constituted by suffering, but not all suffering is a disaster. Hence, there is a distinction to be made between suffering that participates in an economy of pain and growth, and suffering that breaks with such an economy, suffering that is useless. Theodicy, however, insists that at the very least the Law governing trauma is revealed in its suffering,

offering the opportunity of discovery. In theodicy there is always the possibility of return on the investment of suffering. However, as Caputo describes, what makes a disaster disastrous, or trauma traumatic, is the impossibility of suffering participating in an exchange, of suffering for something. A disaster severs the link between mortality and vitality, between struggle and progress.

Frankl (1984) is fond of citing Nietzsche's aphorism: "He who has a why to live can endure almost any how" to support his interpretation of death and suffering as the project of meaning. Despite the difficulties of traumatic experience, Frankl never questions the pursuit of meaning in the form of a "why". A disaster, however, is precisely the impossibility of a "why", a situation theodicy refuses to acknowledge. By refusing the disaster, Frankl and others leave in their wake ugly and unheroic scraps of survivor testimony that do not offer the consolations of meaningful suffering and heroic resilience. For instance, Primo Levi (1958/1996) describes the following during his internment at Auschwitz:

Driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. 'Warum?' I asked him in my poor German. '*Hier ist kein warum*' (there is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove. (p.29)

Does it make sense to insist upon a "why" when faced with this scrap of testimony? Should we insist that Levi find meaning in this experience? Or could the notion of a disaster give countenance to traumatic suffering at the limits of meaning? Echoing Job's complaint, Levi's testimony refuses to conform to the Law that promises to render suffering intelligible.

I am in strong agreement with Caputo (1993) when he insists that the disaster should not be regarded as anything "deep" or "profound", but rather can be found in the names and dates all

around us. A disaster can and should refer to a specific and concrete instance of suffering. Examining another scrap of testimony from Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*<sup>35</sup> we are confronted with the traumatic figure of the "Musselman" who, unlike the heroes of existentialism, have been utterly destroyed by their disaster.

Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the Musselmanner, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labor in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand. (1958/1996, p.90)

The Musselman were those whose "will to meaning" was utterly destroyed, leaving them entirely indifferent to life and death. Their suffering did not lead to spiritual refinement nor was it the heroism of martyrdom. More often than not, the Musselman "touched bottom", never to rise up again, destroyed by the pain inflicted on their bodies and on their minds. Theirs was not the suffering of the average everydayness of existence, but the extreme condition of trauma whereby concepts of freedom, morality, heroism, resilience, and authenticity met their radical limits. As cited earlier, the Musselman was the rule of Auschwitz, survivors were the exception. The Musselman is the flesh and blood of a disaster. For Levi (1958/1996), the Musselman is not to be understood as the Phoenix rising from the ashes of Auschwitz. Rather he invokes a different myth, that of "Gorgon" to describe the disaster, the irredeemable suffering of the Musselman. For Levi (1958/1996), it is the Musselman, not the hero, that is the emblematic figure of Auschwitz:

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<sup>35</sup> The original title of Levi's testimony was, "If This is a Man", a line taken from the poem presumably dedicated to the Musselman:

They crowd my memory with their faceless presences, and if I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image which is familiar to me: an emaciated man with head drooped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of a thought is to be seen. (p.90)

The Musselman refers to a disaster to which no theodicy, no Law, can render, at least not entirely, intelligible.

Returning to the Améry's testimony of torture, we find a description of what Felman (1995) previously described as a "situation with no cure": "Whoever was tortured, stays tortured. Torture is ineradicably burned into him, even when no clinically objective traces can be detected" (1980, p.34). Clearly for Améry the cliché of time healing all wounds does not hold true for trauma at the disastrous limit: "Twenty-two years later I am still dangling over the ground by dislocated arms, panting, and accusing myself" (1980, p.36). Confronted by the disturbance of Améry's testimony, do we approach with our project to submit his suffering to the Law? To render the experience of torture intelligible and subsequently apply technique in attempt to heal the wound? Is there a remedy for the disaster of torture? As a disaster, Améry's torture is sheer loss, irretrievable, irredeemable, and without recompense; what has been lost can never be regained:

Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased. Trust in the world, which already collapsed in part at the first blow, but in the end, under torture, fully, will not be regained. (1980, p.38)

Can current theories account or even tolerate for the disaster that prevents trauma from fully participating in the immanence of intelligibility and the economy of theodicy? If we attempt to formulate Améry's suffering in terms of "cognitive distortions", or "unconscious conflicts", or

“traumatic associations”, do we not find ourselves in the company of Job’s friends? Do we embark on a “search for meaning” to find the “existential gains” from the experience of torture? Or does the disaster call for an altogether different response from the psychologist?

