

**The Ethical Foundations of Postmodernity –  
Communicative Reality and Relative Individuals in Theory  
and North American Literature**

Dissertation

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## Preface

Even though I harbour no illusion that I have addressed all the relevant issues concerning the questions and cultural developments that I discuss, I hope that I have delivered a framework for a new mode of thinking about ethics. This mode is not new in the sense that it offers amazingly innovative insights into the sphere of human life that can be described by the term ethics. Yet, the setting of the following study is new due to its broadness and the (hopefully) innovative combination of already existing approaches. The initial idea was to combine poststructuralist thought with foundationalist ideas. Even though this is still part of the book its focus has shifted to a broader perspective on postmodern culture in general. During the research I realized that the combination of poststructuralism and foundationalism is part of several other encompassing and intersecting discourses and that the consideration of literary discussions is vital for these issues.

The eventual benefit is a new basis for theories about ethics, especially those appertaining to the postmodern relativist kind. To say it in Michael Maffesoli's words: "I am immodest enough to believe that what I am outlining is congruent with the *new art of thinking* that is beginning to emerge before our very eyes."<sup>1</sup> In my opinion this *new art of thinking* describes the tendencies that already exist to formulate such a new kind of ethics in the wake of the *ethical turn in* culture, literature, and theory. Yet, from my point of view a common systematic vocabulary is still lacking. Moreover, we still lack a vocabulary to link all the theoretical academic agendas to what is supposed to be described by them. I am indeed immodest enough to believe that I have achieved a significant step in this direction.

According to my idea of the individual, I could of course not have achieved this without the communicative background that was granted to me. I owe the success of my project to all those who have appreciated me as a person and as an intellectual. I especially wish to thank Joseph C. Schöpp and Marianne Pieper for their patience and support. Many others have assisted me in numerous ways. Here, I can only name but a few – I further express my gratitude to Sandra Doyen, Tanja von Dahlern, F. Fenkes, and Heike von Dahlern. The young academics of the department SLM II at the University of Hamburg have also helped me with their ideas and interesting discussions. Last but by no means least special thanks go to Axel Schmidt for his endless encouragement and kindness.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Maffesoli, *Ordinary Knowledge – An Introduction to Interpretative Sociology* (transl. David Macey) (Cambridge: Polity, 1996) 2 (hereafter: Maffesoli, Knowledge).

## I. Introduction

[L]iterature in general and narrative in particular, through their attention to the concrete particularities of human situations and their capacity to engage our emotions, provide an especially rich arena for the exploration of ethical issues.<sup>2</sup>

Many intellectuals have fairly recently (re)turned to ethics as a central field of research. Therefore a (re)turn to ethics, which began in the 1980s and 1990s and is still predominant today, has been ascribed to literary studies and theory.<sup>3</sup> This *ethical turn* can be understood as part of the larger debate on ethics and aesthetics in literary and cultural studies.<sup>4</sup> This study is concerned with theoretical issues within ethics and is based on literary analysis. The main questions concern the foundation on which ethical concepts are based, and the way in which such concepts function. These issues are evidently connected to questions of human concepts and human nature in general.<sup>5</sup> Such concepts will be exposed to be fundamentally communicative in the following. Communication is understood as a natural trait in the same way that Allan Gibbard defines *talk*: “In talk we work out not only what to believe about things and events and people, but how to live.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, communication should encompass more than linguistic qualities, it should encompass the whole communi-

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<sup>2</sup> James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It – A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2005) 21 (hereafter: Phelan, Rhetoric).

<sup>3</sup> The term theory is meant to include philosophy, the social theories, and the theoretical work in cultural studies, including literary theory. There is a certain focus on sociological theory, as postmodern discourse is often “quite sociologistic in orientation ....” Thomas Osborne, *The Structure of Modern Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2008) 147 (hereafter: Osborne, Structure). For the critical evaluation of a sociohistorical situation it is nevertheless indispensable to focus theory as a whole. Cf. Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 14 (hereafter: Benhabib, Critique). For the interfaces between the different branches of theory see Alan Ryan, *Die Philosophie der Sozialwissenschaften* (München: List, 1973) 7-35.

<sup>4</sup> For the debate on ethics and aesthetics see Claudia Öhlschläger, “Narration und Ethik. Vorbemerkung,” *Narration und Ethik*, Ethik – Text – Kultur 1, ed. Claudia Öhlschläger (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009) 9-21 (hereafter: Öhlschläger, Narration) 9,ff. In this thesis literature is understood after Phelan’s idea of *narrative as rhetoric*. Cf. Phelan, Rhetoric 18-23. Gerhard Hoffmann and Alfred Hornung identify a general turn to ethics in postmodernism and postmodern studies since the 1980s and also point to a renewed interest in ethics in philosophy. Cf. *ibid.*, eds, *Ethics and Aesthetics – The Moral Turn of Postmodernism*, Anglistische Forschungen 233 (Heidelberg: C. Winter UP, 1996) v-vii (hereafter: Hoffmann/Hornung). See also Jane Adamson, Richard Freadman, and David Parker, eds., *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) (hereafter: Adamson/Freadman/Parker); Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn – A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 2001) (hereafter: Davis/Womack); Christine Lubkoll and Oda Wischmeyer, eds., “Ethical Turn”? *Geisteswissenschaften in neuer Verantwortung*, Ethik – Text – Kultur 2 (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009) (hereafter: Lubkoll/Wischmeyer).

<sup>5</sup> The notion *human nature* is reminiscent of anthropological studies. If philosophical anthropology is understood as a reservoir in which the results of scientific and other academic research are collected and monitored for their information about human nature, this study could be described as anthropological in the broadest philosophical sense. Cf. Kuno Lorenz, *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, Die Philosophie – Einführungen in Gegenstand, Methoden und Ergebnisse ihrer Disziplinen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, 1990) 2; 6,f (hereafter: Lorenz, Einführung).

<sup>6</sup> Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings – A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 3 (hereafter: Gibbard, Choices). Cf. Charles Taylor’s definition of *language* in *ibid.*, *Das Unbehagen an der Moderne* (transl. Joachim Schulte) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995) 42 (hereafter: Taylor, Unbehagen).

cative act as a way of understanding, perceiving, feeling, and living. Therefore, the term *human nature* is used to signify a communicative or social nature. In order to study the (functional) communicative foundations it is not enough to scrutinize the above mentioned ethical turn.<sup>7</sup> First, the perspective on this renaissance of ethics must be expanded as a meaningful development of (western) societies in the late *postmodern era* in general.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the relevance of ethics not only for literary and theoretical studies, but for the whole historical period of postmodernity can be estimated. Contrary to popular conclusions of relativity, the need for a realist foundation of ethics – understood as implying universal validity – will be revealed also and especially in this era.<sup>9</sup> It is not only possible, but also necessary to develop such an idea of ethics within a postmodern relativist framework. I will argue for a *communicative foundationalist ethics* on the basis of the literary analyses. Thereby, the main difference from already existing decidedly anti-foundationalist postmodern conceptions of ethics is named: *ethical foundations* as a universal framework for ethics will be justified in the following.<sup>10</sup>

However, the ethical turn is not the only meaningful development at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. A second striking movement is a slow return to more realistic concepts in theory and especially literature during this period.<sup>11</sup> While postmodern relativist explanations of the world steadily gained importance during the twentieth century, these pluralist conceptions of reality have been recently challenged by a new realism.<sup>12</sup> As pluralist conceptions of normative power networks have also

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<sup>7</sup> This concept of communicative structures can be understood to be similar to what Charles Taylor has developed as structural realities. Cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Taylor’s (Anti-)Epistemology,” *Charles Taylor*, ed. Ruth Abbey (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 52-83 (hereafter: Abbey, Taylor).

<sup>8</sup> By using the terms *postmodern era* or *postmodernity* I do not intend to refer to a historically well defined time span. It is a period that has begun sometime during the twentieth century and is opposed to the preceding *modern* times through the general approach to reality. Whereas modern times were characterized by a general believe in positivism and progress, the postmodern mood has been more critical. This mood of doubt and deconstruction towards the idea of a general explainability and my use of the term postmodern with respect to theories will be discussed in more detail in chapters II.i. to II.vi. My use of the term (*late*) *postmodern* is very similar to that of the term *contemporary*.

<sup>9</sup> As will be discussed in II.ii., the idea of a universal foundation is decidedly realist, whereas the cultural po-etical basis for this study would have to be called relativist. The lack of a moral foundation has been identified by many critics as the main problem for postmodern relativist ethics. Cf. e.g. Todd May, *The Moral Theory of Poststructuralism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995) 6 (hereafter: May, Theory).

<sup>10</sup> I have coined the terms *communicative foundationalism* and *communicative ethical foundations* respectively *communicative ethical foundationalism* and *communicatively foundationalist ethics* for this study. Even though it is undoubtedly closely connected to the project of discourse or communicative ethics, I insist on the necessity of foundations. Cf. Benhabib, Critique 285.

<sup>11</sup> Whereas relativist thought is prevalent in the theoretical landscape of the social sciences, literary and cultural studies, there already is a serious new interest in realism in philosophy, and more generally in the field of ethics. The natural sciences have, of course, been steeped in realism all along.

<sup>12</sup> Natural sciences have also gained importance during the twentieth and beginning twenty-first centuries. Yet, the core of (philosophical and social) theory and literary studies has only recently (re)turned to decisively realistic conceptions – including a new interdisciplinary interest in the natural sciences, e.g. the debate on



been challenged by more realist ideas of ethics, the relation between these two developments seems obvious. There is yet a third important trend: An increasing emergence of first-person narrative in literature can be witnessed in addition to the new focus on a realist and more mimetic style after a peak of pluralist conceptions.<sup>13</sup> The analysis of such narrative situations will reveal the significance of the narrative generation of individual personalities for an understanding of ethical questions. It will become clear that the conflict between relativist and realist points of view centers on the postmodern critique of the individual.<sup>14</sup> The study of the literary generation of individuals will elucidate means of confronting this critique. As the three above mentioned developments are strongest in western culture – and are undoubtedly linked to western theory – North American culture will be focused as an example in this thesis.<sup>15</sup> It would go beyond the scope of a single book to conduct such research with regard to all western cultures. As the theoretical discourses can be more generally understood as western, the theorists discussed here are not exclusively from Northern America.<sup>16</sup>

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free will between biology and philosophy. These developments will be discussed in more detail in the following. Transcendental pragmatism represented most prominently by Karl-Otto Apel and Vittorio Hösle's objective idealism could also be ranged among realist conceptions – albeit their mediating tendencies. They focus on communication and intersubjectivity but also still presuppose a rational human being that can objectively and neutrally approach communicative and intersubjective facts.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Rhetoric 2*. The increase of narrations in the first-person can most prominently be witnessed in the downright explosion of the number of autobiographies published. For the boom in autobiographical writing cf. e.g. "Wildwüchsige Autobiographien," *Parapluie* 24 (2007/2008) <http://parapluie.de/archiv/autobiographien/> (21.10.2009); Leigh Gilmore, "Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity," *Biography*, Volume 24, Number 1, Winter 2001, 128-139; K.M. Sibbald, "Autobiography as Cultural Iconography: Rafael Alberti and María Elena Walsh," Congreso Abierto, Publicación en la Red de las actas del 40 Congreso de la ACH, 2004, [http://fis.ucalgary.ca/ACH/Congreso\\_abierto/2004/K\\_Sibbald.doc](http://fis.ucalgary.ca/ACH/Congreso_abierto/2004/K_Sibbald.doc) (5.4.2010). Moreover, the general interest in the self and individuality has been continuously growing throughout the postmodern era, as for example witnessed in the development of psychoanalysis. Cf. Philip Cushman, *Constructing THE SELF, Constructing AMERICA – A Cultural History Of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1995) 5,f (hereafter: Cushman, Self). For the increasing tendency to write in the first-person as a means to write more personally also in academic texts see Rockwell Gray, "Autobiography Now," *The Kenyon Review*, Volume 4, Winter 1982, 31-55; Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey, eds., *Autobiographical Writing Across the Disciplines – A Reader* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Postmodern critique has proven individuals in general and scientists in particular to be influenced by their cultural background. Thus, research has been pronounced to be inevitably biased. The current critique of the human rights movement as ethnocentric and focused exclusively on western civilization also springs from such reasoning. Other critics, such as Richard Rorty, who argue for an allegiance to one's own cultural group, have also been criticized as ethnocentric. Cf. e.g. Logi Gunnarsson, *Making Moral Sense – Beyond Habermas and Gauthier* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 215,ff (hereafter: Gunnarsson, Sense).

<sup>15</sup> For the sake of clarity it is necessary to limit the field of research. In order to be able to penetrate the culture-related features of human reality and understand some of the organizing communicative principles it seems best to research an area with a more or less similar culture. By introducing the North American cultural area as an example I do not mean to mark or separate it from any western culture. Yet, it seemed appropriate to choose a rather narrow field of investigation so as not to enter the debates on how to define the limits of a cultural area, which would not be conducive to the intention of this research. Nevertheless, I obviously do not mean to say that my findings are only valid for Northern America.

<sup>16</sup> In this respect I do not distinguish between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy because these perspectives have started to merge increasingly around the last turn of the millennium. Especially with regard to Benhabib's and Butler's work, such distinctions are no longer important. Before the new millennium these

The culture poetical perspective assesses that the three developments introduced above are interconnected.<sup>17</sup> To fully understand any of them or the questions raised within them it is necessary to consider them jointly. Ethical understanding will be clarified at the interfaces between literature, theory, realism, relativism and the narrative production of individuality. This research is not limited to literature or theory as selected disciplines, but rather concerns the question how these two fields of human activity are relevant to the ethical matters of human life. James Phelan has developed a concept of ethics as rhetoric based on the work of Wayne C. Booth, Adam Zachary Newton, Gérard Genette, and Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>18</sup> Following Phelan, I understand narratives to be instances of human communication, which is organized narratively. I am therefore seeking communicative moral foundations for an ethical concept that underlies moral actions. My differentiation between *morality* and *ethics* is not a qualitative differentiation. Both terms treat the level of life on which what ought to be done, what ought not to be done, and what must not be done is decided.<sup>19</sup> After Ernst Tugendhat I assess that *morality* defines the commonplace debates and actions concerning these questions, whereas *ethics* refers to their systematic theoretical discussion (as, for example, in philosophical discourse). Thus, every moral judgment can be traced back to underlying ethical principles.<sup>20</sup> To understand these principles, theoretical abstrac-

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differences have played a role in the discussion of poststructuralism. Cf. May, *Theory* 15,f; 81-134. As ideas such as Jürgen Habermas' work on discourse ethics have by now been appreciated in international academia, the heightened postmodern interest in ethics can no longer be necessarily identified as exclusively *western*. Cf. Collection of Articles, "Hier kennt ihn jedes Kind' Ein Kollege, mit dem man denken und sogar übereinstimmen will: Cristina Lafont, Richard Sennett, Ronald Dworkin, Wang Hui, Kenichi Mishima und Ahmet Çiğdem über den Einfluss, den das Werk von Jürgen Habermas auf die philosophische Kultur ihrer Länder ausübt" (transl. Karin Wördemann und Michael Adrian), *DIE ZEIT* 10 June 2009, 50. Still, the interfaces between literature and theory, relativism and realism, and the focus on first-person narration, that are rendered fruitful in this investigation, seem to be firmly set in western culture.

<sup>17</sup> Culture poetic approaches are based on the understanding of new historicists who take cultural and thus literary works as an interface of sociohistorical testimony and cultural production. Cf. e.g. Steven Greenblatt, *Verhandlungen mit Shakespeare – Innenansichten der englischen Renaissance* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993) 13,f. I share part of Niklas Luhmann's structuralist position that stresses the interplay between cultural, historical, and social background even more. Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Beobachtungen der Moderne* (Opladen: Westdt. Verlag, 1992) 14 (hereafter: Luhmann, *Beobachtungen*).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Rhetoric* 1, 21-23.

<sup>19</sup> Giving such a clear definition of ethics and the field they apply to is rather unusual in theories of the ethical turn. Especially in social theory it is unusual to define sociohistorical matters at the beginning as they are understood to be intertwined with numerous other issues in cultural power-networks. However, without a definition it often becomes unclear what intellectuals actually discuss. After Ernst Tugendhat and certain philosophical anthropologists I believe that evaluative processes are part of human nature. Humans give sense to the phenomena they perceive and also evaluate them. If a discussion of ethics is not clearly related to this evaluation, it does not make sense to talk about *ethics*. Such phenomena could then rather be identified as social behavior or effects of sociohistorical influences. Thus, I seek a normative or deontological ethics.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ernst Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen über Ethik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1993) 25 (hereafter: Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen*). Tugendhat has changed his understanding of ethics gradually throughout his later work. For the present purpose his argument in *ibid.* is the most adequate to draw from, even though my own definition will be developed further in the following. Zygmunt Bauman makes a similar distinction, albeit with a different aim. Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Flaneure, Spieler und Touristen: Essays zu postmodernen Lebensformen* (transl. Martin Suhr) (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 1997) 22,ff (hereafter: Bauman, *Flaneure*).

tion and thus an engagement in theory is necessary. To set the theory in perspective it is indispensable to embed it within the narrative nature of human understanding. Any description of the world is always mediated through language, and reality can therefore never be described simply as it *is*. “That the perception of the world is mediated through language thus heightens the relevance of literature to real life.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, literature has always had a great impact on the society it was read in, and can therefore be used as an indication to its society’s sociohistorical situation.<sup>22</sup>

As scientific research must be fitted to a given framework, it seems most adequate to deliver a discussion on the basis of several literary examples. Thus six novels written by three North American authors have been chosen in order to analyze the narrative structures of the generation of individuals and the resulting ethical implications. For a balanced insight into the postmodern era, they cover the period from the 1970s until shortly after the turn of the millennium: *Surfacing*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance – An Inquiry into Values*, *The Virgin Suicides*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Lila – An Inquiry into Morals*, and *Middlesex* by Margaret Atwood, Robert M. Pirsig, and Jeffrey Eugenides.<sup>23</sup> An overview of postmodern critique will be established in the beginning in the chapters belonging to II.i. Special attention will already at this point be given to Judith Butler’s and Seyla Benhabib’s work, as they will later serve to demonstrate the conflict of relativist and realist ideas still existing within postmodern relativist approaches to ethics.<sup>24</sup> An opening discussion of postmodern relativist critique is necessary to show that it cannot be simply dismissed in favor of traditional realist concepts. This will be completed by culturally situ-

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Schwerdtfeger, *Ethics in Postmodern Fiction*, American Studies 117 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005) 12 (hereafter: Schwerdtfeger, Ethics).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Luhmann, *Beobachtungen* 14. Effects of interdependency between media, personal identity and memory are also described in psychology and reception theory. Cf. Jochen Paulus, “Die trügerische Sicherheit des Erinnerns,” *Menschen* April 2006, 69-73; Roger Porter and Daniel Reisberg, “Autobiography and Memory,” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 13 (1998) 61-70.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (London: Virago, 2001), (first published 1972; hereafter: Atwood, *Surfacing*); Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (London and Sidney: Vintage, 1996), (first published 1985; hereafter: Atwood, *Handmaid*); Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance – An Inquiry into Values* (New York and Toronto: Bantam, 1984), (first published 1974; hereafter: Pirsig, *Zen*); Robert M. Pirsig, *Lila – An Inquiry into Morals* (New York and Toronto: Bantam, 1992), (first published 1991; hereafter: Pirsig, *Lila*); Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), (first published 1993; hereafter: Eugenides, *Suicides*); Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003) (first published 2002; hereafter: Eugenides, *Middlesex*). The novels will be abbreviated by these short titles in the following.

<sup>24</sup> They have also been chosen for their relativist emphases. As will become clear in the following, the discrepancies between a postmodernist definition of the individual and the point of view represented in self-writing are a most fruitful source for a description of contemporary ethics. I mainly work with Judith Butler, *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt* (transl. Reiner Ansen), *Adorno Vorlesungen 2002* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), (hereafter: Butler, *Kritik*); *ibid.*, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005) (hereafter: Butler, *Account*); and Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self – Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) (hereafter: Benhabib, *Self*). Additionally, I assume that their being feminist thinkers heightens the chance of Butler’s and Benhabib’s ethical concepts to be comprehensive examples.

ating the turn to ethics. This point will be followed by the analysis of ethics as a philosophical discipline in its historical perspective with a focus on relativist ideas in the chapters belonging to II.ii.<sup>25</sup> A special emphasis will be placed on analytical philosophy and Ernst Tugendhat's work here, as it is necessary to explain the importance of foundations in ethical theory.<sup>26</sup> When the theoretical significance of the individual is established, according concepts of the postmodern era (especially in North America) will be introduced in the chapters belonging to II.iii.<sup>27</sup> Part III. encompasses the literary analyses verifying and further investigating the theoretically outlined aspects. Even though the more mimetic style is focused on, the changes in narrational strategies from (*post-*)*modernist* to more realistic styles in the postmodern era will be described.<sup>28</sup> I will integrate the results of the literary analyses in a detailed discussion of Butler's and Benhabib's approaches in part IV. Besides the ensuing recapitulations, an excursus (IV.iv.) will be included to address the currently well-established discussion of (neuro-)biological ethics. Part IV. will be completed by a comprehensive description of communicative foundationalist ethics.

### **I.i. Combining Realism and Relativism in Postmodernity**

Niklas Luhmann has argued that a heightened interest in ethics occurs regularly in the 80s of any century.<sup>29</sup> I will show that the postmodern ethical turn, which still prevails in the first decades of the early twenty-first century, comprehends a special ethical significance. The cultural situation allows for a genuine compromise between relativist and real-

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<sup>25</sup> Pragmatism will not be discussed as a philosophical school in its own right but as part of postmodern understanding. In pragmatism, like Richard Rorty's, ethics is treated in relation to the question of truth. Such *ethical naturalism*, as it is defined by Gary Gutting, describes truth as ethics in terms of justification. In this context, ethics cannot accommodate the importance of an individual's absolute faith in the universal truth of her ethical judgment. Moreover, pragmatism explicitly dismisses the idea of universal validity. Cf. Gary Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 48,ff. It is, however, clear that my approach rests in the postmodern and also in the pragmatic tradition.

<sup>26</sup> The combination of a hermeneutic approach and an analytical approach could be described as a logical consequence of the linguistic turn. See Jürgen Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung – Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004) 65,f (hereafter: Habermas, Wahrheit).

<sup>27</sup> Philip Cushman's discussion of the historical development of the notion of an individual in North America will be central. Cf. Cushman, *Self*.

<sup>28</sup> My use of the terms *postmodernism* and *postmodern* will be specified in chapter II.i. With regard to the postmodern era I use these terms as historical markers. With regard to the typically relativistic argumentation of the new theories developed in this era I usually adjoin the terms relativist and postmodern. As the term is also used to describe anti-realistic styles in the arts and literature, I will vary it with *postmodernist* to refer to these artistic developments. They are also often referred to as *modernist*, as it is difficult to clearly differentiate between these tendencies in the beginning and towards the end of the twentieth century. Cf. e.g. Robert Burden, *John Fowles, John Hawkes, Claude Simon: Problems of Self and Form in the Post-Modernist Novel – A Comparative Study*, Epistemata: Reihe Literaturwissenschaft 5 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1980) (hereafter: Burden, Fowles).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Reflexion der Moral*, Rede anlässlich der Verleihung des Hegel-Preises 1989 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990).

ist perspectives. On the theoretical level I will be able to dismiss a troublesome element, which played a role in all traditionally realistic ethical investigations, in the formulation of a communicatively founded ethics: the extra-communicative standard of comparison. Such a standard is almost unanimously either directly or indirectly supposed to be part of an ethic. The presented communicatively founded ethics will not have to resort to anything outside of the communicative situation.<sup>30</sup> I will focus on the realistic notion of an ethical foundation (which contains its own problems), on the concept of social life, and on the relativistic tendencies developed by postmodern theory. The basic structure emerging from this combination rests to a large extent on concepts of cultural science, but the attempt to base it on a philosophically realistic ground is uncommon.<sup>31</sup> Even though there have been many approaches to ethics with regard to literature and theory during the ethical turn, none has focused on all three of the above mentioned developments with a culture poetic stance. It is also highly unusual to combine the argument of foundationalism with a generally postmodern relativist concept of reality. Older combinations of foundationalist and relativist ideas exist, but they do not consider the special postmodern relativist critique of reality and the individual.<sup>32</sup> When reality is understood as founded in and through communication, the study of written language i.e. literature must be seen as a most appropriate approach for the empirical examination of any theory. Thus, the present thesis can be interpreted as a cultural and specifically literary study, focusing on ethics as part of the reality reflected in literature. It could also be described as a philosophical study, which will be based on empirical literary research.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This idea is similar to Tugendhat's theses and to some arguments of philosophical anthropology, which will be discussed in detail in part II. For the argument often designed in philosophical anthropology in the postmodern era see also Reiner Wimmer, "Anthropologie und Ethik – Erkundungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände," *Vernunft und Lebenspraxis: philosophische Studien zu den Bedingungen einer rationalen Kultur*, ed. Christoph Demmerling (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1995) 215-245 (hereafter: Demmerling, Vernunft) esp. 217-219; 239; 243.

<sup>31</sup> Already existing combinations of relativist and generally realist concepts of reality or ethics and their differences from this thesis will be discussed in the following.

<sup>32</sup> For the tendency to overcome the dispute between realism and relativism see e.g. Richard Rorty, *Philosophie als Kulturpolitik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2008) 231 (hereafter: Rorty, Philosophie). Cf. also Stephen K. White, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 2009) 1-10 (hereafter: White, Ethos).

<sup>33</sup> The cultural aspect is often neglected in traditional (analytic) philosophical studies. Yet, language and communication (which can be taken as a special feature of culture) have often been part of philosophical investigations. Approaches within philosophical anthropology, which will be discussed in some more detail in the following, sometimes come close to the approach taken in this study. Yet, they usually neglect the significance of narrative structure in communication. Stanley Cavell argues most clearly for the relevance of literature (and art in general) to philosophy. Cf. e.g. Stanley Cavell, "Das Phantastische der Philosophie," *Nach der Philosophie – Essays* (transl. Leonhard Schmeiser et al.), *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie Sonderband 1* (ed. Ludwig Nagl and Kurt R. Fischer), (Berlin: Akademie, 2001) 231-238 (hereafter: Cavell, Philosophie) 232. Elisabeth Bronfen even assesses that Cavell understands literature as a *doppelgänger* of philosophical thought. Cf. *ibid.* *Stanley Cavell zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2009) 90.

The resulting communicatively founded ethics must be understood as a culture poetical theory with regard to literary studies and as a foundationalist or universalist theory with regard to theory. On both levels validity for all cultures, respectively all communicatively generated human beings, is implied.<sup>34</sup> Such social and historical transcendence seems to contradict the culture poetical stance. Yet, as will become clear, it logically follows from the culturally situated philosophical argument.<sup>35</sup> I consider the critique of postmodern relativist theories as well as the critique of realism formulated by postmodern relativism. These fundamental arguments will be discussed with a focus on ethics, leading to formal preconditions of the cognitive and ethical subject. As numerous already existing relativist and realist arguments are scrutinized, the present approach necessarily bears similarities to many theories. The most relevant of these will be discussed in some detail. The arguments lead from specific cultural and theoretical observations to general conclusions, and thus cannot be exhaustive – neither regarding the literary nor the theoretical discussions. The justification depends as much on the consideration of examples as the cultural discussions. In a communicatively positivist culture poetical perspective, deductions can only seem to be most adequate and evident, but can no longer be justified beyond *all* doubt.<sup>36</sup> I will nevertheless propose the communicatively founded ethics as the best possible answer under the described communicative circumstances.

A communicative human nature necessarily follows from the theoretical considerations and the cultural observations obtained through the literary analyses. Rational, emotional, and ethical abilities will be conceived as interconnected and intersubjectively established.<sup>37</sup> This will lead to innovative notions of the individual, of motivation, and of intersubjective responsibility. I will introduce ethical standards as already inherent in the notion of a social community and its individual members. Thus, these standards are not an extra-social fixed framework that individuals or communities can relate to and operate with, but

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<sup>34</sup> Human nature is understood to be communicative, and human beings are understood to be generated through communication as described by many postmodern relativist theories.

<sup>35</sup> If there is any transcendence for postmodern metaphysical thinking, it must be entirely immanent. Cf. William Desmond, “Neither Servility nor Sovereignty: Between Metaphysics and Politics,” *Theology and the Political – The New Debate*, eds. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005) 153-182 (hereafter: Davis/Milbank/Žižek) 155. “If matter is to be more than inert, and even capable of subjectivity and meaning, then it must be innately more than a spatially or mechanically limited substance: it must be rather forcefully self-transcending.” John Milbank, “Materialism and Transcendence,” Davis/Milbank/Žižek 393-426, 394.

<sup>36</sup> They could only ever be said to be universally justified through an exhaustive discussion of all existing literary and theoretical examples, which would go well beyond the scope of a single study. Nevertheless, the theoretical point I will make should be *logically* conclusive; communication is not understood as an empirical phenomenon in a way that it can only or even most adequately be evaluated in a statistical manner.

<sup>37</sup> With regard to the interest and scope of this study the emotional and rational part of human nature will only be determined in relation to their ethical function.

an inherent condition in any sociohistorical situation. My focus lies not on individual or social judgments, but on the functioning of ethical standards within a community. I will thus not define the standards *a priori* – as many traditional approaches to ethics do.<sup>38</sup> Nor will I start out from a fully systematized human nature, but will try to reveal it through the discussion of its instances. Following the tradition of analytic philosophy, I also openly address the question of which part of communicative reality ethics concerns.<sup>39</sup> To avoid a common dead-end of postmodern relativist theory criticized by many intellectuals, I propose separate levels of moral and ethical perception, understanding, and action. Whereas the power to evaluate and judge is often reduced through the notion of performativity in relativist frameworks, I will try to establish that this is only one (very basic) level of ethics. Postmodern relativist critique as such can be understood as a new version of various traditional philosophical arguments. The most obvious is probably the debate on ethical foundations. Despite its postmodern relativist sources, communicative foundationalist ethics is clearly positioned against the postmodern relativist stance in this matter: it seeks closure in the face of the postmodern love of the un-finalized; it seeks universality in the face of plurality.

## I.ii. Turning Ethics Around

It would be unrealistic to maintain that ethics had been comprehensively rejected during the decades before the *ethical turn*. Yet, “many critics during the poststructuralist era have doggedly and determinedly sought to place distance between themselves and any mention of an ethical or moral perspective in their works.”<sup>40</sup> It is the shift to ethics *within* such postmodern relativist and pluralist perspectives that is notable.<sup>41</sup> It mainly took two

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<sup>38</sup> As it becomes clear, the approach to the topic of ethics in this study is – at least at its basis – a social constructivist approach, because it primarily focuses on ethics during a certain period of time in a certain society. Yet, in the following the element of realism will be introduced to such postmodern perspectives. For an insightful overview of constructivist approaches see Claudia Kaiser-Probst, *Den Wandel bewerten: Veränderungsprozesse in der öffentlichen Verwaltung im Lichte einer sozial-konstruktivistischen Ethik – Ein qualitativer Zugang* (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme, 2008) 15-38 (hereafter: Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel*). Such postmodern understandings allowed for the concept that reality is produced, perceived, processed, and influenced dynamically through and by language, i.e. in communicative relations. Thereby, all communicative actions are to some extent performative. Cf. *ibid.* 10, 21, 27.

<sup>39</sup> This is rarely done by philosophers and almost never done by literary scholars. Especially in social and literary theory most of the work on ethics lacks an explicit definition, thereby challenging any implicit definitions by not stating clear boundaries for the interests of research.

<sup>40</sup> Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, “Preface: Reading Literature and the Ethics of Criticism,” Davis/Womack ix-xiv, ix.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “Introduction: The Turn to Ethics,” *The Turn to Ethics*, eds. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) vii-xii (hereafter: Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz) viii,f.

different directions. On the one hand, it happened “from foundationalist to pragmatist, tradition-centered ethics[, which] almost inevitably involves a turn to literature and the arts as sites of the culture’s deepest moral questioning.”<sup>42</sup> This direction involves a minimal amount of positivist assertion (or a minimal regard for foundations) and is often directed towards a reanimation of Aristotelian concepts of the good life.<sup>43</sup> The other direction of this shift is more involved in the negative postmodern critique and seeks to install *an ethics of not being able to act autonomously*. No positive assertion of a foundation is directly involved in such reasoning. Instead, the inherent weakness of human beings, a *negative postulate of being*, is taken as a starting point for ethics.<sup>44</sup> The question whether such a version of human nature is adequate can obviously not even be considered if it is taken as a premise. The communicative foundationalist approach to ethics will try to clarify the framework of communicative reality before coming to conclusions about communicative human nature.<sup>45</sup> The ensuing ethics must be considered as a communicative ethics. Contrary to the father of this idea, Jürgen Habermas, I seek a normative and not rationalistic justification.<sup>46</sup>

Both new ways of engaging in a debate about ethics are deeply concerned with literature as a field of research because, for all postmodern points of view, the cultural plurality of human life is taken as evident fact. Yet, philosophy as a discipline in an historical perspective could be reasonably identified as the study of literature in general. Even though mainly theoretical texts have constituted the field of research, it is nevertheless the study of *texts* (which were written in specific sociohistorical situations) that has always constituted the main body of philosophical work. Philosophers in the postmodern era such as Martha Nussbaum, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, or Judith Butler have turned to work with

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<sup>42</sup> David Parker, “Introduction: the turn to ethics in the 1990s,” Adamson/Freadman/Parker 1-17, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991) 87-92 (hereafter: Habermas, *Erläuterungen*).

<sup>44</sup> I understand this negativity as especially evident in the negative assertions that not everything can be understood and that existence can never be represented truthfully. Epistemology and ontology are thus taken to be interwoven. As the instrument of epistemology (man) has been found *faulty*, ontology has been taken down at the same time. General denials of *real reality* and/or of a *coherent individual* have been the result of such thinking. White discusses the opposition of negative and positive starting points from a different angle as weak and strong ontology. Cf. Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation – The Strength of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2000) 8 (hereafter: White, *Affirmation*).

<sup>45</sup> It may be objected that in this way the question whether human reality is generated by communicative interaction cannot adequately be considered. However, I hope that the truth of this assumption will become obvious through the following discussions. The idea of a social or communicative constitution of reality is postmodern relativist in general, has its roots in phenomenology and has been made fruitful for ethics by intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas. Seyla Benhabib’s communicative ethics follows his discourse ethics. Another discipline examining and allocating the communicative nature of human beings is philosophical anthropology. Cf. e.g. Reiner Wimmer, “Anthropologie und Ethik – Erkundungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände,” *Demmerling, Vernunft* 215-245, esp. 219,f; 224,f.

<sup>46</sup> For the discussion of this critique of discursive concepts see for example Thomas Rentsch, *Die Konstitution der Moralität – Transzendente Anthropologie und praktische Philosophie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990) 13-29 (hereafter: Rentsch, *Konstitution*).



*literary* texts as a main part of their field of research.<sup>47</sup> Yet, philosophers of all eras have tended to quote and use literature at least as an example. The study of ethics apparently belongs to – or is at least closely connected to – the study of literature. Following Phelan, I would assess that the narrative quality of literature is of central importance for this matter.<sup>48</sup>

As has become clear, a partly positivist attitude will be upheld in the following. The idea of an empirical substantiation can only make sense in the framework of a basically positivist scientific attitude. Thus, it immediately seems as though my approach could be ranged among those postmodern theories that assume the possibility of some positive assertion in human culture. This both is and is not the case at the same time – I seek to comprehensively combine both directions of postmodern ethics by exposing their internal contradictions. Ethics remained an object to be studied even through the times of high postmodernity. This is true because realism, foundationalism, positivism and all other approaches toward a somehow positively discernible reality have not been erased by postmodern relativist critique. In the same way mimetic narration was far from being *virtually* replaced by postmodernist styles in the arts and literature during the postmodern era. In the new opposition of realism and relativism, old arguments of this nature are revived. I propose that these arguments have never been resolved and are still present in postmodern ethics. The arguments have developed a specific deconstructivist touch since the twentieth century, and yet they resemble old debates between realism and relativism, descriptivism and non-descriptivism, positivism and skepticism, and even theology and philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

Numerous theorists have tried to resolve the underlying dilemmas and have formulated them in different ways. I will principally address them as a matter of conflict between relativist and realist approaches to the world.<sup>50</sup> They will be discussed against the background of postmodern times because the sociohistorical situation offers a genuine understanding of human nature. Moreover, the deconstructive thread in postmodern relativist

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<sup>47</sup> Moreover, their own philosophical writing partly includes decidedly more narrative than theoretical paragraphs. Cf. e.g. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity – A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1997) 2-6 (hereafter: Nussbaum, *Humanity*). These pages are a good example for the fact that Nussbaum clearly engages in storytelling as philosophical writing. Cf. also Judith Butler, “Ethical Ambivalence,” Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz 15-28. The delivery of stories as parables in general has always been a philosophical strategy.

<sup>48</sup> See the opening quote by James Phelan. Cf. also e.g. Nussbaum, *Humanity* 85-112.

<sup>49</sup> The new debate between biological and philosophical ethics seems to be the revival of an old conflict between theology and philosophy. The statement that in a theory no conclusions can be deduced that are not implied in the premises (which will also be important for this study) is a critique of science and humanism frequently found in theological, respectively Christian ethics. Christian ethicists claim that ethics cannot be described in the theoretical terms of metaphysics or philosophy. Cf. Rufus Black, *Christian Moral Realism – Natural Law, Narrative, Virtue, and the Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 6,f (hereafter: Black, *Realism*).

<sup>50</sup> For a philosophical approach directed at the opposition between foundationalism and relativism see Kenneth Baynes, *The Normative Grounds of Social Criticism: Kant, Rawls, and Habermas* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1992) (hereafter: Baynes, *Grounds*).

theories is in a way the crystallized version of older forms of relativism. Besides the traditional problems of ethical philosophy the theoretical prominence of postmodern relativism has led to the dismissal of both ethics and the individual as in any way autonomous or coherent.<sup>51</sup> Yet, when the ethical turn and the cultural prominence of the related debates are considered seriously, the relevance of ethics to the postmodern era must be conceded. All other stances would seem scientifically implausible.

Still, an additional debate about the possibilities and circumstances of *metanoia* lies at the heart of postmodern relativist critique. A human being can apparently never be absolutely scientifically (i.e. objectively) aware of herself.<sup>52</sup> Completely understanding one's actions, decisions, and emotions as matters of cause and effect would logically wipe out the idea of one's self as an individual self. Yet, even those critics who criticize postmodern relativist theories for their implied nihilism stick to this core idea of existence. It seems to be the necessary basis for all communicative action. Thus, terms of identification are often developed in negative ways, as the positive approach has been ruled out. Yet, even though absolute positive knowledge of ourselves must remain eternally out of reach, we can positively approach human nature. The functionality underlying all individuality is obviously experienced by individuals and can thus not be denied. Besides the different levels of ethics, rational, and emotional human nature an additional adjustment must be made. To argue for the ability to consider and evaluate oneself and one's environment absolute scientific objectivity and neutrality have to be restricted.<sup>53</sup> A theory of ethics, resting to a large extent on the understanding of the individual, has to include evaluative and emotional aspects already in its systematic setup to come to evaluative and humane conclusions.<sup>54</sup>

### **I.iii. Matters of The Spirit**

I will briefly return to the above mentioned importance of theological discourses with regard to ethics at this point, as a theory of ethics employing a restricted notion of neutral scientific objectivity calls heavily for a theological or at least spiritual understand-

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<sup>51</sup> One of the traditional problems that is still relevant is the *is-ought problem* most prominently formulated by David Hume. Cf. Vittorio Hösle, *Die Krise der Gegenwart und die Verantwortung der Philosophie – Transzendentalpragmatik, Letztbegründung, Ethik* (München: C.H.Beck, 1994) 29 (hereafter: Hösle, *Krise*). A systematic sketch of how this problem can be solved with regard to postmodern relativist theories is given for example by May, *Theory* 38.

<sup>52</sup> I have decided not to use *he or she or s/he* and the like in the present study. For reasons of convenience, all genderly unspecified pronouns will appear in the feminine form.

<sup>53</sup> For the prevalence of objective neutrality also with regard to questions of ethics in western culture see Taylor, *Unbehagen* 25.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 68-87.

ing of mankind.<sup>55</sup> Many critics, among them Slavoj Žižek, who harshly challenges “the menagerie of intellectual styles known as postmodernity,” actually refer to theology in some way.<sup>56</sup> Such critique exposes postmodern relativist theories as an intellectual activity deeply unsettling the idea of intelligibility. As Rowan Williams puts it, this “end of intelligibility” is not “the inauguration of a *jouissant* pluralism” but the root of what has pushed the world towards a “countdown to social dissolution and the triumph of infinite exchangeability and timeless, atomized desire.”<sup>57</sup> Even though I support this idea and will refer to Žižek’s analysis of Judith Butler’s work in later chapters, my aim is different from most intellectuals’ challenge of the postmodern relativist spirit.<sup>58</sup> The late postmodern critique of the *paradigm of pluralism* will be combined with metaphors of metaphysics in the following.<sup>59</sup> I believe in the possibility of a modulated realism as the *only* way out of the postmodern relativist dilemma regarding ethics. When the theologically inspired critics mentioned above refer to theological concepts, they do not actually refute postmodern relativist critique but merely ignore or avoid its most critical points. They either display reassertion of positive definitions without a foundation or they stay involved in the *negative postulate of being*.<sup>60</sup> The postmodern dilemma is sharply criticized by purely religious as well as theological intellectuals, too. However, I believe that these debates are not especially relevant for the present study, as I criticize neutral scientific objectivity on the grounds of culture and theory in general instead of on the grounds of religion.<sup>61</sup> The positive assertion of individual will is founded in communicative processes. A notion closely connected to the theological points of view in traditional ethics is treated in the section on deontology in chapter II.ii.ii. Theological, as well as postmodern, thinkers tend to dissolve epistemology and ontology into either unquestioned negative or positive postulates of being. This matter will be systematically disentangled in the following.

#### **I.iv. Literature, Language, and Narration**

The literary part of this research can not only help to clarify the narrative generation of intersubjective relations and the generation of individuality, it can be additionally used to clarify the role of the human observer, which underlies all scientific undertakings. The

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<sup>55</sup> This approach is close to narrative conceptions of ethics, which have a long history within theology, too.

<sup>56</sup> Rowan Williams, “Introducing the Debate: Theology and the Political,” Davis/Milbank/Žižek 1,ff; 2.

<sup>57</sup> All quotes *ibid.* 3.

<sup>58</sup> Many of these critics, such as Slavoj Žižek, are inspired by socialist or communist ideas.

<sup>59</sup> Kaiser-Probst states that plurality has become the *paradigm of postmodernity*. Cf. *ibid.*, Wandel 32,f.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Creston Davis and Patrick Aaron Riches, “Metanoia: The Theological Praxis of Revolution,” Davis/Milbank/Žižek 22-51, 22.

<sup>61</sup> Still, the history of theological criticism could in a culture poetical way even be taken as evidence for the validity of my argument.

role of the observer is also crucial as it is the role of the author who is writing these words. To systematically understand the basis of all theories of understanding, some metaphysical groundwork is needed. By considering the culturally verified communicative and narrative aspects of human nature displayed in literature, a description of communicative reality will be approached. After Phelan, I thus understand literature as an example of language usage, which is the founding element of human reality. It should be mentioned that contrary to Phelan and many intellectuals discussing the aesthetic, I have opted to concentrate on the mimetic character of literature. Even more than that, instead of taking narratives as a distinct part of human life that can be understood as reflecting on or representing human experience, I understand literature as an integral part of communicative reality.<sup>62</sup> By reading character narration we are mentally entering other people's experience and are affected by it. Thus, we can scrutinize the way human nature is touched by and related to narratives.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, some questions about the nature of literature and its relation to philosophy will have to be answered beforehand (I.iv.ii.).

#### **I.iv.i. Reading the Self**

The works treated in part III. are first-person narratives, autobiographically influenced fiction, fictionalized autobiographies, or are otherwise related to the representation of an individual's point of view.<sup>64</sup> I have opted for (at least to a great extent) fictionalized texts, because the facet of consistency in the concept of a first-person narrator is the important element for the following argument. I have chosen not to treat actual autobiographies in order to be able to concentrate on this facet and ignore the relationship between autobiographical plot and the author's actual life, which is central to recent autobiography studies.<sup>65</sup> It is in any case very difficult to substantiate the non-fictionality of any form of

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Rhetoric* 25-29.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. also Wayne C. Booth "Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple," Davis/Womack 16-29; Daniel R. Schwarz, "A Humanistic Ethics of Reading," Davis/Womack 3-15. In a more traditional understanding aesthetic techniques can only be revealed to affect a specific part of human perception. My argument seems to be closely related to a point of view that has recently been developed with regard to aesthetics and evolutionary psychology. Cf. Dennis Dutton, "Aesthetics and Evolutionary Psychology," *The Oxford Handbook for Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) [http://www.denisdutton.com/aesthetics\\_&\\_evolutionary\\_psychology.htm](http://www.denisdutton.com/aesthetics_&_evolutionary_psychology.htm) (21.10. 2009). Yet, as will become clear in the following, I oppose the natural scientific understanding related to evolutionary psychology.

<sup>64</sup> Pirsig's *Lila* is actually the only novel not narrated in the first-person singular. As it is designed as a sequel to *Zen* and further develops the philosophical theory, the change in narrational style is in itself an interesting comment on the included philosophical ideas.

<sup>65</sup> The debate over this relation, which was among others explicitly developed by Philippe Lejeune, is irrelevant for this thesis. Cf. Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996).

autobiography in postmodern autobiography studies.<sup>66</sup> This difficulty, which results from relativistic postmodern views of reality and of the individual, will be discussed comprehensively and systematically and not intra-disciplinarily in the following. There has been a return to more mimetic and realistic writing recently, also in North America.<sup>67</sup> My arguments are to an extent based on the fact that such a realistic renaissance had to occur after the relativistic paradigm. It therefore seems sensible to analyze consistent and rather realistic characters.

The criteria of choice are supposed to ensure balanced research, which traces the development of the ethical debate: a more or less equal historical distribution, no exclusive focus on US-American literature, a manageable amount of authors and novels, and their popularity.<sup>68</sup> The latter fact matters if the results shall be generalized in relation to the contemporary ethical debate. A great number of readers have identified with the narrations and narrators of the chosen novels. The novels are divided into two thematic groups according to the creation of the pivotal individuals through the narration. Whereas the first subsection will focus on relative individuals in relation to founded moral norms, the second subsection will discuss the contrary situation of coherent individuals in relation to relative moral norms. The main focus lies on the nature of human life and the importance of emotions and rational abilities with regard to ethics. Intersubjective objectivity as well as narrational strategies and their effects will be scrutinized. Many of the ethically crucial points could be analyzed through more than one of the chosen novels. As this discussion is supposed to serve as an example, they are treated in the work representing them best.

The analyses will be divided into the discussion of the central character's development as an individual and the discussion of the narrational style. The methodology is to some extent based on the ideas of James Phelan and Adam Zachary Newton. These two literary theorists concerned with ethics base their work on, respectively, Wayne C. Booth,

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<sup>66</sup> "Die Nachwirkungen der absoluten Individualisierung des Menschen durch die Romantik und der Mythos des *self-made man* insbesondere in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft ließen historiographische Sachlichkeit in Lebensschilderungen nicht länger zu, und spätestens das Aufkommen poststrukturalistischer Positionen bestätigte den unsicheren Boden, auf dem sich Konzepte des eigenen Lebens und das Bemühen um Wahrheitsfindung bewegen: Unfähig, sich selbst vorurteilsfrei, kohärent oder gar abschließend kennen zu können, sowie geplagt von Zweifeln, ob ein autobiographisches Selbst überhaupt losgelöst von seiner textlichen Manifestation Bestand hat, wird das Subjekt autobiographischer Texte zu einem linguistischen Konstrukt, das auf keinen äußeren Referenten mehr Bezug nehmen kann, wird die Schwierigkeit jeglicher historischer Objektivität durch die Unumgänglichkeit der Fiktionalisierung bei der Textproduktion abgelöst." Larissa Bendel, *The Requirements of our Life is the Form of our Art: Autobiographik von Frauen der Beat Generation*, American Culture 4 (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2005) 66 (hereafter: Bendel, Requirements).

<sup>67</sup> The renaissance of the family saga in Jeffrey Eugenides' or Jonathan Franzen's books must be ranged among such works. There has also been an increased interest in genres such as fantasy and the crime novel.

<sup>68</sup> Popularity is evaluated considering best-selling lists, the worldwide availability in libraries, the granting of awards and nominations for awards, sales rankings and the general online presence.

Gérard Genette, and Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Stanley Cavell.<sup>69</sup> Neither Newton's triadic structure of narrative ethics nor Phelan's concept of four ethical situations communicated by a narrative are exactly what I have in mind in my analysis.<sup>70</sup> Yet, Newton's idea that "character and narration, like theme and form, presuppose each other" and his understanding of human existence in terms of narration is very similar to my concept of human nature.<sup>71</sup> I would not want to assert that a literary narration is exactly the same as real communication happening between *live persons*. But if human narration is deeply interconnected with human nature, the narrational structures would have to be the same in any sort of narration. Therefore, the analysis of any narrational structure can heighten the understanding of human nature and ethics.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the characters' actions within a narrative directly engage the reader in a(n ethical) relationship.<sup>73</sup> "[N]arrative itself can be fruitfully understood as a rhetorical act ...."<sup>74</sup> Especially because we are not only involved (as in *live situations*) but can also observe and feel with other individuals, literature seems perfectly suited for an analysis of the structures of personalities. These structures are usually buried within endless dynamics and can rarely be (re)visited for better understanding. Hence, "reading is an act which, in some way, does make a difference."<sup>75</sup>

Both Newton and I work with a postmodern (relativist) understanding of the human individual as existing intersubjectively. The most striking difference between our theories lies in the fact that, following Levinas, Newton supposes the possibility of representation (and consequently misrepresentation) without a realistic discussion of a positively understandable and to some extent *stable human nature*.<sup>76</sup> I take this as the most severe self-referential incoherence within postmodern relativist thought in general and will discuss it thoroughly in following chapters. Besides my critique of this sort of postmodern argument, I will also advance the view that questions of identity and ethics are in no way questions of *representation*.<sup>77</sup> Phelan's terminology regarding the analysis of the ethical information

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Rhetoric* 1, 21-23; Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1995) 13 (hereafter: Newton, *Ethics*).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Newton, *Ethics* 17,f; Phelan, *Rhetoric* 23.

<sup>71</sup> Newton, *Ethics* 18.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 24,ff.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Rhetoric* 5.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>75</sup> Newton, *Ethics* 26.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *ibid.* e.g. 18,f; 46,ff. This claim is made by starting from a distinct focus on the *other*. In a way, this study is meant to redirect the focus from the other to the self again, to talk about subjectivity and individual personality before talking about alterity. Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 28.

<sup>77</sup> In the discussion of Judith Butler's and Seyla Benhabib's theoretical positions concerning ethics, Newton would have to be grouped with Butler, whereas Phelan would be closer to Benhabib.

contained in narratives is very insightful. Moreover, I agree that it is especially in character narration (or homodiegetic narration) that the ethical implications of narrative structures become clearly visible. In a way, the postmodern relativist focus on the *other* will be redirected to the self – such focus on the individual is understood as the first and most significant ethical action.<sup>78</sup>

Phelan analyzes all levels of this “art of indirection” as he calls it.<sup>79</sup> He clearly differentiates between the narrator, the author, the implied author, the implied listener and the reader. He is also very specific in naming different levels on which human beings are affected by narratives: they engage with them “cognitively, psychically, emotionally, and ethically.”<sup>80</sup> I would suggest that the psyche is merged into the emotional, rational, and ethical parts of human nature. Still, the systematic approach in the present study certainly bears resemblance to his system. But when Phelan insists on differentiating the mimetic, synthetic, and thematic function of the narrative, my more foundational understanding would maintain that these are merged. It might be very helpful to have such specific concepts to approach a text, when the aim of a study is to scrutinize the culturally specific moral implications of specific narratives. Yet, if an insight into the foundational nature of ethics within the narrative existence of human beings is aimed for, these differentiations rather obfuscate the view. If there is a foundational ethical core of human nature in relation to narrative existence, then it must be the same in all narratives. Thus, the specific relations between implied author and implied listener (the systematic level) and the differentiated thematic function (only regarding the sociohistorical environment) are of no greater interest here. It seems far more adequate to understand the narration as an abstracted communication happening between an abstract author (or narrator) and an abstract reader (or listener).<sup>81</sup> The reader – when she is referred to in the following – is meant as a reader in such a general and abstract way.

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<sup>78</sup> When I write about the *other* as another human being, I have opted not to capitalize the term. I usually refer to human others (in their specificity as well as theoretically) and not, like Levinas, to an abstract ethical relation that infinitely exists between a human being and her *Other*. Cf. Butler, Account x.

<sup>79</sup> Phelan, Rhetoric 1.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>81</sup> For concepts of abstract communication partners involved in the narrative experience see e.g. Wolf Schmid, “Abstrakter Autor und abstrakter Leser,” Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology (2003) [http://www.icn.uni-hamburg.de/images/download/ws\\_abstrautorleser030325.pdf](http://www.icn.uni-hamburg.de/images/download/ws_abstrautorleser030325.pdf) (29.7.2009). The differentiation between implied author and narrator points out that there are different levels of a narration. It is difficult to clearly differentiate abstract author and narrator, and I therefore try to work with an integrated concept that fuses these two instances as they exhibit similar intentions (if one can speak of *intentions* in this case at all). Cf. Wolf Schmid, *Elemente der Narratologie*, Narratologia (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) 81. A character narrator can be *interrupted* by the voice of an implied author or (abstract) narrator to transfer crucial information to the reader. Yet, as my main interest is to understand the involvement of the reader, I will

The six novels discussed in the following do not only include all the crucial theoretical points of the postmodern ethical debate, but are aligned in their use of narrators with highly interesting and complex points of view (or even different levels of narration as in *Handmaid*). The protagonists are autonomous subjects and their stories do not lack coherence. And yet, this coherence is based upon incoherent situations and incoherent personal histories. Despite the apparent relativity within their universes, a search for knowledge and certitude is still possible, as is the mediation of values. This mediation of values is as necessarily linked to narration as is the generation and maintaining of an individual personality. The narrational structure is therefore essential for human nature and for ethics. In the chapters designed to analyze the main characters' developments, it is mostly Phelan's first aspect of mimetic reality which is scrutinized. As might have already become clear, the mere term *mimetic* seems somehow inadequate as I am searching for general traits of narrativity that also appear in literary narratives. The thematic aspects are only relevant in so far as they help to understand the way in which ethics are included in narrational communication (and in human nature). The systematic aspects are useful only with regard to the way in which the reader is affected by specific stylistic turns in the narration. Yet, I want to argue for such affection (ethical and emotional) as it relates to human nature and not to certain cultural themes or technical aspects of literary narration. The chapters designated to the analysis of narrational style are thus meant to show the relation of the narrator to the narration and the audience. This means that the relation the character narrator maintains to other characters and the effect of this relation on the reader as well as the relation of narrator and reader will be focused upon.<sup>82</sup> This study does not aim to explain the reader's reaction to certain culture-specific values operating within the story. Rather, her affections raised with regard to underlying human ethics will be discussed. The culture-specific level of ethics can of course not be excluded, but is meant to be transcended.

Such an understanding of literature as testimony of human nature operating within cultural concepts is intrinsically a culture poetical approach. Yet, the foundationalist intention transcends this framework. In the same way that the systematic methodology of this study is organized, it intends to transcend the opposing systems of realism and relativism.

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interpret such moves as either a change in narrator (in Atwood, *Handmaid*), in the narrator's perspective (in Atwood, *Surfacing*) or as special devices applied by the narrator herself (Eugenides, *Middlesex*).

<sup>82</sup> The supposed *narratee* (the character within the story who is supposedly addressed by the narrator) will be disregarded. In postmodern writing *narratees* are sometimes even completely replaced by narrations which are openly (or at least implicitly) addressing the reader. Although a *narratee* can be supposed in many instances of literary narration, it is only in relation to the dynamic process of reading (i.e. in relation to a reader) that this relationship takes form. Moreover, due to the narrational communicative nature of human beings, the reader can never help but identify to some extent with the one who is addressed by the narration. Ultimately, this addressee is the reader. She is the one who is affected by the narrational style.



This opposition never actually exists in all its theoretical clarity within the particular theories. As we will see, not even Butler's approach clearly pursues a purely relative or deconstructivist line. Yet, such ambiguity at the interface of relativism and realism is no real penetration of either theoretical standpoint. As will be shown, it only leads to contradictions when it comes to epistemological, ontological, metaphysical, and ethical questions. As a certain form of universal validity is necessary, we need a clear and sustainable foundation to thoroughly explain and understand ethics. This cannot be done by ambiguous compromises but calls for a comprehensive combination of the respective interfacing currents in terms of theoretical groundwork. This study approaches the different debates involved in a rhetorical or narrative mode, thus not only studying theory and literature but also complying with their nature.<sup>83</sup> I mean to engage in the existing debates and to seriously engage them with each other. The following will thereby not so much reveal new arguments as it will reveal new ways of combining and interpreting already existing discourses. This agrees with the communicative understanding of reality – a new creation is not so much an actual innovation, but can rather be described as the innovative use of an already existing tradition.<sup>84</sup> Similar to the analyses of the novels, the discussion of the various interfaces significant for ethical understanding will treat the relevant issues selectively. Even though some problems will be revisited with regard to different debates, most arguments will only be clarified with regard to either literary or theoretical or cultural contexts. The individual or the narrated self as the central figure of this *story* and her ethical dimension will of course be *read* with regard to all of the interfaces mentioned.

#### **I.iv.ii. Literature, Fiction, and Philosophy**

So far I have argued that literature is to be understood as an integral part of cultural reality and that concepts of narrativity must transcend the complete sociohistorical realm for narrations to be recognizable as narrations.

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<sup>83</sup> Such a narrative approach resembles already existing postmodern intellectual modes. Newton calls it *dialogical engagement* to “follow through on ethics’ own discursive modus operandi.” Newton, *Ethics* 37.

<sup>84</sup> I will take up many discourses and debates that can sometimes not even be clearly distinguished from each other. It would go far beyond the scope of this study to try to trace all sources of each line of argument. The choice has probably more often than not been influenced by the direction of my personal and professional narrative existence rather than by any objective and neutral scientific criteria. In this way my work also accords with the intersubjective nature of the scientist-observer. Yet, if the narrative nature of cultural reality can be penetrated to discover universal values, it is not important from which exact starting points this undertaking is begun.

We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed.<sup>85</sup>

I will discuss these aspects as well as the relation of human nature, personhood, and narration in more detail in chapter III.i.i. However, it is still legitimate to ask what renders a literary story *literature* in contrast to other narratives. This will lead us to the nature of fiction and forms an excursus as it is only necessary to answer such questions to give this study a broader framework. In addition, the relation of literature and philosophy will be further clarified. Poststructuralist understandings of literature suggest that literary texts can tell us something about the process of language itself – about the game that constitutes meaning and knowledge in different discourses and different contexts. Texts are no longer static objects but dynamic textual processes.<sup>86</sup> Literature as a process reveals that stories are organized narratively and how human beings desire such an order (often affirmed as a plot). Through reading such narratives, meaning is created by the reader with respect to the narrational style.<sup>87</sup> The progression of a story is always an interactive process between readerly and narrative dynamics.<sup>88</sup> “[W]e constitute ourselves in part through our fictions within the constraints of a transindividual symbolic order, that of signs, including, pre-eminently, language itself.”<sup>89</sup>

As will become obvious in the following, the organization of meaning through narrative order is central to being an individual human person. This is why I will not clearly distinguish between the different forms of narration for the purposes of this study. They all form human communication and can thus inspire a deeper understanding of human nature. Narrativity is understood through the interpretative orders offered by postmodern theory, cultural poetics and a rhetorical understanding of narrative. What renders a random set of utterances a narration can be understood as the story’s progression or plot. This progression is produced by and influencing the narrator as well as the reader at the same time, involving the dynamics offered by the story and the process of reading. In constituting a plot the reader’s judgments are always already involved. This means that narrativity includes an ethical level. As readers share some significant emotional and ethical responses,

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot – Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1992) 3 (hereafter: Brooks, Plot).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Johanna Bossinade, *Poststrukturalistische Literaturtheorie*, Sammlung Metzler 324 (Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2000) ix-xii; Brigitte Kaute, *Die Ordnung der Fiktion – Eine Diskursanalytik der Literatur und exemplarische Studien*, Diss U Rostock 2005 (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2006) 40 (hereafter: Kaute, Ordnung).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Brooks, Plot xi, 14.

<sup>88</sup> James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction – Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative*, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2007) 134 (hereafter: Phelan, Fiction).

<sup>89</sup> Brooks, Plot xiv.

the idea of an abstract reader is adequate to describe general effects of narrative organizations.<sup>90</sup> Besides, the designs that cause such responses “are conveyed through the words, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions readers use to understand them.”<sup>91</sup> Through the design of an entire story an ethical level of the “overall narrative act” can be perceived, which corresponds to the idea of abstract narrator used in this study.<sup>92</sup> The ethical judgments about the story and its characters as well as the aesthetic judgments regarding the emotional responses and the anticipated progression vary according to the reader’s cultural background.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, I maintain that general observations regarding human nature can only be made with respect to the organization of communicative practices and not with respect to particular cultural aspects of communication.

Yet, what is the difference between the narration of our life and a literary fiction and why is the latter especially suited for the investigation of narrative structures? Literature offers a prototype of communicative order. Moreover, the organizing elements are not buried within the extremely dynamic processes of real life and can be revisited.<sup>94</sup> In addition, the literary discourse openly displays a deep involvement in the nature of human narrative communication and cultural context – contrary, for example, to the discourse of analytic philosophy.

Fiction’s advantage ... is that it can get beyond the abstract meanings and black-and-white implications of ethical categories to the complexities and nuances of ethical choices within the detailed contexts of real lives.<sup>95</sup>

If “any narration presents a selection and an ordering of material,” the selective mechanisms of literary choice can be investigated with more care and consideration as the life processes constituting human beings.<sup>96</sup> They are also often more carefully constituted, which means that the communicative strategies are applied with more exactness, so that the narrational style is easier to analyze and thicker.<sup>97</sup> One might still ask how it is possible to define fiction and to distinguish literature from other discourses. This ontological status of fictional narrative is irrelevant for the purposes of the present study. It shall nevertheless be considered to clarify this study’s position in existing sociohistorical discourses.

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Fiction* x,f; 1-4; 7; 10; 80.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 33.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Newton, *Ethics* 26.

<sup>95</sup> Phelan, *Fiction* 93,f.

<sup>96</sup> Brooks, *Plot* 13.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Phelan, *Fiction* 6.

The way a fictional artifact is created is different from the way it is used in communication. Therefore, its fictionality has nothing to do with the way narrative and communicative structures form the process of reading and understanding. I will briefly sketch an understanding of the nature of literature by referring to Foucauldian discourse analysis. I do not think that it is helpful to refer to the intentions of the author or the process of creation to define fictionality. On the one hand, literature is understood as a process between readerly and textual dynamics; on the other hand, it is not even clear how the intentions of an author can unmistakably be derived from a text.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the author as a real person does not seem to be the author as she appears in literary discourse. To understand how literature, as a discourse, can be related to other discourses is part of the meaning of a text. Yet, to understand these references is not to understand the *meaning* of a text itself, but to understand how the text functions in different discourses (e.g. political and religious) in sociohistorical contexts.<sup>99</sup> The *literal* meaning of certain word clusters is related to the system of language and communication of a certain culture. The way it introduces itself into the discourses of its time refers to the way these semantic systems function. The text in itself can have no meaning apart from such reference systems. However we interpret a novel does not really tell us anything about its status as a fictional text. Its being fictional as such does not constitute any special fictional meaning – interpretations cannot be drawn from narratives in a direct way. The things the characters do and say within the plot neither directly constitute the meaning nor the fictionality of a text. This indirect generation of meaning could be called a characteristic feature of fiction. Even though some novels and plots are surely bolder than others, and it might even happen that whatever is supposed to be communicated through a story is stated rather directly, it is always mediated through the fictional plot and the fictional persons. There is never an author speaking to us directly as, for example, in scientific essays.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. George Dickie and W. Kent Wilson, “Der intentionalistische Fehlschluss: Zu Beardsleys Verteidigung” (transl. Axel Bühler), *Fiktion, Wahrheit, Wirklichkeit – Philosophische Grundlagen der Literaturtheorie*, Kunstphilosophie 8, ed. Maria E. Reicher (Paderborn: Mentis, 2007) 143-177 (hereafter: Reicher, *Fiktion*). For attempts to define fictionality through the author’s intention see e.g. Gregory Currie, “Was ist fiktionale Rede?” (transl. Maria E. Reicher), Reicher, *Fiktion* 37-53; R.M. Sainsbury, *Fiction and Fictionalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 5.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Kaute, *Ordnung* 24,ff.

<sup>100</sup> I do not want to state that completely direct communication (whatever that would be) is ever possible, but a person telling another what she thinks is as direct as it could possibly be. As meaning is in general created through relations between semantic systems, any communicative act is at least always mediated through language (or any basic communicative system). At this point it is not necessary to answer the question whether it is the context involved or the function of the fictional discourse that constitutes the actual meaning. One could argue that it is the discourse system that renders contexts distinguishable. Apart from the way the constitution of meaning of literary and other fictional works functions, a true discourse analysis would investigate much more. In this model the whole discourse itself – including the work of literary scholars –

Within the discourse of fiction, the literary text and its meaning can be understood as products of the sociohistorical context. Even though there clearly is a function that can be called *author*, the author is not a speaker or a person as any other person. In using the name Plato we are using the equivalent of a description in the following sense: the author of *Politeia* or the classical Greek philosopher and mathematician etc. Additionally, this personal name does not have *one* fixed meaning. If we for example found out that the Platonic dialogs had not been written by Plato, the meaning of his name would nevertheless not really change. It would still refer to the real person and even the description would still not have changed in any significant way with respect to this real person. But understood as the name of an author (i.e. in the context of literary discourse) the *function* of this name would dramatically change if we found out that he had not written one of his major works. The name of an author is not an element in a special discourse, but has a purpose in this discourse. This function regulates the way texts by this author are circulated, received and evaluated. But it also constitutes the way in which the fictional talk in the text is organized. Were we to find out that one of the major texts was written by someone else, the entire organization of the group of texts assigned to this author would change. Several texts organized by the same author name stand in a relation to each other that allows for their simultaneous use, their reciprocal quality to explain each other, a special way of comparison, etc. One could say that an author name does not point to the outside of the fictional texts, to the real author person, but that it stays within the texts, or in between the texts. In this way the author of fiction is not the same as the writer or composer of a non-fictional text or artifact. The author has a function in literary discourse that is characteristic of the way in which fictional texts exist.<sup>101</sup> This cannot be said of the real person related to the name of the author. In this way, the author function that is important for the fictionality of the text is not the same as the real person. In fiction the author thus does not directly communicate to the reader.

I would suggest that the simple fact that fiction (in oral culture specifically) has been part of human life for a long time and that we seem to be able to recognize it from other centuries and cultures implies that even though there might be a specific cultural part of the construction, some elements of literary discourse must have stayed the same over

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must be understood as being constituted in certain ways. The organization of the discourse would then include the ways in which we can even talk about such things as *literary* texts and their meanings; how meaning as something relating to fiction is constituted. Cf. Kaute, *Ordnung* 28-37. However, to sketch a way to differentiate fiction from other discourses, it is not necessary to discuss these matters and the problems involved in detail.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault, *Schriften zur Literatur* (transl. Karin von Hofer and Anneliese Botond), (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988) 15-18 (hereafter: Foucault, *Schriften*).

time. Even though I do not agree with all conclusions that can be drawn within the project of a discourse analytical theory of literature, it seems evident to me that a fictional text does not assert anything *about* an object that is constituted through it. It *is* the object that is constructed through the text. The construed object or fiction might seem to be a comment in the general communicative process of the respective culture. But this comment as a communicative act is only constituted by the readers that perceive it and relate it to these context factors. This can, of course, be the intention of the author as a real person and she might as well mean it to be such a communicative act. Yet, this only happens on the indirect level of the work, and the producer cannot directly influence the way her work is perceived. Directly, the fiction itself is all that is said. A literary object is thus created that can be scrutinized.<sup>102</sup> Fictional talk is then not the talk about things, but the talk that constitutes things to talk about. Once we leave the direct level of fiction and relate the fictional artifact to other discourses, we can obviously talk about its structure, elements, effects, meanings etc. We can try to interpret it like any other object in this world. Therefore, its ontological status must equal those of other objects in the real world. Yet, once we have started relating the artifact to language and have separated singular sentences, these sentences have entered the network of discourses that constitutes our culture (and our *Lebenswelt*).<sup>103</sup> Hence, we have separated them from the level on which their fictionality was established and should no longer treat them as fictional sentences. They have become part of human communication.

Fictional discourse constitutes the order that ascribes every fictional text to an author and thus groups it with other texts and immediately constitutes the way in which it exists and is circulated in our culture. The way in which we do not take fictional sentences literally as we would understand real sentences is due to this organization. It seems to be quite difficult to specify the organizing principles that are transcultural and transhistorical. As it is enough to identify such a discourse to explain what renders fiction fictional, I will only try to sketch some of the characteristics that seem vital to me. Maybe the most important feature consists in the way fictional artifacts are related to an author, as has been explained above. This gives fiction a status that sets it clearly apart from any other texts or communicative acts in general.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, fictional utterances are usually marked by conventional signs. These may vary from culture to culture and epoch to epoch, but to truly be fictional and part of what constitutes the fictional discourse, we can expect one or sev-

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. Kaute, *Ordnung* 78,ff.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Foucault, *Schriften* 30,f.

<sup>104</sup> For structural reasons I will refrain from differentiating literature from other art works.

eral markers. These can be specific stylistic devices, a formal beginning, special perspectives, a characteristic plot organization, the use of fictional characters or objects, but also very obvious things like *visual* markers in a text. Fictional texts usually start by giving the authors name, the title and some explanatory words like *A Novel* or *Short Story*. One might argue that I could *smuggle* a fictional sentence into any non-fictional text and no-one would notice that it was fictional. Yet, it would indeed not be fictional then. Every sentence of fiction must necessarily obey the same rules, be constituted of the same material as any non-fictional sentence or else it would be cryptic. Fictionality cannot be a feature of a sentence as such. It is a status achieved by fictional cohesion. This cohesion only becomes visible if the whole product is either visible or referred to. However, it might happen that books that were not intended to be fiction become considered thus over time. If we take the Bible as an example of such a development, we can assert that the status of its *original creator* as an existing entity became doubted over time and it was ascribed to several human authors. Additionally, the style of the writing was adapted in literature over the centuries. In this way, markers of fiction can be detected in the work by today's readers.

Readers create different levels of meaning in fictional texts. Once they have started to create the literal level, readers immediately establish a (more or less) coherent plot and meaning of what they are reading. Whereas their emotional involvement depends on the literal meaning and the way it is conveyed, i.e. the aesthetic level, the meaning in a superordinate sense is created by taking the story as part of human communication in general. Of course, the literal meaning can also be understood as a communicative act organized by the author function and thus perceived as the message of an abstract communicative partner. But it seems sometimes to be perceived as a kind of inner monologue that is directly *experienced*. On the intellectual level, an ethical/political message is established. If the narrative, for example, reveals the cruel treatment of women, the reader can relate this literal meaning to ethical and political discourses which concern what is right and wrong. She thus understands the fictional narrative as a genuine part of the ethical/political discourse of her time, taking the literal story to have a superordinate meaning transcending its aesthetics.

The relation between philosophy and literature discussed in this study thus comes down to the relation between different cultural discourses. What is fictional about fiction and what is philosophical about philosophy does not matter in any conventional sense. Rather, the fundamental communicative structure that can be revealed by an analysis of these cultural practices is vital. In this sense, the way I investigate philosophical questions

concerning ethics cannot be seen as part of this discourse. Contrary to postmodern theory, I suggest that it is possible to refer to a meta-discourse about communicative reality. If ethics can be revealed to be a fundamental part of human nature, the questions concerning moral communicative practices transcend conventional philosophical considerations. However, I obviously believe that some of the philosophers discussed in the following can contribute to this meta-discourse. The philosophical texts are thus considered as an object of investigation as well as part of the meta-discursive formation to analyze this object. Literature in the same way provides a field of research as well as part of the strategies to accomplish the examination. If the meta-discourse to reveal human nature is understood to be part of the organization of the communicative practice, it cannot be a genuine meta-discourse that is situated above and beyond the other cultural narratives. Therefore, literature and philosophy fuse as what differentiates them as fictional and non-fictional is not decisive for the kind of questions asked in the following.



## II. Fundamental Ethical Interfaces: Relativity, Foundations, and Individuality

Roughly, the idea that cognition saturates perception belongs with (and is, indeed, historically connected with) the idea in the philosophy of science that one's observations are comprehensively determined by one's theories; with the idea that one's values are comprehensively determined by one's culture; with the idea in sociology that one's epistemic commitments, including especially one's science, are comprehensively determined by one's class affiliations; and with the idea in linguistics that one's metaphysics is comprehensively determined by one's syntax.<sup>105</sup>

This study opens with a focus on postmodern relativism, as its critique has to be accepted to some extent and as it is still the main theoretical current in the social sciences and most of literary and cultural scholarship.<sup>106</sup> This focus guides chapter II.i. and the respective subchapters. The above quote shows that the basic idea of human perception being biased can be found in many disciplines and various debates. In this way postmodern relativist critique should not be understood as an absolutely new or unrelated way of thinking. The most obvious influences and characteristics will be discussed in the following and they will be systematically related to the debate between realism and relativism, focusing the critique of the human individual. First, the different schools or tendencies of postmodern theories will be discussed with respect to their relativist characteristics. General problems will be revealed already. At the end, the importance of the ethical turn within the postmodern era will be discussed from a sociohistorical, that is to say cultural angle. This leads to II.ii. and to ethics as a philosophical discipline. It will be discussed in a historical perspective with a focus on important schools of thought and on main philosophical issues which relate to ethics and postmodern critique. Subsequently the importance of analytic philosophy and relativism for ethics will be treated. The postmodern situation marks ethics as a central intellectual field in literature and theory, and the relativist tendencies mark the concept of the individual as its crucial problem. Therefore, II.iii. is dedicated to concepts of the individual during the postmodern era. The alternative communicative foundationalist concept will already be introduced.

### II.i. Relativist Thought and Critique in the Postmodern Era

Many postmodern theories such as postpositivism, pragmatism, poststructuralism, feminism, communitarianism, and deconstructivism have revealed modern credos such as

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<sup>105</sup> Jerry Fodor quoted after Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct – The New Science of Language and Mind* (London et al.: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1994) 404,f (hereafter: Pinker, Language).

<sup>106</sup> Cf. e.g. Stephan Moebius and Andreas Reckwitz, "Einleitung – Poststrukturalismus und Sozialwissenschaften: Eine Standortbestimmung," *Poststrukturalistische Sozialwissenschaften*, eds. Stephan Moebius and Andreas Reckwitz (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2008) 7-23 (hereafter: Moebius/Reckwitz) 7-10. White also discusses the relevance of postmodern critique. Cf. White, *Ethos* 32,f.

the existence of an autonomous individual as illusions. In the end this relativist critique of the autonomously acting individual leads to ethical questions. The main conflict of postmodern times can thus be described as ethical – which will become clear in chapter II.i.iv. on the ethical turn. First, the postmodern critique will be explained and historically situated. Then, Judith Butler’s and Seyla Benhabib’s positions will be discussed, as they are the main theoretical examples treated in this thesis. They can be understood as examples for the two most prominent relativistic schools of thought engaging in ethics in postmodern times: poststructuralist ethics and communicative or discourse ethics. Whereas poststructuralist ethics completely adhere to a negative definition of identity and to value pluralism, communicative ethics can already be understood as a critical challenge to such an absolutely negative approach. Even though a regulative ideal of universality in ethics is defended, value pluralism is mostly accepted and cherished in communicative approaches as well. Especially in Benhabib’s work, a challenge to postmodern relativism in the framework of postmodern critique becomes clear.<sup>107</sup> The postmodern dilemma will be related to the debate between realism and relativism, which is why these aspects are already focused on at this point. Relativism will come to stand for a negative definition of identity, whereas realism will be associated with a mostly positive understanding of the subject and her faculties. The most prominent problems of postmodern theories in general will be discussed before distinctly relating them to ethics. In the end, the relativist critique is based on perception and concepts of perception. Yet, it criticizes realism for trusting perception and accepting existing theories uncritically.<sup>108</sup> It is – to say the least – highly debatable, whether this claim to have provided a *realistic* description of reality production can be maintained by postmodern relativist theories.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The earlier discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel are rationalistic theories and do therefore not actually (completely) accept the postmodern critique of reason. Yet, due to their situating ethics within a pragmatic relation a relativistic aspect cannot be denied.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Hans Jürgen Wendel, *Die Grenzen des Naturalismus – Das Phänomen der Erkenntnis zwischen philosophischer Deutung und wissenschaftlicher Erklärung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997) 57-93 (hereafter: Wendel, Grenzen).

<sup>109</sup> The problem of standards of reality or even of applicability is discussed by Ludwig Pongratz with regard to constructivist and system theory approaches to education. Cf. Ludwig A. Pongratz, *Untiefen im Mainstream – Zur Kritik konstruktivistisch-systemtheoretischer Pädagogik* (Paderborn et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009) esp. 34-37; 205,f. (hereafter: Pongratz, Untiefen). Paul Grice also sees a connection between scepticism and objectivism and assesses that both approaches include contradictions. Cf. *ibid.*, *The Conception of Value* (intr. Judith Baker) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 35; 40,f (hereafter: Grice, Conception).

## II.i.i. Philosophical and Cultural Overview of Postmodernism and Relativization

*Relativization* is a very prominent feature in postmodern theories. It can also be explained as the central element in strategies of *deconstruction* combined under the term *deconstructivism*, which is why these notions will not be clearly differentiated in the following. Moreover, it will be argued that relativization is central to the general movement of postmodernism, or in other words, it is key to the general sociohistorical situation of postmodernity.<sup>110</sup> It can be roughly described as a situation of incertitude. Yet, as the term *postmodern* is used to refer to numerous and diverse developments in various cultural areas it is difficult to pinpoint its meaning.<sup>111</sup> *Postmodernity* must be treated with caution, as it is “slippery, vague, and ambiguous.”<sup>112</sup> As this work is concerned with the interfaces of postmodern theory and the sociohistorical implications of the technique of self-writing, the focus on the meaning of *postmodernity* and *deconstruction* must be limited to their theoretical exertion in the humanities, social sciences, and philosophy.<sup>113</sup> When it comes to theory, there is a group of French intellectuals who are usually mentioned as central or original to postmodernism: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Jacques Lacan.<sup>114</sup> Many scientists define the central issues of postmodern thought as follows: a “growing incredulity toward traditional metanarratives” and a “new awareness of the costs of societal rationalization.”<sup>115</sup> Richard J. Bernstein suggests that postmodern intellectuals replace traditional metanarratives, which refer to foundational and positivist knowledge, with “a version of the narrative of the history of philosophy that has its origins

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Klaus W. Hempfer, ed., *Poststrukturalismus – Dekonstruktion – Postmoderne*, Text und Kontext: Romanische Literatur und allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft 9 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992) 7 (hereafter: Hempfer, Poststrukturalismus). The term *deconstruction* was originally coined by Derrida. Cf. Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida – The Other Side of Reason* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 90,ff (hereafter: Boyne, Foucault).