Améry’s disastrous testimony powerfully resonates with Job’s, particularly in the foreword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of his book where he offers a scathing refusal of attempts at intelligibility:

I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today, and I hope that I never will. Clarification would also amount to a disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing just this. For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled, no remembering has become mere memory. What happened, happened. But that it happened cannot be so easily accepted. I rebel: against my past, against history, and against a present that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history and thus falsifies it in a revolting way. Nothing has healed, and what perhaps was already on the point of healing in 1964 is bursting open again as infected wound. (1980, p.i)

Nothing has healed not because technique was not up to the task, but because at a structural level the disaster is heterogeneous to the Law, to immanence, and is thus a wound that cannot be healed by technique. In 1978, twenty-three years after being liberated Améry took his own life. Do we dare accuse Améry of having failed to find meaning in his survival, unlike the heroic Viktor Frankl? Did Améry fail to “authentically” seize upon his utmost and ownmost possibility in being-towards-death? Did he lack “resilience”? Are our theories of trauma capable of responding to disasters without subtly or not so subtly accusing those irreparably destroyed by

their suffering? Can our theories resist the temptation to reduce the excessive horror of disasters to the intelligibility of the Law?

The disaster of trauma calls into question the promise of intelligibility that has long guided what it has meant for the clinical psychologist to “bear witness”. Disasters are not problems to which one takes on the project of seeking a framework by which to contain its excess. In his description of trauma, Gregg Horowitz (2009) reveals the impossibility of intelligibility when faced by a disaster:

Trauma gives rise to no concept or, if I may, ‘trauma’ is not a concept. It is not even right to say that trauma challenges conceptualization, as if somehow the proper response to it is to think better. In the register of the metapsychology, the fact of trauma is that we will never be able to think well enough. In the realm of ethics and politics, that means that we are always too late in the face of trauma. (p.40)

Like Job’s friends, we are always too late in our response to a disaster, even when we believe that knowledge and technique can represent traumatic suffering. The psychologist in his or her own way is exposed to a disaster, revealing a passivity in my relation to the other’s suffering. Perhaps this “too late” arrival to the scene of the other’s suffering reveals something about what it means to be bear witness.

Trauma at the limit is the disaster of useless suffering, shattering the immanence of the Law and the economy of theodicy. It is when faced by the disaster that the psychologist must wrestle with the questions regarding the bonds we have to the trauma survivor/victim, and what it means to bear witness to their suffering. For Levinas (1982/1998), the radical failure of theodicy following the Holocaust reveals a relationship to the other

Pain in its undiluted malignity, suffering for nothing. It renders impossible and odious every proposal and every thought that would explain it by the sins of those who have suffered or are dead. But does not this end of theodicy, which imposes itself in the face of this century's inordinate trial, at the same time and in a more general way reveal the unjustifiable character of suffering in the other, the outrage it would be for me to justify my neighbor's suffering? (p.98)

Confronted by the disaster of survivor testimony, we must rethink the primacy of grasp and vision, of comprehension and knowledge in our relation to the traumatized other. Bearing witness may refer less to an act of the psychologist, and rather refer to an obligation to the suffering other prior to and otherwise than knowledge.