<sup>111</sup> “Es ist ein Merkmal des Begriffs der ‘Postmoderne’, daß er immer aufs Neue zur Definition herausfordert, bis dato jedoch alle Definitionsversuche überlebt hat. Ja er vermehrt sich geradezu durch sie und hat ... inzwischen alle Bereiche des kulturellen Lebens infiltriert.” Heinz Ickstadt, “Die unstabile Postmoderne oder: Wie postmodern ist der zeitgenössische amerikanische Roman?” Hempfer, Poststrukturalismus: 39-51, 39. Especially for literary criticism it has proven to be a problematic notion. “Postmodernism is so widespread a term that it can easily become useless.” Bo Pettersson, *The World According to Kurt Vonnegut – Moral Paradox and Narrative Form*, Diss U Abo, 1994 (Abo: Abo UP, 1994) 12 (hereafter: Pettersson, World).

<sup>112</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation – The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 11 (hereafter: Bernstein, Constellation).

<sup>113</sup> It is unclear whether some theoretical developments in the twentieth century are to be ascribed to sociological theory or philosophy (e.g. system theory or Michel Foucault’s work). As this is not crucial to the analysis of the interfaces in question, the classification of the thinkers discussed in the following will be omitted.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Bernstein, Constellation 5 and Benhabib, Self 3 among others.

<sup>115</sup> Stephen K. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) ix (hereafter: White, Theory). It is debatable whether the new forms of a relativist understanding cannot in themselves be understood as new forms of metanarratives. Cf. e.g. Pongratz, Untiefen 191,ff.

in Nietzsche, [and] has been refined and perpetuated by Heidegger and Derrida.”<sup>116</sup> Jane Flax appoints three central theses to postmodern thought: 1. The death of the human individual in terms of transcendental and foundational existence. 2. The death of history as a homogeneously and progressively proceeding narrative. 3. The death of metaphysics with its principle of presence, with the ever sought-after possibility of unproblematically representing the true nature of the world.<sup>117</sup> Seyla Benhabib combines these points in a statement about truth in relation to the work of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas.

[T]ruth is no longer regarded as the psychological attribute of human consciousness, or to be the property of a reality distinct from the mind, or even to consist in the process by which “givens” in consciousness are correlated with “givens” in experience.<sup>118</sup>

The statements assembled above provide an idea of philosophy and sociological theory in the twentieth century. Yet, to understand their development more clearly, it will be helpful to look at philosophy in general.<sup>119</sup> The accepted philosophical understanding of the world until the beginning of the twentieth century can be called *foundationalist*. The theories of knowledge, or *epistemologies*, were based on the idea that a secure foundation for knowledge existed, and that it could be detected and represented through human (basically philosophical) effort. One branch of foundationalism, *rationalism*, is concerned with rational faculties and believes that what cannot be questioned rationally, should be accepted as true.<sup>120</sup> The other division is convinced that truth can only be based on and verified by experience, and is thus called *empiricism*. One part of the empiricist division is concerned only with phenomena that can be observed. Thus, they exclude questions concerning the knowledge of final causes and believe in strict reasoning about what can be observed. The only method accepted in this reasoning is the positive or scientific method. Hence, they are named *positivists*.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Bernstein, Constellation 251. For Nietzsche’s importance with regard to moral critique see also Otfried Höffe, *Lebenskunst und Moral – oder: Macht Tugend glücklich?* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007) 42 (hereafter: Höffe, *Lebenskunst*) and Charles Taylor, *Negative Freiheit? Zur Kritik des neuzeitlichen Individualismus* (transl. Hermann Kocyba), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988) 224,f (hereafter: Taylor, *Freiheit*).

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Jane Flax, *Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 32,ff (hereafter: Flax, *Psychoanalysis*).

<sup>118</sup> Benhabib, *Self* 4,f.

<sup>119</sup> The following very brief historical overview draws on D.C. Phillips and Nicholas C. Burbules, *Postpositivism and Educational Research* (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) 4-27 (hereafter: Phillips/Burbules).

<sup>120</sup> In this way earlier versions of discourse ethics are clearly not postmodern and relativist, as they are rationalistic.

<sup>121</sup> One group of positivists connected to Vienna in the beginning of the twentieth century even more strongly argued for not trying to reason about questions that could not be proven by scientific experience. Their method became known as *logical positivism*. They are also called the “Vienna Circle,” logical empiricists, or neopositivists and their positivism includes a version of rationalism, stating that there are elements in human knowledge that are not derived from observation. Cf. Rudolf Haller, *Neopositivismus – Eine historische Ein-*

When comparing the end of the nineteenth century with the second half of the twentieth century, it becomes clear that foundationalist epistemologies have virtually been displaced. This is not to say that no adherents of empiricism and rationalism survived. But the cardinal arguments are clearly all influenced by or even completely based on *nonfoundationalist* epistemology.<sup>122</sup> *Nonfoundationalism* can be described as follows.

[E]xperience and reason have not been shown irrelevant to the production of human knowledge; rather the realization has grown, that there are severe problems facing anyone who would still maintain that these are the solid or indubitable *foundations* of our knowledge.<sup>123</sup>

The various forms of new epistemology cannot be easily combined or classified. Additionally, there are sometimes different names for the same position or different names for two positions that cannot be clearly differentiated. As they all share the belief that knowledge has no unchallengeable and adamant foundations, the term *nonfoundationalism* seems appropriate, although *postpositivism* and, as mentioned before, *postmodernism* are also widely used terms. It can be generalized that during the first half of the twentieth century an intellectual climate of wide recognition of these problems of foundationalist epistemologies prevails in western societies. These problems can be roughly summed up in six points.<sup>124</sup> First, the relativity of the capacity of reason: What the reason of one man supposes to be beyond doubt must not necessarily be certain to all men. Reason can work inaccurately and its premises can be faulty. Second, the relativity of observation: Human perception is never neutral, but always guided by personal conceptions. Third, the relativity of demonstration: A fact cannot be infallibly proven by empirical evidence. Any situation can be explained by more than one theory, which means that no fact can be rock-solid proof for a proposition. Fourth, (and in a way this is the inverted third point) the relativity of evidence. As every incident consists of various interrelated factors, the specific outcome of an incident can be related to all of these factors. The evidence delivered by an incident or an experiment can therefore never prove a theory relating to one single factor. The positive outcome of an experiment could always also be evidence for many other theories; it never indubitably proves one hypothesis. Fifth, the relativity of induction: Even if we could design an

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*führung in die Philosophie des Wiener Kreises* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993) 1 (hereafter: Haller, Neopositivismus).

<sup>122</sup> Similarly, a lot of recent intellectuals understand themselves as decidedly non-metaphysical. Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 43-45. Elisabeth Conradi discusses how feminists thoroughly criticize traditional moral systems for their lack of an idea of intersubjectivity. Cf. Elisabeth Conradi, *Take Care – Grundlagen einer Ethik der Achtsamkeit* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2001) 85,ff (hereafter: Conradi, Care). It must be conceded that analytical philosophy with regard to ontology has never completely stopped metaphysical considerations and has recently regained influence with respect to more conservative philosophical research.

<sup>123</sup> Phillips/Burbules 14.

<sup>124</sup> These points are taken from the above mentioned passage from Phillips/Burbules, although the authors only use the term *relativity* once.

experiment to prove a given theory, we could never be sure that this experiment would proceed in the same way each time it was carried out. As our experience of the world is limited, our knowledge must also be limited. Sixth, the relativity of the decisions related to scientific research. Usually, scientists interact with colleagues, authorities, or other human beings, who can influence the decisions they make concerning their research. Already their hypotheses can thus be biased and politically influenced.

Obviously, the above simplification contains some hitches. On the one hand, not all nonfoundationalists agree about the descriptions and the consequences of these problems. On the other hand, these problems have partly been formulated long before the twentieth century. Famous rationalist René Descartes has for example already in his first publication warned about the relativity of the capacity of reason: “Car ce n’est pas assez d’avoir l’esprit bon, mais le principal est de l’appliquer bien.”<sup>125</sup> What can be derived from these generalizations, though, is an understanding of the new intellectual climate, spreading through the western world in the twentieth century.<sup>126</sup> The new terms used to describe theoretical directions (postmodernism, poststructuralism, feminism, et cetera) must be understood as orientations rather than schools of thought. What unifies such a group of nonfoundationalist thinkers is a focus on a special problem of foundationalist epistemology rather than a similar way of dealing with this subject in form and content (although the latter characteristic does not completely vanish). They take the assertion seriously that there are various sources of human knowledge and that none of them can be said to have authority. Thus, they can only search allies in regard to special problems or special topics.<sup>127</sup>

What is even more perturbing is that some terms, widely used to describe this new epistemology, such as *postmodernism*, have numerous meanings in various other cultural areas.

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<sup>125</sup> *It is not enough to be endowed with sound rational capacities, but the most important thing is to reason soundly* (transl. Nina von Dahler). René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode: Französisch – Deutsch* (transl. and ed. Lüder Gäbe), (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997) 2,ff.

<sup>126</sup> It has taken some time until postmodern theories have generally gained ground especially in America. In the nineties the traditional philosopher Richard J. Bernstein could still state: “With the exception of Richard Rorty ... there is scarcely another Anglo-American *philosopher* who has creatively appropriated ‘postmodern’ themes.” Bernstein, *Constellation* 6. But even Bernstein, who tries to re-establish an alternative form of humanism, clearly rejects foundationalism, and is influenced by the new intellectual atmosphere as far as he devotes a whole book to postmodern ideas: “I *do* recognize that these critiques and deconstructions call for a strong response” [emphases in the original] Bernstein, *Constellation* 3; see also 28.

<sup>127</sup> Bernstein characterizes this tendency as an element of rebellion, a tendency *against* something. Cf. Bernstein, *Constellation* 57,f. It might be objected, that there are still schools of thought, such as pragmatism. But such groups have become much more heterogeneous and are much more in discord about who is to be considered as a member than before the twentieth century.

The term “postmodern,” as well as its companions “postmodernity” and “postmodernism,” are used in relation to a wide variety of phenomena in and claims about art, architecture, literature, philosophy, society, and politics.<sup>128</sup>

In addition to the meanings related to theory, the terms also usually invoke the sociohistorical situation of an increasingly globalized world including explosively augmenting informational technologies and the appearance of novel social movements.<sup>129</sup> These developments can be associated with the postmodern mood of incertitude and relativity mentioned above. This mood seems to be characteristic for the sociohistorical situation from the second half of the twentieth century on, and it also corresponds to the growing awareness of relativity and fallibility in philosophy and sociological theory. Yet, when it comes to literature and art, *postmodern* is related to a certain set of artistic strategies and characteristics. Literary postmodernism and theoretical postmodernism did not enter the historical stage at the same time, and whereas literary postmodernism is understood to be coming to an end, theoretical postmodernism is still at its peak.<sup>130</sup> Even though they share some characteristics, they should not be understood to share a causal relation to each other.<sup>131</sup> Their relationship will be characterized further in chapter II.iii. and the respective sub-chapters. At this point it should suffice to say, that in literature the popularity of postmodernist techniques passed rather quickly and writers returned to a more mimetic style. This latter style was produced within what has been characterized as the postmodern atmosphere. Hence, the influence of this atmosphere is evident in the more mimetic works, and *postmodernism in literature* will only play a subordinate role in this thesis.

As there are various interdisciplinary meanings of *postmodernism*, intellectuals commenced to resort to other terms, when talking about theoretical postmodernism. Obviously, these other terms meant to further specify a given group as well. A term that is often used synonymously in theory is *poststructuralism*.<sup>132</sup> Yet, beside all the postmodern connotations it is also meant to refer to an advancement of nineteenth-century structuralism. It is an appropriate term to describe postmodern theories as structuralism can be said to have relativized the positivist, essentialist, or foundationalist assumptions about reality, but especially about language. Theorists like Ferdinand de Saussure have described the function-

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<sup>128</sup> White, Theory 1.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. *ibid.* ix.

<sup>130</sup> Of course, there are different interpretations concerning the end of literary postmodernity and its characteristics. Yet, in the United States it is usually thought to have had its heyday with writers like Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, and John Barth in the period of the 1970s to the 1980s. Cf. Heinz Ickstadt, “Die un-stabile Postmoderne oder: Wie postmodern ist der zeitgenössische amerikanische Roman?” Hempfer, *Post-strukturalismus*: 39-51.

<sup>131</sup> “[Es] wäre nichts falscher, als ein monokausales Verhältnis zwischen poststrukturaler Theorie und einer spezifischen literarischen Praxis anzunehmen.” Hempfer, *Poststrukturalismus* 8.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Bernstein, *Constellation* 5.

ality of language and the ascription of meaning as a web of structures without any external-ly realistic foundation. Social, cultural, historical, or individual meaning is then produced through these structural networks.<sup>133</sup> Poststructuralism could be described as a further *relativization of this relativization*, and thereby said to represent the essence of relativity so characteristic of postmodern theories. Whereas structuralists described more or less cohesive systems, poststructuralists showed that these systems are subject to constant change and disruptions. They introduced a certain dynamic and thus an even more anti-foundationalist concept to the idea of social and cultural structures. Hence, (along with system theory) they expanded this model of explanation to all areas of human existence and reality. Conceptually, the focus was moved from the dynamic game of signs not allowing for stability in culture, to questions of power and cultural hegemony, to the construction of difference and exclusion, to questions of time and plurality as opposed to universality, and finally to the subjection and subjectivation of body and mind by power structures.<sup>134</sup>

In poststructuralism no elements are given a principal position within the cultural structures, and thus a relativity of the nonfoundational elements that constitute reality is established. As these structures and their networks are the only sources of sociohistorical meaning, they came to be characterized as power structures or power networks.<sup>135</sup> This probably can be determined as one of the general underlying concepts of reality in western societies from the middle of the twentieth century until today. The nonfoundational belief in relativity (or pluralism) and sociohistorical interconnectivity can be found everywhere in the intellectual and cultural atmosphere.<sup>136</sup> Another term that is often used to describe the general postmodern mind-set is *constructivism*.<sup>137</sup> Following the terminology of the respective philosophical movement based on neuro-biological assumptions, the idea is expressed that social and cultural reality are not given or even mediatedly perceivable, but independently constructed by human beings. The philosophical school often led to solipsistic con-

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<sup>133</sup> Ernst von Aster, *Geschichte der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1998) 455,f (hereafter: Aster, *Geschichte*).

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Stephan Moebius and Andreas Reckwitz, "Einleitung – Poststrukturalismus und Sozialwissenschaften: Eine Standortbestimmung," Moebius/Reckwitz 7-23; 10-19.

<sup>135</sup> The group of French philosophers around Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida were first considered structuralists and then poststructuralists, whereas they always abstained from pronouncing their affiliation to either intellectual movement.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self 1*. Pluralism is of course meant as epistemological pluralism, which leads to value pluralism.

<sup>137</sup> Alternatively, the term *constructionism* is used. Cf. Ron Mallon, "Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-construction-naturalistic/> (5.5.2009).



cepts, yet the general idea that reality is (intersubjectively) constructed can also be applied to describe other non-foundationalist and relativist theories.<sup>138</sup>

All of these anti-foundationalist movements leave little or no place for an idea of ethics as it was traditionally conceived.<sup>139</sup> Their method of criticizing foundationalism can be generalized as deconstruction or relativization. Deconstruction and constructivism are not linked in the same way as structuralism and poststructuralism, but rather deconstruction was generated as a poststructuralist practice. It consists of the destabilization of hierarchical determinations proposed by rationalism and empiricism, and by reason and experience. Through the above characterized critique of foundationalism and the new concept of reality as consisting of cultural networks of power, slowly but surely all traditional metanarratives were called into question. Particularly the metanarrative of the consistent and autonomous individual is crucial for ethical questions. On the one hand, foundational approaches to ethics become impossible without this individual; and on the other hand, post-structuralists suggest that the new way of deconstructing the related metanarratives is the only “possibility of an exit from the anti-social snares of liberal individualism.”<sup>140</sup> The individual or subject was relativized with regard to her cultural and social involvement and to the respective power structures. As deconstruction and relativization are very closely connected in meaning, I will primarily use the term relativization in the following. The question remains whether a nonfoundationalist ethical theory can still be called an ethics in the way human beings use and understand this concept. As it is this conflict of traditional and postmodern ethical issues that shall be analyzed and solved in this work, the following discussion is mostly limited to the effects on the individual.

Postmodern relativists attach great importance to language and to the productive power of utterances. Their cultural networks are created to a great part of spoken and written discourse.<sup>141</sup> One of the aims of their relativization of metanarratives is to show how important the narrative is to establish knowledge.

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, *Kulturelle Vielfalt und demokratische Gleichheit – Politische Partizipation im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (transl. Ursula Gräfe) (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999) 19-23 (hereafter: Benhabib, Vielfalt).

<sup>139</sup> “It is endemic to the mode of inquiry known as ‘critique’ that, despite its emphatic normative dimension, it considers itself to have transcended the normative naïveté of evaluative theories prescribing an ideal ethics and an ideal politics.” Benhabib, Critique 8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. e.g. Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung der Dinge – Eine Archäologie der Humanwissenschaften* (transl. Ulrich Köppen), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1974) 17,ff (hereafter: Foucault, Ordnung); Ibid., *Sexualität und Wahrheit I: Der Wille zum Wissen* (transl. Ulrich Raulff and Walter Seitter) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977) 27,ff; 90,ff (hereafter: Foucault, Sexualität); or Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) (hereafter: Butler, Speech).

Recently, a number of philosophers including Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, Paul Ricoeur, and Jean-Francois Lyotard have reminded us about the central (and problematic) role of narratives for philosophic inquiry. I say “reminded us” because narrative discourse has always been important for philosophy.<sup>142</sup>

Yet, to disclose all sources and traces of poststructuralist deconstruction in all concerned disciplines would go beyond the scale of this project. Through twentieth-century poststructuralist deconstruction, the previously characterized six problems of relativity were (re-) defined and came to prevail in the intellectual scene of western societies. This critique was then used to identify many superficial narratives ruling and constituting human knowledge, such as the narrative of the autonomous individual, the narrative of the naturalness of sexuality, and the narrative of the objectivity of science. These metanarratives were relativized, which means that their consistence, history, and functional techniques were analyzed to show their arbitrariness and to open discursive space for possible alternative concepts of reality. As this critique was perfected in its postmodern meaning in the twentieth century, only theorists from this period are important for the present purpose.<sup>143</sup> As Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib serve as examples in this study, they will be briefly ranged among existing postmodern relativistic currents.

### **II.i.ii. Butler and Benhabib in Theoretical and Historical Perspective**

Judith Butler (born 1956) works in various theoretical fields, such as feminism, political theory, and ethics, and has been influenced by the ideas of many other poststructuralists, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, and Luce Irigaray. Other sources of her work are Sigmund Freud, Theodor W. Adorno, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Emmanuel Lévinas. As she applies important elements of their theories in her deconstructivist approach to ethics, it would be inappropriate to analyze their works in addition to Butler's.<sup>144</sup> I share Seyla Benhabib's (born 1950) approach, who is convinced that basic elements of practical philosophy can be combined with postmodern approaches to ethics and can thus be reformulated – especially in regard to the universalist tradition. Her idea of *communicative ethics* includes theories developed by thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jürgen Habermas and Aristotle.<sup>145</sup> In the following section, Butler and Benhabib will be positioned within the history of postmodern rela-

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<sup>142</sup> Bernstein, Constellation 30.

<sup>143</sup> Even though I have shown that deconstructivist' techniques have a much longer history, the relativist conclusions that are characteristic to poststructuralism were usually not drawn before the twentieth century.

<sup>144</sup> After all, the aim of this study is not to give an account of poststructuralist development, but of the effects of deconstructivism on ethics.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Benhabib, Self.

tivization. Simultaneously, I would like to outline the *idea of relativization*, which has already been evoked by traditional foundationalist philosophers. Descartes, who is famous as a rationalist, has for example started his most important work *Meditationes de prima philosophia* with a thorough skepticism of all conceivable things.<sup>146</sup> This skepticism shows strong similarities to postmodern relativization.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, the idea of relativization also appears in many other disciplines. Famous linguist Ferdinand de Saussure has for instance laid the foundations for twentieth-century linguistics by establishing a systematic relationship between all linguistic occurrences.<sup>148</sup> He assessed that the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, and this ascertainment can be seen as one of the founding events for postmodern relativist theories.

Still, phenomenology can be identified as the main source of twentieth-century postmodern relativist theory. Even though Edmund Husserl should be considered as the founder of phenomenology, his student Martin Heidegger, who has further developed this concept, is usually associated with it.<sup>149</sup> Relativist tendencies, which became so prominent in postmodern theories, were thus already prevalent in the beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, the passage from modernity to postmodernity is not clearly distinguishable. Bernstein structures his own definition of the postmodern intellectual situation around a phenomenon he calls “the rage against reason.”<sup>150</sup> I understand this development more generally as the rage against or relativization of the individual.<sup>151</sup> Intellectuals like

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<sup>146</sup> See the first meditation in René Descartes, *Meditationen über die Grundlagen der Philosophie* (ed. Lüder Gäbe) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1993) 15-20.

<sup>147</sup> In addition, the technique is very similar to general philosophical skepticism – a school of thought much older than Descartes’ work.

<sup>148</sup> Later *structural linguistics* developed from his work. Cf. “Saussure, Ferdinand de” *DIE ZEIT: Das Lexikon* (Hamburg: Zeitverlag Gerd Bucerius, 2005); Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns – Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Rowohlt’s Enzyklopädie (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2006) 34 (hereafter: Bachmann-Medick, Turns).

<sup>149</sup> The term phenomenology was famously introduced to philosophy by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and his ideas of intersubjectivity remain important for postmodern relativism. For the inherent Hegelian ideas in prominent postmodern approaches to ethics see Slavoj Žižek, *Die politische Suspension des Ethischen* (transl. Jens Hagedstedt) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005) 11-107 (hereafter: Žižek, Suspension). Yet, what later came to be associated with phenomenology as a strategy and school of thought originates in Husserl’s work. For the importance of this body of thought for postmodern thinkers see e.g. Bernstein, Constellation 4; Thomas Rentsch, “Vorwort,” *Martin Heidegger – Sein und Zeit*, Klassiker Auslegen 25, ed. Thomas Rentsch (Berlin: Akademie, 2001) VII-X. Husserl can actually be argued to have tried a consolidation of realistic and relativistic tendencies, namely idealism, right as a cornerstone of his newly developed phenomenology. Cf. John J. Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism – Noema and Object*, Contributions to Phenomenology 4 (London et al.: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990) 253,f (hereafter: Drummond, Intentionality); Christian Bayer, “Edmund Husserl,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/> (02.03.2009).

<sup>150</sup> Bernstein, Constellation 31,ff. For the idea of the deconstruction of reason see also Höhle, Krise 38-58; White, Ethos 11,f.

<sup>151</sup> This has been identified as the central postmodern problem by many intellectuals. “The intellectual climate from which such views on the self-problematic derive is described by Culler precisely in terms of the deconstruction of the Subject as the centre or source of meaning.” Robert Burden, *John Fowles – John*

Heidegger analyzed the western concept of reason with all its entanglements in power structures and inherent individualizing stereotypes.<sup>152</sup> This critique showed how individuals, who had been understood as foremost reasonable beings, were influenced and bound by the normative notions of the individuality and rationality they were to fulfill.<sup>153</sup> The individual was suddenly no longer in opposition, i.e. differentiated from her environment, but now deeply interwoven with and even produced by it. Michel Foucault later developed a comprehensive theory of the individual's entanglement and disintegration into cultural structures around the notion of *bio-power*.<sup>154</sup>

Yet, it must be acknowledged that the idea of a possible power to change her fate for a better future is at least implicitly still associated with the individual in postmodern relativist theories. “[M]odern cultural theory [is] ultimately ethical in its aims and outlook.”<sup>155</sup> Some intellectuals formulate such an ideal clearly, others do not; but when criticizing cultural configurations by means of deconstructing them (i.e. by means of dissecting their sociohistorical components) a certain point of view regarding configurations must be taken. The critics that pursue a deconstructivist position are usually aware that their position is always entangled with the very cultural situation they want to criticize.<sup>156</sup> The idea of postmodern relativization is foremost the idea of exposing inconsistencies in existing

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*Hawkes – Claude Simon: Problems of Self and Form in the Post-Modernist Novel – A Comparative Study*, Epistemata: Reihe Literaturwissenschaft V (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1980) 21.

<sup>152</sup> Other prominent philosophers who have taken this view are for example Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Maximilian Weber, and Theodor W. Adorno. Moreover, especially Nietzsche and Weber must be seen as strong influences on Heidegger's work.

<sup>153</sup> Immanuel Kant had most famously pronounced the individual to be a rational creature. Even though he already formulated a critique of human reason, he never seriously doubted that critique can be rationally grounded. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (ed. Jens Timmermann) (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003). For the idea that Kant could also be interpreted as the father of relativist ideas – in the sense that he showed how perception is always influenced by the perceiving subject – see for example Pongratz, *Untiefen* 43, 205. Even though Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel criticized Kant's philosophy essentially, he shared his basic view of the grounds of critique. Cf. Bernstein, *Constellation* 316. Yet, Hegel introduced the notion of immanent critique, which means measuring a theory against its own standards. Thus, he should be seen as one of Heidegger's and therefore of postmodernism's predecessors. Cf. e.g. Bernstein, *Constellation* esp. 293,ff and Pongratz, *Untiefen* 19.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Foucault, *Sexualität*.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas Osborne, *The Structure of Modern Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2008) 140 (hereafter: Osborne, *Structure*). Osborne is talking about *modern* culture here, and he distinguishes between modernity and postmodernity. However, his judgment refers to thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, who have in the terms of this study clearly been identified as postmodern. Moreover, this study proposes that the relativistic tendencies, which were already part of modern theories (and were their main characteristic), were only further developed within postmodern theories.

<sup>156</sup> Foucault's work is a very good example for this awareness of sociohistorical embeddedness. Even though he had still imagined the possibility of an objective standpoint in the beginning (cf. Foucault, *Ordnung*), he became aware of the relativity of his own critique when writing Foucault, *Sexualität* (at the latest). For the development in Foucault's work see also Boyne, *Foucault* esp. 108,ff. Boyne, however, sees this development in close relationship with Derrida's critique of Foucault and describes the above mentioned change as already applying to *Histoire de la folie*. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

cultural systems.<sup>157</sup> A persuasive mood of doubt thus lies at the heart of deconstruction.<sup>158</sup> It can also be described as an atmosphere of “destabilization, rupture and fracture – of resistance to all forms of abstract totality, universalism, and rationalism.”<sup>159</sup> Lyotard has introduced the topic of *postmodernity* to a greater audience and has given much cause for controversy by his definition of the term.<sup>160</sup> The fact that he pronounced ethics to be first philosophy and to have superseded ontology is a distinctive characteristic of his philosophy. He has also related ethics to the fundamental otherness of the *other*, which has in general dominated much of twentieth century Continental philosophy and culture, in particular Judith Butler’s ethics.<sup>161</sup>

One cannot ignore the extent to which ... ‘postmodern’ emphases on plurality, otherness, *différance*, and alterity are themselves expressions and reflections of what has become a fact of ... ‘postmodern’ forms of life. For our everyday experience is one of a fractured totality.<sup>162</sup>

Yet, by comparing all these different theorists to each other and by generally referring to them as *postmodern*, the distinctive nature of their works cannot be adequately appreciated. When intellectuals have referred to themselves as either *postmodern*, *poststructuralist*, or *deconstructivist*, they usually understood themselves as being in opposition, or at least not in accordance with the other two.<sup>163</sup> By describing a postmodern atmosphere no particular theory is supposed to be debased. Yet, the general relativistic intellectual atmosphere creates problems with regard to ethics and these problems must be acknowledged. They will be analyzed during the discussions of Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib. They occur when secure foundations are doubted as has increasingly been done by all but the most unyielding intellectuals as the twentieth century has unfolded. Regarding this anti-

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<sup>157</sup> Relativists, such as constructivists, have thus often been criticized for their simplifications of those philosophies they set out to challenge. Thereby, they tend to ignore the fact that great parts of their critique are not as new and postmodern as they seem to be, but are firmly rooted within the history of philosophy and the history of science. Cf. e.g. Pongratz, *Untiefen* esp. 30; 44,f; 54.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Judith Butler, “Kontingente Grundlagen: Der Feminismus und die Frage der ‘Postmoderne’,” *Der Streit um Differenz – Feminismus und Postmoderne in der Gegenwart*, Seyla Benhabib et al. (transl. Kathrina Menke, Karin Wördemann and Vincent Vogelvelt) (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993) 31-58, 34 (hereafter: Benhabib, *Streit*).

<sup>159</sup> Bernstein, *Constellation* 57.

<sup>160</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Das postmoderne Wissen: ein Bericht* (ed. Peter Engelmann and transl. Otto Pfersmann) (Wien: Passagen, 2005). Cf. e.g. Bernstein, *Constellation* 11,f and Judith Butler, “Kontingente Grundlagen: Der Feminismus und die Frage der ‘Postmoderne’,” Benhabib, *Streit* 31-58; 33,f.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Bernstein, *Constellation* 312; Georg W. Bertram, “Die Dekonstruktion der Normen und die Normen der Dekonstruktion,” *Philosophie der Dekonstruktion*, eds. Christoph Menke and Andrea Kern (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002) 289-310 (hereafter: Menke/Kern) 298-301.

<sup>162</sup> Bernstein, *Constellation* 312.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Judith Butler, “Kontingente Grundlagen: Der Feminismus und die Frage der ‘Postmoderne’,” Benhabib, *Streit* 31-58, 33. Butler also points out that the different disciplines such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, literary critique, et cetera that work within a postmodern framework usually do not conceive themselves as part of the same project. Also, for example Derrida’s and Foucault’s work cannot be combined theoretically with Lyotard’s theories.

foundationalist attitude and the resulting doubts, Butler and Benhabib are clearly both working within the postmodern relativist tradition. Whereas Butler tries to find a new basis for ethics exactly in the resulting insecurities concerning the human individual, Benhabib identifies partly secure identity traits. In this way, Butler works with a negative (purely relativist) definition of identity and Benhabib with an at least partly positive one (resting on partly realistic assumptions). Benhabib is thus a postmodern thinker who is not willing to radically reject all traditional foundations, whereas Butler aims at (re)creating a new theory exactly through the rejection of all secure foundations. Both theorists are concerned with ethics and represent an opposition to the charge of moral nihilism often raised as an objection against the postmodern body of thought.

In the beginning of their theoretical careers the two women seemed more or less united by the cause of feminism. Yet, theoretical differences rapidly manifested and could no longer be easily bypassed. Generally, it can be stated that Benhabib's feminism is rooted in critical theory, whereas Butler's views are entrenched in radically poststructuralist concepts.<sup>164</sup> Their approaches can be seen as characteristic reactions to the postmodern atmosphere. On the one hand, the results of deconstructivist critique show that every possible foundation is relative. On the other hand, the very act of criticizing demands a point of view – a foundation or a possible position to speak from. Either a philosopher must try to find new starting points or positions through a thorough deconstruction; or they must find ways to defend traditional points of view, always realizing that these have been created on precarious foundations.

The search for normative foundations is bound up with *normalization* which Foucault takes to be the primary danger of the age of bio-power where the disciplines make our bodies into docile objects.<sup>165</sup>

As Benhabib argues, it can be useful to examine the manners in which ethics was described in historical cultural contexts in order to understand how it is organized today and to compare the current problems to those that have always been part of ethics. Still, Butler's post-structuralist approach does not inevitably lead to nihilism, which is the main charge against postmodern relativist tendencies.<sup>166</sup> Even though I also oppose radical deconstruction, I

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Nancy Fraser, "Falsche Gegensätze," Benhabib, Streit 59-79.

<sup>165</sup> Bernstein, Constellation 311.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. e.g. Seyla Benhabib, "Feminismus und Postmoderne: Ein prekäres Bündnis," Benhabib, Streit 9-30 or Kaiser-Probst, Wandel 35 (even though Kaiser-Probst discusses the general charge of relativism). For the charge of nihilism and amorality with respect to postmodernism, especially poststructuralism see Brian Caterino, "Poststructuralism and the Ethical Turn: Restructuring Practical Reason," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Massachusetts, Aug 28 2002, [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p66569\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p66569_index.html) (26.05.2009). For the charge of moral nihilism against other postmodern theories, such as existentialist tendencies cf. David E. Cooper, *Existentialism – A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 170 (hereafter: Cooper, Existentialism).

find that the relativistic charge of nonfoundationalism that is present everywhere in the (later) twentieth-century must be considered thoroughly and cannot be discarded easily.

Therefore, I prefer to think of my concept of ethics as a combination of postmodern relativism and foundationalism. This combination will be conducted as a fusion from inside of poststructuralist thought. Benhabib's communicative ethics rather discard some of the poststructuralist consequences on traditionally realistic grounds. Even though many postmodern thinkers, such as Foucault, understand western society and its concepts of dialog and communicative rationality as part of the "now exhausted metaphysics of presence, logocentrism, phonocentrism, ethnocentrism, and phallogocentrism, which compromise the violent history of the West," this skeptical cautioning does not mean that there are no goals that can be formulated or pursued within a basically poststructuralist framework.<sup>167</sup> It should also be considered that communicative faculties might have to be understood as man's first and foremost characteristic and that reason does not have to be neglected so easily. By thus highlighting the communicative abilities of men, one of Benhabib's predecessors immediately comes to mind. Jürgen Habermas can be considered as the father of the notion of communicative ethics.<sup>168</sup> Following Habermas and Benhabib, the solution suggested in the present study will also build upon a notion of communication as central to human existence. Psychological considerations of poststructuralism will also be partly included in an alternative version of the individual. Psychology is in a way the postmodern discipline *par excellence* as the unconscious and incomprehensible aspects of knowledge are its main focus.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, in this thesis I investigate the interface of realistic and postmodern relativistic approaches to ethics. I also examine the interface of poststructuralist and universalist theories. As will be discussed in detail in II.ii., a universal element – as

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<sup>167</sup> Bernstein, Constellation 50. I disagree with Bernstein, who presents Foucault and Derrida as exceptions from a negative and skeptical deconstructivism that can be "only ending in hidden forms of violence and nihilism." Bernstein, Constellation 52. He and Roy Boyne agree in the description of the development of both intellectuals' work from a radical criticism towards a more cautious way of understanding reality. But Boyne sees this circular movement facing the problems created by their own ways of criticizing as characteristic for postmodern thinkers and for the intellectual attitude at the time in general. Cf. Boyne, Foucault

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Bernstein, Constellation 317. Habermas' concept is usually called *discourse ethics* and is indebted to earlier notions of dialogical philosophy. For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that Habermas himself conceded that *discourse theory of morality* would be the more accurate term. Cf. Habermas, Erläuterungen 7. The problem range between relativist and realist notions in ethics that will be discussed as central in the following can even be interpreted as stemming from the Habermas-Gadamer debate about the possibility of foundations in the postmodern world – also with regard to Butler and Benhabib. Benhabib would of course represent Habermas, whereas Butler would be seen tracing along Gadamer's lines. Benhabib's work, which is deeply influenced by the same postmodern relativist arguments guiding Butler's theories, has been interpreted as resuming the Gadamer-Habermas debate or as being part of a return of this debate. Cf. David Parker, "Introduction: the turn to ethics in the 1990s," Adamson, Freadman, Parker 1-17, 16.

<sup>169</sup> Obviously, these questions could not be discussed in a purely psychological debate as the question of the point of view of the scientist (i.e. therapist) can only with great difficulty be discussed from within the discipline regarding the epistemological questions involved. A culture poetic view of psychotherapy will be included in chapter II.iii.iii.

it is also defended by Benhabib and Habermas – is crucial for ethics. Consequently, the interface of an ethical concept, an individual accomplishing a moral action, and the individual's motivation for acting morally will be central to this thesis.<sup>170</sup>

### II.i.iii. Problems in Postmodern Relativist Thought

Only by participating in the will to knowledge can deconstruction make its objections. The pathos of deconstruction is that it remains continuous with, not traverse to, the tyranny of self-knowing. The bad faith of deconstruction is that it cannot admit this.<sup>171</sup>

Even though it remains to be discussed whether self-knowing can be said to exert tyrannical power, it is obvious that deconstructive tendencies can only be said to make sense in relation to the wish to come to more adequate knowledge. Postmodern relativization is evidently a critical practice. Does it suffice to say that, in the broadest sense, it is a critique of foundationalism? “For in Wittgenstein’s sense, the very ‘grammar’ of critique requires some standard, some measure, some basis for critique.”<sup>172</sup> Otherwise, the critical argument would seem to be circular reasoning.<sup>173</sup> Obviously, the various poststructuralists, using relativization, have all formulated certain goals they hope to reach (some have done this rather openly, whereas other included them indirectly). Yet, when they criticize and deconstruct the way knowledge is produced through the power networks that constitute reality, it seems rather difficult to uphold a value that has necessarily been formed within these networks.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Habermas also highlights the importance of the self-concept for any concept of ethics. Cf. Jürgen Habermas “The Moral and the Ethical: A Reconsideration of the Issue of the Priority of the Right over the Good,” Seyla Benhabib and Nancy Fraser, eds. *Pragmatism, Critique, Judgment – Essays for Richard J. Bernstein* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2004) 29-43 (hereafter: Benhabib/Fraser).

<sup>171</sup> Newton, *Ethics* 29.

<sup>172</sup> Bernstein, *Constellation* 6.

<sup>173</sup> Among others Jürgen Habermas has formulated self-referentiality as a core point of critique regarding postmodern theories. He is sometimes even called the “most prominent and comprehensive critic of philosophical postmodernism.” Gary Aylesworth, “Postmodernism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/> (2.11.2009). Cf. also Christoph Menke, *Spiegelungen der Gleichheit – Politische Philosophie nach Adorno und Derrida* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004) 121 (hereafter: Menke, *Spiegelungen*). For a more moderate but similar critique of Michel Foucault see Taylor, *Freiheit* 188-234. For a positive understanding of this circularity in a socio-constructivist (but not normative) sense see also Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 9,f.

<sup>174</sup> This point is also made by Satya Mohanty and many other intellectuals working in the field of cultural studies combining literary and theoretical aspects as I do. Cf. Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History – Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1997) 116,ff; 126,ff (hereafter: Mohanty, *Theory*). For the difficulty of political action in postmodern framework cf. Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care – Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics* (transl. Liz Savage) (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 29 (hereafter: Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship*).



Although we can distinguish ethics and politics they are inseparable. For we cannot understand ethics without thinking through our political commitments and responsibilities. And there is no understanding of politics that does not bring us back to ethics.<sup>175</sup>

Additionally, or more profoundly put, the question of truth cannot be excluded from moral discourse – ethics and epistemology are inextricably involved.<sup>176</sup>

Postmodern relativist theories negate universality because of every person's cultural integration in a sociohistorical context or, alternately, because of every person's isolation.<sup>177</sup> As a neutral objectivity cannot be achieved, they conclude that every normative system must be culturally biased, and thus no norm can claim universal validity.<sup>178</sup> Yet, postmodern relativist ethics usually imply such a universal validity.<sup>179</sup> With regard to all theories that austere preclude general authoritative information about ethics, universality must be further discussed. The pragmatist critique voiced by Richard Rorty shall serve as an example of such theories at this point. Rorty states that "nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence."<sup>180</sup> He thus rejects the possibility of normative evaluation. It is undeniably true that every judgment will always be made in reference to an existing cultural background. Furthermore, every judgment will always be expressed within the standards of a language. However, if a certain language is the cultural means of expression developed in a certain culture, it does not necessarily follow that it must be inappropriate as a means to describe this culture. If a certain normative system has been developed by a specific culture, it does not necessarily follow that this system is an inadequate means of evaluating that culture. Rorty would surely allow for the possibility of such a judgment to suffice. Yet, he would state that nobody would ever be able to prove this adequacy on the grounds that people are always culturally biased. If the challenge of cultural relativity is taken seriously, it seems to necessarily lead to the

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<sup>175</sup> Bernstein 9. Cf. also Benhabib, Critique 13. For the general interfaces between philosophy and politics with regard to their aesthetic level see also Vittorio Hösle, *Der philosophische Dialog – Eine Poetik und Hermeneutik* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2006) esp. 13-16.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Kaiser-Probst, Wandel 37.

<sup>177</sup> With regard to the philosophically constructivist dictum that a human being only perceives what is created in her isolated perceptual system it can fairly easily be argued that it is theoretically impossible to found a relativist theory on this idea. An isolated perceptual system could not know for certain that it cannot gain knowledge about what is outside of itself. Cf. Pongratz, Untiefen esp. 207.

<sup>178</sup> Roy Boyne centralizes this idea by taking Foucault and Derrida as a parable for poststructuralist thought, when he states: "The ultimate lesson of the Foucault-Derrida debate is that there is no pure other, that ontological difference is a chimera." Boyne, Foucault 170.

<sup>179</sup> Bernstein has dealt with this question and has shown this suggestion to be true for thinkers such as Richard Rorty and Jean-François Lyotard. Cf. Bernstein, Constellation 313.

<sup>180</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: University Press, 1979) 178. In another publication Rorty makes the same point by stating that "reference to the practices of real live people is all the justification anybody could want for anything..." Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth – Philosophical Papers Volume I* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991) 157.

acknowledgement that neutral objectivity is impossible.<sup>181</sup> Yet, if there is no neutral point of reference, a term like *cultural bias* cannot make any sense. It remains to be discussed whether universality or a universal value could be sensibly redefined without the traditional realistic notion of extra-social that is to say extra-communicative references.

As plurality has become the paradigm of postmodernity, it seems impossible to formulate a value, which the deconstructivist critique could be based on or with which it could be justified.<sup>182</sup> Nonetheless, there is a “political imperative of deconstruction.”<sup>183</sup>

If there is one commitment which unites postmodernists from Foucault to Derrida to Lyotard it is the critique of western rationality as seen from the perspective of the margins, from the standpoint of what and whom it excludes, suppresses, delegitimizes, renders mad, imbecile or childish.<sup>184</sup>

As absolutely no privileged point of view can be conceived within a postmodern relativist framework, it seems to be understood by all postmodernists, that it is necessary to criticize the standpoints that occupy such a privileged position within a sociohistorical situation. It is thus indispensable to deconstruct the dominant metanarratives producing such privileges; yet, why is it indispensable? Where does the apparent urge for justice come from? How could justice be formulated as a value in a poststructuralist framework?<sup>185</sup> If a deconstructivist approach strives to reach any formulated goal, another problem arises. It will never be possible to consider all parts belonging to a given sociohistorical situation. Anyone engaging in the effort of trying to change it can thus never be sure of the adequacy of her strategy and hence of the outcome. It is therefore additionally unclear how motivation for such an act could be gathered.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, the role of an individual as acting has become dubitable. It becomes clear, that in a deconstructive framework the question must arise, whether a consistent deconstructivist practice does not necessarily render ethical dis-

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. e.g. Phillips/Burbules 1,ff. For a different but similar critique of the universality of postmodernism’s reasoning see also Menke, *Spiegelungen* 95,ff.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 32,f.

<sup>183</sup> Phillips/Burbules 167.

<sup>184</sup> Benhabib, *Self* 14. See also Drucilla Cornell, *Moral Images of Freedom – A Future for Critical Theory* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008) 72 (hereafter: Cornell, *Images*).

<sup>185</sup> For the significance of injustice with regard to deconstructivist thought see Menke, *Spiegelungen* 16, 21-116. Paul Grice already assessed that phenomenological approaches are always vulnerable with respect to a challenge of their justifications. Cf. Grice, *Conception* 40. I use the term *justice* in my challenge, even though it is a difficult term. It has been appropriated mainly with regard to Kant and, recently, Rawls. As will become clear, a minimalist and objective justice in this sense cannot be used as a foundation for ethics. The communicative foundational approach is in some respects much closer related with the idea of an *ethics of care*, developed by recent postmodern (feminist) philosophers. Still, the reference to an ideal of *justice* helps to clarify the contradiction at the heart of the branches of postmodern relativist thought which are concerned with ethics. Pragmatists, for example, tend to deny an ethical realm and content themselves with a more or less objective description of reality as it is. Cf. Conradi, *Care* 11-20.

<sup>186</sup> For the problems of judgment and motivation in Butler’s ethical theory see also: Nina von Dahlen, “Judith Butler und die Probleme des ethischen Handelns – eine Einordnung der Probleme der Motivation und der Urteilskraft,” *Ordnungen des Denkens – Debatten um Wissenschaftstheorie und Erkenntniskritik*, Verhandlungen mit der Gegenwart 2, eds. Ronald Langner et al. (Berlin: LIT, 2007) 227-235.

course impossible. I will propose a detailed solution to this problem on the basis of the discussion of Butler's and Benhabib's theories in part IV. At this point the turn to ethics within an era of postmodern relativism shall be discussed in a cultural perspective.

#### **II.i.iv. Culturally Situating the Turn to Ethics**

Whereas intellectuals tried to find rational explanations and rules for every part of human existence during modern times, the postmodern world seems to be determined by exceptions rather than rules. A modern intellectual attitude can be identified in the western world, roughly beginning with the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the initiation of industrialization. This modern attitude slowly but surely broke with (especially religious) traditions. It was characterized by an optimistic faith in material, technological and moral progress, as well as by the idea of an autonomous subject, and culminated in the rise of capitalism and liberal states. In the twentieth century this intellectual attitude changed to its postmodern state, which allowed for vigorous self-criticism, when the possessive individual and the disruptive logic of capitalism became a threat to war-torn societies.<sup>187</sup> The general public responded to this new mode of criticism at the latest in the aftermath of logical empiricist theories.<sup>188</sup> The new informational technologies, international television channels, and newspapers deliver massive amounts of information in real time. This information is contradictory more often than it is not. If anything can be immediately scrutinized, this puts societies into a peculiar situation concerning their ethical principles. If any judgment could be rendered dubious by comparing it to other existing judgments, then ethical discretion would seem impossible. An ethical judgment is traditionally thought of as impossible if the one judging cannot, without doubt, believe in the principle on which it is founded. Additionally, it used to be founded on or at least closely connected with religious beliefs.<sup>189</sup> And yet, even the industrialized cultures, which nowadays claim to be secularized, produce societies in which people judge morally every day.<sup>190</sup>

As the twentieth century draws to a close, there is little question that we are living through more than the chronological end of an epoch. [...] The many 'postisms' ... circulating in our intellectual and cultural lives, are at one level only expressions of a deeply shared sense that certain aspects of our so-

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<sup>187</sup> This definition is based on the concepts of postmodernity drafted by Bauman, Flaneure; Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) (hereafter: Bauman, Ethics); White, Theory; and Bernstein, Constellation.

<sup>188</sup> Rudolf Haller describes a general disorientation, into which society has been rushed by philosophy and philosophy of science following logical empiricism. Cf. Haller, Neopositivismus 8. See also Benhabib, Critique 1.

<sup>189</sup> Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 14,ff.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 12,ff.

cial, symbolic and political universe have been profoundly and most likely irretrievably transformed.<sup>191</sup>

The increasing deconstruction of traditional values, through globalization, and through the decreasing influence of religious faith in the western world is often given as an explanation for the postmodern moral disarray. The International Club of Rome, a non-commercial organization for a global exchange of ideas, has expressed a serious anxiety concerning the increasing indifference, moral and ethical disorientation, and intolerance.<sup>192</sup> The most disturbing contemporary currents relativizing what once has been a universally founded moral discourse are communitarianism, feminism, postpositivism, pragmatism, poststructuralism and deconstructivism, above summarized for their relativist content.<sup>193</sup> Their criticism has led to a “mood of skepticism”<sup>194</sup> among intellectuals, politicians, and artists regarding all traditional values. These doubts are voiced in every part of social discourse. Michael Maffesoli states that this is not so much an *end* of the great explanatory systems, as these systems simply belong to a now past sociohistorical period. For him, the postmodern time is characterized by “the process of heterogenization that results from the decadence” of the civilization that had been previously developed.<sup>195</sup> Postmodernity in historical terms is thus a period of “methodological relativism.”<sup>196</sup>

In heterogeneous times it is certainly important to challenge the premises of one’s own culturally biased point of view. Still, it is also important to consider the *paradigm of pluralism* as a sociohistorical feature of postmodernity. When we oblige to this paradigm we will necessarily come to culturally influenced conclusions. When it comes to ethics, the normative evaluation of tangible situations, and to actual political decisions, can we not and should we not fiercely demand *coherence*? Should the decision whether a war should be waged not rest on more than a culturally biased analysis? Is this not the essence of a moral judgment, that it evokes a higher standard of measurement than culturally relative norms? Such standards could be claimed to be illusions exposed by postmodern thought. Yet, the way in which the ethical discourses develop is still universalist, i.e. evoking a higher standard of measurement. It seems to me that such transcendence lies at the heart of

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<sup>191</sup> Benhabib, Self 1.

<sup>192</sup> This anxiety was expressed for example on a meeting on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary in April 1998. Cf. Cardinal Franz König, “Die Gottesfrage klopft wieder an unsere Tür,” *Woran glaubt, wer nicht glaubt?*, eds. Carlo Maria Martini and Umberto Eco (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005) 11-18 (hereafter: Martini/Eco).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Benhabib, Self 2, ff. “The most prevalent set of intellectual strategies for undermining the status of traditional metanarratives can be gathered under the term ‘post-structuralism.’” White, Theory 13.

<sup>194</sup> Benhabib, Self 2.

<sup>195</sup> Maffesoli, Knowledge 12.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.; cf. ibid. 45-54.

human discussions of ethics and moral judgments. It is, for instance, possible in a liberal democracy such as the United States that doctors are murdered just because they conduct abortions.<sup>197</sup> Behind such fundamentalist behavior lies the ethical discourse of the value of unborn life. It is a discourse in which human beings strongly refer to a universalist foundation of moral values. This is why cultural and theoretical relativism necessarily leads to crises of orientation.<sup>198</sup> I propose to take it as a given sociohistorical fact that a foundational universalist ethics exists in postmodern societies (and, as will be shown, has always existed in this way). As such ethical foundations are obviously not meaningless to human beings and as they seem to be more than general illusions, they must be analyzed closely to understand the ethical dimension of human life.<sup>199</sup>

In general it can be claimed that ethical questions became increasingly central to a great variety of cultural debates during the years preceding the turn of the millennium.<sup>200</sup> Growing numbers of books treating moral subjects have been published; several governmental and non-governmental councils have been established.<sup>201</sup> In more philosophical discourses the increasing popularity of virtue ethics in the nineties and a “renewal of Christian ethics” can be observed.<sup>202</sup> Yet, new topics, dehumanized capitalistic scenes, and the norms of different cultures, suddenly forced into close contact in a globalized world blur moral and ethical questions.<sup>203</sup> The postmodern world puts man into a contradictory situa-

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<sup>197</sup> I refer to the case of Dr. George Tiller, who was assassinated in 2009. Cf. Ross Douthat, “Not all Abortions are Equal,” *The New York Times* 8 June 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/09/opinion/09douthat.html> (09.06.2009).

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Höhle, *Krise* 27,f.

<sup>199</sup> Even if it were a matter of illusions, such a fundamental illusion, seemingly shared by all mankind, would have to be investigated before taking a relativist or realist stance toward the subject.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. e.g. Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen* 11,f; for the return to ethics in literary studies see Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: from Leavis to Levinas* (London: Routledge, 1999) 5,f; and for the return to ethics in cultural studies in general see e.g. Steven Connor “After Cultural Value: Ecology, Ethics, Aesthetics,” Hoffmann/Hornung 1-12. The phenomenon as such can also be seen in the development of an abundance of *composed ethics*, such as medical ethics, economical and ecological ethics, ethics of sports and of the area of employment etc. pp. Cf. Jean-Claude Wolf and Peter Schaber, *Analytische Moralphilosophie* Alber Reihe Praktische Philosophie 54 (Freiburg and München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1998) 148,ff (hereafter: Wolf/Schaber).

<sup>201</sup> These were for example the Council for Responsible Genetics (CRG) in 1983, the National Council on Ethics in Human Research (NCEHR) in 1995, the Pan-African Bioethics Initiative (PABIN) in 1999, the German National Ethics Council in 2001, and the Strategic Initiative for Developing Capacity in Ethical Review (SIDCER) in 2001. For the tendency in general see also the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies [http://ec.europa.eu/european\\_group\\_ethics/publications/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/european_group_ethics/publications/index_en.htm) (4.1.2010), the Ethics Resource Center <http://www.ethics.org/> (4.1.2010), and the Forum of National Ethics Councils <http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=75> (4.1.2010).

<sup>202</sup> Black, *Realism* I; cf. May, *Theory* 16.

<sup>203</sup> With the new informational technologies data about events and situations from all over the world can be achieved very quickly, easily unsettling the *status quo* in a given society. By using the term *globalization*, I also refer to the heightened possibility of travelling for individuals, the consumerism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the increasing internationality of business relationships. Cf. e.g. Seyla Benhabib, “Das demokratische Projekt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung – Ein Plädoyer für institutionelle Phantasie,” *Philosophie*

tion, because a normative judgment demands universal validity. As postmodern citizens seem to be well able to live on these ostensibly dubious moral grounds, there must be an ethical background strengthening the basis of their moral conduct. Especially in North America, which is in itself already marked by social and cultural oppositions, immigration and multiculturalism, a coherent ethical concept would seem particularly difficult to define.

After the horrific attacks of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, ethical problems were focused on in North America and especially in the United States. The political and intellectual debates that followed this event were highly charged with ethical problems. They were part of what has to be classified as purely ethical discourse.<sup>204</sup> Problems treated in such a discourse were, for example, questions concerning the immigration act, the right of asylum, the rights of immigrants, abortion, the responsibility towards future generations, as well as the legitimacy of a war or of crisis intervention. Suddenly completely new areas of responsibility emerged in social and economic ways that did not exist some decades ago. Modern medicine and agriculture, with their possibilities of genetic manipulation, have also offered a field of debate that can only be described in ethical terms.<sup>205</sup> These aspects of the new or postmodern social life have been accompanied by anti-terrorism acts and an intensified debate about cultural and religious conflicts. Therefore, it seems more pressing than ever to define a valid ethical discourse that guides judgments and unifies different cultures, which will need to be capable of communicating in a satisfying manner in the ever more globalized future. In the wake of the acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001, it is also especially important *for* North America to come to terms with the basis of moral decisions made in this culture area in order to be prepared for future inter-cultural communication.

It was my sense in the fall of 2001 that the United States was missing an opportunity to redefine itself as part of a global community when, instead, it heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship.<sup>206</sup>

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*und Politik: Kulturforum der Sozialdemokratie*, eds. Julian Nida-Rümelin and Wolfgang Thierse, *Kultur in der Diskussion 3* (Essen: Klartext, 1997) 48-62 (hereafter: Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie 3*) 54.

<sup>204</sup> Besides this ethical debate, a general political debate aroused, which is not the concern of this thesis. For an insightful political interpretation focused on the development of the transatlantic political relations before and in the wake of the political approach to the supposedly new terrorist threat see Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and European-American Affairs," *Hard Power, Soft Power and the Future of Transatlantic Relations*, ed. Thomas L. Ilgen (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006) 25-35.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Tugendhat's definition of purely moral questions: Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen 12*. Especially modern medicine with new possibilities of organ transplantation and of exact definition of the moment of exitus has produced a field of totally new ethical questions.

<sup>206</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life – The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004) xi.

To avoid or at least minimize future crises, the strategy of focusing on the nation state and obstructing it against external influences is not likely to succeed.<sup>207</sup> Sustainable solutions can only be found through dialog and interaction. To communicate topics of ethical character, it is indispensable to define the ethical grounds most accurately. That there is common moral ground in different cultural areas cannot be denied.<sup>208</sup> Certainly, the element of justification has always been an intrinsic part of any ethics. The question why normative judgments are rendered in certain ways is fundamental for their reflection. The topic of ethics is the guidelines of this process.

Ethics (as part of philosophy) flourishes especially in times when the elements traditionally consulted to justify moral judgments become suspicious. Already Plato's Socratic ethics can be interpreted as a reaction to sophistic relativism.<sup>209</sup> Even though the postmodern insecurity springing from postmodern relativism clearly shows that the latest theoretical interests have pervaded western society, it must be stated that they are not necessarily accepted in their own right.<sup>210</sup> From the above discussion it can be concluded that the main ideas of postmodern relativist critique have nevertheless been widely received (if not properly appreciated) by western academic scenes and alternative cultural discourses by now. The western cultural permeation of postmodern critique has led to a focus on ethics as it has become problematic. Therefore, the cultural turn to ethics must be understood as inherently interconnected with postmodern relativist theory. To fully embrace the element of universality it seems as if theory has to turn yet a bit more towards ethics and the underlying tensions between realism and relativism. Aubrey Neal argues for a cultural explanation of the heightened interest in ethics and the current problems. He opposes G.W.F. Hegel with Immanuel Kant and sets out to develop a sociohistorical metanarrative from a postmodern perspective.<sup>211</sup> Starting with Kant's ideas concerning reason, Neal describes the development as follows.

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. Peter Singer, *One World – The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002) esp. 1-13 (hereafter: Singer, World). "For the rich nations not to take a global ethical viewpoint has long been seriously morally wrong. Now it is also, in the long term, a danger to their security." Ibid. 13.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 30,f.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Oliver Hallich, *Richard Hares Moralphilosophie – Metaethische Grundlagen und Anwendung* Alber Reihe Thesen 11 (Freiburg and München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2000) 13,f (hereafter: Hallich, Moralphilosophie).

<sup>210</sup> Cultural, literary, and social theories have widely embraced postmodern relativist ideas and especially their latest form of deconstructivist and poststructuralist critique. Nevertheless, the traditional discipline of philosophy has only partly paid attention to these developments. "The most striking feature of the history of postmodernism is the ease with which it was ignored. [...] The first issue is how cleverly mainstream academic politics was able to ghettoize the movement." Aubrey Neal, *How Skeptics Do Ethics – A Brief History of the Late Modern Linguistic Turn* (Calgary, Alberta: U of Calgary P, 2007) 261 (hereafter: Neal, Skeptics).

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Neal, Skeptics 6,ff. Even though Neal does not conclude that there must be an essentialist or foundationalist element to ethics and even though he does not exactly support the presented opposition of relativism

Kant's answer is the beginning of postmodernism and the late modern linguistic turn. It is, simply put, the way skeptics have to do ethics. We are categorically responsible for the order of things. The meaning of life, history, and human culture is in our hands. [...] Skeptics have to sort out what they know from how they know it. [...] Ethics are the one and only way a human being can concretely intuit the world whole and entire.<sup>212</sup>

In this way ethics are linked to a universal experience or to a specific human nature. What has been called postmodern relativism in this thesis is described as skepticism in Neal's narration. He identifies the same problems with regard to ethics. "Lacking guidance from a higher spiritual entity, all judgment is relative. [...]he skeptical moral situation is dubious."<sup>213</sup>

This situation led to more sophisticated theories of language, which explained all meaning as a relation of description to usage.<sup>214</sup> Postmodern relativist French philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault especially discussed ensuing problems of reference.<sup>215</sup> Neal states that "Continental philosophy is the Kantian unconscious of modern history. [...] The late modern linguistic turn was taken by real life people ... who believed their language had been robbed of its moral power."<sup>216</sup> I reason that language as a means of communication cannot be robbed of its moral element as this moral element is as much part of human nature as the ability to communicate. A culture poetic explanation of postmodernism, as a challenge of conventional philosophical explanations of ethical thinking driven by an ethical interest, is basically still coherent.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, it is compatible with the supposition that all relativistic critique carries moral interests at its core. Despite these interests it spread relativistic tendencies further into the sociohistoric situation and generated inherent inconsistencies. Neal shows that the theoretical development increasingly pervaded western culture and increased the tendency to separate theoretical thought (i.e. science and philosophy, especially ethics) from its cultural embedding.<sup>218</sup>

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and realism, his attempt to shape the changes as a causal development from the modern beginnings of skepticism to a problematic understanding of ethics supports the idea that such a project is feasible.

<sup>212</sup> Neal, *Skeptics* 8.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>214</sup> Neal discusses that such theories were for example developed by Hilary Putnam. Cf. *ibid.* 11,f.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 13,f.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 15. The idea that morality is innate in the same way as language is innate (in its form) in human nature is an idea also argued for by some neuroscientists and psychologist. Cf. e.g. Marc D. Hauser, *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* (New York: Ecco, 2006).

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Neal, *Skeptics* 16,f; 270,f. Neal describes postmodern relativists as those skeptics who grieve about lost (religious) traditions. He argues that they show how words cannot lead to moral behavior without being embedded in a cultural practice and that they can therefore be understood as religious traditionalists.



Rhetoric has replaced faith. Talismanic words became the highest measure of mutual understanding. [...] Obligation was unsayable, ethics were unintelligible, and traditional morality was all but impossible in the chaos of a world where words rule and reason is speechless.<sup>219</sup>

Neal argues that the reason for reinstalling a universal standard of measurement is utterly pragmatic.<sup>220</sup> In this way he rests inside a culture poetic framework without challenging his own position of observer. I would argue that such a description is not enough. The obvious interest in ethics at the beginning of the twenty-first century can be explained through the history of theory in addition to the effects of globalization. Besides, I believe that some universal knowledge about human ethics (and human nature in general) can be extracted from the study of communication. Thereby, the theoretical development is also approached from the inside. I suggest that the return of an interest in ethics is a chance to get the theoretical issues straight. In order to better understand the questions involved, the history of the philosophical issues concerning ethics shall be considered in some more detail.

## II.ii. A Philosophical and Historical Perspective on Relativism, Realism, and Ethics

### **Moral**

Es gibt nichts Gutes,  
außer: man tut es.<sup>221</sup>

An ethical theory must be inextricably linked to moral behavior.<sup>222</sup> When intellectuals talk about today's relativism and deplore the moral uncertainty of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, many of them ignore the fact that people make numerous moral decisions every day.<sup>223</sup> Even by deploring moral and general relativism, intellectuals are judging in ethical terms (they at least have to know what morality is, and how it should be applied, if the contemporary application is to be deplored). Therefore, the general description of a postmodern mood of moral uncertainty should be reconsidered. Additionally, postmodern discussions are implicitly readopting many traditional debates of ethical philosophy. To generate a comprehensive understanding it is necessary to explore ethics and especially the already differentiated conflict between realism and relativism in a philosoph-

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<sup>219</sup> Neal, *Skeptics* 17.

<sup>220</sup> He calls this standard *faith* and argues that (the faith in) such a projection of a possible and better future is the only element that can keep a skepticist from nausea. He describes the sociohistorical situation neutrally and understands ethics as a cultural phenomenon. Cf. *ibid.* 17, f.

<sup>221</sup> Erich Kästner, *Lyrische Hausapotheke* (Stuttgart and München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000) 51.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 55. This holds true not only for the logical understanding of an ethical discourse that I discuss in the following. It is also a viable point of critique of meta-ethics, when it reduces ethical problems to problems of pure linguistic analysis. Cf. Friedrich Kaulbach, *Ethik und Metaethik – Darstellung und Kritik metaethischer Argumente* Impulse der Forschung 14 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, 1974) IX-XIV (hereafter: Kaulbach, *Ethik*).

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen* 11.

ical-historical perspective.<sup>224</sup> The interfaces involved consist not only of the here highlighted conflict of relativist and realist concepts of ethics (or of reality). The same problems can, for example, be reformulated with regard to non-descriptive or descriptive ethics, or rationalist and idealist approaches. Analytical theory is highlighted in the following because communicative foundationalism strongly relates to its definitions. The special branch of biological ethics very much *en vogue* at the beginning of the twenty-first century will be discussed in further detail in chapter IV.iv. Such combinations of science and philosophy can in themselves be analyzed as an attempt at the solution of the conflict between postmodern relativist and realist approaches to ethics. Therefore, these explanations will be discussed separately. In the following I intend to develop the already begun metanarrative concerning ethics further in order to come to secure foundations for moral behavior.

### II.ii.i. Ethical Theory and Moral Behavior

Even from a postmodern relativist perspective the assessed paradigm of pluralism and the ensuing problems regarding ethics must be reconsidered. The existence of many alternative moral choices can in fact only constitute a problem if the people belonging to the different cultural groups are quite sure of their own ethical concept. A normative judgment can only be called into question and thus be relativized by another normative judgment.<sup>225</sup> Of course, it could be argued that it would be a sign of incertitude if one was unsettled by the existence of alternative ethical concepts. Yet, as people are still able to judge morally in their everyday life, the unsettling is not complete. Apparently, the mere existence of moral alternatives constitutes a problem, when general (and not individual) moral decisions ought to be made. It seems not to be the judgment as such that is put into question, but the

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<sup>224</sup> This could be understood as a general concern in philosophy. “Keine andere Disziplin befasst sich so eingehend mit ihrer eigenen Geschichte wie die Philosophie.” Karl Acham, “Zur Komplementarität von historischer und theoretischer Arbeit in Philosophie und Sozialwissenschaften,” *Dialogisches Handeln – Eine Festschrift für Kuno Lorenz*, eds. Michael Astroh, Dietfried Gerhardus, and Gerhard Heinzmann (Heidelberg, Berlin, and Oxford: Spektrum, 1997) 1-17 (hereafter: Astroh/Gerhardus/Heinzmann) 1. Nevertheless, it is a rather postmodern development in theory to openly evaluate the content of a concept with regard to the historical perspective. In this way, facts are always relative to the way human beings use them in. One of the schools that have developed such an understanding is the *philosophy of dialogue*, originated from Martin Buber’s work, which is exemplified in the concepts of dialogical action and dialogical logics by Kuno Lorenz and Paul Lorenzen. Cf. Astroh/Gerhardus/Heinzmann and Laurent Keiff, “Dialogical Logic,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2009, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-dialogical/> (23.12.2009). Dialogical philosophy is an important influence of Habermas’, Apel’s, and Levinas’ theories.

<sup>225</sup> I am referring to the principle originally formulated by David Hume that normativity cannot be deduced from (natural) facts. This principle is sometimes referred to as the “is-ought”-question and it is accepted by many if not most of today’s philosophers. The bottom line is that ethical disagreements are disagreements about metaphysical facts. Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 242-247 (hereafter: Hursthouse, *Virtue*).

justification of the judgment.<sup>226</sup> This is due to the fact that universal validity is imperatively included in the idea that a *right* way of doing things exists.<sup>227</sup> As such doubt only keeps intellectuals from coming to conclusions for contemporary ethical issues, a solution for this problem should not be sought within ethical theories.<sup>228</sup> It is mainly in human behavior in the actual process of making moral judgments that it can be found. The literary analyses are supposed to fulfill this task, yet, some preliminary theoretical considerations will be of help.

Moreover, the sociohistorical evidence of the emergence of moral doubt in the context of relativist theories in itself proves that ethical consideration always includes a foundation for justification. I will approach this matter of an ethical foundation in the following mainly with recourse to Ernst Tugendhat's reformulation of this problem as the justification of the criteria of justification. He critically engages in a definition of the nature of moral concepts and how they can refer to each other. The present approach thus also involves a meta-level of ethics and can be roughly described as normative. Yet, I will eventually include not only reason, but also emotions and ethics in the concept of human nature and human reality.<sup>229</sup> An aspect of concrete moral judgment as an individual's *intuitive* cultural response to the given situation will also be included.<sup>230</sup> The social character of human existence shall not only be defined as an additional feature on top of man's rational nature but as an inherent characteristic of an individual's intersubjective or social reality.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> For the need to justify cf. e.g. Seyla Benhabib, "Das demokratische Projekt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung – Ein Plädoyer für institutionelle Phantasie," Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 3 48-62; 50, f.

<sup>227</sup> There are various approaches to ethics that challenge the existence of such a way or of the according criteria to identify an absolute reference value to define what is *right*. The idea respectively the problem of universalizability is logically linked to either rationalism or naturalism in ethics, which means that it can only be part of certain approaches to the topic. Additionally, it is contentious what universality with regard to ethics can or should mean. Cf. Reiner Wimmer, *Universalisierung in der Ethik – Analyse, Kritik und Rekonstruktion ethischer Rationalitätsansprüche* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980) 9, ff. Moreover, *universality* and *universalizability* can be discriminated against each other. Cf. Fumikazu Shibasaki, *Formalismus und Fanatismus: Eine Untersuchung zur Moralphilosophie R.M. Hares* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 1994) 10 (hereafter: Shibasaki, Formalismus).

<sup>228</sup> It is, of course, essential to understand the conflict as it is discussed in different theories in order to be able to grasp the full meaning of the problem. This will be done in the following chapters. It still seems necessary to formulate a meta-theory that includes the different levels which ethics operate on in society though. As the functionality is mainly constrained on the theoretical level, it must be clarifying to regard the level on which it is working unproblematically.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. esp. part IV. Many postmodern theorists at least understand subjectivity and ethics as closely connected. Cf. e.g. White, *Ethos* 8.

<sup>230</sup> With recourse to *phronesis*, Paul Bloomfield develops a definition of moral intuition as "a posteriori intuition," which "just comes to us" by what we have learned and our instantaneous ability to apply our knowledge (he compares this ability with the ability to render a diagnosis). Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 67 (hereafter: Bloomfield, Reality).

<sup>231</sup> The particular character of this *social intuition* will become clear through the literary analyses and will be described in detail in chapter IV.iii. What is termed *intuition* here is rather a sociohistorically constructed personality framework and does not resemble for example the way in which an emotivist approach would describe moral decisions.

Hence, one could describe the here argued for communicative foundationalist ethics as a sort of social or intersubjective naturalism.<sup>232</sup> Before entering a discussion of such theoretical particularities the general character of moral behavior shall be discussed as it was conceived by different philosophical traditions.

### **II.ii.ii. Ethical Theory: Schools of Thought and Methods**

To position the idea of communicative foundationalist ethics within philosophical tradition different schools of thought will be introduced in the following. As normative ethics serves as a background, virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, and contractualism feature prominently. The schools of philosophical thought concerning ethics will be scrutinized according to their realistic or relativistic aspects, and the main problems of ethics will be identified. Approaches can always be organized according to different criteria, whereas the differentiations vary. Additionally, the demarcation lines between normative theories have become blurred during the postmodern era. Thus, the most important feature of postmodern theory – relativism – will also be discussed in its own right as an element of theory in chapter II.ii.iv. Chapter II.iii. and the following parts will show that the communicative foundational approach is far more involved in postmodern relative ideas than in traditional philosophical categories of normative ethics. Still, it is an approach searching for foundations that decidedly seeks access to the postmodern paradigm of plurality but which is not necessarily incompatible with philosophical traditions.<sup>233</sup>

In ethical discourse it is not common to accept a deconstructed view of the subject, although theorists obviously have also had to deal with postmodern critique. This critical discourse, which entered the stage of meta-ethics in the 1930s, can be identified in *non-cognitivism* in philosophical debate. This position understands moral statements as unverifiable. Norms and facts are essentially different, and the moral norms are part of an area of extra-scientific meaning. Schools of thought usually operating in this theoretical branch are, for example, emotivism and prescriptivism. Yet, the question of principle discussed between non-cognitivism and its counterpart *moral realism*, arrainging the strict segregation of facts and norms, is not linked to philosophical schools of thought as such. Non-cogni-

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Hursthouse, *Virtue* 192,ff.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 1, 4. The way in which virtue ethics argues for the moral action as an action that is part of a good life is for example still valid at the base of communicative foundationalist ethics, even though their view of human nature and intersubjectivity sets these two theories thoroughly apart. Virtue ethics' idea of moral education is also compatible with communicative foundationalist ethics. Cf. *ibid.* 163-265.

tivist approaches have been increasingly attacked by realists since the 1970s.<sup>234</sup> For them, normative judgments refer to the experience of values; hence, the moral realm is experienced as something to be discovered and not as something to be constructed.<sup>235</sup>

The way in which general philosophical concepts of understanding have developed is described as a historically and systematically reconstructable sequence of reflection with regard to the conditions of philosophical thought by Karl-Otto Apel.<sup>236</sup> He thus complements the sociohistorical perspective opened on intellectual and cultural concepts in chapter II.i.iv. Apel assumes that there have been three paradigms of philosophical thought since Greek philosophy. The first paradigm naively asked what existed and understood itself roughly in the manner of recent basic interpretations of natural sciences' external realism.<sup>237</sup> Apel refers to this as the ontological paradigm of antiquity. The second paradigm (with Immanuel Kant's critique of reason as its first classic) did not just generate questions about what existed. It also added question after the conditions of the possibility of experience and thought and established this kind of philosophical inquiry as first philosophy. Apel calls this transcendental philosophy of mind and subject. The third paradigm creates a transcendental semiotics as first philosophy and searches for a universal foundation for philosophy. As the history of the change of such grand paradigms has always been a history of long and insecure periods of transition, the last paradigm has not yet unfolded its explanatory power. First of all, the concentration on the communicative embedding of thought and experience in the twentieth century has led to a rejection of the mere thought of first philosophy or universal foundations.<sup>238</sup> The ensuing theoretical inability to face the concept of a foundation is thus historically justified by Apel as is done in this study.<sup>239</sup> One

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<sup>234</sup> Especially in Anglo-American philosophy realism has been revived towards the end of the twentieth century. Ethical questions are accordingly rephrased in a metaphysical sense and the rational cognition as part of moral considerations in relation to moral experience is reevaluated. Cf. Noel Carroll, "Moral Realism in the Age of Postmodernism," Hoffmann/Hornung 87-114, 87-96. Paul Grice, who also develops a theoretical position that could be located in between these two extremes, speaks of an opposition of objectivism and anti-objectivism or objectivism and subjectivism. Cf. Grice, *Conception* 23-45, 71. White approaches the realism-relativism opposition as a question of strong and weak conceptions of the human being in what he terms the modern *ontological turn*. Cf. White, *Affirmation* 5.

<sup>235</sup> Wolf/Schaber 117,ff; 130,ff.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, "Transzendente Semiotik und die Paradigmen der Ersten Philosophie," *Globalisierung: Herausforderung für die Philosophie – Erste Philosophie heute? Von der zeitgemäßen Letztbegründung der Philosophie zur Antwort der Philosophie auf die Herausforderungen der 'Globalisierung.'* eds. Karl-Otto Apel, Vittorio Hösle, and Roland Simon-Schäfer (Bamberg: Bamberg UP, 1998) 21-47 (hereafter: Apel/Hösle/Simon-Schäfer) 26.

<sup>237</sup> This concept states that the world of natural things already exists in a certain order that has to be empirically revealed. For a summary and the logical problems innate in such a concept see Peter Janich, "Dialog und Naturwissenschaft," *Astroh/Gerhardus/Heinzmann* 53-62, 56,f.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, "Transzendente Semiotik und die Paradigmen der Ersten Philosophie," Apel/Hösle/Simon-Schäfer 21-47.

<sup>239</sup> Due to his rationalism, communicative foundationalism as it is formulated here does not really correspond to his ethics. Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, "Praktische Philosophie als Diskurs- und Verantwortungsethik," Apel/Hös-

could understand communicative foundationalist ethics as a consequence of the theoretical developments in the light of Apel's philosophical and historical analysis.

Such arguments have to be differentiated as the different philosophers belonging to the various ethical schools of thought have developed individual approaches and methods. These schools of thought and also certain sets of methods cannot be unambiguously ranked according to the distinct positions in the above briefly presented questions of principle concerning justification.<sup>240</sup> Additionally, not every philosopher can unequivocally be identified as belonging to a distinct school of thought. Moreover, regarding the more recent philosophical terms to describe theoretical differences, there is no consensus on how they are to be understood. In the following I will try to position the theories generally involved when engaging in ethics at least to a certain extent, so that the sociohistorical field of moral discourse is roughly surveyed. A very brief introduction to the most important schools of thought will be given, sometimes relating to ethics as a philosophical topic long before the twentieth century, when it seems appropriate to bring to mind the historical development of certain positions.

### **Kantianism and Utilitarianism**

In the philosophical development of ethics two major concepts can be constituted in modern times: Kantianism and utilitarianism. Both can be interpreted as reactions to the abating faith in religious orientation.<sup>241</sup> Since then, philosophical ethics have had to pursue the question of justifying a moral judgment beyond religious criteria. They try to determine if the principle or norm used to justify the judgment is based on a secure foundation or if it

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le/Simon-Schäfer 49-74. It must be conceded that communicative foundationalist ethics resemble a discourse ethics in the end. The main difference lies in the understanding of the individual and the communicative community as not purely rational beings.

<sup>240</sup> I understand the issue of possible verification of moral norms with e.g. Wolf/Schaber and Tugendhat as twentieth century's most important question of principle. This must hold true especially in relation to the aim of this study. Yet, other ethicists particularize the issues debated further and discuss the antagonism of cognitivism and non-cognitivism, realism and anti-realism, centralism and non-centralism. Moreover, meta-ethics as a discrete discipline was only developed through analytical ethics in the twentieth century and could be understood as purely linked to linguistic analysis. Yet, the scientific division in meta-ethics, normative ethics, descriptive ethics and applied ethics, applying ethical theory to real-life situations, shows that these categories refer to different levels of moral philosophy. Even though they have been formulated and widely exercised at different times, it should be kept in mind that these divisions cannot and usually do not stand alone in comprehensive ethical theories. Additionally, the meta-ethical question of a justification or foundation of ethics has already played a part in Greek philosophy.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Hallich, *Moralphilosophie* 14. It can be debated if the formation of such rational theories is an effect of the regress of religious commitment, or if the concentration on human beings as foremost rational creatures and thus their construction as free individuals led to the decline of the power of religion on such matters. Zygmunt Bauman for example argues that the development of the individual, which was owed to various sociohistorical changes, has finally led to the abandoning of religious justification. Cf. Bauman, *Ethics* 5,f; Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Oxford and Malden: Polity and Blackwell, 2001) 63,ff (hereafter: Bauman, *Society*).

is simply the product of chance, social habit or subjective prejudices. Put in existentialist terms they ask: Why should we be moral? The questions whether any norm that is considered moral in a given society can truly be considered moral and why it can be considered moral, can be inferred from this task. Another matter closely related to these questions of justification is the motivation for acting morally. By simplifying the matter a great deal for purpose of clarifying the overview, one can say that Immanuel Kant and his followers have replaced the faith in God with the faith in rationality.<sup>242</sup> Kant formulated the *categorical imperative*, a set of rational rules by which moral behavior can be judged, justified, and guided.<sup>243</sup>

Utilitarianism is an ethics judging the moral quality of statements, actions, and norms by their consequences. There are disagreements as to what a good consequence is and how this should be determined, and also whether a consequence ought to be simply better in comparison to alternatives, or if the best possible consequence should be achieved by moral behavior. Classical utilitarianists of the nineteenth century argued that a consequence can be considered good, when it maximizes the *happiness* of the persons involved. In the twentieth century the focus was shifted to the satisfaction of preferences. These preferences form an empirical basis, and are not to be understood as mere subjective emotions. They only qualify for the philosophical reflection when they fulfill certain criteria of rationality, such as the absence of logical flaws and adequate information in their establishment. How the criteria can be exactly defined and whether it is more appropriate to focus happiness or preferences is still subject to philosophical debate.<sup>244</sup> For both Kantianism and utilitarianism the element of rationality is vital for justification.