**Chapter VI:  
Bearing Witness & the Obligation of Address**

*Bearing witness is not expressed in or by dialogue but in the formula “here I am”.*

-Emmanuel Levinas  
*God, Death, and Time* (1993/2000)

*History, I want to say, a certain history, is the record, the archive and the treasury, of irreparable loss. History is haunted by the voices of the dead, whose unrequited misery and persecution cry out for justice. But history and justice come too late for the dead. Justice, however swift, is not swift enough to return to the moment of their misery and redress it. History, however sweeping and complete, cannot erase the misery of their lives.*

- John Caputo  
*The Ethics of History* (2004)

*The tears say that the eyes are not made primarily for seeing but for crying.*

-Jacques Derrida  
*Of Hospitality* (2000)

As we enter the final chapter, there is the temptation to provide a grand finale, to offer something profound and illuminating regarding traumatic suffering, survivor testimony, and bearing witness. Such a conclusion, however, may not do justice to the experience of not knowing what to do or where to go, betraying the arguments from the previous chapters. A dissertation on the experience of the aporia regarding survivor testimony would certainly find itself in an embarrassing contradiction if it offered a sweeping conclusion that suddenly knows where to go and what to do. This is not to say that one does not conclude, does not offer something to its reader, but one must endure the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of knowing what to say or what to do in the face of a disaster. To be sure, we must draw upon our scientific

tradition in order to *calculate* our response, to put our knowledge of trauma, of the Law, in the service of responding to the other in a responsible and effective manner. However, the disaster of trauma at the limit reveals the limits of being able to calculate, and yet we nevertheless must, even if by a refusal, respond, confronting the psychologist with the obligation of having to make a *decision*. It is precisely when we do not know what to say or what to do, when our situation is one of “undecidability”<sup>36</sup> from which, according to Derrida (1999), a decision becomes possible: “So when I say, ‘I do not know what to do’, this is not the negative condition of decision. It is rather the possibility of a decision” (p.66). It is precisely when knowledge cannot provide our decision, the situation of “undecidability”, the gravity of our decisions is revealed.

By calculating or applying technique, the responsibility of one’s response is shouldered by the Law, or at least by knowledge of the Law. Indeed, when one’s response is critically questioned, one can easily offer the defense: “I followed the letter of the Law”. If one’s response has been calculated in a manner consistent with the most accurate knowledge of the “Law”, one has been “responsible”. When calculating, one is assured by their formula of fulfilling their responsibility. “A decision is something terrible” writes Derrida (1999), referring to the singular responsibility of my response without reference or defense. Resting exclusively on my shoulders, a decision bears my unique signature to which I am wholly and singularly responsible. With no deflection to a third party or entity, such as the Law, I am exposed to an obligation that exceeds my knowledge: “Without this terrible experience, however, there would be no decision, there would simply be the serene application of a programme of knowledge and then we could delegate decisions to scientists and theoreticians” (pp.66-67). The response to a disaster cannot

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<sup>36</sup> Undecidability is not indecision, but rather it is the situation whereby one must respond from beyond knowledge, at the point where knowledge becomes impossible: “At some point, however, for a decision to be made you have to go beyond knowledge, to do something you don’t know, something that does not belong to, or is beyond, the sphere of knowledge” (Derrida, 1999, p.66).

(nor ever should) merely be the serene application of knowledge or technique, for to do so would betray via theodicy, the testimonies of survivors such as Job. The limits of technique and knowledge exposes psychology to the aporia of not knowing what to do or what to say, and yet we are nevertheless faced with the demand to which I must respond. But faced with the aporia and undecidability, are we not right back to where we started, in a double-bind, in silence and mourning, in the company of Job's three friends?

There is, on my reading, something of profound importance for the interpretation of survivor testimony and trauma signified by the seven days and nights of silence and mourning that occurs *prior* to the knowledge and technique offered by Job's three companions. In that aporetic moment of stunned silence, of mourning, of prayers and tears, clearly the three friends do not know what to do or what to say, faced by the disastrous suffering of Job. For me, this silence does not issue from the not-yet known or from knowing something overwhelming but rather more fundamentally gestures to something wholly unknown, beyond knowledge, structured otherwise than the presence/immanence that guarantees the promise of intelligibility. And yet the friends are there, called to the scene despite not knowing what to do or say, weeping with Job, in compassion (*com*—together + *pati*—to suffer) and as companions (*com*—with + *panis*—bread, literally to “break bread together”), in the midst of a disaster.<sup>37</sup> They left their home, perhaps compelled by an obligation not of their choosing but by being chosen, elected by their bonds of friendship and fraternity with Job. For to speak of a disaster is not simply to refer to an empirical event, fact, or even object of knowledge or inquiry. While these are certainly necessary and undeniable elements, a disaster always refers back to the suffering of another, to the suffering of the other, the unique and singular other to which I have a particular kind of relationship, indelibly marked by a particular kind of obligation.