### **Descriptivism and Non-Descriptivism**

Until the work of utilitarianist Richard Mervyn Hare the question of justification used to be inextricably linked to the question whether moral statements were related to moral facts.<sup>245</sup> Hare reevaluated the antagonism between cognitivists and non-cognitivists. He proposed a distinction with regard to the descriptive qualities of ethical theories. A descriptivist approach, such as naturalism, would state that moral sentences have a purely

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<sup>242</sup> Differently put, the cognitive subject is understood as the absolute horizon of knowledge instead of a world of objects (created by God). Cf. Jürgen Mittelstraß, "Das Absolute und das Relative," Astroh/Gerhardus/Heinzmann 77-89, 79.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Robert Johnson, "Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/> (20.05.2008). There are of course many different approaches to Kant's Philosophy. Ernst Tugendhat offers a convincing interpretation in Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 79-160.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 46,ff.

<sup>245</sup> The label utilitarianist can be debated with regard to Hare's early work, but is evident with regard to his later work; even though it should not simply be regarded as utilitarianist. Cf. Shibasaki, Formalismus 9.

descriptive character. Non-descriptive ethicists, such as Hare himself and emotivists, believe that there is an additional element contained in moral statements. This element causes the partial consistency of ethical statements. Even if the norms in relation to which an act is judged as moral have changed, the meaning of the moral judgment will not change accordingly. This feature actually defines if we can talk about ethics as a process of (rational) decision in reference to any theoretical standards or if we have to accept that an ethical statement is solely linked to natural occurrences, which cannot be further scrutinized.<sup>246</sup> Even though emotivists do not rely on a process of rational decision, but on the orientation through emotional reactions, they also have theoretical (emotional) standards with regard to a certain purpose: Moral statements are the expressions of feelings, wishes, and attitudes, but are also always meant to change the addressee's feelings, wishes and attitudes accordingly.<sup>247</sup> The element at stake in the confrontation of descriptivism and non-descriptivism is the relation towards something else than the norm. Meta-ethics and justification would thus always have to be non-descriptive.

### **Modern Deontology, Contractualism, and Virtue Ethics**

Other important schools of thought are modern deontological ethics, contractualism, and virtue ethics. Tugendhat's ethics can be considered as part of the modern deontologies. As for Kant and his popular disciple John Rawls the moral quality of an action, for a deontologist, is not judged according to its consequences, but according to its compliance with certain rules or principles.<sup>248</sup> Moreover, the agent's intention is decisive for her morality. While one could say that a consequentialist, such as a utilitarianist, always estimates the result as more important than the manner of achieving it, a deontologist would estimate the manner of achieving it as more important than the result. In this way, modern deontologies can be said to have an anti-utilitarian character.<sup>249</sup> Whereas utilitarianism can

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<sup>246</sup> Cf. Hallich, *Moralphilosophie* 19-37.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 117,ff. Emotivism has often been criticized because the differentiation between a moral statement and manipulation is very difficult in this theory. Cf. e.g. Alasdair McIntyre, *Der Verlust der Tugend* (transl. Wolfgang Rhiel) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995) 41,ff (hereafter: McIntyre, *Verlust*).

<sup>248</sup> Cf. John Rawls, *Eine Theorie der Gerechtigkeit* (transl. Hermann Vetter) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1993). Despite their many differences, Rawls and Tugendhat share the same notion of the moral good. Cf. Ernst Tugendhat, "Erwiderungen," *Ernst Tugendhats Ethik – Einwände und Erwiderungen*, eds. Nico Scarano and Mauricio Suárez (München: CH Beck, 2006) 273-312 (hereafter: Scarano/Suárez) 284.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 51,ff. This distinction between deontological (inferred from greek *déon*, duty/obligation) and teleological (inferred from greek *télos*, aim/end) ethics is very popular in Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Cf. Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen* 126. The following discussion of the three schools of thought draws on the analysis in Wolf/Schaber 52-58 and 63,ff. There are also philosophical approaches founded on rights. These do not play a role in this study, because fundamental human rights are not fruitful for the discussion of a justification of ethics. The determination of rights always has to resort to preliminary obligations or responsibilities. Cf. Wolf/Schaber 62; Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen* 336,ff.



be criticized for allowing immoral actions, if they bring about an adequate result, deontologists can be criticized for not considering foreseeable immoral results. Additionally, problems arise concerning the distribution of profit gained through the respective moral systems. Whereas in utilitarianism the maximized benefit for the whole society does not have to be distributed equitably, the establishing of justice and thus fair treatment does not necessarily follow from deontology either.<sup>250</sup> The notion of respect for fellow human beings as rational persons, derived from Kant, is often used as a basic normative principle in modern deontologies. However, the notion of equality is not self-explanatorily springing from the notion of mutual respect.<sup>251</sup>

The different schools can only be considered completely consistent if the focus is limited to some elements of the theories. Thus, Rawls works in the tradition of Kant's ethics, and the foundation of his approach has a modern deontological aspect. Yet, this principle can be analyzed as intuitive and as a principle that cannot be further justified.<sup>252</sup> In general he must be counted to belong to the contractualist school of thought, which bases moral norms on an agreement or contract between rational persons. This approach can work on the assumption of human beings acting for an optimum of their subjective interests, or on the assumption of human beings characterized by a more impartial nature. Contractualists can be criticized as having only a minimal moral position, because they do not really have a concept of what is morally good as such, and a moral justification in their terms can only be relative.<sup>253</sup>

Ethics of virtue have been revived in the 1980s, as an alternative position to utilitarianism and modern deontologies. Ethicists of virtue dissent from those approaches in estimating the core of ethics as the question of being a good person. Plato, Aristotle and more recently Alasdair MacIntyre have held that view.<sup>254</sup> Virtue is a basic term for ethics, and virtues have played an important role for moral philosophy throughout the centuries; but in virtue ethics they are not only an element, but also the foundation of ethics. Thus, the pro-

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<sup>250</sup> "Der Utilitarismus ist die Ideologie des Kapitalismus, denn er erlaubt es, das Wachstum der Ökonomie als solches ohne Rücksicht auf Verteilungsfragen moralisch zu rechtfertigen." Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 327.

<sup>251</sup> For a detailed discussion of this problem see *ibid.* 364-391; Jacob Rosenthal, "Der Primat der Gleichheit oder: der Symmetriesatz in Ernst Tugendhat's Ethik," Scarano/ Suárez 134-152; Ernst Tugendhat, "Erweiterungen," Scarano/Suárez 273-312, 289,ff.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 79. White also assesses a circularity in Rawls reasoning. Cf. White, *Ethos* 15,f. For a challenge of the uncritical acceptance of equality as a foundation in political liberalism and especially in Rawls' work see Menke, *Spiegelungen* 12-15, 226-269.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 72,ff. The same critique can be rendered because contractualists are moral positivists – therefore their justification must remain internal to its culture. For a critique of Rawls as a positivist see T.K. Seung, *Intuition and Construction: The Foundation of Normative Theory* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1993) 1-23; 217,ff (hereafter: Seung, *Intuition*). For the purposes of this study it is unnecessary to go into details regarding the difference between contractualists and contractarianists.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. MacIntyre, *Verlust*.

ject of a rational moral philosophy is discarded. The revival can be interpreted as a renunciation of Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>255</sup> McIntyre embeds ethics into the social realm, and thereby abandons the possibility of a notion of the morally good, free from tradition and sociohistorical influences.<sup>256</sup> He critically evaluates the sociohistorical situation as instrumentalizing lives and actions of human beings. He further characterizes virtues in a novel way as dispositions, enabling humans to perform *practices* (special actions). Trying to establish ethics through dispositions and embedding them sociohistorically is problematic, though. The idea of linking ethics to cultural and social functionality opens the door to conformity, which – without rational principles – cannot contribute to a notion of morality. Moreover, the sociohistorical view must allow for a critique of itself on the grounds of perspectivity. Virtues can generally be considered as character traits, which can be positively evaluated in virtue ethics. Thus, the virtues of a person are expressions of her (positive) mental attitudes. It remains unclear whether a person is to be evaluated positively, if she must overcome her feelings to act virtuously or rather if all her emotions support the virtuous behavior. Problems can be seen in the sole concentration on the actor, instead of on the actions. The moral evaluation of actions must not necessarily coincide with the moral evaluation of the actor. Additionally virtue ethics, concentrating on the question which kind of person one shall be, complicate answering palpable moral questions.

A particular form of virtue ethics should be mentioned in its own right: the ethics of compassion and pity, initially designed by Arthur Schopenhauer.<sup>257</sup> A compassionate disposition can certainly be understood as a virtue. Nevertheless, this concept was originally conceived in contrast to Kant's ethics, and can therefore also be described as a position of disinterested altruism.<sup>258</sup> This approach is nowadays often used to justify ethical concepts that include responsible behavior towards animals.<sup>259</sup> For Schopenhauer, ethics are as exclusively based on compassion as they are based on reason for Kant. Even though this concept of ethics does not face the problem of establishing a valid virtue catalogue, the focus on compassion as primary virtue and as sole basis of ethics cannot be understood

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<sup>255</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 197-238. The following interpretation draws on Tugendhat's analysis.

<sup>256</sup> "Moralphilosophie ... setzt bezeichnenderweise eine Soziologie voraus. Denn jede Moralphilosophie liefert explizit oder implizit zumindest teilweise eine Begriffsanalyse der Beziehungen zwischen dem Handelnden und seinen Beweggründen, Motiven, Absichten und Handlungen und indem sie das tut, setzt sie generell voraus, dass diese Begriffe in die wirkliche soziale Welt eingefügt sind oder zumindest sein können." McIntyre, Verlust 41.

<sup>257</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Über die Grundlage der Moral* (ed. and intr. Peter Welsen) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2007).

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 178. The following interpretation is based on Tugendhat's analysis in *ibid.* 177-196.

<sup>259</sup> See e.g. Ursula Wolf, "Für Tiere nur Mitleid? Überlegungen zu den Quellen der Moral," Scarano/Suárez 77-90.

without recourse to a natural, empirical feeling. This feeling is the factor by which the moral quality of all actions can be determined. Such a concept does not allow for the formulation of moral responsibilities and also holds the complication that moral behavior cannot be argued for or justified. It is not to be founded in any principle, but exists because of a (certainly variably) shared natural feeling and can therefore not guide any political behavior. Hence, the ethics of compassion do not illuminate the crucial point of a foundation of ethics, which is to be investigated in this thesis.<sup>260</sup> Yet, Schopenhauer was one of the first philosophers in the nineteenth century who contended that at its core, the universe is not a rational place.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, the significance of obligation springs from the discussion of the ethics of compassion.

[D]ie Frage ist nicht, was wir mit allen Menschen teilen (da gibt es alles Mögliche), sondern was es ist, worauf uns eine Moral allen Menschen gegenüber verpflichtet....<sup>262</sup>

### **Monism and Pluralism**

Moral theories can be distinguished by being either monistic or pluralistic. Ethical monism charges ethical pluralism with the criticism that it cannot conceive normative conflicts as resolvable. Pluralists, however, evaluate the notion of resolvable moral conflicts as an erroneous a priori statement. For ethical pluralism there is no central moral reference value and it is part of the human condition that normative conflicts cannot be ultimately reconciled. The forms of pluralism vary, most of them allow for the possibility of solutions for at least some sorts of moral conflicts. In these solutions no moral reference value is needed. Yet, if this were true, human endeavors to find the *right* solution to an ethical problem would be in vain.<sup>263</sup> The endeavor to establish a foundation for ethics is thus part of ethical monism. Even though different ethical concepts exist, there must be a reference value, or an underlying moral system to enable human beings to compare them and to reconcile the different normative judgments resulting from them. This basic moral system might as well not embrace the whole range of moral life, but it should set a basis to permit fruitful communication between several ethical concepts. The antagonism between monism and pluralism, respectively the critique contained in a pluralistic approach will be discus-

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<sup>260</sup> Additionally, in Schopenhauer's ethics human beings are characterized through their intrinsic egoism, which can only be confined by their compassion. Why and how exactly they are able to act compassionately when they are characterized by egotism remains unclear in Schopenhauer's argument. Cf. Mirko Wischke, *Die Geburt der Ethik: Schopenhauer – Nietzsche – Adorno* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994) 3-46.

<sup>261</sup> See Robert Wicks, "Arthur Schopenhauer," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schopenhauer/> (26.05.2008).

<sup>262</sup> Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 186. We will see in the following – especially in parts III. and IV. that these two points must be combined.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 198-200.

sed further in the context of relativism in chapter II.ii.iv. It can be concluded, that without a comprehensive concept different moral systems could not even be identified as moral systems. Therefore, absolute pluralism cannot apply to the human condition.

### **Discourse Ethics – Ethics as Practice**

The discourse theory of morality, most prominently presented by Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel, draws on philosophy of dialogue and is generally called *discourse ethics*. The concept of discourse ethics was anticipated by Georg Herbert Mead and has been argued for by several intellectuals, amongst others Seyla Benhabib, who prefers the term *communicative ethics*, which implies intersubjective versions of rationality and identity.<sup>264</sup> In the beginning it was prevalent among German philosophers, gaining popularity at the end of the 1960s. Like Kant's approach, discourse ethics founded ethics on rationality and linked morality to autonomous agency. Yet, unlike Kant and many other ethicists, discourse theory challenges the belief that an impartial moral point of view can be achieved solely by rational reflection; to reach it one must engage in a real discourse with all persons who are affected by the issue in question.<sup>265</sup> Consequently, the criterion of truth is the consensus of the people involved in the argument. For Habermas an argument is an essentially communicative action, but not every consensus can define truth.<sup>266</sup> To allow this, the discourse must have taken place under ideal conditions, which are constituted through egalitarian standards regarding the speakers' social situation and their rights to participate in the argument. In the same way morally right, or *good* solutions to moral arguments can be found. Again, I must oversimplify matters for the purpose of giving a clear overview: If the consensus reached through discourse is supposed to create standards of truth and morality, then these standards cannot already be applied *a priori* to constitute an ideal discourse; and if the equal distribution of rights to participate within a discourse is not regulated, then it would be impossible to deduce moral implications. Thus, the problem of a circular argument arises within discourse ethics.<sup>267</sup>

A consensus arrived at through argument often does form the solution to moral problems that emerge in everyday life. Yet, it seems more logical, that the persons in-

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<sup>264</sup> Cf. James Bohman, "Jürgen Habermas," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/#HabDisTheMorPolLaw> (26.05.2008).

<sup>265</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion*, Festschrift für Walter Schulz zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. Helmut Fahrenbach (Pfullingen: Neske, 1973) 211-265.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 162. For the following analysis see Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 161-176. Elisabeth Conradi also reveals an inherent bias in Habermas' ethics. Cf. Conradi, Care 79,ff.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 283; Menke, *Spiegelungen* 75. Even though Apel argues for a foundation in discourse ethics, his purely rationalistic concept does not adequately comprehend the human condition. For a detailed critique of Habermas with regard to this thesis' important aspects see Conradi, Care 94-101.

volved in such a discourse relate to certain moral standards to form arguments for their cause. Without such a standard, moral discourses (which are differentiated in discourse ethics) could not be identified as moral. As the moral theorist is obviously able to do this, the question of the observer remains unclear. Moreover, a person's involvement in a conflict could constrain her arguments and decisions. The just solution of a conflict seems to involve some ability to abstract from concrete situations.<sup>268</sup> The idea of a completely practically founded ethics is not alluring, as a person seems well able to evaluate at least certain situations morally without the actual accordance of someone else. As can generally be stated for descriptivist positions, there seems to be no consistent way of relating to rational normative standards if ethics are to be explained through an empirical practice or an empirical feeling. The mere existence of a relation between empirical phenomena and moral judgments is neither enough to comprehensively explain the ethical judgment, nor to criticize a given social reality.

Das heißt, dass der Aufweis eines empirischen Zusammenhanges zwischen einem bestimmten moralischen Urteil und gewissen sozioökonomischen Bedingungen zwar auf eine normative Kritik verweist, sie aber nie schon an und für sich enthalten kann.<sup>269</sup>

Even though the different schools of poststructuralist and feminist ethics share the postmodern position that tries to conceive of ethics as practice, the ethics of care should be mentioned in its own right. It is a movement that combines different postmodern approaches with the common purpose of a feminist cause. In the end, the evaluation of moral behavior resembles communicative foundationalist techniques. Therefore, the ethics of care as a postmodern theory related to the ethics of compassion shall be briefly introduced. Theorists such as Nel Noddings, Carol Gilligan, Lorraine Code, and Elisabeth Conradi understand the intersubjectivity of individuals as a relation of constant caring and being cared for. Instead of integrating the concept of taking care into existing theories of ethics, they understand it as the constitutional framework of human existence. Conradi and others formulate a dynamic *interrelatedness* of human relationships, which is reminiscent of the dynamic intersubjectivity of communicative and especially of communicative foundationalist ethics. Yet, they do not develop a foundation for ethical evaluation and mother-child-relationships, friendships or similar relationships are often taken rather arbitrarily as models for explanation.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 171.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>270</sup> Even if epistemological or ontological foundations are discussed, neither the "is-ought"-problem nor the problem of observed and observing subjects are solved. Cf. Conradi, Care 112,f; 135-163; 175,f; 180; 200,f; 229; Sevenhuijsen, Citizenship 8-19, 22, 27, 56. Sevenhuijsen also rather arbitrarily includes a standard of

## Ethical Theory and the Postmodern Position

The systematic analysis of moral judgments seems to be inevitably reliant on rational terms and on at least partly rational normative standards. This is not only theoretically interesting, but also describes moral constants that appeared in different sociohistorical situations. Apparently, ethics has always been related to either reason or emotion and has always been discussed as relating to a foundation.<sup>271</sup> Even the anti-foundationalist tendencies of postmodern times have been revealed to include standards of evaluation and justification. Without the inherent relation to justification, the problems and doubts resulting from postmodern relativism could not be explained. Additionally, several methodological regularities can be perceived. One critical measure of theory is to challenge the ways in which rational normative values are created. This is done in all non-descriptive schools of thought, discussed above, when they relate to each other. This points to a certain cultural relativity of concepts of cognition. Another, more drastic means of critique challenges the existence of distinctly demarcated normative values that are transhistorical and transcultural, and the descriptive theories must be counted to this group. Sociological theories, for example presented by Zygmunt Bauman and Judith Butler, are examples of descriptive theories. Even though description thus seems to be a characteristic of postmodern critique, the actual criticism differs. A point that postmodern and sociological critique can be reduced to is the focus on perspectivity and consequently the *other*, human beings are always confronted with and are connected to deeply.<sup>272</sup> By starting from a social situation, it is thus very difficult to comprehend how an ethical element can be introduced into theory. Still, how could anyone decide whether this situation was a moral situation and what would be morally right or good to do in this situation if there were no normative values to guide the decision?

As such decisions have been made, described, and justified throughout the history of philosophy, it should be obvious, that the rational realm has to belong to ethics. Even if ethics were understood as a purely sociohistorical phenomenon of determination without any normative implications (which would contradict the apparent use) the rational level involved could not simply be dismissed without finding an alternative standard to justify this dismissal. It will be problematic to consolidate the perspectives presented above. Yet, the central lines of demarcation seem to evolve around 1. The is/ought problem – the passage from description to values; 2. The question of the subjectivity of norms already involved in

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justice without founding its relation to care. Cf. *ibid.* 64. See also Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking – The Politics of Epistemic Location*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York: Oxford UP, 2006) vii-9.

<sup>271</sup> This refers to philosophical contexts in which no religious supposition was used as a foundation.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. e.g. Bauman, *Ethics* 82, ff.

non-cognitivism, yet, blatantly apparent in pluralism; and 3. The question of a universal foundation. If the mind of man is subjective (the second point can be related to the mind/body problem in philosophy), there cannot be a universal foundation. Universal foundations should have the character of facts, yet, from facts one cannot derive values. And if values are located in the mind, they could be in turn questioned as subjective. These three problems as well as the aspects of reason, emotions, and universality in ethics must be considered for a comprehensive ethical theory if it is to embrace the whole of human reality. Additionally, postmodern relativist aspects of intersubjectivity should be included as they are clearly part of the sociohistorical situation of the twentieth and beginning twenty-first century. Moreover, in these conflicts the question of the observer is implied, who is supposed to be able to understand and evaluate a situation in order to formulate a theory. This aspect will be discussed in II.iii. First, a closer look at the way in which moral judgments are rendered is necessary.

### **II.ii.iii. Analytical Theory – Analyzing Language**

Analytical theory in philosophy has reflected the increasing importance of language on the intellectual field due to postmodern critique. Following the linguistic interest spreading in the wake of non-cognitivism, philosophical analysis focused on language as well. Thus, meta-ethics has concentrated on linguistic analysis, sometimes even rejecting the relation of ethics to real life.<sup>273</sup> The conflict arising between non-cognitivism and realism at the end of the twentieth century can be monitored in the integration of linguistic analysis in more realistic ethical theories, respectively the introduction of more realistic elements into the linguistic ethical analysis. Ernst Tugendhat's work will serve as an example for such a merged concept in the following. The linguistic ethical analysis has been discarded by many ethicists in the last decades, as it was operated in purely non-cognitivist means.<sup>274</sup> Yet, there is no other way of approaching ethics systematically than the analysis of the communicative ethical actions. A certain amount of realism will always be needed when the relevant meta-level shall be preserved.<sup>275</sup> Without this meta-level the notion of

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<sup>273</sup> Cf. Kaulbach, Ethik IX.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. Ernst Tugendhat's essay "Sprache und Ethik" in Ernst Tugendhat, *Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992) 275- 314 (hereafter: Tugendhat, Aufsätze) 279.

<sup>275</sup> "Although it would be possible to accept (or reject) realism across the board, it is more common for philosophers to be selectively realist or non-realist about various topics .... In addition, it is misleading to think that there is a straightforward and clear-cut choice between a realist and a non-realist about a particular subject matter. Also, there are many different forms that realism and non-realism can take." Alexander Miller,

something being morally right or good would lose its specific moral sense and would be dissolved in descriptive cultural or social relations. The problems and doubts resulting from relativism additionally point to the existence of this meta-level.

What do they mean exactly when people use moral notions, and is it possible to be, to a certain extent, realistic and relativistic at the same time regarding the subject matter of an ethical foundation? These two questions are inextricably intertwined. When we refer to a special meaning of *good*, we are referring to a theoretical concept of measuring. Were we only to describe that a certain act is part of a special social realm, we would also refer to a theoretical concept of measuring, but it would be differently structured. A moral action would be indistinguishable from actions related to other norms of behavior. Logically, a second level of meaning has to enter the definition, when we want to talk about a specifically moral sphere of meaning. The criteria for the demarcation of this sphere cannot be derived from any norms defined as moral within the society that is described. Otherwise it is only constituted as the sphere that is called moral by a certain society. Discourse ethics displays such circular argumentation. Many sociologists actually take what constitutes the moral sphere for granted, defining it variously as the realm of private interpersonal relationships (often only the relation between two human beings), or the basic pre-social relation we have with the *other*. Except, without a definition for why exactly this cultural sphere is the framework for moral judgments and how these judgments are acted out, the *use* of such a method of judging, i.e. the evaluation of any action as morally good or bad, can have no meaning other than a purely descriptive one.

At this point it is important to differentiate between a realistic approach to ethics that postulates a realistic element to the matter and what is generally defined as moral realism. What is usually called moral realism at the end of the twentieth century is a rapprochement to natural scientific approaches and thus explicitly not normative. It is nevertheless a reply to the relativistic charges, as it understands ethics as part of human nature.<sup>276</sup> In such reasonings we are again faced with the problem of description as previously discussed.<sup>277</sup> Some of the new moral realists even explicitly accept that there is no absolute certainty in science, and that there can thus be no absolute certainty in ethics either.<sup>278</sup>

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“Realism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism/> (28.05.2008).

<sup>276</sup> Paul Bloomfield, for instance, creates ethics as a part of the human nature analogous to the concept of health. Cf. Bloomfield, *Reality*.

<sup>277</sup> We should still understand moral realism as an exception to the rule, because it is a transcendentalist approach. Cf. John M. Rist, *Real Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Bloomfield, *Reality* 25-55. As Bloomfield understands ethics as analogous to (mental) health, a problem regarding human beings as individuals able to chose more or less independently arises: If an individual



From a theoretical point of view it would even be perfectly acceptable to state that the traditional idea of ethics was merely an illusion and to get on with one's life henceforth without bothering about morality.<sup>279</sup> Theoretically it seems easy to dismiss the conflicts between people with different ethical concepts. However, it seems to be not nearly as easy to practically solve such conflicts for people, considering the number of intercultural debates on moral issues, the number of wars or acts of terrorism acted out because of morality issues. Even the intra-cultural debate on moral issues is as vivid as ever (if not actually more vivid) and matters of moral persuasions form a controversial part of the cultural and political debate in the United States of America.<sup>280</sup> The judgments that are made every day do not simply imply that something is inadequate for the organization of social life or impractical regarding the maximization of society's profit, when they state that something is *bad*. The international debate on female genital mutilation is just one of numerous examples that could be cited at this point.<sup>281</sup>

The ethical meaning is obviously something that cannot be seen or touched, but must be understood in a rational or experienced in an emotional way. The only possible means of analyzing it seems to be turning to moral language and moral communication.<sup>282</sup> Here, language will be focused systematically, whereas the whole communicative process is focused in part III. The meaning of a moral statement can only be ascertained in relation to its content. Philosophical analysis should thus be understood as a semantic and cultural analysis. In order to be certain of the area of investigation, a criterion to distinguish moral statements from other statements must be found. Ethics can never be founded purely semantically and a foundation of ethics can neither be generated analytically, nor empirically,

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can opt against (mental) health, there is no responsibility towards other individuals that can be formulated in moral terms. If she cannot choose not to be moral (which would conflict with the actual perceivable reality), there is no morality as such, but moral behavior is only a natural reflex.

<sup>279</sup> Thus minded persons could still adopt a utilitarian or contractualist approach and could talk about the maximization of profit or the necessity of an adequate regulation of society for the convenience of the persons living in it. But it has to be very clear that there could be no further justification of these practices. If asked why the profit should be maximized or how it should be distributed, no notions of justice could be taken as orientation. For the problem of the lack of a higher standard of evaluation in utilitarianism see also Taylor, *Freiheit* 12-27, 131. It could obviously also be convenient for a society to be organized feudally, supposing that no one would object to such a contract (which is easily imaginable, supposing information and education were not equally distributed).

<sup>280</sup> We can, for example, consider the explosive force contained in questions of abortion, euthanasia, warfare, and stem-cell research on embryos. Part of such political conflicts in the United States of America is briefly but intelligently analyzed in relation to the Blackwater corporation in Jeremy Seahill, *Blackwater – Der Aufstieg der mächtigsten Privatarmee der Welt* (transl. Bernhard Jendricke and Rita Seuß), (München: Verlag Antje Kunstmann, 2008) 41-49, 150, ff; 189, ff; 267, ff.

<sup>281</sup> For a brief discussion of the topic of genital mutilation see e.g. Diane F. Orentlicher, "Relativism and Religion," Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (ed. and intr. by Amy Gutmann), (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001) 141-158; 144, f or Beate Rössler, "Menschenrechte und Autonomie," Scarano/Suárez 235-254; 247, ff.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. Ernst Tugendhat's essay "Sprache und Ethik" in Tugendhat, *Aufsätze* 275- 314; 276, f.

but it has to be supported through volition respectively by some motivated autonomous action to participate. If moral statements are normative statements, which means that they include instructions for a certain type of behavior, then such statements cannot be founded by simply regarding these norms, but must be connected to certain social practices.<sup>283</sup>

[J]ede Norm ist inhaltlich, und nichts Inhaltliches (Substanzielles) lässt sich gesollt analytisch begründen.<sup>284</sup>

One of the central consistent points in Tugendhat's ethics is the formal notion of a basic ethical concept that underlies different moral theories and is functional to them. He clearly approaches ethics normatively, as he strives to define how normative judgments can be rendered adequately. Only if we allow for the possibility of an ethical basis and adequate normative judgments, can we conceive a potential comparison and informed dialog between different moral theories.

Die übliche 'direkte' Herangehensweise an ein Moralkonzept (das jeweils für richtig gehaltene) hat zur Folge, dass man die Auseinandersetzung zwischen den Moralkonzepten nicht mehr führen kann.<sup>285</sup>

This underlying ethical basis and formal determination of a moral concept, is not only important for ethicists, but must be a part of each enlightened individual's moral capability. Otherwise they would perceive every person who has alternative moral ideas automatically as morally *bad*, and not as having different moral convictions. Even though this might sometimes be the case, in general, the distinction between moral concepts is possible.

Nicht nur für ethische Theorien ist es wichtig, einen Begriff der Moral zu haben, der nicht selbst schon den Inhalt der Moralprinzipien festlegt. Er scheint für jeden einzelnen, der die Fähigkeit hat, moralische Urteile zu fällen und kritisch zu ihnen Stellung zu beziehen, unverzichtbar zu sein. Ansonsten könnten wir moralische Kontroversen gar nicht als moralische Kontroversen wahrnehmen.<sup>286</sup>

This basic notion of ethics can thus be descriptively evidenced.<sup>287</sup> It must have realist elements, because otherwise a moral obligation could never logically achieve an obligatory

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<sup>283</sup> The here developed understanding of ethics bears certain resemblances to Luhmann's concept of morality. He thinks of morality as a special set of communicational acts implying respect or condemnation. He even differentiates between the mere abilities (like playing the piano) and the moral personality as Tugendhat does. Yet, as Luhmann does not consider morality in a normative perspective, his theory must be characterized as purely descriptive. For him, moral communication is more or less a behavioral strategy only applied in situations of crisis. Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Reflexion der Moral*, Rede anlässlich der Verleihung des Hegel-Preises 1989 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990) 17.

<sup>284</sup> Tugendhat, Aufsätze 16, f.

<sup>285</sup> Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 27.

<sup>286</sup> Nico Scarano, "Die Sanktionstheorie der Moral – Überlegungen zum formalen Begriff der Moral bei Ernst Tugendhat," Scarano/Suárez 91-114, 95.

<sup>287</sup> This can also be demonstrated by purely logical means: "Aus der Annahme, dass kontradiktorische moralische Überzeugungen denkbar sind, lässt sich also folgern, dass dasjenige, was beide zu moralischen Über-

character. Tugendhat solves this problem by linking a purely descriptive model of moral language to the social practice of moral speech. Rendering ethical judgments thus does not only mean enunciating an evaluation, but also normatively demanding a certain behavior.<sup>288</sup>

From what has been said so far, we have to conclude that such a course of action is the only possible course, when ethics shall be conceived in a realist, or normative way that fits the sociohistorical situation. Tugendhat concedes that the notions *ethics* and *moral* cannot be interpreted with regard to their linguistic origins, but have become pure *termini technici*. Consequently, he resorts to their linguistic usage and finds the groups of words *must/must not/ought* and *good/bad* as central to the matter. In relation to the usage of these words, human beings experience moral affects or emotions, such as disgust, indignation, resentment, shame, and feelings of guilt. These moral emotions can be defined as feelings of aversion, being based on negative moral evaluations. In the following chapters and the literary analyses it will become clear that appreciation is more central to ethics than negative emotions. However, it can be concluded that it is necessary for such an approach of ethics to accept the assumption of basic freedom in intersubjective relationships. How such freedom can be grasped in a postmodern relativist framework remains to be discussed. Nonetheless, the existence of such moral emotions cannot be denied. They are based on moral judgments that are expressed through the usage of the above mentioned group of words. Following Tugendhat, they receive their moral meaning when they are used in a grammatically absolute way. The moral usage for example of the word *must* implies that something has to be done without recurrence to a consequence – it just has to be done. Thus, moral judgments are meant to be extraneous to the person being judged or the person judging, and respectively meant to be objective or at least intersubjective. Similarly, this case can be exemplified by the usage of *good* or *bad*. If we say for example that it is bad to humiliate someone, we do not mean that this would be bad for the humiliated person or bad for the society as a whole, but that it is a bad thing in itself. *Must* or *ought* in their moral meaning correspond to the character of obligation included in moral judgments. Any sentence including *must* or *ought* implies a norm, a rule, or a designated way of being, like a character trait. Usually, such an imperative sentence implying a certain norm or rule re-

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zeugungen macht, keine solche inhaltliche Überzeugung sein kann.” Nico Scarano, “Die Sanktionstheorie der Moral – Überlegungen zum formalen Begriff der Moral bei Ernst Tugendhat” Scarano/Suárez 91-114, 96.

<sup>288</sup> Such an obligation is also developed by Kant, but Tugendhat’s notion differs from his. Except for Kant, ethicists rarely systematically work on the obligatory character of ethics. Cf. Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen* 40, 110,ff; Friedo Ricken, “Die Perspektive der Moral,” Scarano/Suárez 218-234, 218,f. For the idea of a moral imperative as an order see also Grice, *Conception* 64.

fers to a negative consequence that will occur if what is demanded is not fulfilled. Even though moral imperative sentences are meant to refer to intersubjectivity or objectivity, they would be meaningless, if no consequence were to occur at all.<sup>289</sup>

Thus, ethics are defined as a system of claims individual members of society demand from each other. Even though communicative foundationalist ethics will depart from such reliance on the rational autonomous individual, the aspired intersubjective relatedness of human beings bears similarities to Tugendhat's system. It will focus on the exchange of rational and emotional communication, instead of on the typical postmodern absolute dependence on others. Following Tugendhat, the experience of communication and ensuing emotions must be thought of as referring to a mutual and shared humanity. Tugendhat does not explicitly engage in a definition of human nature in connection with these ethical considerations. Still, this interactive notion is formulated with regard to affections. The organization of his ethical concept can be described as follows: 1. A person's moral convictions are what she believes to be good or bad in the above described absolute way. 2. *Good* describes the way which every person wants her fellow members of the moral community to behave. 3. If the members of moral communities want this mutually, they usually develop affectionate dispositions if other persons do not act accordingly. 4. Having such a mutual disposition to negative feelings with regard to what is experienced as *good* means that the members mutually claim the good behavior of each other. Moral affect and implicit demand constitute moral judgment.<sup>290</sup> The consequence of a disregard of moral norms thus consists in a special and complex sanction, which is composed of a mutual moral affection that can be internalized and necessitates justification.

Even though communicative foundationalist ethics will include human nature as a general frame of reference, culturally and socially construed moral norms exist as well. I would not describe them in Tugendhat's decisionist terms, yet, he clarifies that they are nevertheless not simply a matter of sociohistorical description. If a person judges something as morally positive, or in other words if she approves of something as morally *good*, then she evaluates it as objectively preferable. We cannot conceive moral judgments simply as a description of what is factually approved of in a moral community. The moral judgments themselves cannot be said to have an empirical constitution as they are in-

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<sup>289</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 20,f; 35; 37; 43,ff. It should be noted that Tugendhat does not conceive of a postmodern concept of intersubjectivity.

<sup>290</sup> Cf. Ernst Tugendhat, "Erwiderungen," Scarano/Suárez 273-312, 285. "Freilich entspricht ein so definierter Begriff von moralischer Überzeugung nicht unserem gewöhnlichen, in dessen propositionalem Gehalt das normative Moment schon enthalten ist." Ibid.

dividually approved.<sup>291</sup> Even though I will participate in an intersubjective definition of individual identity, it is important to understand that a community might evoke identities, but constitute personalities that engage in communicative communication. They must keep this individual capacity to engage in normative considerations if the normative character of ethics is to be described adequately. When an individual is judged as morally good or bad, she, or, her actions are evaluated in relation to this point. Even though I will insist on the previously mentioned two levels of ethics, it is important to understand that in relation to human nature as well as a certain cultural concept of citizen, a judgment always refers to an identity. The emotional rejection will arise if a certain behavior cannot be integrated in a version of identity. It can be either motivated by the respective culture or by underlying characteristics of humanity.

Tugendhat concedes that the exertion of social roles can be construed as a moral norm following his ethics – for instance in traditional societies. At this point communicative foundationalist's above mentioned differentiation between cultural moral norms and ethical norms sets in. A concept in which moral consciousness is embedded in mutual moral claims could easily be understood as leading to a very conservative ethical system of social assimilation. The question whether an individual is autonomous enough to free herself from such social constraints remains to be clarified in the discussion of the literary analyses. As a certain amount of freedom will have to be admitted, the additional level of ethics has to exist. Yet, I do not think that human beings can independently choose to form a social and cultural identity. The appeal to a standard of humanity behind these cultural and social norms must be possible, as a moral demand cannot purely rely on the content of moral norms, but must appeal to a standard or system. I propose to differentiate between culturally or socially established identities and an underlying identity as a human being. In this way, there cannot be a rational choice to be or not be human, yet, as autonomy will be defined in intersubjective terms, ethics will not become a matter of determination either.

Tugendhat's systematic establishment of the moral system through moral interaction thus serves as a model for communicative foundationalist ethics. His ethics hold the possibility to understand the system of justification that a moral obligation is supported by. Judgments always refer to an ideal of a good cooperative member of the moral community. As will be shown, judgments on a level regarding human nature refer to an ideal harmonious person. To include the mutual respect and the equality Tugendhat evokes, an underly-

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<sup>291</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 56.

ing standard such as human nature must be assumed.<sup>292</sup> It cannot be ignored that when moral judgments are rendered in social practice, an objective meaning is implied in the grammatical absolute usage. Thus, moral statements relate to a meaning beyond their actual linguistic and cultural content. Yet, Tugendhat's solution remains too entangled in cultural and social identities and relies too heavily on a notion of autonomy, which must be adjusted to postmodern relativist critique. To be able to develop a balanced solution to the apparent problems, the prevalent points of critique expressed in postmodern ethical positions shall be focused in the following chapter.

#### **II.ii.iv. Relativism as a Functional Element of Theory**

In addition to the several aspects of the charge of relativity that have been discussed in previous chapters, the functional aspects of relativism in theory shall be summarized briefly.<sup>293</sup> What can be called *normative-ethical relativism* is based on the assumption that given sociohistorical forms of ethics are conceived as describable, but the different forms are not comparable as such.<sup>294</sup> In addition to the acknowledgement of a pluralist concept of the world in general, it states that no norms that could have transcultural and transhistorical applicability can be established because of the wide variety of different ethical standpoints. We can compare the various ethics of different cultures or different centuries, but no norm could be installed as a standard of evaluation.<sup>295</sup> This is the basic charge made by postmodern theories, and it can be defined as a move towards tolerance in the face of alternative ethical possibilities. A *conceptual relativism* is often added, which even excludes the possibility of comparison from the pluralistic notion of culturally and historically relative ethics. It assumes that societies have developed closed linguistic schemes for each realm of society, such as religion or ethics. These linguistic schemes are fit to transfer information for instance on ethical topics, but their content cannot be translated into the descriptive language of the world or its events. These schemes – and there can even be several ethical schemes in the same society – are genuinely different from each other and do not even bear similarities related to their notion of rationality. As will be shown in this chapter, viable counter-

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<sup>292</sup> The topic of equality is, of course, central to ethics. It is a difficult topic as has already been mentioned with regard to Kant's notion of mutual respect. Cf. e.g. Jacob Rosenthal, "Der Primat der Gleichheit oder: der Symmetriesatz in Ernst Tugendhat's Ethik," Scarano/Suárez 134-152. Justice will be debated in chapter IV.ii.

<sup>293</sup> For an insightful discussion of constructivist perspectives on ethics see Kaiser-Probst, Wandel 51-78.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. Nico Scarano, "Die Sanktionstheorie der Moral – Überlegungen zum formalen Begriff der Moral bei Ernst Tugendhat" Scarano/Suárez 91-114, 92.