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<sup>37</sup> Laubscher, 2015, personal communication.

Can clinical psychology's predominant approaches to trauma and survivor testimony do justice to these aporetic moments of stunned silence and of prayers and tears? Is the promise of intelligibility first and foremost of our obligations? Let us remind ourselves again of this most famous account of traumatic suffering, of the disaster of Job.<sup>38</sup> A man of perfect integrity, a man of God (the Law), a man who enjoyed a prosperous existence who underwent catastrophes of traumatic proportions. A man whose traumatic testimony refused consolations, and demanded justice of not only his friends, but also of God/Law. The figure that emerges from this account of the disaster is not the archetype, but rather the ghost whose signification hovers between presence and absence, demanding our response without responding in return. As Colin Davis (2007) points out, the alterity of the ghost disturbs and disrupts our common modes of knowing and understanding revealing not only their limits, but also their ethical significance:

Attending to the ghost is an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian Other: a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving. (p.9)

Job's ghost has haunted each chapter throughout this dissertation. And not only are we haunted by Job, but also Primo Levi, Jean Améry, Charlotte Delbo, the Musselmen; by all the victims, survivors, and dead of each and every disaster, who in their own singularly unique alterity, cry out their demand for justice. To study psychological trauma is to be haunted by its victims, but the company of ghosts is small consolation in the absence of those dead and departed, leaving us in grief and mourning.

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<sup>38</sup> No doubt there is much I have neglected from the book of Job, such as the voice from the whirlwind which responds to Job with the line of questioning, "Where were you"? Additionally there is God's rebuke of Job's three friends and the restoration of Job's prosperity. Each of these are certainly worthy of a response and would no doubt complicate my use of Job in this dissertation.

Clinical psychology has predominantly approached survivor testimony as containing an inherent intelligibility the discovery of which would help us subdue and master the disturbance of traumatic suffering. By insisting that trauma conforms to the structures that make knowledge possible, we have perpetuated a theodicy long after religion ceased to provide the interpretive paradigms of suffering and death. Seduced by the hubris of knowledge and immanence, we have all too often neglected the powerful and painful limits that are vital to bearing witness to the disasters of traumatic suffering. Survivor testimony is not first and foremost a problem/project for clinical psychology, but rather it reveals the bonds the psychologist has to the suffering of the other, the *passivity* of being obligated via the address of the suffering other. Deconstruction, whose influence on this dissertation cannot be overstated, is not some mere literary device or strategy, but is rather an incessant reminder of our own passivity in responding to a wound already inflicted:

Deconstruction, from that point of view, is not a tool or technical device for mastering texts or mastering a situation or mastering anything; it's on the contrary, the memory of some powerlessness... a way of reminding the other and reminding me, myself, of the limits of power, of the mastery—there is some power in that. (Derrida, 1992, p.385)

The aporia of those seven days and seven nights in the company of Job's friends is the memory of just such a powerlessness, the infantile shaking of sobbing. The powerlessness by which my projects, my mastery, indeed where all knowledge and possibility reaches its radical limit. Given that I must decide, even at the limits of knowledge, the limit of the Law does not limit my responsibility to and for the other in his or her suffering, revealing a tie that binds, an obligation, that is otherwise than knowledge.

Once again, we seemed to have returned back to the undecidability of the *aporia*. However, the situation of Job's three friends, which is also our situation, cannot tolerate paralysis or indecision. Despite these limits, we, like Job's friends, *must* nevertheless *decide* how to respond with all the *urgency* of being addressed by those who suffer. The ethical, the political, and yes, even clinical decisions happen in and from this dilemma of undecidability, from a space that is otherwise than knowledge:

Decision, an ethical or political responsibility, is absolutely heterogeneous to knowledge. Nevertheless, we have to know as much as possible in order to ground our decision. But even if it is grounded in knowledge, the moment I take a decision it is a leap, I enter a heterogeneous space and this is the condition of responsibility.