<sup>295</sup> I have borrowed the specifications *normative-ethical relativism*, *causal relativism*, and *conceptual relativism* from Wolf/Schaber 24-38 and have adapted their definitions to the requirements of my argument.

arguments to both challenges can be given. An immediate counter-argument to the charge of conceptual relativism is that it is highly improbable that the different language schemes created for similar realms of different societies are completely discrete.<sup>296</sup>

A third form of relativism which is also born from the basic normative-ethical relativistic attitude can be called *causal relativism*. In this vein the individual normatively evaluating a situation can never be sure to take all important facts into account. Different ethics can be compared, but to generate a meta-perspective from them would be immoral. The person evaluating could never consider all possible forms of ethical evaluation, so the evaluation would not be the morally correct thing to do. For a causal relativist, this argument goes one step further: As each cultural group has their own perspective, it would not be immoral to try to judge members of other cultural groups, but it would simply be impossible. Not only is there no meta-perspective from which to judge, there is also no consensus in methods with which to conduct a description or evaluation.<sup>297</sup> The central piece of relativist arguments can thus be described as the empirical establishment of different moral judgments in different cultures and at different times.

Yet, when a relativist states that different cultures, different linguistic schemes, or different ethics exist, she is already using a scientific meta-perspective. As was mentioned before, theoretical sociologists tend to approach the topic of ethics via the social situations that can be designated as moral situations. Yet, this leads to serious problems, as they do not analyze what moral may mean, and still want to classify actions as being *good* or *bad*.

[T]he postmodern perspective on moral phenomena does not reveal the relativism of morality. Neither must it call for, or obliquely recommend, a ‘nothing we can do about’ disarmament in the face of an apparently irreducible variety of ethical codes. [...] By exposing the essential incongruity between any power-assisted ethical code on the one hand and the infinitely complex condition of the moral self on the other, ... the postmodern perspective shows the relativity of ethical codes and of moral practices they recommend or support to be the outcome of the politically promoted parochiality of ethical codes that pretend to be universal, and not the ‘uncodified’ moral condition and moral conduct which they decried as parochial. It is the ethical codes which are plagued with relativism, that plague being but a reflection or a sediment of tribal parochialism of institutional powers that usurp ethical authority.<sup>298</sup>

This paragraph shows the circular line of argument. When there is no ultimate standard of evaluation, the assertion that some part of the ethical sphere is *parochial* remains arbitrary. Besides, the very definition of anything as ethical or moral must include an empirical certainty as to the way in which these things are identified. At the same time, the focus on power that was already mentioned above forecloses the possibility of moral evaluation. Additionally, a universal perspective would be needed to be able to decide that what is

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<sup>296</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 35.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 28,f.

<sup>298</sup> Bauman, *Ethics* 14.

considered ethics in society is inherently different from what is deemed the “moral self.” As was already recognized by the first deconstructivist writers, metaphysics cannot be challenged without using metaphysical arguments.<sup>299</sup> Ethical relativism defended in the name of tolerance, for example, is self-contradictory, as it holds on to a meta-perspectively assumed universal value.<sup>300</sup> If a certain part of life can effectively be designated as moral – implying the intersubjective and communicative acceptance of others – then the persons designating it must already command a standard. It is impossible to conceive any of these relativist arguments with regard to ethics and still assume that one will continue to talk about ethics, even if ethics were only to describe a certain linguistic practice without any normative frame of reference.

It could still be true, however, that all communication about ethics were an illusion, and that we are not able to designate a part of life as ethical. This would mean that we only think that we communicate about something. It is also possible that even though a realist normative frame of reference is evoked, this is still an illusion although we are communicating about something. The whole history of ethical philosophy and cultural discourse, analyzed so far, stand against the first assumption. The linguistic and social practice as far as it has been analyzed above seems to contradict the second assertion. To fully reject this (as far as a full rejection is possible) the large-scale analysis of cultural ethical communication in part III. will be necessary. Additionally, the role of the individual and thereby the role of the observer have to be clarified. At this point, I intend to take a more detailed look at relativism as it appeared in the twentieth century and the ensuing concept of reality. Until now, I have mostly shown how ethics can only exist in a certain way, if it exists and if the observations made can be trusted. Still, to underline this existence a concept of reality in which human beings are capable of cognition and knowledge needs to be established in order to render the above considerations credible. Only in postmodern times has relativism become a characteristic feature of general constructivist approaches to reality.<sup>301</sup> As a form of argument it must be understood as being opposed or at least related to what is generally referred to by a *justification* in philosophical theory.<sup>302</sup> Yet, neither an exclusive norm of what is to be understood by the term relativity, nor what is to be understood by the term

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<sup>299</sup> Cf. Udo Tietz, “Der gemäßigte Kontextualismus Richard Rortys,” Hempfer, *Poststrukturalismus* 129-160; 145, f. For the critique of postmodern theory as too focused on questions of power cf. Behabib, *Self* 203-241.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Noel Carrol, “Moral Realism in the Age of Postmodernism,” Hoffmann/Hornung 87-114; 94, f.

<sup>301</sup> “[T]here was a profound and highly significant difference between the skeptical thought of antiquity and its modern reincarnation.” Bauman, *Society* 59.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. Noel Carrol, “Moral Realism in the Age of Postmodernism,” Hoffmann/Hornung 87-114, 20.



justification has been established. Thus, there is no generally acknowledged assessment, for example, of how detailed the justification for a philosophical argument needs to be.

A moderately precise justification of ethics tends to abandon axioms superordinated to experienced reality, and to find coherence rather through the pattern of sociohistorical reality. Thereby, they abandon the concept that human beings can somehow relate directly (i.e. extra-communicatively) to a transcendent truth. This argument is implicitly or explicitly central to all postmodern theories. One of its most skilled advocates is Richard Rorty with his pragmatist concept of reality.<sup>303</sup> The ideal of a transcendent quality, that exists apart from a given sociohistorical situation, is central to realism, whereas the focus on a particular sociohistorical reality is central to postmodern theories, such as pragmatism. The realist approach rests on an idea of objectivity that came to be understood as the guiding principle of natural sciences. In the prospering process of postmodern critique, even the natural sciences underwent a serious reassessment. Realists at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century usually argue that science in general can only reach a certain amount of conviction. It is only to this vague degree of certitude, which an argument must be sustained. What is decisive at this point is that the realist argues for the existence of extra-communicative ideals humans can refer to. The justification for their accuracy or truth is thus derived from some external reality. The postmodernist critique, as pointedly formulated by Rorty, shows that such external reality is inaccessible for human beings if not completely impossible.<sup>304</sup> He argues that human beings must fall back on metaphors of height or depth to transform the inspiring visions of a better world into justifications for their actions. Even though, for example, a general desire for mutual respect in terms of human rights might exist, this is not an indication that any actual formulation of these rights in fact corresponds to reality. If we refer to some underlying or embracing truth, somehow transcending the existing circumstances, he dismisses this as nothing but propaganda.<sup>305</sup>

Rorty refers to the assumption of transcendence of truth, either through a romantic concept of emotion (depth) or a rationalistic concept of reason (height). When reduced to the central feature of transcendence, both romantic and rationalistic theories can be called realistic. The basic assumption is that a transcendent truth exists at the outside of the immediate situation described by our communications that mankind can reach either through

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<sup>303</sup> Rorty, *Philosophie* 150.

<sup>304</sup> Even though this argument is formulated on many different levels in various postmodern approaches, and even though the focus on the linguistic qualities of reality or truth is also widespread, my own view is mainly inspired by Rorty's insistence on this point in *ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 157.

reason or emotion.<sup>306</sup> After a century of postmodern critique it seems impossible not to agree that no such extra-communicative reality is directly accessible to humans, although realists refrain from doing so very fervently and natural scientists are still able to publish results in this vein. I argue that the acceptance of the neglect of an extra-communicative reality must not necessarily lead to the dismissal of all universalism or essentialism that is implied in the idea of transcendence or the idea of foundations.<sup>307</sup> When we accept the fact, that human reality is a communicative reality, we can dismiss realist approaches as searching for something that simply does not exist or is inaccessible.<sup>308</sup> At the same time, the fact that extra-communicative truth or quality cannot be proven loses its sense as a critique of the concepts of truth or quality. The mere fact that these concepts cannot be defined by an extra-communicative reality does not have to mean that they cannot be reasonably defined at all. Moreover, empiricism, in the sense of an objective description of reality, and traditional realism are no longer as closely intertwined as they originally seemed. Realism searches for something behind or below the only *real* reality, which lies within communication. Thus, we should engage empiricism in a new way, meaning we should analyze communication in pursuance of conclusions about reality.<sup>309</sup>

Objective truth might be found through the communicative processes constituting this reality. The obvious objection against this cause is that a dynamic process, such as the postmodern concept of communicatively constituted reality, could only produce relative empirical data. I disagree with this argument. Since I have chosen (written) communication as my field of empirical research, I will briefly design a model of linguistic explanation. When we analyze a language, a grammar is formulated behind the usage of words. As parts of the grammatical structure we might identify nouns and verbs. Of course there is no extra-communicative element such as an *ideal* verb that transcends through the culturally determined usage of the particular verbs in question. Therefore, we could not argue that any objective result on verbs would hold true in all possible communities, social contexts, or

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<sup>306</sup> For my thesis it is not necessary to further differentiate this concept of reality, even though it should be stated that emotivism, also assuming truth to be accessible through emotions is decisively different from romantic approaches.

<sup>307</sup> This idea is formulated in more structured philosophical terms by James J. Drummond with regard to Husserlian phenomenology. Drummond states that one can be an ontological realist and still not commit oneself to epistemological realism. He presents Husserl as an advocate of a new sort of non-foundational realism not unlike the kind of theory proposed in this study. Cf. Drummond, *Intentionality* 254. Satya P. Mohanty has also argued that Rorty's challenges do not necessarily lead to relativism. Cf. Mohanty, *Theory* 149-197.

<sup>308</sup> This positive (re)evaluation of the obvious circularity has been quite extensively discussed in constructivist theories. Cf. e.g. Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 9. Yet, socio-constructivism usually rests descriptive when it comes to ethics. See also Habermas' idea of a *weak naturalism* in Habermas, *Wahrheit* 32-40, 48-55.

<sup>309</sup> This is a different argument from Tugendhat's simple assumption that human beings can rationally perceive their world. It is a new starting point from within poststructuralist critique dismissing simple realist assertions of external reality. For such a different understanding of empiricism see also Grice, *Conception* 131.

worlds with or without language respectively communication. However, we could state that findings on the function of verbs could be true in all communities using languages including verbs. If we can identify general truths about the way human beings communicate, these truths would not be true in all conceivable contexts. But they would be true in all contexts in which humans communicate. In my concept of reality this is as true as something could possibly be.

In this sense, realism and relativism can both be charged with the illegitimate assumption of an extra-communicative reality. Realism does this openly and assumes that mankind can perceive and understand the world around them. Relativism performs this implicitly, by stating that human beings' inability to do so forecloses all access to truth or cognition. Communicative foundationalism recognizes that the communicatively mediated reality is the only reality that exists. Even though there might be natural causes for perception, it is not observations that we identify, but intersubjectively established meanings that we exchange. To clarify this process a more detailed concept of human nature has to be established. This will be done in subsequent chapters. Here I want to address one more systematic point. Obviously, communicative foundationalism will still be faced with the relativity of induction. An empirically proven fact can only be stated as true as long as there is no counter evidence. Yet, a possibility to find results that are universally true for all human beings at all times and in all cultures is established. I thus propose a kind of realism that is an empirical approach to a communicative reality.<sup>310</sup> Similar approaches to consolidate the postmodern moral contradictions will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The manner in which this study builds a metanarrative based on postmodern critique, drawing on sociohistorical developments in theory and culture, has not yet been attempted. As one of postmodern theory's main characteristics is the concept of reality as conceived, constructed, and created through communication, this approach could be called *postmodern realism*.<sup>311</sup> Relativity will still play a role in the results of such a postmodern realistic

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<sup>310</sup> The argument made in favor of communicative ethics comes to similar conclusions, yet, is organized differently, as it relies on universality as it is established in discourse ethics. It does not rely on a foundation, but on rational action exclusively. Even though the existence of a foundation is deduced from the systematic displayed in moral action in communicative foundationalist ethics as well, a foundation is understood as absolutely necessary. Moreover, communicative ethics as argued for by Benhabib do not deny that extra-communicative reality is accessible for human beings.

<sup>311</sup> The focus on language is inspired by many postmodern intellectuals, who have used speech and text in numerous ways to represent reality. Paul Ricoeur shall be mentioned as an example at this point as his idea of personal identity as narrative identity and the importance he ascribed to narrativity in general must obviously play a role in a study like this which involves philosophical inquiry and literary analysis. For an overview of Ricoeur's philosophy see Bernard Dauenhauer, "Paul Ricoeur," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/> (24.05.2009). Ricoeur also developed a philosophical anthropology, which focuses on an idea of action that is in a way linked to Tugendhat's notion of the social norm, as ethical action can only be enforced by threats. Yet, as Ricoeur's ethics does not involve universals in the deontologi-

empirical analysis within a communicative concept of reality because of the impossibility to analyze all linguistic and communicative data. Yet, it will be possible to formulate statements about ethics that can be considered to be universally true for the time being. The results of the analysis of cultural examples will provide a guideline to understand the nature of moral actions, which in turn will increase the probability that moral conflicts can be solved peacefully.

As I have argued above, and as I will show in detail in the fourth part of this dissertation, an ethics without any universal value is impossible.<sup>312</sup> Additionally, only a secure foundation can guarantee the validity of such universalism. Ethics is about the evaluation of sociohistorical situations and not about their description. Firmly based standards are needed for such evaluative practices. Postmodern critique has argued that the two levels of description and evaluation cannot be separated from each other, because we never perceive any fact without its social context. Thus, according to Richard Rorty, the normative evaluation is already built into perception and what has been called ethics until now must be replaced by considerations of utility within the frame of cultural politics.<sup>313</sup> As I will demonstrate by means of literary analysis, the levels of factual properties and values can still be separated on the basis of the structure of their usage. Apart from the problem of dismissing all categories for an ethical argument and still wanting to present an ethical theory, many postmodern theories have an additional weakness: They are based on over-simplified versions of what has been a realistic position before the postmodern age. They focus more on the differentiation of their theory from what they perceive to be traditional philosophy than on the basis of their own arguments. In the same vein, postmodern critique is often not considered carefully by realist theorists. Many dismiss their ideas as some form of *total relativism*, as for example Tugendhat.

Dieser in der zeitgenössischen französischen Philosophie so populäre und in der heutigen jungen Generation so beliebte totale Relativismus ist natürlich Unsinn.<sup>314</sup>

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cal sense, he would have to be subsumed under the relativist heading in this study. In philosophical anthropology, however, a notion of anthropological reality (including an anthropological universalism as well as a *dianoietic* interpretation) very similar to communicative reality is discussed. Thomas Rentsch introduces a "*Grammatik der dianoietischen Termini*" that will be analyzed in more detail in following chapters. Rentsch, *Konstitution* 11. This interface with anthropological analysis reveals that a combination of realistic and relativistic tendencies must in some way always include the question of the essence of a human being. Rentsch's analysis can be described as postmodern in the above defined sense as it focuses on perspectivity and on the fact that any human being always already is in the world, i.e. is embedded in a sociohistorical setting.

<sup>312</sup> Cf. also Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 29, ff.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Rorty, *Philosophie* esp. 163-170. It is not the aim of this thesis to deconstruct Pragmatism, yet, it should be noted that a concept of *utility* is as precarious as a concept of ethics within such a vein of argument.

<sup>314</sup> Ernst Tugendhat, "Der Golfkrieg, Deutschland und Israel," ed. Ernst Tugendhat, *Ethik und Politik: Vorträge und Stellungnahmen aus den Jahren 1978-1991* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992) 111 (hereafter: Tugendhat, *Ethik*).

Such absolute dismissal on both sides is definitely inadequate. The above discussions of both postmodern critique and traditional philosophical ethics thus also serve the purpose of reaching a balanced concept of the human individual, who ultimately is the basis of all elements of reality in question according to a communicative understanding.

### **II.iii. Concepts of Individuality with Regard to Postmodern Relativist Critique and Self-Writing**

The next step towards a comprehensive ethics is to scrutinize the postmodern relative notion of an individual or subject and to compare it with the sociohistorical situation at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Before entering the detailed literary analysis in part III. to comprehend this individual in detail, general postmodern concepts of the self and their development will be discussed in the following. First, a relative definition of a subject as it is pivotal in postmodern relativist concepts will be discussed. Afterwards, the development of postmodern notions of individuality will be presented in historical perspective. An alternative notion of a communicatively founded individual will then be introduced. Through this theoretical and historical approach of postmodern concepts of individuality and their possible foundation in a communicative nature, the organization of communicative reality will become clearer. It is only through the individual, who uses, forms, and passes language on, that the claim to communication as the principal element of reality can be discussed. Without human beings actually expressing communication, it would not exist – it remains to be demonstrated that the individual and the reality she lives in would not exist without communication either.<sup>315</sup> As the main interest in this thesis must thus be the examination of the creation of individuality, the area of investigation will focus on self-writing as a practice of creating individuality, which will be introduced in chapter II.iii.ii.<sup>316</sup> This serves as a background for the detailed analyses of self-writing in part III.

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<sup>315</sup> Of course, this leaves us with the basic axiom that any human being not taking part in human communication is not a genuine human individual. I think this exclusion can be accepted. The severity of the exclusion depends on the definition of communication. The idea of communication I have in mind is probably similarly wide-ranging as Alfred Schütz's is usually understood. Cf. Michael Hanke, *Alfred Schütz* (Wien: Passagen, 2002) 77-90. Elisabeth Conradi discusses how thinkers such as Hannah Arendt have always considered language and communicative action as exemplary for human interrelatedness. Cf. Conradi, *Care* 84.

<sup>316</sup> In the following I will sum up first-person narration, autobiographical fiction, fictionalized autobiographies, and texts that otherwise include autobiographical elements under the term *self-writing*.

### II.iii.i. The Postmodern Individual as a Relative Individual

In the same way I have argued in chapter II.ii.iv. for the possibility of intra-communicative universality, I will argue for the possibility of a stable intra-communicative subject in the following.<sup>317</sup> Before this can be done, the postmodern critique with regard to the individual, i.e. the postmodern concept of the individual must be presented in detail. The problem of a systematic view of a *postmodern individual* has long been recognized in sociology as the problem of describing people as parts of systems. Sociologists such as Peter L. Berger have realized that the actual individuals do not live exclusively in a relation to their state or in the relation between the economy and the power structures of their society.<sup>318</sup> They also live *elsewhere*: in communities, groups, families, neighborhoods, associative relations et cetera.<sup>319</sup> With respect to the group an individual feels herself to be part of in a specific social situation she will resort to a role model. The social reality of the group as well as the social availability of certain social roles depends on the collective concept of reality.<sup>320</sup> Social reality is thus to be interpreted as a social construct passed on and sustained through communication.

A lively debate is still conducted between more and less radical constructivists whether this social construct is to be described as arbitrary or whether it relates to a to some extent realistic environment that cannot be socially constructed completely at will.<sup>321</sup> This conflict exists within the above mentioned basic debate between realists and postmodern relativist theorists. The relativistic postmodern interpretation of the individual is thus at its core either based on a non-existent reality, which can be interpreted in any social way; or on the multitude of social roles available through a somehow realist environment. As postmodern society is perceived as, or even characterized through an increased alterability,

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<sup>317</sup> Udo Tietz has formulated this sort of argument as an objectivity created by the possibility of intersubjective validity. Cf. Udo Tietz, "Der gemäßigte Kontextualismus Richard Rortys," Hempfer, *Poststrukturalismus* 129-160, 138.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Peter L. Berger, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society* (ed. Michael Novak), (Washington, DC: AEI Press 1996).

<sup>319</sup> For an insightful summary of Berger's concept see Manfred Prisching, "Der soziologische Gastgeber," *Gesellschaft verstehen: Peter L. Berger und die Soziologie der Gegenwart*, Sozialethik der Österreichischen Forschungsgemeinschaft 3, ed. Manfred Prisching (Wien: Passagen, 2001) 23-70 (hereafter: Prisching, *Gesellschaft*) 24-29.

<sup>320</sup> One of the first comprehensive theories of reality as a social construct was also formulated by Berger. Cf. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit – Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* (transl. Monika Plessner) (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1980) esp. 49 ff.

<sup>321</sup> Berger holds the position that the social construction of reality refers to some extent to a *realistic* reality. Deconstructivists often tend to views rendering the available social positions more arbitrary. Still, Berger proposes a multitude of available social role models between which an individual can choose or at least switch. Cf. Manfred Prisching, "Der soziologische Gastgeber," Prisching, *Gesellschaft* 23-70; 33,f.

and as the social role models available depend on this changeable environment, the resulting individual can hardly be defined as completely constant, definite, and autonomous.

Both concepts of relativity are based on an extra-social element. The first concept argues that because of the inexistence of such an extra-social element, the roles available for an individual are completely relative to the cultural environment. As has already been shown in relation to the extra-communicative qualities of reality, the inexistence of extra-social elements must not mean that there is no universally valid basis for *individualness*.<sup>322</sup> It cannot be sustained by an extra-social standard, but it could still be intra-socially founded for all possible human societies. The other concept introduced above argues that the mere magnitude of available social roles renders individualness insecure, but that there is a chance to break through to the reality behind the roles. This second approach is traditionally realistic at its basis and constitutes a transcending individualness behind what we can actually experience in a sociohistorical environment. The first concept corresponds to Judith Butler's completely negative definition of the subject and the second concept corresponds to Seyla Benhabib's partly positive definition of the individual.<sup>323</sup> As was argued in the preceding chapter, such a transcending reality as it is supposed in both concepts can never be justified by the sociohistorical environment humans can perceive. They can only perceive socially and culturally relative situations. Thus, it will be impossible to base something on their perceptions other than social and cultural facts mediated by communication.

As discussed, some postmodern theorists have returned from the complete deconstruction of the individual to focus on universal standards. This "moral turn of postmodernism in the 1980s"<sup>324</sup> is reflected in less radical constructivist concepts. This movement has been described as "the realization of the unavoidability of moral issues."<sup>325</sup> But the mere will to political correctness or the mere will to have an ethics is not a theoretically sustainable ground for an ethical concept. Even though the various theories might in the end be able to adequately describe moral practices displayed in society, they are ultimately built on circular reasoning.

To systematically understand postmodern concepts, the constitution of the individual as a single human being and her ties to her social environment must be discussed.

The trouble with my generation is that we all think we're fucking geniuses. Making something isn't good enough for us, and neither is selling something, or teaching something, or even just doing

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<sup>322</sup> I resort to the term *individualness* to describe the core of what it means to be an individual. As individuality usually refers to the peculiarities of specific individuals, it seems inappropriate as a term.

<sup>323</sup> As will be discussed in chapter IV.ii., Benhabib already suggests a mediation between both positions.

<sup>324</sup> Hoffmann/Hornung v.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

something; we have to *be* something. It's our inalienable right, as citizens of the twenty-first century. If Christina Aguilera or Britney [Spears] or some *American Idol* jerk can be something, then why can't I? Where's mine, huh?<sup>326</sup>

This quotation reveals the prevalent twentieth-century idea of an individual that has become more and more independent from social interrelations. A notion of the single human being, who was a fixed part with a fixed place in her social community during the preceding centuries, has been replaced by the (post)modern subject, which strives for a place in society in her own right. Although the formation of individuality and a sense of self have definitely changed over the last decades, it seems more appropriate to understand this development as a coherent change of western societies as a whole during the twentieth century. The *individualness* of a human being still completely depends on her communicative community, even though the sociohistorical meaning of individuality has changed. It is thus the process of creation of individualness that must be scrutinized rather than the sociohistorical appearance of a single human being. Still, there is no way to approach this concept or functionality without studying the forms in which it is realized.

People and things exist only within a certain political and moral context, and they are not understandable outside of it.<sup>327</sup>

To understand the procedures of the creation of individualness and the development of a sense of self, a psychological-historical approach will be pursued.<sup>328</sup> American culture in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been chosen as an example and shall be focused upon in the following.

As Philip Cushman argues, one way of addressing the increasing absence of religious and communal identity in Northern America was the formation of a negative identity. American society developed a concept of the self by constructing an *Other* – the Negro slave, the Native American, the Jew, the Irishman, the woman – in such a way as to define and justify the white self by demonstrating what it was not. Especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the dominant white and particularly Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture formed a configuration of the self that met its political and economic requirements by defining what was an improper way of being human and locating it in the *Other*.<sup>329</sup> This

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<sup>326</sup> Nick Hornby, *A Long Way Down* (London: Penguin Books, 2006) 23.

<sup>327</sup> Cushman, *Self* 17.

<sup>328</sup> The main part of this approach draws on Cushman, *Self*. My thoughts according to Cushman's concepts have already been published in a similar form in Nina von Dahler, *The Man Who Heard the Song of Truth – Love as e.e. cummings' Concept of Reality* (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2007) 23-33.

<sup>329</sup> Luhmann observes this tendency of negative identification not only as part of American culture, but as part of the modern sociohistorical framework in general. He identifies the description of the modern age as *modern* as a negative definition in itself. Due to the insecurity about what this age's most important characteristics were, it has been described primarily through differentiation from the past. To declare anything as



cultural practice was to become a “characteristic American process” that eventually helped capitalism to manipulate the workers and then the public, “seducing both into the emptiness of consumerism.”<sup>330</sup> To understand the development of the *empty self*, a particular kind of self that appeared on the sociohistorical stage soon after World War II, and the influence it had on American society, chapter II.iii.iii. will give a brief historical overview of the development of self concepts in the western world. As this study sets out from a postmodern and even poststructuralist perspective, the deconstructive practice of historicism is taken seriously and historical perspectives constitute an important part of the arguments. After having treated the central sociohistorical development of relativism and ethics in chapters II.i. and II.ii. the historical development of perspectives on the individual is discussed here. So far it can be stated that postmodern relativist perspectives on the individual are in the same way circular as they are with regard to concepts of reality and critique. Concepts of the other as negative and absolutely different as well as of the self as empty or completely relative seem to have been generated by social and cultural developments.

### **II.iii.ii. The Postmodern Individual in Sociohistorical Perspective**

In the following the development of modern and postmodern self-concepts will illuminate the social and historical influences that have become visible throughout the twentieth century. Due to the fact that the present study is rather focused on formation procedures, the historical overview will be concise and restricted to the example of Philip Cushman’s psychoanalytically informed analysis. The parts of the cultural frame of reference which will be examined are crucial for a substantial analysis of literature as a socio-communicative artifact of the period in question.<sup>331</sup> The psychoanalytical perspective will help to criticize postmodern relativist perspectives, as they typically strongly rely on psychology.

In combination with the enormous disorientation and disruption caused by westward immigration from Europe, the modern intellectual attitude caused an unsettling ab-

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*modern* first of all means that it is new and different from everything that existed before. This relation to the past is a normal and necessary technique for any identification process. A system can only construct its identity by relating to its previous form, by differentiating between self-reference and the reference to other systems. However, Luhmann observes that in the modern age this relation is not established as identification any longer, but increasingly as dis-identification, as the establishment of a negative difference. Cf. Luhmann, *Beobachtungen* 14,ff. For the separation of the concept of self and other in general in poststructuralism (and especially by means of psychoanalytical thinking) see Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor, *On Kindness* (London: Penguin, 2010) esp. 28 (hereafter: Phillips/ Taylor).

<sup>330</sup> Cushman, *Self* 345.

<sup>331</sup> “Each poet, novelist, painter and sculptor may choose to accept the dominant ideas and priorities of his or her time, may question them, may even vigorously deny them, but will inevitably in some sense acknowledge and react to them. Even when the writer or artist resists them most forcefully, those impulses will, as matters of immediate pressure, continue to affect, often without their awareness, aspects of the art produced.” Hege- man, *Patterns* 4.

sence of communal identity in the newly founded United States.<sup>332</sup> Many historians, sociologists, and other scientists have emphasized the immense importance of industrial capitalization for the development of modern societies. The resulting loss of communal stability and “the general concern of the period over personal alienation in the context of an increasingly massified urban world” have been the focus of innumerable studies.<sup>333</sup> The new concepts of the self of the Enlightenment era led to individualism and to the belief in an inward autonomous individual who was able to determine her own destiny.<sup>334</sup> It was a unique self that was able to understand truth either through reason or, in the romantic version, through feelings.<sup>335</sup> This belief found its full expression with the romantic poets who enlarged and advanced the realm of the mysterious, mystical, hidden self. The sixteenth century concept of the inner, hidden, and private realm of individuality was thereby transformed into a mystical source of vitality and self-potential.<sup>336</sup> The tradition of the romantic age that focused on interior mysticism became institutionalized in the United States through Emersonian transcendentalism and, as Cushman argues, more recently through forms of secular psychotherapy.<sup>337</sup> In the late nineteenth century Americans suffered from disorientation and a feeling of alienation from the material world and from one another.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> The relation between these developments has been confirmed through many sociological studies. “Structural modernization was accompanied by cultural modernization which is characterized by secularization and individualization of religious and moral values, the rationalization of society, fast information diffusion, and the origination of a consumer culture.” Peter Ester, Loek Halman and Ruud de Moor, “Value Shift in Western Societies,” *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America*, eds. ibid. (Tilburg: Tilburg UP, 1993) 3 (hereafter: Ester/Loek/de Moor). For the destabilizing effects of the influx of settlers from the Old World see Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 72,ff (hereafter: Hegeman, *Patterns*). For the general confusion man experienced in the modern world see Rainer Emig, *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (London and New York: Longman, 1995) 2,ff.

<sup>333</sup> Hegeman, *Patterns* 12. Obviously, this focus results in the exclusion of other cultural information. But the alienation and disorientation that Cushman identifies as the motivation for the development of what he calls the “the empty self” in the twentieth century include important information for the interpretation of the post-modern individual. Cushman, *Self* 79.

<sup>334</sup> “The self of the early modern era was ... powerful and autonomous (and confused and isolated) .... It was an inner self that was essentially removed from the outer world. [...] It [...] lived in a world in which spiritual was divided from material, mind from body – a disenchanted world. ... [I]t could manipulate the material world and transform it. Miraculously, the self could also manipulate and transform *itself*: it was pure, independent, instrumental consciousness. [...] It was a self that was all alone, with the weight of the world on its shoulders.” Ibid. 381.

<sup>335</sup> Even though the romantic era is often depicted as a rebellion against the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment, both concepts of reality have a similar understanding of the individual in this respect. For the feminist critique of the traditional opposition of reason and emotion see Conradi, *Care* 89-93.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Cushman, *Self* 382.

<sup>337</sup> This, of course, refers to Ralph Waldo Emerson. For the general development of the (romantic) idea of hidden inner miracles and its connection to psychotherapy see also Phillips/Taylor esp. 31,ff; 47; 59-70. They argue for a relationship between religious views, psychoanalysis and postmodern theories as well. Cf. ibid. esp. 19,ff; 28; 72, f.

<sup>338</sup> Similarly to Cushman Thomas Strychacz describes that people’s traditional relations to work, leisure, the community, and cultural pursuits were deeply disturbed due to the rapid development of consumer capitalism from the early nineteenth century on. He describes this development as a *crisis of cultural authority* and observes a continuous fragmentation and disintegration of the notion of selfhood resulting from the unsettle-

Mesmerism soothed and offered hope to a country confronted with the emotional and social consequences of the growing industrial capitalism, which created “a great deal of human wreckage.”<sup>339</sup> Named after the European Anton Mesmer, mesmerism became the first psychological healing technology to popularize and develop a treatment regime featuring the expansion and liberation of the self.<sup>340</sup>

In such theories healing was understood as helping each individual make an adjustment to her inner spiritual world. Each person was considered capable of using the inner spiritual power to achieve control over the material world. The brain was thought to have originally been divided into two selves, a true and a false one. By gaining contact with her interior spiritual forces, an individual could undergo a transformation, and could transcend the original divides. Inside each person was the immortal self, the summit of all that is divine and good in man. The influence of this dichotomy of a true and a false self is still perceivable in twentieth-century self-concepts.<sup>341</sup> Interestingly, Cushman observes that even though the importance of individual freedom grew with the popularity of mesmerism, the individuals were at the same time restricted. With the emphasis on inner values, one’s social conduct was no longer the standard which personal value was judged by. The only thing that could render a person deserving of a natural reward, was the quality of her thoughts about herself. Moreover, the external influences that worsened contemporary life could no longer be considered as causes for personal misfortune.<sup>342</sup>

After Sigmund Freud exported the notion of the Victorian unconscious to the United States in 1909, psychoanalysis became the most discussed theory in the nation’s bustling magazine trade within several years.<sup>343</sup> Through American capitalism, the unconscious became a vehicle for what Cushman considers the single most important cultural

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ment of traditional modes of living through the unknown urban environments and technologies. See: *ibid.*, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (New York and Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 1993).

<sup>339</sup> Cushman, *Self* 131.

<sup>340</sup> In 1836 Mesmer’s mixture of Enlightenment science, hypnotism, romanticism, and spirituality was brought to the United States by his follower, Charles Poyen. He argued that within each individual resided magnetic forces of the divine order. Cf. Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1982).

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Cushman, *Self* 117.

<sup>342</sup> “Given that individual freedom from institutional coercion was such a central value in the United States, it was necessary for the body politic to develop ways of creating voluntary compliance with the customs and laws of society. [...] Compliance had to be framed as enhancing the pursuit of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’.” *Ibid.* 133. Barbara Ehrenreich offers an interesting analysis of contemporary American positive thinking philosophies including the trend to coaching. She also relates what could almost be called a commitment to be happy and to take personal responsibility for all, even externally caused, mishaps today to the historical developments mentioned above. Cf. *ibid.*, *Smile or Die – How Positive Thinking Fooled America and the World* (London: Granta, 2009) 79; 94,f.

<sup>343</sup> Other critics, such as Murray Roston, have also described the triumphant advance of the notions of psychology, overtly visible through the overwhelming influence psychiatric counseling had gained in leading western cultures by mid-century. Cf. Hegeman, *Patterns* 6.

dynamic of the twentieth century: “the consumerization of American life.”<sup>344</sup> At the time America had completed its immigrant push to the West, had finished its cultural war, and almost total genocide of Native Americans, as well as its consolation into one industrial nation. The powerful contemporary influences were the new influx of immigrants, the increasing urbanization, and the industrialization and mechanization. In contrast to these substantial changes, most Americans still thought of themselves as God-fearing Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who were small-town, honest, hardworking farmers and small businessmen. The agenda of the reform movement known as Progressivism, which was characterized by the reforms of Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency of powerful alliances between government and corporate management, formed. As a result of Freud’s articulation of the unconscious, corporations could generate the ability to psychologize the management of labor and profit from a continuously induced flood of consumer desire.<sup>345</sup>

In the early twentieth-century environment of optimism, pragmatism, abundance, and expansion a new psychological way of thinking developed. The mental hygiene movement deepened the trend toward self-liberation practices.<sup>346</sup> Slowly but surely, deviants were not considered to be bad, undesirable, mad, or possessed any longer. Instead the notion of the social deviant as a sick person in need for mental health grew stronger.<sup>347</sup> Historians such as Warren Susman have argued that capitalism’s hegemony grew steadily through the replacement of religion as the dominant arbiter of deviance.<sup>348</sup> The moral codes of traditional religion had been too hostile to the obsessive consumption of modern commodities.

[M]odern empirical sciences such as psychology held that pursuit of pleasure rather than compliance with moral codes was the foundational human motivator.<sup>349</sup>

Psychology was instrumentalized by capitalist businesses to manipulate the public into desiring what they might not otherwise buy.<sup>350</sup> The U.S.-American population experienced a lack of emotional resources and personal conviction occasioned by this loss of authoritative tradition. This loss, which was – due to mesmerism and Freud – increasingly envisaged as an inner void, constituted the space in which psychotherapy and advertising tech-

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<sup>344</sup> Cushman, *Self* 143.

<sup>345</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 143,ff.

<sup>346</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 152.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. the notion of sexual deviance that is linked to psychological illness in Foucault *Sexualität* 50,ff.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) (hereafter: Susman, *Culture*).

<sup>349</sup> Cushman, *Self* 153.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 154.

niques could be inserted. Through the influence of the ideology of self-liberation, individuals were manipulated to believe that the search for the self was part of human nature.

Ironically, the dismantling of communities and traditions was continuing at an increasingly faster pace at the same time as the social realm was discovered as an object of scientific research. The mental hygiene movement came to replace earlier concepts of healing, without extinguishing the notions of human inwardness or individual growth and of self-liberation. The idea of the enchantment of the inner, true self was deeply troubled, when the thirties rushed in the Depression and World War II. The thirties left the people watching in horror as the same technology that had filled the twenties with optimism and an expanding economy, offered no help in the face of the Depression and later played an important part in the German National Socialist's genocide of all Non-Aryan groups. Beneath the surface, the terror had already dwelled throughout the twenties. At the time bitter class warfare, racial hatred, a blatant disregard of the Bill of Rights, and a very unequal distribution of economic power already existed. During the thirties the United States were torn by the conflicting internal forces of activism and isolationism and weakened by the Depression and their own racism and anti-Semitism. As a result of this unsettling situation, there was a tendency to avoid the political and ethical in favor of the technological, the humanistic in favor of the scientific, the humanitarian in favor of the utilitarian, and the needs of labor in favor of the interests of capital. The mass consumption economy that was founded in the twenties could grow stronger and develop a reputation of expedience in such an environment.<sup>351</sup>

With the development of mass media the American society developed a new understanding of itself.<sup>352</sup> People were more aware of one another through telegraph, phone, radio, and through the opportunities that cars and the beginning air travel offered. After the economic crash in 1929 the nation finally embarked on a search for structural solutions to the unavoidable problems of unregulated capitalism. At the same time, psychologists tried to establish their field of research as a scientific discipline. They did so by presenting psychology as a discipline like the sciences of the Enlightenment era, claiming that they objectively studied the universal individual in order to discover the universal laws of human existence. In the following decades psychology offered its expertise to business in various areas, such as advertising, marketing, and personnel management. Through the emerging branches of psychology the notion of a given social world was strengthened. The social

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<sup>351</sup> Cf. Lawrence W. Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression," *The Unpredictable Past*, Lawrence W. Levine (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 206-230.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. Susman, *Culture* 158.

world was considered apolitical, and its requirements and demands universal. Therefore psychological theories were free to develop a rationale for social conformity that was considered objectively scientific.<sup>353</sup>

Cushman describes the American society during the two decades surrounding mid-century as terrified and traumatized. The overall atmosphere was characterized by the fear of another depression, the USSR, racial prejudices, social uncertainty regarding gender, and by the general aftermath of the war with its never ending holocaust revelations. The population craved stability and was afraid of the unknown, the different, the unusual, the extreme, and the destabilizing, in short: the *Other*. The emphasis Freud had put on conflict could not aid to build an inclusive psychology that offered help in such an unstable social terrain.<sup>354</sup>

Americans had never been drawn to a cultural framework that featured conflict. Their fledgling eighteenth-century government had a society to organize, a frontier to conquer, and a continent to settle – expansion and success were always America’s mother tongue.<sup>355</sup>

As a result, mid-century American society was focused on the value of success in the capitalistic marketplace, influenced by a technological frame of reference, confused by the discrediting of religion and community traditions, and yet paradoxically preoccupied with the individual’s task of achieving social acceptance.<sup>356</sup> Cushman envisions a new era arising from “the deprivations of the thirties and the terror and hatred of the forties.”<sup>357</sup> This post-war era has in his opinion been influenced greatly by psychology, oriented toward youth, focused on liberation, and obsessed with consuming. Out of the confusion and fear, a world of amazing affluence, television shows, credit cards, and mass consumption originated.<sup>358</sup>

During this new era two essentially American trends culminated: The expectation of individual salvation through self-liberation and the strategy to avoid economic stagnation (which would have led to a second depression) through the manipulation of consumption. This was only possible through a newly generated concept of the self, the *empty self*. After the Second World War America tried to metabolize the war and incorporate it in a new

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<sup>353</sup> Cf. Cushman, *Self* 168,f; 186,f.