This not only a problem, but the *aporia* we have to face constantly. For me, however, the *aporia* is not simply paralysis, but the *aporia* or the *non-way* is the condition of walking: if there was no *aporia*, we wouldn't walk, we wouldn't find our way; path-breaking implies *aporia*. This impossibility to find one's way is the condition of ethics. (Derrida, 1999, p.73)

It is in the impossibility signified by those seven days and nights of tears and mourning that we find ourselves responsible in excess of our response, bearing its full weight not so much as a heroic labor, but more passively woven into the very fabric of my identity and subjectivity.

### **Obligation as the Structure of Address:**

It is my conviction that survivor testimony is first and foremost an address that binds the psychologist to an infinite responsibility that does not issue from knowledge. The structure of this obligation takes the form of Levinas's interpretation of Abraham's utterance before God, "Here I am" as a radical responsibility to and for the other. This responsibility is not something

that is added to my subjectivity via my freedom to choose, but rather it is constitutive of my subjectivity. Therefore, I am “elected” to this responsibility prior to any will or agency: “Responsibility for the other, this way of answering without prior commitment, is human fraternity itself, and it is prior to freedom” (Levinas, 1974/1998, p.116). Given that “Here I am” is in the accusative, Levinas (1974/1998) points out that this reveals the radical passivity by which one is obligated. One responds as responsible to and for the other without mediation, exposed and nude as “Here I am” suggests.

Bound by this obligation the promise of intelligibility need not disappear, but rather it is to be transformed. Instead of focusing on the content of the promise however, I wish to inquire into the structure of the promise itself and its relation to obligation. The promise of the promise of intelligibility reveals that prior to any knowledge that I can affirm or offer, I am bound or responsible to the other. A promise is not simply something I pledge out of my choosing, but rather it is always already in response to the obligation to other. As this obligation is structurally otherwise than immanence, it is nothing that I am able to access. A promise is always bound to a summons that I cannot master or satisfy. In an aptly named interview *Passages—From Traumatism to Promise*, Derrida (1992) argues that language itself is always already bound by the structure of the promise, as a response to the other:

Whatever my discursive mastery may be, I submit at once to language and to the structure of the promise whereby language is addressed and, consequently, responds to the other. And it is there that I am responsible before even choosing my responsibility. From this point of view, responsibility is not the experience of something one chooses freely. Whether we will it or not, we are responsible. We respond to the other, we are

responsible for the other, even before any kind of freedom—in the sense of mastery.  
(p.384)

Therefore, the promise of the promise of intelligibility reveals that bearing witness cannot be satisfied by vision alone. Rather, bearing witness refers not simply to an epistemological relationship to the other, but rather to a profoundly ethical relationship marked by the passivity of a radical obligation. The promise of the promise of intelligibility opens up a new dimension of what it means for the clinical psychologist to bear witness to trauma at the limit.

### **Bearing Witness:**

The obligation of address that issues from a disaster poses serious challenges to the predominant notions of witness and witnessing. Earlier we pointed out that witnessing has typically been defined by the act of seeing, vision, and visibility corresponding to the structures of intelligibility, namely immanence and presence. Traditionally, the label of bearing witness has typically been reserved for an act of knowledge that endures some hardship but ultimately triumphs in bringing to sight and to grasp the intelligibility of the object in question. However, if the disaster and obligation of address signify ruptures to the totality of the immanence, then can such notions of bearing witness hold when exposed to trauma at the limit? What if the traditional gestures that have defined what it means to bear witness are structurally impossible? What if the seven days and nights of mourning from the book of Job gesture to an altogether different notion of witnessing, whereby the tears in the eyes of the three companions suggest a relation to the suffering other that is not fundamentally founded on vision as knowledge: “The tears say that the eyes are *not* made primarily for *seeing* but for *crying* (Derrida, 2001, p.115, my emphasis). Moved to tears<sup>39</sup>, perhaps by a force than I cannot master or appropriate, are we not confronted by something beyond our choosing, revealing a passivity whereby “bearing” is not a heroic act

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<sup>39</sup> Tears can also be read as tears, as wounds or rents, signifying as a present absence and as an absent presence.

that I choose to take on, but a burden to which I have been selected or elected prior to my consent? What signals bearing witness as an undergoing rather than an undertaking? We have identified the cognitive experience of the *aporia* as not knowing where to go or what to say, but what about its affective dimension? If the thought “I don’t know” reveals the limits of knowledge, could it be the affective dimension that carries us beyond knowledge, into the realm of the ethical?

The affective relation to the disaster of the other’s death has troubled Western thought since the time of Socrates. As Levinas (1993/2000) points out, the whole intention of the *Phaedo* is to demonstrate rational thought’s triumph over death and yet even there the excess of affect, of tears, cannot be suppressed. When Socrates accepts the hemlock to fulfill his death sentence, the composure of his learned friends unravels with the impending demise of their companion:

Most of us had been able to hold back our tears reasonably well up till then, but when we saw him drinking it and after he drank it, we could hold them back no longer; my own tears came in floods against my will. So I covered my face...Even before me, Crito was unable to restrain his tears and got up. Appollodorus had not ceased from weeping before, and at this moment his noisy tears and anger made everybody present break down, except Socrates. (Plato, 1981, p.155)<sup>40</sup>

Socrates, however, rebukes them for their tears, telling them to keep quiet and regain control of themselves, shaming them into checking their tears,<sup>41</sup> thus inaugurating the tradition that has privileged vision over tears, privileging knowledge in relation to the other and the other’s suffering and death. This has led to tears being all too often dismissed as mere sentimentality, as

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<sup>40</sup> This scene is famously captured in the *Death of Socrates* (1787) by Jacques Louis David depicting Socrates maintaining his intellectual composure while his friends weep, wracked with grief.

<sup>41</sup> Notably, Socrates sent the women away so as to avoid the disturbance of tears and weeping. Existentialism, indeed much of Western thought, continues to suffer a masculine anxiety regarding what is signified by tears.

a “subjective” confounding variable that contaminates the sterility and objectivity of scientific enterprise. I would argue, however, that if we keep our tears quiet and maintain our autonomy in the face of the other’s death and suffering, we miss something vital to bearing witness regarding psychological trauma and survivor testimony.

**Fear & trembling, and mourning.** It is in fear and trembling that one experiences the aporia of not knowing where to go or what to do in the face of the other’s suffering and death. According to Derrida (1995), one trembles in the face of what exceeds knowledge:

I tremble at what exceeds my seeing and knowing although it concerns the innermost parts of me, right down to my soul, down to the bone, as we say. Inasmuch as it tends to undo both seeing and knowing, trembling is indeed an experience of secrecy or mystery...One doesn’t know *why one* trembles. (pp.54-55, my omission)

One does not simply contemplate not knowing where to go or what to do, rather the aporia causes one to tremble, an experience that Derrida (1995) goes on to say is at least as enigmatic as tears. The shaking of hands, the flutter in one’s stomach, even the waver in one’s voice all gesture towards this trembling that cannot be reduced to physiological process.<sup>42</sup> Something overwhelms my intentions, beyond what is “mine”, in response to something that I cannot entirely master through knowledge. Taking these experiences seriously, Derrida (1995) asks, what does the body mean to say by trembling or crying (p.55)? Weeping and tearing their clothes, are not Job’s three companions struck by precisely this sort of fear and trembling, overwhelmed by the excess of a disaster? Job’s suffering exceeds their grasp and yet it does not fail to disturb them via their proximity to him, signifying in their souls and right down to their

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<sup>42</sup> Derrida’s eulogy to Levinas raises the significance of a voice that trembles in response to his dead friend: “For a long time, for a very long time, I’ve feared having to say *Adieu* to Emmanuel Levinas. I knew my voice would tremble at the moment of saying it, and especially saying it aloud, right here, before him, so close to him, pronouncing this word *adieu*, this word *a-dieu*, which in a certain sense, I get from him, a word that he will have taught me to think or to pronounce otherwise”. (2001, p. 200)

bones. What does this fear and trembling reveal about our relation to the suffering and death of the other?