<sup>354</sup> Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor also argue that the psychoanalytical theories formulated in such a chaotic and menacing sociohistorical environment reflect this atmosphere in their negative views of the individual and the other, of the relationship between them, and in the formulation of an increasingly competitive individualism (which is again linked to the increasingly menacing ambience in Britain and North America until today). Cf. Phillips/Taylor 90-99, 108, 111.

<sup>355</sup> Cushman, *Self* 189,f.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 187.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* 210.

<sup>358</sup> Only some of Cushman’s conclusions will be summarized in the following. The discussion reflects his argumentation in *ibid.* 210-278.

hopeful and ambitious vision of America. Thereby, the belief in the moral goodness of the individual's interior was reinforced. The imperative to help this inner self to grow, prosper, and be liberated through more emotional expressiveness became once more a prominent influence in society, although the techniques of growth had changed considerably. Americans became less restricted, and developed an unconditional sense of entitlement.<sup>359</sup> They felt entitled to money, commodities, experiences, speaking their mind, expressing their feelings, and so on.<sup>360</sup> What was considered worth having was not defined by moral or communal standards, but by advertising techniques. Therefore, Americans could not develop an indigenous, inclusive tradition of shared meanings and shared moral values. Through the prevalence of freedom, as the freedom to choose which consumer products to purchase, the entire political vocabulary was transformed. Consumer choice became an ultimate measure of the good. By the late twentieth century the sociohistorical developments had resulted in an environment in which relatedness usually showed up either as a profit-loss calculus, as the product of the isolated parent-child dyadic relationship, or as part of the manipulations of the workplace. Social relatedness also exists in the dyadic relationship between a psychologist and her patient. Cushman envisions these spheres of social exchange as too weak to form a counter-weight to the increasing power of the influence of consumption in their environment.<sup>361</sup>

This environment can be described as bleak and unsafe, and hardly offering any space for social interaction. Consequently, isolation and dissatisfaction have become normal ways of life, and human beings have to struggle with feelings of irreality, hopelessness, despair, and a lack of self-esteem.

The empty self has become the predominant configuration of our era. [...] This is how the empty self works: the insatiable, gnawing sense of internal emptiness drives individuals to yearn to be filled up; to feel whole, solid, self-confident, in contact with others. Advertising preys on this yearning by linking it with images and slogans from liberationist ideology. In our society advertising functions as a 'therapeutic,' a way of healing the empty self of the viewer. Ads promise a personal transformation, implying that by purchasing and consuming the product, 'taking it in,' ... becoming one with it, the consumer's self will become magically transformed.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> The Nick Hornby quote in chapter II.iii.i. also reflects this sense of entitlement.

<sup>360</sup> "Values are no longer dominated by institutional religion, but are based on personal choice. Self-development and personal happiness are leading principles for individual actions. [...] As a consequence of this development, an ego-centered, consumerist mentality of non-commitment is widely diffused." Ester/Loek/de Moor 7.

<sup>361</sup> Other historians, such as Gary Cross, have also emphasized the immense importance of consumerism for twentieth-century American society. In an interview Cross explained: "Konsum ist ein Ersatz für andere Arten kultureller Erfahrungen geworden. In dieser individualistischen Gesellschaft, in der kulturelle und soziale Erfahrungen eingeschränkt worden sind, definieren sich Menschen stärker durch ihren Verbrauch und ihr Eigentum." Thomas Fischermann, "Konsum statt Freundschaft – Ein Gespräch mit dem amerikanischen Wirtschaftshistoriker Gary Cross über die nimmermüden Verbraucher in den USA, die Wegwerfgesellschaft und ökonomische Tabus bei der Präsidentenwahl," *DIE ZEIT* 30 September 2004, 30.

<sup>362</sup> Cushman, *Self* 245,f.

At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, America was shaken further by the fear of terrorism, new wars, and an increasing economic crisis.<sup>363</sup> Against this backdrop new fears and new forms of the *Other* were created, politically culminating in the prevalent acceptance of Samuel Huntington's cultural pessimism.<sup>364</sup> In his concept of a clash of civilizations, a quasi-biological difference between the members of different cultural groups is constructed, even though it is obviously (even for the author himself) not possible to differentiate between them by any objective and stable criteria.<sup>365</sup> An increased interest in a stable front to differentiate oneself against might be intensified by the postmodern insecure individualness, which is also the origin of the yearning for stability, or sense of a self constantly in motion.

At first glance it seems appropriate to state that the instability is caused by the internalized *emptiness* of postmodern individuality. Yet, it is an emptiness played on by external forces. Even though a heightened awareness of inner value and inner (psychological) activities has been created throughout the historical development, these notions should not beguile the inherent dependence of processes related to an inner emptiness on outer triggers – be they commercials or any other external influences. Consequently, the heightened focus on the inner variability of postmodern individuals, often used as an example to point out her increased vulnerability to power structures by postmodern theorists, does not necessarily mean that postmodern individualness is in any way more contingent towards the socio-communicative environment than previous forms.<sup>366</sup> Previous forms were born into a more stable communal and religious framework, but they were as dependent on the impulses and conditions presented by their environment. Even if older views of the self were guided by other principles and concepts than postmodern views, the respective communicative framework conditions both.

The shift from a strong trust in religious towards a strong trust in natural scientific or romantic concepts has in no way changed the basically realistic view of the world. It was changed only in the twentieth century, when a growing sense of the individual as dy-

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<sup>363</sup> Cf. Thomas Assheuer, "Der große Ausverkauf – Das Unbehagen am Kapitalismus wächst. Nicht einmal Manager vertrauen noch auf den Markt. Gerät nun das ganze System ins Wanken?" *DIE ZEIT* 27 March 2008, 49-50.

<sup>364</sup> The respective book Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) (hereafter: Huntington, *Clash*, 1996) is based on the ideas formulated in the article *ibid.*, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3), 1993, 22-49.

<sup>365</sup> Cf. for example Harald Müller, *Das Zusammenleben der Kulturen – Ein Gegenentwurf zu Huntington* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1998).

<sup>366</sup> For an interpretation of the diagnosis of the postmodern subject as more dependent on her environment e.g. as heroizing the autonomous gentrified individual see Rolf Haubl, "Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen," *Spuren des Subjekts – Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, ed. Hans-Joachim Busch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) 111-133.



namic and highly dependent on her environment was developed.<sup>367</sup> Before discussing this shift toward a postmodern concept of the individual in more theoretical detail, an idea that has been implied in the preceding argument should be formulated explicitly. It is important to understand both the concept of an autonomous modern individual and of an empty respectively highly relative postmodern individual as culturally constructed. Neither can claim to have a more adequate access to truth. Yet, when they are analyzed in a historical perspective, a narrative explanation encompassing both versions becomes possible. If the history of human knowledge is understood as a gradual shift starting from religious perceptions of a true nature of the world, we can formulate it as a homogeneously proceeding process leading to a concept of human understanding in a communicative framework as has been proposed by the present study. It remains to be seen whether the communicative concept is to be understood as a constant progress or the end point of such a development. Although I see communicative foundationalism as a natural culmination point of understanding, this point of view might be compared to the work of a linguist. As long as a certain language is still spoken and thus developed, the linguist must leave general conclusions about the nature of this language at least to some extent to be proven again and again by future generations of linguists. Additionally, the homogeneity must not be seen as homogeneously encompassing all members of a society to the same extent. It is rather to be understood as the development of the average concept of reality of a sociohistorical community – the overall mood in which statements regarding reality are formulated.

The idea behind such a narrative of human understanding's homogenous development would take, as a starting point, the obvious desire to explain their environment. In the beginning, this environment could not be understood by relating to human communicative actions (as the first hominids can hardly be expected to have been able to think of their communicational habits on any meta-level). It can be supposed that it was related to inexplicable forces, which might in hindsight be identified as religious. With the advancing ability to abstract from tasks necessary for immediate survival, these thoughts have been developed into complex belief systems. Yet, the old concepts of gods often show a very close entanglement with the actual human environment. Historic communities, for example, identified the sun as an actual god. With the growing interest in intentions behind the gods' actions, especially when only a few or even a single god was held responsible for all the different developments on the planet, a sense of truth behind the actual perceivable reality

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<sup>367</sup> With regard to concepts of reality before the recording of communication in written language it can be assumed that the identification of a traditionally realistic concept was not the actual beginning of this development, but already a first step toward a complex understanding of reality.

was formulated. When just one being was assumed to be responsible for all that happened, the true nature of what was seen must be hidden somewhere behind the ostensible appearances of things. This was also how the first philosophers built their concepts of reality – a true nature was supposed to be behind what only *seemed* to be real.<sup>368</sup>

This sense of a *true* nature of reality has been preserved in a basically realist perception of the world. It does not spring from secret knowledge of the *true* truth or the *real* reality, but from the initial inability to understand the immense influence of the means of communication created by the very persons who want to understand their environment. The idea of their own power to change their views and their ways of perceiving was alien to the desire to understand what was going on around them. Humans in the postmodern age are finally able to realize their own influence on their concepts of explanation – they begin to understand that their environment is purely communicative and that there is no truth *behind* the appearances. This becomes visible in postmodern relativist theories. The only real guidelines are to be found within the appearances respectively through the way in which humans construct such appearances.<sup>369</sup> Norms that can be found in such a way are then no *absolute* norms. Although no norms are true for the whole universe, or even the whole planet and all its other inhabitants, they are nonetheless true and (might even be) obligatory for all human beings living together in communicative contexts. Starting from a social community any possible responsibilities towards oneself will unavoidably be linked to responsibilities towards the other members of the community. If someone lives alone on an island, there won't be any way for her to behave morally; although (given prior socialization) she could ponder ethics in such a case. If someone is faced with a disaster that erases her community, she can no longer refer to the binding framework. Even if people are engaged in a destructive action towards a community (such as warfare), it will be very hard to construct the possibility of moral behavior.<sup>370</sup> Still, the communicative framework can be understood as a basis of responsibility to conserve the communicative situation. A more detailed explanation of such responsibility will be given in part IV.

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<sup>368</sup> Cf. especially Plato's theory of true ideas.

<sup>369</sup> In a very similar vein Richard Rorty explains the development from realistic to postmodern or pragmatist approaches to reality by the passage from metaphysical ideas to more literary concepts. He, of course, denies the possibility of universally valid moral norms, conceives the postmodern concentration on language very similarly to other postmodernist thinkers and locates the connected concept of reality within literature. Cf. Rorty, *Philosophie* 160-185.

<sup>370</sup> I will come back to this point in part IV. When an action against the communicative community such as waging a war or dropping an atomic bomb can be thus evaluated as destroying the context for moral behavior, it is possible to solve quite a number of moral dilemmas usually construed by postmodern philosophers to show the impossibility of a universal ethics. Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 85.

To demonstrate the main idea of a homogenous historical process, it is helpful to turn to the process of learning a language. A baby learning the first words of her mother tongue will not be able to explain any grammatical organization or to abstract from the language in any way. This opens up a possibility of education and learning, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter II.iii.iv. and the following parts. The learner is persuaded that the dog she points to is actually by nature connected to the word *dog* she utters while pointing. Only when she gradually understands that there are several items described by the same word, or when the native speaker is confronted with alternative words for the same item, will she realize that the signified and the signifier are distinct. An idea of true meaning can be built only with such a concept in mind. Thus, she will be able to reach a meta-level to the practical use of language. When confronted with an alternative language, that might even describe processes with a completely different approach, the concept that can be conceived from such a meta-viewpoint becomes more and more complex. The postmodern understanding finally allows humans to challenge the process through which meaning is assigned as such. In the postmodern era, people started to realize that the idea of a *true* element connecting all the signified items with the signifier is just an *idea*.<sup>371</sup>

### **II.iii.iii. A Communicatively Founded Individual and Her Position in Postmodern Discourse**

The focus will now be shifted from the purely historical (descriptive, outer) to a more (logical and intra-)theoretical perspective. Furthermore, a communicatively founded meta-concept of individualness will be suggested. How can such a meta-concept be described in the postmodern era, when most theories highlight the relativity of the individual? Psychology, for example, generally supposes that a human being is not as free as Enlightenment philosophy claims her to be. The idea of the self, having undesired elements that are to be governed already existed in realistic theories. In psychology a new element enters this model: the subconscious. Suddenly, there is a part of the self that cannot be easily accessed or understood and that nonetheless has enormous influence on an individual's behavior. In cognitive psychology ethics is for example reduced to a learned behavioral pattern. Although an adult can somehow reach autonomous modes of thinking concerning her behavior, children's moral behavior, on the other hand, completely rests on psychologi-

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<sup>371</sup> Cf. Foucault, *Ordnung* e.g. 17,ff.

cal education or socialization according to this understanding.<sup>372</sup> If they were true, such concepts would completely destroy any hope for a stable individual and consequently the universal validity of ethical codes. They imply a general relativity of ethics, as this realm becomes merely a tradition to be passed on, even though it might be crucial for the peaceful coexistence of individuals. This perfectly reflects the postmodern mood, in which theorists have deconstructed the possibility of universally valid norms and then (implicitly) realized how useful and even necessary such norms are for communication between people.

The communicative foundationalist approach evaluates such findings from other disciplines as potentially adequate descriptions of moral practice in given sociohistorical communities. Yet, like all knowledge such research is mediated through communication. Thus, the specific cultural manners in which knowledge can be described remain the original source of the conceptual understanding of ethics. Specific explanations from various disciplines can therefore only be considered as describing occurrences of moral behavior. They are no threat to a theoretical formulation of ethical principles, but an expansion. Even though the theoretical basis is crucial to justify any moral claim and to understand the way in which ethics are functionally part of communicative reality, it is impossible to understand and solve tangible moral conflicts without such a specific cultural understanding. A theoretical approach to the concept of a communicative foundationalist reality would thus consider the *why* of ethics, whereas other sciences, not primarily concerned with the communicational framework enabling their research, can be understood to approach the *how* of moral behavior.

Besides these theoretical explanations of the partial irrelevance of findings from other disciplines, another element points to their inadequacies for formulating the basis of ethics. Disciplines approaching the formation of the self have changed throughout the history of human understanding. Alternately, religion, medicine, psychology, evolutionary biology, and more recently neurology have been seen fit to explain how the human mind (and thus the located ethical faculty) works. There is no way to objectively compare these disciplines, regarding their adequacy to fulfill this task, as there is no extra-communicative standard of truth. Yet, the knowledge they have formulated has always been sustained through communication. The organization of communication is the only factor that plays a part in virtually all research. It is the only link that can be used for all human activities and thus seems a good basis on which to formulate a foundation of ethics. This argument is further supported by the similarities in concept that occur in the various disciplines in the

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<sup>372</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 67, 72.

postmodern age. Socio-biological evolutionists such as Arnold Gehlen, molecular biologists, and neurologists such as Antonio R. Damasio all conduct research with postmodern implications.<sup>373</sup> In the postmodern era evolution is suddenly supposed to give reasons for the absence or impossibility of human autonomy (i.e. supposed to explain the empty self). Additionally, neurologists and biologists present their results with regard to the freedom to act autonomously and a new field of research regarding consciousness has developed.<sup>374</sup>

The postmodern relativistic perspective and the resulting problems are prevalent in virtually all parts of postmodern western society. This clearly shows that the element of relativity sustained through varieties of determinism is not a basic element of human reality, but rather an element that is focused on exceedingly. Even though an ethics based on instinctive constraint to kill could be formulated on such a framework, it would not be able to reflect the more complex considerations of values.<sup>375</sup> Yet, as humans obviously show such an ability to ponder ethics, which is not only reflected in the respective philosophical volumes, but also in the huge amount of literature treating human behavior, such a concept can obviously not be adequate to explain what happens in the communicative reality. Thus, the numerous attempts by postmodern theorists, such as Judith Butler, to base their ethical concepts on scientifically understood psychological research results are doomed to have imperfect results, as will be discussed further in part IV. Still, the psychological frame of understanding the individual is linked to postmodern culture and can thus be an adequate tool to understand the current developments; however, approaches that base ethics on external realism, like the natural sciences, face numerous theoretical problems with regard to descriptivism that will be further discussed in chapter IV.iv. Furthermore, such seemingly neutral and objective results can no longer be taken uncritically after the postmodern critique. Moreover, natural scientific data only makes sense with regard to the meaning that is given to them in a certain concept of reality. To approach the significance of meaning in more detail, the relation between human nature and meaning will be scrutinized.

As the reference to human nature implies anthropological reasoning, an anthropological concept of ethics that argues similarly to communicative foundationalism shall be

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<sup>373</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 80,f and Antonio R. Damasio, *Ich fühle also bin ich – Die Entschlüsselung des Bewusstseins* (transl. Hainer Kober) (München: List, 2001); (hereafter: Damasio, Entschlüsselung).

<sup>374</sup> Cf. Damasio, Entschlüsselung 18. It is remarkable that research results that describe activity in the human brain or genome are presented or discussed in articles that ponder and challenge autonomy. Cf. e.g. Thomas Assheuer, "Ich war es nicht! – Hirnforscher legen uns nahe, dass es weder persönliche Schuld noch Freiheit gibt. Wie kommt es, dass sich die Gesellschaft an dieser Nachricht jubelnd berauscht?" *DIE ZEIT* 11 October 2007, 57; Ulrich Bahnsen, "Erbgut in Auflösung: Das Genom galt als unveränderlicher Bauplan des Menschen, der zu Beginn unseres Lebens festgelegt wird. Von dieser Idee muss sich die Wissenschaft verabschieden. In Wirklichkeit sind unsere Erbanlagen in ständigem Wandel begriffen," *DIE ZEIT* 12 June 2008, 33,f.

<sup>375</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 86.

briefly discussed. Thomas Rentsch's philosophical anthropology leading to his dianoietic ethics is also meant to find universalizable characteristics of the *human world*.<sup>376</sup> According to the traditional approach of anthropological philosophy, the theorist inquires after human nature and the given preconditions enabling human life.<sup>377</sup> Rentsch thus finds functional (in his terminology *practical*) standards that are always already inherent in this world. It is not possible to clearly distinguish between anthropology and ethics in the same way as it is impossible to clearly separate ethics and politics. "What you think humans are will tell you something about what humans can (or perhaps even ought to) be."<sup>378</sup> Rentsch's practical focus leads to a complete integration of dianoietic universals in a practical level and to a dismissal of autonomy in the individual.<sup>379</sup> Even though humans only exist in social communities, it is important to understand them as single individuals, too. Morality in a deeper, more ethical sense can only be developed and refined through individual rational acts. It is a behavior that results from social experience, yet, social experience directly only leads to moral intuitional behavior. This will be clarified in detail in chapter IV.iii.<sup>380</sup> Rentsch shows that morality was always already part of the human being as she is a creature who gives sense to her world. This focus on humans as beings creating meaning is vital to comprehending ethics.

Historical anthropological research underlines the fact that ethical controversies have existed (e.g. the golden rule in the western world) for more than five thousand years.<sup>381</sup> This is an interesting clue to the relationship between human life and ethics, and shows that ethics have always been inherent in human culture.<sup>382</sup> However, from the per-

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<sup>376</sup> He searches explicitly for "die *volle* Konstitution der menschlichen Grundsituation" Rentsch, Konstitution 284. The organization of Rentsch's arguments is similar to the present one. He also criticizes major philosophical tendencies of postmodernity as I have done so far, and he distances himself from Ernst Tugendhat and discourse ethics. Nevertheless, there are decisive differences, which will be highlighted in the following footnotes. For a feminist idea of human nature see also Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship* 55.

<sup>377</sup> At this point it should be conceded that *the* philosophical anthropological perspective on human nature does not exist. As a philosophical and anthropological discipline it displays the same differences between realist and relativist (respectively materialist/biological and idealist/phenomenological) points of view as have been discussed so far. This can, for example, be seen in the opposition of the two founders of modern philosophical anthropology Helmuth Plessner and Max Scheler. Cf. Lorenz, *Einführung* 3-6.

<sup>378</sup> Osborne, *Structure* 104.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Rentsch, *Konstitution* 30-46. Even though Rentsch equally understands the communicative aspect of human life as central, the importance of narrativity (which will become decisive for communicative foundationalist ethics) is not sufficiently stressed in his concept.

<sup>380</sup> In this respect the concept of this study is closely related to alternative communicative ethics. See for example the detailed discussion of Seyla Benhabib's communicative ethics in chapter IV.ii.

<sup>381</sup> Cf. Rentsch, *Konstitution* 259.

<sup>382</sup> Rentsch actually uses the focus on anthropology and philosophy to dismiss all sorts of other approaches to ethics. In his critique of Tugendhat and Ursula Wolf he, for example, finds fault with their foundation of ethics on sociological and psychological theories. On the one hand, they do not question the findings of sociology and psychology according to his challenge. On the other hand, Rentsch thinks that it is a risk to found ethics on anything than philosophy and anthropology. Cf. *ibid.* 35-37. Philosophical anthropology as a discipline often refuses to interpret ethical functionalities as foundational for human nature. Moral norms are rather

spective of a communicative foundationalist ethics, human nature could be revealed through a discussion of any discipline, and anthropology does not necessarily play a special role.<sup>383</sup> If a systematic approach to human life, which explains reality including ethics, is to be maintained universally, it has to include and explain all aspects of this reality. The present foundational communicative concept of reality understands reality and all its parts in a postmodern vein as absolutely interrelated.<sup>384</sup> Thereby, ethics cannot be clearly unhinged from specific cultural contexts, and the concept of reality should comprehensively integrate ethics in an epistemological context.<sup>385</sup> Although the study of literature as a specific cultural product is certainly most appropriate for a study of human reality and communication, it is by no means the only possible approach.<sup>386</sup>

The humanities still seem predisposed for such an inquiry, as human nature has been found to be communicative and the humanities have always been concerned with mediated knowledge.<sup>387</sup> Additionally, discussing the existing theories of ethics (which to a great extent belong to the philosophical discipline) seems almost inevitable. Yet, the above conducted critical sociohistorical discussion of postmodern relativistic and realistic positions is not meant to discard these approaches. Rather, it is supposed to emphasize the fact that a coherent analysis of ethics has remained necessary since the beginning of the twenty-

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interpreted as logical conclusions of considerations of human existence (often in the sense of a contract). Cf. Lorenz, Einführung 45-49; 97,f; 105; 108; 109-131. See also Joachim Israel, *Martin Buber – Dialogphilosophie in Theorie und Praxis*, Sozialwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen der Görres-Gesellschaft 23 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1995) 140 (hereafter: Israel, Dialogphilosophie).

<sup>383</sup> It becomes clear that what I term rationality is a sort of practical cognitive ability to understand and order reality. Even though the term has evolved through cultural practices in which a notion of God was always implied, the functions that are rational in such a sense cannot simply be denied with reference to the culture-historical genesis of the term that is used to describe them. Cf. Lorenz, Einführung 21-31.

<sup>384</sup> Rentsch's insistence on anthropology's preliminary character is artificial, as is his resulting strict distinction of emotions, rationality, and morality. Cf. Rentsch, Konstitution esp. 49-59. By defining a *culture of moral practice* (cf. e.g. *ibid.* 51) he dissects the existing reality in an inapplicable manner. What is culturally identified as morality and practically acted out in this understanding can only rest on theoretical ethical ideals, which have to be identified as well. Even though it is impracticable for moral arguments to emphasize idealizations too extensively, idealization is an irreducible part of the very idea of morality.

<sup>385</sup> Communicative ethics in this way is closely linked to the understanding of Charles Taylor, who also works in an anthropological setting. Cf. e.g. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006) 3-90 (hereafter: Taylor, Sources).

<sup>386</sup> The special character of the written (or printed) word has been described by many philosophers, such as Karl Popper. Cf. Gerhard Wilczek, *Metaphysik und Gesellschaft – Bedeutende Philosophen unserer Zeit* (Eichstätt: Polygon, 2008) 142. Moreover, cultural scholars and social scientists usually think that works of art (or cultural products) are appreciated by an audience because they raise questions the audience sees as relevant to their lives. Literature may be seen as special for its self-reflective potential and addressing both reason and emotions. As with all works of art, perception and understanding (i.e. evaluation) are closely linked to the identity of the observer or reader and influence it at the same time. Cf. John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) 54,f; 174-181; 187; 208-212; 259; and Norman N. Holland, *The Critical I* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992) 25, 31-40, 44-57 (hereafter: Holland, I).

<sup>387</sup> This point is very accurately described by Fritz Wallner, cf. *ibid.*, *Die Verwandlung der Wissenschaft – Vorlesungen zur Jahrtausendwende* (ed. Martin Jandl) Constructiviana – Interdisziplinäre und interkulturelle Wissenschaftstheorie I (Hamburg: Dr. Kovac, 2002) 243-236 (hereafter: Wallner, Verwandlung).

first century.<sup>388</sup> Moreover, the comprehensive concept of a foundationalist communicative reality depends on the discussion of existing ethical theories as a point of contact to the actual existing reality (which these theories are undeniably a part of). Furthermore, as a postmodern approach must accept the interrelated communicative nature of reality, all theories in human discourse have to be to a certain extent compatible.<sup>389</sup> Even though it must, for example, be agreed upon that descriptive theories can never comprise the ethical (and emotional) features of the communicative world, they cannot simply be left out of the equation when they are so obviously part of the postmodern communicative reality. The fact that human beings feel that pure description is possible puts their abilities of observing and rational abstraction in focus.

These abilities are also part of human nature, and the role of the observer (especially the scientific observer) must be treated as a central theme when human reality is analyzed. The anthropological situation of human existence, practically realized in social relations, is an important and undeniable fact. Yet, the solitary side of individuality and the possibility of observing through rational abstraction cannot simply be cast aside.<sup>390</sup> A realization of the nature of human existence is impossible without individual consciousness. Therefore, the individual is an important and problematic aspect of human existence, torn between intersubjective and subjective experiences.<sup>391</sup> After having discussed a systematic historical philosophy of ethics in previous chapters, it could be stated that not only have moral values always been debated and are part of the human world, but a certain rationality, constituting a distinct metaphysics has been the functional expression of such disputes. The metaphysical level of evaluation, even though it is without a doubt acquired simultaneous-

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<sup>388</sup> In this way it accords to Rentsch's intentions.

<sup>389</sup> In this vein the discussion of alternative postmodern theories in the present study is meant to show how the communicative foundations can extend and complete other postmodern theories of ethics. It can be understood as a means to erase the contradictions and problems regarding postmodern relativity. Poststructuralist and deconstructivist approaches would naturally have to be adjusted to the concept of a foundation. Thus, the development of a communicative foundationalist concept of reality is meant to inscribe the respective concept of ethics in postmodern discourse, whereby this discourse is necessarily altered itself. This fits the basic understanding of thought and science (as structured thought) in postmodern times, which is definitely coined by constructivist ideas. Cf. Wallner, *Verwandlung* 229, f. When Rentsch tries to discredit the possibility of all sciences to reach an understanding of ethics, he does not allude to the strategy of description (and scientific objectivity) which is indeed inappropriate to grasp human nature including its ethical character. Instead, he states that the modern and postmodern concepts of the world (which see the cosmos in a natural scientific way) do not fit the actual reality. Cf. Rentsch, *Konstitution* 102, ff.

<sup>390</sup> Rentsch writes: "*Es ist pragmatisch unmöglich, die primäre Welt zu verlassen.*" Rentsch, *Konstitution* 73. But he misunderstands that rational abstraction as well as ethical values (in the sense of an abstract system moral behavior relates to) are actually part of the experience of the *primary world*. If they were not part of it, a true moral evaluation would be impossible. In this way Rentsch's idea of justification (cf. e.g. *ibid.* 13) also differs from communicative models.

<sup>391</sup> This emphasis on intersubjectivity is typical for postmodern theories (in the historical sense). At the latest since the genesis of phenomenology the interdependence of the subject and others has been cherished as a constitutive element of theories concerned with human nature. Cf. Lorenz, *Einführung* 109, ff.



ly with all other understanding of the world, is to be regarded as functionally important for ethics. Individuals can abstract from practical reason and practical action. Even though the whole world cannot be understood in this way, it is an important aspect of this world.

The notion of the world of human beings as a world of giving sense must be highlighted. Things are never just done for the sake of doing, although the absolute consciousness of the implied reasons is not automatically available. A good example seems to be the person holding a pair of scissors in her hand, who has suddenly forgotten what she was about to do with them. The instrumental level of the situation immediately loses its sense since humans need the evaluative horizon as an orientation for their actions.<sup>392</sup> Humans can therefore be described as beings designed to realize their concepts of reality in intersubjective environments. Additionally, it must be stated that for realizing these concepts it is indispensable to develop a personality, which includes a certain level of abstraction and solitude. This means at the same time that all religious and otherwise metaphysically constituted concepts of *higher meanings* must relate to the human nature of rendering situations meaningful. As they are an integral part of human socio-communicative practice, it can be expected that the notion of universal meaning is tied to human understanding. Against such a background each individual application of this sense can be compared to the universal concept of sense.

Die Rede vom Menschen, die Rede von uns selbst hat gar keinen Sinn, wenn wir sie nicht bereits so verstehen, dass Personen einzig und allein über ihren Lebenssinngesamt angemessen begriffen werden.<sup>393</sup>

Understanding oneself as a human being essentially always includes understanding oneself from the perspective of possible others – it means to develop an intersubjective understanding of existence.<sup>394</sup> Still, the ability to develop a point of view also includes the solitariness of the idea of an individual personality. In part IV., especially chapter IV.ii., the relationship between the individual and the other according to communicative foundationalist ethics will be discussed in detail.

At this point it is helpful to return to the three theses that have been presented to describe postmodern thought in chapter II.i.i.: 1. The death of the human individual in terms of transcendental and foundational existence. 2. The death of history as a homogeneously and progressively proceeding narrative. 3. The death of metaphysics with its principle of presence, with the ever sought-after possibility of unproblematically representing the true

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<sup>392</sup> This example is borrowed from Rentsch. Cf. Rentsch, *Konstitution* 120.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.* 211.

<sup>394</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 122, 242.

nature of the world. As has been argued in detail, the third of these declarations can be re-defined when *the true nature of the world* is understood to be communicative. The situatedness that was assumed following phenomenological insights is then re-interpreted as a new framework instead of becoming an argument against the existence of a framework.<sup>395</sup> It thereby gains a foundationally interpersonal character as communication is always happening between more than one person and as language (which forms a large part of communication) is inevitably a public and intersubjective framework.<sup>396</sup> Nevertheless, this is no reason to generally doubt first person authority.<sup>397</sup> If the personality of an individual is generated through intersubjective cultural activities, it can function in much the same ways in which subjectivity used to be traditionally understood. Individuality has to be understood as being much more flexible and dependent on the respective society or culture. Still, the individualness, i.e. the functionality of a first person approach to the world, need not be understood as completely or even mainly unreliable.

The unreliability resulting from such an intersubjective concept can be restricted to the meanings that are produced in cultural and social environments. These meanings can change thereby complicating the attribution of truth with respect to the objects as they are defined within a sociohistorical situation. Yet, the functionality of ascribing truth stays the same. It is still possible to judge an individual's personal behavior as truthful. Besides, truth can be reformulated as intersubjective truth.<sup>398</sup> Additionally, the very intersubjectivity of an intersubjectively created communicative reality necessarily provides a certain stability – realities can only be changed by a majority of their upholders. The notion of human history as a homogenously proceeding narrative has thus been reinstalled on the premise that basic norms of communication will be found.<sup>399</sup> The role of the observer or narrator of this account has been reinstalled by a sociohistorical critique of traditionally realist as well as relativist concepts of the self. Without foundational norms sensibly organizing the world (of human perception) it would be impossible for an individual to gain any information

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<sup>395</sup> For the formulation of phenomenological situatedness see chapter IV.iv.i. For such a re-interpretation see for example Rentsch, *Konstitution* 68,f and chapter IV.ii.

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001) 17 (hereafter: Davidson, *Subjective*).

<sup>397</sup> The problem of situating the individual “both as knower and as agent” has been acknowledged and discussed in critical social theory, new contextualism and postmodern theories. Cf. Benhabib, *Critique* 14. For the special kind of first person authority see also Davidson, *Subjective* 3-14, 38.

<sup>398</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 30-38; 83,f; 105. Davidson does not reject external realism in the same way poststructuralism does. He understands communication exclusively in a linguistic way, but his argument can be systematically transferred to this context. For the differences see e.g. *ibid.* 195.

<sup>399</sup> This seems to be an intuitively correct assumption as the sphere of communication has without any doubt expanded immensely and has been decisively specified throughout the history of mankind. See for example Niklas Luhmann's theory of communications media functioning on a symbolical and generalized level. Cf. e.g. *ibid.*, *Liebe als Passion – Zur Codierung von Intimität* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983) 28,ff.

from any research that could lead to the formulation of organizational concepts to understand this world (or the ethics which is part of it). This can in principle be understood as a logical problem. If the outcome of a study is supposed to comprehend normative matter (i.e. the possibility to judge), the field that is studied must contain normativity too. Moreover – as has been argued in II.ii. – the manner of research must contain the possibility of normative evaluation as well. Without such norms, comparison of any sort would indeed be futile. This search for communicative norms is also the driving force for the followers of Habermas in discourse ethics. Yet, as will be shown through the discussion of Benhabib’s work in part IV., a communicative foundationalist approach, which is based on the assumption that the framework of reference is purely communicative, differs decisively from what usually has been labeled discourse or communicative ethics. Whether human history, in terms of a homogenous narrative, offers only descriptive information or also normative values will be scrutinized in the literary analysis and the following chapters.<sup>400</sup>

Metanarratives and metaphysics (of a communicative sort) will thus have been re-animated or will at least have been given the hope to revive in a communicative form the moment it will be possible to elaborate universal norms of communication.<sup>401</sup> Whether such norms can be found depends on the ability of the human individual to become aware of the true nature of the world. As this has been proposed as a communicative nature, and as the individual has been recreated in a communicative and intersubjective form, she does not need any special abilities to break through to the extra-communicative *real* reality any longer. She simply needs to be able to analyze the communicative environment she helps to create and to sustain.<sup>402</sup> To explain the individual’s communicative nature as it is proposed in this study, another linguistic example will be of help: A native speaker of the German language is part of the community using and developing the language, as well as keeping it alive. The fact that she is not objectively evaluating the German speaking community from the outside cannot be used to argue that she is unable to evaluate the concept

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<sup>400</sup> It can be stated already, that – were the contents purely descriptive – the existence and usage of moral norms would have to be described as a social fiction. Additionally, the problems and doubts arising with regard to postmodern relativism could not be explained.

<sup>401</sup> For various reasons there recently has been a lot of research trying to formulate an accurate characterization of the normative structures underlying linguistic practice. Yet, it is still debated whether they exist, and if that is the case, whether they can merely be described or actually understood. Cf. Mitchell Green, “Speech Acts,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/speech-acts/> (2.4.2009).

<sup>402</sup> This thought is indebted to anthropological versions of the *Lebenswelt* in which the constructed cultural concepts are always already part of the reality humans seek to understand. Especially the focus on a functional identification of human nature draws on the respective approaches of philosophical anthropology. Cf. Lorenz, Einführung 14-19. In this way it is rather a *postmetaphysics* than a metaphysics in the traditional sense that takes form here. Cf. Annika Thiem, *Unbecoming Subjects – Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008) 205 (hereafter: Thiem, Subjects). For the idea of post-metaphysical considerations see also Benhabib, Self 4.

organizing the usage of the language. On the contrary, were she not able to speak German this fact would be used in favor of her inability to understand the linguistic concept. Thus, her being a subjective part of the reality she is supposed to research can in no way be a hindrance for her accumulation of knowledge. This knowledge could even be called objective in the framework of her linguistic community. She would be able to understand and describe the grammar appropriately, although it is to some extent in constant development and is not even used in the standard form by all members of the community.<sup>403</sup> It is important to thus re-establish the notion of a human faculty of cognition. As was discussed, the challenge of the cognitive subject with her ability to gather objective knowledge is one of the main points of postmodern critique.<sup>404</sup> It was proposed to completely dismiss the idea of objectivity with regard to a realistic reality outside of communicative practice.<sup>405</sup> Therefore, the self-referentiality of the observer, who is part of the communicative community that is shaped by and at the same time shaping her, is no longer problematic.<sup>406</sup>

Whether it is possible to find (or distinguish) transcultural and transhistorical (in this case grammatical) elements remains to be discussed.<sup>407</sup> So far it can be concluded that it is possible for a member of the foundationally communicative reality to arrive at a true characterization of this reality. According to the example presented above, the modeling of such a characterization is related to a certain amount of understanding. There are certainly

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<sup>403</sup> Cf. John Searle, *Sprechakte – Ein sprachphilosophischer Essay* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971) 23-34; Stanley Cavell, “Müssen wir meinen, was wir sagen?” Cavell, *Philosophie* 37-73, 41-47. Phenomenologically inspired intellectuals allow for the definition of knowledge through language (if sometimes among other things). Language renders knowledge possible by confining its boundaries – this much seems to be accepted even by scientists interested in religious and biological potentials. Cf. e.g. Hans-Peter Müller, “Freiheit der Wissenschaft – Verantwortung des Wissenschaftlers?” *Wissen als Verantwortung – Ethische Konsequenzen des Erkennens*, ed. Hans-Peter Müller (Stuttgart and Berlin: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1991) 141-159, 142, ff.

<sup>404</sup> The deep problems arising through this critique for everyday intellectual practice are discussed illuminatingly by Ina Schabert in *ibid.*, “Hardliners – Selbstzweifler – Traumtänzer – Lesende: Literaturwissenschaftler und Literaturwissenschaftlerinnen im Zeitalter des Poststrukturalismus,” *Kulturwissenschaftliche Literaturwissenschaft: Disziplinäre Ansätze – Theoretische Positionen – Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, eds. Ansgar Nünning and Roy Sommer, (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2004) 161-176 (hereafter: Nünning/Sommer). The two-faced stance postmodern critics have to take ensuingly is also exposed by Kathleen Lundeen. Cf. *ibid.*, “Who Has the Right to Feel? The Ethics of Literary Empathy,” Davis/Womack 83-92, 84.

<sup>405</sup> This complete dismissal is a distinctive difference to Tugendhat’s conception of ethics as he works with a traditionally realist notion of objectivity. In later works he even refrains from the heavily social and linguistic approach of ethics in Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen*. The fact that even radical constructivism remains realistic to a certain extent has also been observed by other intellectuals, for example, Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 33, f.

<sup>406</sup> Such a concept of the observer, which will be scrutinized in later chapters with regard to narrativity, is indebted to the idea of the observer in interactive constructivism. It is thus generated following pragmatist and constructivist assumptions. The main difference is my strong opposition to the claim that “there is no claim to true knowledge that *per se* warrants the consent of all observers and thus evades the possibility of relativization.” Stefan Neubert, “Pragmatism and Constructivism in Contemporary Philosophical Discourse,” *Interaktionistischer Konstruktivismus* (2001) <http://www.uni-koeln.de/hf/konstrukt/texte/download/pragmatism%20constructivism.pdf> (31.10.2009).