The experience of fear and trembling brings us back to the argument that my relationship to the other's death is not fundamentally one of knowledge. For Levinas (1993/2000), the experience of the other's death is grounded in being moved, being dis-located, by emotion (*ex*—from + *movere*—to move, set in motion, or disturb) related to the other's vulnerability and mortality: “A purely emotional rapport, moving us with an emotion that is not made up of the repercussion on our sensibility and our intellect of a previous knowledge. It is an emotion, a movement, a disquietude within the *unknown*” (p. 16, author's emphasis). Unknown but not unfelt, bearing witness is the experience of fear and trembling before the other's death insofar as I am obligated by their address. Given the structure and obligation of address, fear and trembling is not an emotion I “have” but rather something I undergo that does not involve my intentionality. Bearing witness to trauma at the limit relates to the other's suffering and death in fear and trembling as the tie that binds. In a powerful summation of his thoughts on death, Levinas (1983/1998) argues that my responsibility before the other's mortality and vulnerability is that of “Here I am”, the offering of companionship in the face of the inexorable:

Fear and responsibility for the death of the other person, even if the ultimate meaning of that responsibility for the death of the other person is responsibility before the inexorable, and at the last moment, the obligation not to leave the other alone in the face of death. Even if, facing death—where the very uprightness of the face that asks for me finally reveals fully both its defenseless exposure and its very facing—even if, at the last moment, the not-leaving-the-other-alone consists, in that confrontation and powerless facing, only in answering ‘Here I am’ to the request that calls on me. Which is, no doubt,

the secret of sociality and, in its extremes of gratuitousness and futility, love of my neighbor, love without concupiscence. (pp.130-131)

However, fear and trembling before the other does not cease by their death, for our obligation extends beyond simply the community of the living to those who have died, signified by the passivity of grief and mourning.

According to Butler (2004), the experience of grief and mourning reveals that we do not “have” relationships with others, at least not totally, but rather that in some ways our relationships “have” us. “I”, my subjectivity is not crystallized in my seizing upon what is more mine than anything else (my death) but rather my subjectivity is inaugurated by the ways in which I am seized by the relational bonds to others. Perhaps nowhere else are the limits of my freedom and autonomy more powerfully revealed than by the experience of grief:

What grief displays, in contrast, is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. (Butler, 2004, p.23)

In mourning one is not only confronted with the unknown that is exterior, but I also become inscrutable to myself. Fear and trembling issues not only from without, but also from within, from what is other-in-me, a diachrony within the supposed unity of the self. Butler (2004) goes on to write, “Perhaps we can say that grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am” (p.28). Bearing witness as grief, in fear and trembling, for the traumatized other refers to this dispossession that occurs without my consent. The passivity of grief reveals that to bear witness is to be obligated by the very knot of my

subjectivity. As Laubscher (2010) notes, this radically transforms how we understand our summons to bear witness:

To witness, now, as it is to testify, is consequently a summons to a wholly different order of truth than fact, proof, totalizing law, theory or settled science. It is nothing less than a summons to justice, love, care, and the self that is myself by the other in me. (p.63)

Fear and trembling, mourning and grief reveal the radically passive dimensions of what it means to bear witness, obligating us to speak, to be there for the other, even when our words and actions seem to fail.<sup>43</sup>

The work of mourning, however, is not to be borne alone. For it is certainly the case that communities, not just individuals, can experience fear and trembling, grief and mourning, in the wake of a disaster. Therefore, it not only my obligation to the suffering other that concerns me, but also the web of relations in which (perhaps by which) this suffering occurs. For Butler (2004), grief can provide a profoundly ethical foundation for a community if grief can be publicly expressed:

Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility (p.22).

Clinical psychology is clearly a community that is moved by the traumatic suffering of others, and do we not participate in a common grief? Do we not require one another in order to respond

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<sup>43</sup> It is rather so as to traverse speech at the very point where words fail us, since all language that would return to the self, to us, would seem indecent, a reflexive discourse that would end up coming back to the stricken community, to its consolation or its mourning, to what is called, in a confused and terrible expression, 'the work of mourning'. (Derrida, 2001, p.200)

to traumatic violence? And if grief can indeed gather a social and political community, then do we not find ourselves back again at the moment of disaster, in the company of Job's friends?

### **In the Company of Job's Friends:**

Despite the preceding criticisms of theodicy and its modern manifestation in psychology, disasters leave no opportunity for the experience of good conscience, particularly good conscience over and against others, such as Job's friends. Especially as I do not believe it is entirely possible to abandon theodicy; to claim as much would be to claim a pure justice. The etymology of theodicy refers to the *justice* of *God* (or the Law), but could there be an interpretation of theodicy that does not attempt to justify the Law, but rather brings *justice* to bear upon the Law? To reinvent the Law each and every time we invoke its authority?

I count myself among Job's companions not only because of my own obligations to the Law, my own participation in theodicy, but as part of a community that grieves the suffering and deaths of those who are and have been traumatized. By virtue of my tears, by my fear and trembling, I identify not only as a companion to Job, but also to his three friends. Referring back to its etymology as *com*—with + *panis*—bread, literally to “break bread together”, to be a companion requires a visit to one final Levinasian gesture:

It is passivity for being-for-another, which is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat. But for this one has to first enjoy one's bread, not in order to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give oneself in giving it.

(1974/1998, p.72)

Bearing witness calls for nothing less than a giving of oneself, of one's own bread, to the other. To offer a hospitality to the other by which I am vulnerable, even hostage, by their address. To further complicate matters, even if it was possible to offer the other a pure gift or hospitality,

what about all of the other others who suffer? Have I not forsaken them? As Derrida (1995) points out, “I am responsible to any one (that is to say any other) only by failing in my responsibility to all the others, to the ethical or political generality. And I can never justify this sacrifice...” (p.70, my omission). To bear witness is to be always already caught up in the scandal of obligation, to which we must take ownership without justification.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that is only Job’s suffering that concerns me by virtue of being in the company of his three friends. As Levinas (1961/2007) points out, the “third party” looks at me in the eyes of the other, meaning all of the other others. That to which or to whom I am obligated does not concern Job alone, but rather I am faced by the demand of justice for all the other others. My response and responsibility is obligated not only to the singular other, but to all the other others. Intelligibility, which offers the formula to calculate my response, is obligated to justice, to take responsibility for my response, with urgency, to each and every other. However, by virtue of giving my bread to one and not the other, I must, as terrible as it is, decide. Prior to knowing just what to do and say, intelligibility finds itself entangled with the aporia of justice. Levinas (1961/2007) notes that language *is* justice of which the “saying” of “here I am” indelibly marks what gets said by a particular fear and trembling before not only the other, but all the other others to whom I am infinitely obligated.

My aim has not been to simply offer a novel iteration regarding the intelligibility of trauma survivor testimony but rather to argue that our knowledge is obligated from beyond the structures of immanence, issuing from the alterity and vulnerability of the other. My aim has been to remind psychology of the limits of knowledge when faced with alterity and vulnerability of the other, limits that inspire, at least for me, no small measure of fear and trembling. If we are indeed bound in some measure to theodicy, I wish to acknowledge and bear the responsibility for

its violence and its scandal. Levinas (1982) is fond of quoting Dostoyevsky's "We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than others" (p.98). Confronted by the impossible of survivor testimony, I am obligated to respond beyond the securities of calculation and risk everything, including my inculpability, in the very moment of that response. That is the moment of infinite responsibility, which is to say the moment of bearing witness.

At the conclusion of his treatise on obligations and disasters, Caputo (1993) offers some remarks for the occupations designated by our society to respond to traumatic suffering:

Therapists and clinical psychologists and counsellors of every stripe belong, on this view, to an ancient but very unscientific jewgreek paradigm, the paradigm of the 'healer', people who 'drive out devils', usually by the 'laying on hands.' I imagine what is behind such old jewgreek stories is the power of a man or woman of compassion to calm a troubled heart, to take the hand of the troubled on in their hands, literally to lend them a hand, to be on hand...In the matter of obligation, 'being-there' means being there for the other, for someone who calls out for help (p.244, my omission).

Perhaps bearing witness means being a companion, of breaking bread, of giving bread from one's own mouth, to those who call out to us in pain and suffering. To give one's self over to the other in their time of need and suffering.

It is, therefore, as a companion to Job that I sign my name to this dissertation as a response to that infinite demand, obligated to and for the other.

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