<sup>407</sup> Even a postmodern thinker like Rorty, who dismissed all ethics in favor of cultural politics, admits that philosophy in the traditional sense (as used in this thesis and by realists) would be possible, were there such transcultural and transhistorical items. Cf. Rorty, *Philosophie* 216.

members of a language community, who are unable to see through the usage of their mother tongue and grasp the underlying linguistic concept. Yet, the mere fact that not everyone might be able to understand the organizing principles of reality easily (or at all) does not by any means constitute a viable counter-argument to such a concept of communicative foundational reality. On the contrary, in all realistic concepts of reality access to truth was conceived to be problematic. Otherwise, the development of a discipline such as philosophy (and later philosophical anthropology and philosophy of science) would not have been necessary. A point that I want to stress again is that the intra-social and intra-communicative discoveries can only refer to intersubjective objectivity. What has been erased by the assumption that reality is basically communicative is the debasing meaning of the *only* in the preceding sentence. As communicative reality is the only existing reality, justification of a concept within this framework is sufficient. There is no extra-communicative standard of objectivity that could possibly be referred to in a traditionally realistic meaning. As a result, this seems, to me, a consequence of postmodern relativism that is genuinely true to its critique.<sup>408</sup>

As the postmodern cultural framework comes up with an increased interest in ethics as a foundationalist concept, it is curious that postmodern theorists, such as pragmatists, deny the foundation of ethics. Since numerous notions of autonomous individual action have also been present in the postmodern framework for quite some time, it is even more remarkable, how fervently such individualness has been dismissed and denied by postmodern theory.<sup>409</sup> In general it can be stated that the subjective point of view, from which human beings evaluate their lives, is central to postmodern theories. This viewpoint is rendered dubious, because a human being can never know her own origins, and can therefore never know herself completely. Additionally, the manner in which she can talk about herself is never her unique way of speaking, but something she learned from society.<sup>410</sup> Thus, her ability to talk about herself is at the same time her mode of existence as it is evidence

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<sup>408</sup> For the idea of intersubjective objectivity see also Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Konstanz: UVK, 2003) 659-666 (hereafter: Schütz/Luckmann). The constructive realistic notions of the world, initiated by Fritz Wallner and clearly identifying the traditional realistic concept of reality as an illusion, should be mentioned as an additional model for socio-communicative meditations. Constructivist realistic thought is most illuminatingly described by Kurt Greiner, *Therapie der Wissenschaft – Eine Einführung in die Methodik des Konstruktiven Realismus*, Culture and Knowledge 2 (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2005) (hereafter: Greiner, Therapie). It also systematically reasons that, once the belief in the illusion of a traditionally objectifiable reality is overcome, an alternative objectivity will become possible. For the exposure of objectivistic illusions see *ibid.* esp. 58,ff.

<sup>409</sup> Communicative ethics can be counted as an exception and (as the name implies) bear similarities to the present approach.

<sup>410</sup> Cf. Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1992) 22.

of the impossibility of the truthfulness of her account.<sup>411</sup> In summary, postmodern relativist approaches try to avoid harmonious or deterministic system theory and structural functionalism dismissing differences, as well as organic models dissolving the fragmentation and *Otherness* of society. Furthermore, they reject evolutionary models of society including concepts of perpetual progress, and metanarrations or concepts containing essentialism or reductionalism, too.<sup>412</sup> Yet, it would be as absurd to opt for one or a combination of these structures for purely utilitarian reasons – because otherwise ethics does not work – as it would be to dismiss these structures and any combination of them just because they allow the human mind to form normative values that can exclude others. The impossibility to refer to oneself before the development of a consciousness through means of communication is no viable argument for the dismissal of the possibility of universally valid human statements.

To exemplify this, the native speaker shall be pondered again. Even though she had no idea at all of her mother tongue before she learned to speak it, she can be considered an authority on linguistic questions after having mastered it – at least when she has developed the ability to understand the meta-level of language consisting of grammatical organization.<sup>413</sup> Hence, the fact that an individual cannot remember her existence before entering the community consciously does not necessarily mean that her *individualness* or her self cannot contain a stable core. Of course, this stability would only refer to her communicative existence and could not mean that her self had already existed before her socialization or continued to exist after her (communicative) death. The basic element not subject to changes could thus only have a functional and non-spiritual character. But the *individualness* does not have to rely on an *individualness* outside of the self existing within communicative relations, provided that there are transcultural and transhistorical elements within communication. The realistic (and originally religious) duality must be dismissed once and for all.

The fundamental ability of an individual to come to sustainable conclusions about (communicative) reality and about herself has thus been established. Postmodern relativity is thus relativized and a new postmodern realism or communicative foundationalism can be

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<sup>411</sup> Cf. Butler, Kritik 50,ff.

<sup>412</sup> Cf. Douglas Keller, “Zygmunt Baumanns postmoderne Wende,” Junge/Kron 303-324, 320.

<sup>413</sup> Whether there is a genetic pre-disposition towards learning the language will be left aside, because it would in no way be an encumbrance to the argument above. If ethics can be understood through the use of language, a quasi predisposition to ethics will be supposed that could imply a genetic predisposition to learn languages. Cf. Taylor, Sources 355,ff.

formulated to research a stable universal basis of ethics.<sup>414</sup> As a result of what has been discussed above, some important implications shall be noted:

- A) The insight in the true nature of reality requires a certain amount of understanding.
- B) There are thus two levels of communicative reality: 1. a level of the usage of communication; and 2. a level of communicational organization.
- C) Communication can be used without understanding its organization, as language can be used without truly understanding grammar.
- D) The concept of ethics as universally valid only makes sense, if we can find elements in communicative reality that bear two features: 1. they must be transcultural and transhistorical; and 2. they must include a level of description and a level of evaluation (as stated in II.ii. evaluative norms cannot be deduced from factual information).

#### **II.iii.iv. The Postmodern Individual in Literature and Self-Writing**

Saladin felt the past rush in like a tide, drowning him, filling his lungs with its revenant saltiness. *I'm not myself today*, he thought. The heart flutters. Life damages the living. None of us are ourselves. None of us are *like this*.<sup>415</sup>

The above quotation shows the dynamic concept of individualness that so accurately expresses the postmodern mood. In the postmodern age intellectuals have paid heightened attention to all the influential effects on human beings' decisions and actions. For instance, they would have interpreted Saladin as actually altering between selves. Yet, the dynamic development and behavior related to the environment could also be understood as a movement around a stable self-nucleus. In more tangible words: The literary character Saladin experiences an unpleasant memory and feels estranged from himself. He thus engages in a meta-conversation with himself gaining a meta-level experience. Thus, the concept of a self that can be destabilized by the environment in such a way that she feels completely estranged from herself. A postmodern interpretation would state that as there is no extra-communicative entity of *individualness* to each person, the subjects must be understood as empty and inherently connected to their environment; and thus, are absolutely

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<sup>414</sup> It might seem to be a sweeping blow to clarify the whole question of knowledge with regard to purely ethical matters. Yet, to answer ethical problems, it is necessary to develop a notion of universality. Especially as a postmodern relativist theorist – and my argumentative basis is clearly postmodern – I have to acknowledge the interdependency of all elements within a cultural framework and the frame of reference. This argument is made aptly for the relation between meta-philosophical questions and the related notions of gnosis, truth, and meaning by Richard Rorty in Rorty, *Philosophie* 215. For a different sort of realism with regard to language see also Davidson, *Subjective* 137,f.

<sup>415</sup> Salman Rushdie. *The Satanic Verses* (London and New York: Viking Penguin, 1988) 65.

relative. When the circumstances are arranged accordingly, the self will change in such a way that she actually forms a new self, a self that crucially differs from how she was construed before the change of circumstances. Some postmodern theorists acknowledge that there is a bodily aspect of each person, but such a material occurrence cannot matter for the core of the self. Such thinking would lead us directly to biological determination. Following radical postmodernism, I think persons can change drastically and do not have an extra-social or extra-communicative core.<sup>416</sup> However, as I have argued with regard to the historical perspective, the idea of an extra-communicative element is a consequence of the initial religious perspective, in which such an element would for instance have been referred to as a *soul*.<sup>417</sup> It is not necessary, that the personality *content* stays constant if one wants to generate a notion of stability. In order to still be able to talk about a stable entity it is sufficient to suppose a stable organizational system. The quotation could then be interpreted in relation to the effect of creation of an individual talking self. Whether or not the speaker actually feels estranged from herself, this effect is created by specific structures (use of the first person).<sup>418</sup>

Hence, the important structure that has to be analyzed in part III. is the communicative (or literary) construction of the self. Which field of research could be more adequate for such a study than self-writing? Although it is not the focus of investigation, it might be helpful to take a moment to discuss autobiography, a special form of self-writing.<sup>419</sup> In this thesis the concept of the self standing outside all her communicative relations is dismissed. In this regard, the connection between a person recreating her *self* within a representation of her communicative relations as a literary character seems an unnecessarily complex area of study. These implications need to be dealt with to a certain extent in an analysis of autobiographical writing; however, as previously mentioned it is not the focus of this disserta-

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<sup>416</sup> This is a postmodern argument often misunderstood as denying bodily existence. Yet, it only shows that the mere existence of something does not matter in any important way for human interaction. It is always the interpretation (the communicative meaning) that matters. In this way, a friend's gun possession is a completely different thing than an arch-fiend's gun possession. Cf. Alexander Wendt, "Der Internationalstaat: Identität und Strukturwandel in der internationalen Politik," *Perspektiven der Weltgesellschaft*, ed. Ulrich Beck (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998) 381-410.

<sup>417</sup> For a discussion of the philosophical concept of this problem, the dualism between body and soul, see John R. Searle, *Geist, Sprache und Gesellschaft* (transl. Harvey P. Gavagai) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004) 53-83 (hereafter: Searle, *Geist*).

<sup>418</sup> Cf. the comparison of realistic philosophical *terms* and the realistic notion of a person in Rorty, *Philosophie* 216.

<sup>419</sup> Literary analysts would not confuse the two genres, but from a theoretical point of view focused on the structural organization of writing there is no crucial difference. For discussions of the ethical implications of autobiographies see e.g. Richard Freadman, "Moral luck in Paris: *A Moveable Feast* and the ethics of autobiography," Adamson/Freadman/Parker 134-160; Paul John Eakin, "The unseemly profession," *ibid.* 161-180. As these analyses show, the focus on autobiography is often connected to a rather limited view of the concept of individuality.



tion.<sup>420</sup> Instead, purely – or at least mostly – fictional settings of self-writing have been chosen. An additional advantage of this choice is the heightened variance of narrative situations. The chosen novels all display complex narrative situations such as the narration in the first person plural in *Suicides*. Thus, the creation of identity that allows a person (or persons) to speak within a communicative framework can be explored on different levels and the results will be far more comprehensive than if actual autobiographies were studied. Even though autobiographical writing, as a literary phenomenon, has increased in the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, this can be classified as a general increase of self-writing in the postmodern era.<sup>421</sup>

This brings us to a question of terminology, because what is generally deemed postmodernist literature has to be clearly differentiated from what is meant by the average literary development in postmodern times. *Postmodernist writing* is a term of literary criticism referring to a set of techniques and a certain style. Ideologically it can be linked to the intention to create more tolerance and a repression-free community.<sup>422</sup>

In all eras ... both writer and artist create their work from within the same cultural setting and hence inevitably express to a larger or lesser extent the dominant concepts of their time.<sup>423</sup>

In this sense it must be seen as related to postmodern theory and also to the implications of relativity. In the art of writing, modernist and postmodernist writing techniques can be interpreted as two parts of the same expression of postmodern theory. Postmodernist litera-

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<sup>420</sup> The narrative situations in the novels are at least to a certain extent autobiographic. In contemporary autobiography studies the problem of a postmodern and supposedly dubious individual telling her story has been identified and treated. Thus, the issue of the possible inconsistency of the narrator and his story has also been analyzed intra-disciplinary. As this thesis approaches the role of the individual only as part of the general problem of a coherent ethics, and as it has a social constructivist approach, it cannot focus on such intra-disciplinary questions. But they will of course be considered in the discussion of self-writing. For an intra-disciplinary approach see for example Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters, eds., *Autobiography & Postmodernism* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994) or Regine Hampel, *"I Write Therefore I Am" Fictional Autobiography and the Idea of Selfhood in the Postmodern Age*, Diss U Tübingen 2000 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001) (hereafter: Hampel, *Autobiography*).

<sup>421</sup> An increasing number of novels narrated in the first person singular are published. In addition to this, autobiographical writing has experienced a downright boom over the second half of the twentieth century. For the extraordinary boost in the production as well as in the critique of autobiography see Bendel, *Requirements* 64, ff.

<sup>422</sup> Cf. Winfried Fluck, "Literarische Postmoderne und Poststrukturalismus: Thomas Pynchon" Hempfer, *Poststrukturalismus* 25-38, 25. This tendency towards tolerance in postmodern theory is aptly characterized by Douglas Keller as follows.: "Diese Veränderungen im gegenwärtigen theoretischen Paradigma können mit Veränderungen in den Wahrnehmungsmodi ausgedrückt werden, die in der Literatur, in der Kunst im Allgemeinen, in der Kultur und im alltäglichen Leben im weitesten Sinne auftreten. Solche kulturellen und theoretischen Entwicklungen können deshalb als Teil eines neuen postmodernen Paradigmas gesehen werden, das auch den Willen beinhaltet, Grenzen zu sprengen, den Willen zu transdisziplinären Denken [sic], Eklektizismus, Betonung radikaler Differenz und den Angriff gegen Realismus und Fundamentalismus." Douglas Keller, "Zygmunt Baumans postmoderne Wende," *Zygmunt Bauman: Soziologie zwischen Postmoderne und Ethik*, eds. Matthias Junge and Thomas Kron (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002) 303-324 (hereafter: Junge/Kron) 319.

<sup>423</sup> Murray Roston, *Modernist Patterns in Literature and the Visual Arts* (New York: New York UP, 2000) 1.

ture features a discontinuous form of narration, opposing the assignment of a distinct genre and challenging hierarchies.<sup>424</sup> Yet, the popularity of such postmodernist narrative strategies reached its peak during the 1980s, after which a return to realistic narrative structures can be detected.<sup>425</sup> Postmodernist literature does not equal postmodern theory, but the deployed narration strategies create a sense of a dynamic and instable version of reality. Additionally, these strategies refer to their construction as a text, thus penetrating the illusion of reality.<sup>426</sup> This effect is also the desired realization behind relativist theoretical assertions. In other words, they intend to highlight that there is no *real*, extra-communicative reality. Postmodernist texts achieve this by displaying the techniques, with which a sense of reality is created inside the world of inter-personal communication and at the same time deconstructing this sense of reality. They seem to direct the reader's attention to the fact that every element of the world that can be perceived by human beings is created within and through a communicational context.

Yet, as argued, the mere fact that the world is constructed is no proof that humans cannot find universal organizational standards. I propose that these standards should be searched within the narrative strategies creating a realistic impression of reality or a realistic impression of an individual. In the same way that postmodernist texts stress style and their quality as a text, postmodern theory stresses the *constructedness* of the world. Realistic narratives eclipse the style of writing, and focus on the narration, the *meaning* of the text, and the sense individuals offer to their world. In this sense, traditionally realistic concepts of philosophy similarly pretend that there is an exterior meaning to the text(ure) of what can be perceived. Yet, even though realistic narratives written in the postmodern age at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries construct a believable illusion of a realistic setting, they are still concerned with postmodern topics, such as tolerance and the exclusion of the other.<sup>427</sup> However, they do not approach these themes by pointing to the inherent relativity of all standards (as is done by postmodernist narratives and postmodern theory), but rather by offering alternative standards or alternative meanings through realistic narration.

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<sup>424</sup> Cf. Heinz Ickstadt, "Die un stabile Postmoderne oder: Wie postmodern ist der zeitgenössische amerikanische Roman?" Hempter, Poststrukturalismus 39-51, 39.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>426</sup> Cf. ibid. 43.

<sup>427</sup> Cf. e.g. the hermaphrodite as narrator in Eugenides, *Middlesex*.

As argued in a philosophical context, a normative judgment can only be challenged by alternative normative judgments.<sup>428</sup> Thus, it seems far more effective to create alternative narrative realities in which different morals or concepts of evaluation are applied, rather than displaying the construction of reality, if a normative goal such as an increase in tolerance is pursued. The setting of this study has been presented as the search for a universally valid basis for ethics. In previous chapters various moral goals, like the amendment of international crisis communication, have been established. In the end, they all arrive at an increase in tolerance. If people can access the organization of human ethics in an easier fashion, the understanding of the crises will increase. If this does not directly lead to more tolerance, it will certainly advance peaceful cohabitation on the planet. In the preceding discussions, postmodern relativist theory in its usual form has been dismissed as an adequate representation of the communicative situation in this world, and as an adequate method to analyze ethics. Instead, a new approach, with recourse to realistic techniques has been taken. Thus, the communicative foundationalist ethics proposed in this study follows the path laid out by the literary development. However, this movement is not exclusively a literary development – as previously discussed, the postmodern age displays a distinct return to ethical questions and to realistic concepts. The movement within philosophy is only one example for a near miss of the implications of the postmodern ethical turn. As I intend to show through the literary analyses, the narrational turn displayed in postmodern literature (as distinct from postmodernist literature) offers not only a return to realistic concepts while retaining postmodern pluralist topics, but also a model for a sensible combination of realism and relativism. Hence, the literary research can be interpreted in two ways:

- 1) Starting from the point of view of the literary critic, literature is understood in a culture poetical manner as the representation of postmodern discourse, whose organization will be analyzed. On a theoretical level this leads to the argument that the reorganization of narrative form in the postmodern age has to contain meaningful information for the interpretation of the return to realism in philosophy.
- 2) Starting from the philosophical point of view, communication is understood as the origin of human reality (distinct from human material existence). This non-cognitivist ap-

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<sup>428</sup> Above, this was argued for from a cognitivist basis following Tugendhat. An alternative argumentation based on a non-cognitive background is made by Richard Rorty in Rorty, *Philosophie* 343.f.

proach to reality essentially leads to the study of (written) communication. Literature displays the practice of moral behavior through realistic narratives.<sup>429</sup>

The organization in realistic narratives seems to be the only way in which ethics can exist.<sup>430</sup> Postmodernist texts often dissolve features such as a comprehensible plot and consistent characters, whereas the more mimetic texts of the (later) postmodern era entail these features. Self-writing still or again manages to create comprehensible individuals, even though – or perhaps precisely because – it was (and still is) surrounded by a postmodern atmosphere. It is remarkable that self-writing actually thrived in the postmodern era, even though relativistic tendencies have constantly attacked its basis: the consistent individual. The effect created through this narrative form is one of feigned objective representation of a subjective or individual point of view. In addition, it stresses the act of narrating (of creating meaning) as opposed to the narrative.<sup>431</sup> This is not the postmodern stress on the fact that the story is a construct, even though the popularity of a subjective point of view could also be interpreted as a growing interest in the seemingly implied relativity. The subjective point of view I am referring to, is the idea of an individual telling her life story, is the crucial factor for this analysis, as it permits scrutiny of the organization of the individual. In a way, the idea of a first-person narrator, telling her story, always implies the idea of success.<sup>432</sup> The one who is able to talk about her life has survived and has the power to make sense of what has happened to her. This idea endows the narrator with a certain autonomy and control. Her subjective way of narrating gives her story an individual characteristic and the status of an autonomous human being, who has an individual point of view resulting from her own life. This element of autonomy, originally springing from a realistic concept of reality, will be comprehensively included in communicative founda-

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<sup>429</sup> In a third way, such an approach also engages in dissolving the dispute of accurate literary criticism. It used to be preoccupied with text-immanent interpretations, before it turned to viewing literature purely as part of the social, historical, and political situation in the postmodern era. First, the text was perceived as a truth in itself, then as a mere reflection of the truth. Cf. J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 2,ff (hereafter: Miller, Ethics).

<sup>430</sup> J. Hillis Miller also comes to the conclusion that ethics can only be communicated through a coherent (or realistic) narrative. Cf. *ibid.* 3,ff. For a more general argument in favor of the relation between narratives and ethics with regard to Martha Nussbaum see Cora Diamond, "Martha Nussbaum and the need for novels," Adamson/Freadman/Parker 39-64.

<sup>431</sup> Cf. Hampel, *Autobiography* 28,ff.

<sup>432</sup> For implication of success see Juli Zeh, "Zur Hölle mit der Authentizität! Der Echtheitswahn der Unterhaltungsindustrie verführt dazu, auch in der Literatur nach wirklichen Personen und Vorgängen zu fahnden. Dabei geht verloren, was Literatur ist. Ein Zwischenruf," *DIE ZEIT* 21 September 2006, 59,f (hereafter: Zeh, Hölle) or Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead – A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 2002) 118. For a narrative approach to subjectivity see also Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship* 56, 60.

tionalist ethics in part IV.<sup>433</sup> Providing meaning to the world from an individual perspective is understood as a cultural practice embedded in the functionalities of communicative human nature. Thus, the theoretical considerations have been embedded in and combined with a cultural study, which in this case is focused on literature.<sup>434</sup> It remains to be seen whether there are such transcultural and transhistorical elements within the organization of written communication, if they include valid information regarding ethics, and what in actuality is this information.

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<sup>433</sup> The communicative foundationalist concept of ethics is non-cognitivist in many senses, yet, it cannot deny autonomy if it is displayed as a tangible element of communicative reality. Thus, an important notion of how many non-cognitivists understand philosophy becomes apparent: changes in theory can only mirror changes in culture. Douglas Keller discusses this phenomenon regarding Bauman's theory in relation to the postmodern changes of the sciences in *ibid.*, "Zygmunt Baumans postmoderne Wende," *Junge/Kron* 303-324; 318, f.

<sup>434</sup> Cf. Rorty, *Philosophie* 255-265.

### **III. Literary Analyses**

[O]ur living prompts us to tell, and our telling affects how we go on living.<sup>435</sup>

This part is meant to establish the deep connection between written communicative acts, i.e. literature, and human's communicative nature. The focus on the individual and her narrative generation and maintenance will be deepened and refined in the following literary analyses. The understanding of narrativity's significance for ethics is most important; therefore, it seems inevitable to address philosophical issues within some parts of literary interpretations. But mainly, this is meant to be a section about narrativity and individualness as they have been introduced in chapter III.iii.iv. The combination of this chapter's findings with the theoretical framework will be conducted in part IV. The cultural poetic setting of this study is supposed to unravel the narrative constitution of human existence. The postmodern intersubjective understanding of human will and action as narrationally constituted will be especially focused upon.<sup>436</sup>

#### **III.i. Setting and Procedure of the Literary Analyses**

The following literary interpretations are conducted against the background of the twofold framework introduced in chapter II.iii.iii. The results obtained regarding the organization of ethics in human communication will constitute the foundations for a communicative foundationalist ethics. The interpretations will be limited to the ethically relevant aspects of the texts. To avoid repetition each novel will be scrutinized for the most prevalent aspects only. Yet, as no choice of a sample can be understood as innocent, especially in light of empirical verification, the text range can be debated. However, if there is a trans-cultural and transhistorical foundation of ethics in the means of human communication, then it will be explicitly or implicitly visible through all of its forms, be those the present novels or any other written, spoken, or alternative means of conveyance. The persuasiveness of the deduction of implicitly graspable universal foundations will rest in the inner coherence of the narration in which they are included as there is no extra-communicative standard to prove them. Whether the argument made in the following is convincing will be debated in part IV.

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<sup>435</sup> Phelan, *Rhetoric* 204.

<sup>436</sup> For an insight in the constitution of human will see Reiner Wimmer, "Anthropologie und Ethik – Erkundungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände," *Demmerling, Vernunft* 215-245 227-231.

### III.i.i. Method of Interpretation

The novels will be roughly treated according to their dates of first publication. The mainly chronological order helps to integrate changes in narrational style. Although no novels of high postmodernist writing have been chosen, the first samples still show some postmodernist techniques. By following this historical change towards a more mimetic narrational style chronologically, the concept of the individual in the postmodern era can be traced. The research to date on the novels will be presented along with the remaining work of the authors in the following chapter. It is of no higher consequence for the results, yet, as this study is set in a cultural poetic vein, the closer sociohistorical framework in which the chosen novels stand should at least be mentioned. Additionally, the approaches of other literary critics are naturally an inspiration for the following interpretations within the present study. As brought up above, postmodern literary critics have not resorted to a realistic approach because it would contradict their initial socio-cultural pluralist stance and would not fit the tradition of postmodern theory in which they understand themselves to work. The same holds true for other postmodern theorists, who have often resorted to the analysis of literature for a better understanding of the socio-cultural situation. Moral realists usually do not regard literary studies as an appropriate field of research to come to ethical foundations. In this way, the following approach is innovative, even though its methods are part of cultural studies, with regard to theory as well as to literary criticism, and even though a communicative ethical concept as such already exists.<sup>437</sup>

For a better understanding of the background of literary criticism in which this project stands, the study of self-writing shall be discussed further. To clarify the method of interpretation some of the previously discussed points will be brought up again in the light of literary and cultural studies. Thereby, their significance for the literary analyses will become unambiguous. The study of self-writing must of course be placed among the bigger discussion of narrative techniques in general. Usually, technique in postmodern fiction is described as “the excluded middle and linguistic play, ... [as] the demystification of grand narratives and other totalizing systems of knowledge ....”<sup>438</sup> Culture poetically inspired critics understand this style as the expression of “a world transformed by nuclear energy,

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<sup>437</sup> As it is not my aim to give a detailed account of the field of cultural studies (and/or the German *Kulturwissenschaften*), my approach to the field rests tentative and focuses on the points that relate to issues of twentieth and twenty-first century theories in general. For an overview of the specifics of current literary and cultural studies cf. e.g. Doris Bachmann-Medick, “Kultur als Text? Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften jenseits des Textmodells,” Nünning/Sommer 147-159.

<sup>438</sup> Shawn Smith, *Pynchon and History – Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) 1 (hereafter: Smith, Pynchon).

global war, and the technocratic reorganization of society.”<sup>439</sup> Postmodern characters are analyzed as existing in a world in which their individuality and even sometimes their very being is endangered.<sup>440</sup> Thus, the moral resistance of characters to hostile or fracturing environments has often been picked out as a theme in their discussion.<sup>441</sup> This thesis proposes that the new and more realist narrational style following the heyday of postmodernist narration in the 1980s should be judged as advancement in terms of ethics.<sup>442</sup> The novels discussed in this study have been chosen for their (mostly) realist narrational concepts. Thereby, my challenge of the understanding of the subject as completely dependent on her environment will be underlined.<sup>443</sup> Thus, I propose that postmodernist readings have to be rewritten in this way. The trace of a re-emerging communicatively realist concept of the individual could be constructed in detail by revising existing postmodern relativist interpretations and scrutinizing texts of high postmodernism. Yet, such a project would go well beyond this study’s scope. I do not attempt a comparison of narrational styles, but an interpretation of the *new* style – merging realist and relativist elements – for its meaning in terms of ethics.<sup>444</sup>

So far the connection between the individual and ethics has not been fundamentally formulated in literary studies. At least, the means of producing individuality (i.e. the underlying individualness) have not been analyzed as a possible basis for an ethical system. Regardless, ethics has of course been identified and discussed as the core problem at the heart of postmodernity.<sup>445</sup> The writers of high postmodernist fiction tended to construct their universes similar to the already discussed poststructuralist theorists.

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<sup>439</sup> Smith, Pynchon 2.

<sup>440</sup> Robert Burden, for example, talks about the “fragmented nature of modern identity” when referring to the second half of the twentieth century. Burden, Fowles 27. For a discussion of the postmodern fragmentation of the individual in terms of psychology (with respect to sociological theories) see Hans Joachim Busch, ed., *Spuren des Subjekts – Positionen psychoanalytischer Sozialpsychologie*, Psychoanalytische Sozialpsychologie 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) (hereafter: Busch, Spuren).

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Smith, Pynchon 2.

<sup>442</sup> For a discussion of the literary and theoretical uncertainties concerning the subject in high postmodern times cf. Burden, Fowles 2-27. The current tendency in cultural studies is to actually turn away from foundations, so that the path chosen in this study can be understood as a new approach within this context. Cf. Bachmann-Medick, Turns 8-13. It is only within the wider philosophical or rather *philosophical-scientific* debate that this mode of thinking finds its precedents.

<sup>443</sup> As discussed in chapter II.iii., the identity of the individual in postmodern theories has been increasingly defined by her environment. In psychoanalytical terms this has been analyzed as a transmission from inside-generated to outside-generated identities. Cf. Rolf Haubl, “Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen,” Busch, Spuren 111-133, 111.

<sup>444</sup> The interferences of mimetic style and postmodernist relativization are usually allowed for by all critics of postmodernist literature (even if they explicitly understand themselves as part of the postmodernist tradition). This is simply because without a basic realist assumption a coherent interpretation would not be possible. Postmodernist characters are thus often described as *borderline* individuals. Cf. e.g. Pettersson, World 21.

<sup>445</sup> Cf. e.g. Smith, Pynchon 15,ff. For theory (and philosophy) this identification was discussed in part II. For philosophy as well as for literary theory the practical field in which the importance of ethics becomes evident



[P]ostmodernists are conscious of fiction as artifice and turn to the tradition of the novel to revitalize their fiction .... The continual revision of our view of the universe in this century ... suggests that reality itself, like fiction, is a construction. By conspicuous use of a genre ... postmodernists can simultaneously tell a story and reveal its artifice.<sup>446</sup>

I propose that this mode of reading is inappropriate, as it suggests a normative effect: constructed reality necessarily leads to skepticism of values.<sup>447</sup> Postmodernist fiction can only reveal the constructedness of the universe as leading to a normatively significant relativity by implicitly believing in the necessity of realistically conceived values for universal norms. Moreover, taking the supposed *failure* of human individuals as a core concept for ethics misses the empirical communicative reality of human individuals and its narrative organization.<sup>448</sup> Self-writing seems to be the ultimate counter-evidence to a complete disintegration of coherent individuality, as its mere existence proves that a coherent subjective narration is possible (to some extent). It seems far more fruitful (and less ignorant of the communicative reality) to try to formulate a new communicatively founded realism than to try to press old concepts of objectivity and truth into pluralistic postmodern forms.

Self-writing can thus be identified as a phenomenon of importance for theories of individuality within cultural and literary studies.<sup>449</sup> Even though autobiography is not explicitly discussed in this study, elements of autobiographical studies will be used in the analyses.<sup>450</sup> Writing from a first-person perspective confronts the reader with alternatives that functionally read and feel like her own way of perceiving and living. Comparison is

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is usually the field of political decisions. For an informative study on literary theory and moral implications of postmodernity (drawing on relativity as a new source of stability) see for example Mohanty, Theory.

<sup>446</sup> Pettersson, World 14.

<sup>447</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 15, f.

<sup>448</sup> Haubl for example argues in psychological terms that absolute postmodern flexibility is impossible. Cf. Rolf Haubl, "Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen," Busch, Spuren 111-133; 115, ff.

<sup>449</sup> These fields of research cannot be clearly differentiated. Usually, they are strongly overlapping as well in objects of research as in methods. Cf. Aleida Assmann, *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft: Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen*, Grundlagen der Anglistik und Amerikanistik 27 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006) 7 (hereafter: Assmann, Einführung).

<sup>450</sup> For an overview of the typical postmodern discussion of the decentred self in relation to autobiographical writing cf. Edmund Smyth, "Introduction," *Autobiography and the Existential Self – Studies in Modern French Writing*, eds. Terry Keefe and Edmund Smyth (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995) 1-5 (hereafter: Smyth/Keefe). Doris Günther especially expounds the problems of the relation between the representational claims of autobiography and postmodern forms of writing: Doris Günther, *Autobiographie und Nouveau Roman: Ein Beitrag zur literarischen Diskussion der Postmoderne*, Text und Welt 4, Diss U Münster 1993, (Münster and Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1994) 7-28. The question of defining genres is neglected in this study as the basic assumption of universal foundations renders such issues insignificant. If attended, matters of definition are always problematic, and the genre of autobiography has proven to be no exception. Cf. e.g. Paul Jay, *Being in the Text – Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1984) 14, ff (hereafter: Jay, Text). To dismiss the need for such a clarification even further, intellectuals as Spengemann have discussed a tendency of autobiography "to assume fictional forms in the modern era." William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography – Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1980) xiii. For a discussion of the postmodern *blurring of genres* see for example Caroline B. Brettel, "Blurred Genres and Blended Voices: Life History, Biography, Autobiography, and the Auto/Ethnography of Women's Lives," *Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Explorations in Anthropology, ed. Deborah E. Reed-Danahay (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997) 223-245 (hereafter: Reed-Danahay, Self).

therefore almost inherently implemented in this form of writing.<sup>451</sup> It is a special sort of personalized comparison, of questioning not life in general from some objective observer's perspective, but challenging every reader's personal life.<sup>452</sup> Besides the contrasting effect, an intrinsic connection between self, narration of the self, and memory and accordingly consciousness is established.<sup>453</sup> Additionally, writing from a first-person perspective entails certain constrictions in contrast to, for instance, an omniscient narrator. By accepting these constraining features self-writing can produce a more intensive and realistic version of a character.<sup>454</sup>

Some literary critics such as H. Porter Abbott distinguish between writing as an alteration of and as a means of confirmation (of herself) for the writer.<sup>455</sup> I prefer to understand this communication between narrator and audience as examples of negotiation within narratively organized communicative reality. The writer or speaker is thus not conceived as a completely autonomous person willfully changing her life, but coming to life through her narration, which has to follow social, cultural and foundational communicative rules to be understandable. The task of identifying core concepts of the first person is a highly complex task as it is essential to cross the many sociohistorical "idioms of selfhood" differing from culture to culture.<sup>456</sup> Yet, postmodern allegiances to plurality with regard to literature seem to be contested by the simple fact that bestselling novels' popularity often spreads internationally, i.e. cross-culturally.<sup>457</sup> It is only natural to suppose that some elements of narrational reality (and thus also some elements of self-writing) must be intercultural. The unbroken popularity of writers who lived during past centuries even suggests that these elements must have a transcultural *and* transhistorical character.

I even wish to propose that the currently growing popularity of forms of self-writing in literature illustrates that the members of the sociohistorical discourse have realized ex-

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<sup>451</sup> Cf. Terry Keefe, "Conclusion," Smyth/Keefe 183-193.

<sup>452</sup> It thus corresponds nicely with the idea of the native speaker, evaluating her mother tongue while involved in speaking it. Therefore, it seems the perfect area of empirical research on identity and individuality. At least a significant intersection between the self existing in sociohistorical contexts and the literary self (who are functionally equated in this study) is usually assumed in postmodern approaches. Cf. e.g. Doris Kolesch, *Das Schreiben des Subjekts: Zur Inszenierung ästhetischer Subjektivität bei Baudelaire, Barthes und Adorno* (Wien: Passagen, 1996); Daniela Langer, *Wie man wird, was man schreibt – Sprache, Subjekt und Autobiographie bei Nietzsche und Barthes*, Zur Genealogie des Schreibens 4 (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2005); Matthias Thibaut, *Sich-selbst-Erzählen – Schreiben als poetische Lebenspraxis Untersuchungen zu diaristischen Prosatexten von Goethe, Jean Paul, Dostojewskij, Rilke und anderen*, Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik 239 (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 1990) esp. 24-29 (hereafter: Thibaut, Schreiben).

<sup>453</sup> Cf. e.g. Christel Naughton, *LETTERS FROM THE SELF – Concepts of the Self in the Life Writing of Native Canadian Women*, Diss. U Osnabrück, 2006 4-49; Thibaut, Schreiben 31.

<sup>454</sup> Cf. Roy Pascal, *Die Autobiographie – Gehalt und Gestalt* (transl. M. Schaible), (Stuttgart and Berlin: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1960) 189-207.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. H. Porter Abbott, *Diary Fiction – Writing as Action* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1984) 9.

<sup>456</sup> Michael Herzfeld, "The Taming of the Revolution," Reed-Danahay, Self 169-194, 169.

<sup>457</sup> The same holds true for some philosophical theories' international fame.

actly these limits of postmodern ideas.<sup>458</sup> Identity cannot be understood in a postmodern fragmented way in social relationships by human beings. To prove this, I will show what individuality or personal identity – terms, which I deliberately use as more or less interchangeable – mean in some of the first-person narrations in the following. Thus, I will offer alternative interpretations of novels written in postmodern times which still show postmodernist characteristics to a certain extent. Even though I try to reintroduce certain aspects of realism into the postmodern view, this study’s approach still shares the (specifically poststructuralist) idea that there is no *dehors de texte*.

This takes us back to Lacan’s and Derrida’s idea – based on Saussure – that the self can be compared to the linguistic structure of signs in which everything is based on differences. Central to all texts therefore is a poststructuralist notion of language and the idea that there is nothing outside the “text”, that is, “text” in a wider semiotic sense as a structure of signs in which one part only makes sense in its relationship to other parts. This “making sense” is always a process, it is never a finished product ....<sup>459</sup>

In this way I do not mean to reduce humanity or culture to literary texts as such, but to refocus the idea of a linguistically and communicatively shaped world.<sup>460</sup> Moreover, I insist that difference only makes sense with respect to some kind of standard. This is not a new idea, yet, taking it seriously within the postmodern frame of mind means opening relativism for a universal structure. It means reconciling postmodern plurality with the idea of foundations without dismissing the underlying constructivist assumption. This can also be expressed as a conflict between dynamic and static elements. As the dynamic aspects have been investigated by countless postmodern researchers, I intend to engage in the description of its static functional characteristics.

American literature seems an explicitly adequate field of research for matters of individuality as the relation or opposition between the individual and her society has always had a thematic prominence. This relationship is characteristically created as a conflict between the private individual and her social environment.<sup>461</sup> Yet, the individual cannot be easily discerned from her community. The context of cultural poetics is influenced greatly

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<sup>458</sup> For the growing popularity cf. e.g. Hampel 11, 22-26. For the already existing critique within the body of postmodern relativist theory see e.g. Shane Phelan, “The Space of Justice: Lesbians and Democratic Politics,” *Social Postmodernism – Beyond Identity Politics*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies, eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995) 332-356 (hereafter: Nicholson/Seidman).

<sup>459</sup> Hampel, *Autobiography* 249.

<sup>460</sup> This notion of culture initially coined by Clifford Geertz has been challenged recently, but I still think that it is a good basis for understanding. For the problems concerning this view see Doris Bachmann-Medick, “Kultur als Text? Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften jenseits des Textmodells,” *Nünning/Sommer* 147-159.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. e.g. Stephen Harris, *The Fiction of Gore Vidal and E. L. Doctorow – Writing the Historical Self* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2002) 9 (hereafter: Harris, Fiction). A typically American way of writing is highly concerned with the integrity of individuals. Cf. *ibid.* 28.

by the views of ethnologist Clifford Geertz, who understands cultures as texts.<sup>462</sup> As in cultural studies and *Kulturwissenschaften* in general, I understand literature as deeply embedded in the whole sociohistorical context.<sup>463</sup> Even though postmodern theories regarding ethics tend to neglect this aspect, there are certain concepts within cultural, literary, and social studies with which identity is usually described. Ascribed or chosen identities are decisive for social interaction of any kind concerning the recognizability of individuals. The notion of a person is used to describe communities ranging back to the early tribal structures. Becoming a person usually means to be included in a group, which is linked to certain rites. To describe (post)modern personhood, cultural studies often employ the notion of the *subject*, referring to inner functions relating to environmental norms. Developing a personal identity always means the inclusion and simultaneous exclusion of elements, means identifying with and distinguishing from environmental concepts. The individual can only become an individual in contact with communicative partners.<sup>464</sup> The communicative understanding of personal identity is impossible without the respective social or collective identity. In cultural studies the question of collective identity is often understood as a problem compared to personal identity. Yet, as many realist theorists understand it, I see no problem in understanding the generation of individual identity and collective identity as simultaneous processes.<sup>465</sup>

I suppose that literary communication can serve as an example for human communication as such. Berel Lang has stated with regard to the author that “expression reveals the agent.”<sup>466</sup> In the same vein I have proposed that human communication reveals something about their communicative state of existence. This puts the present study close to an understanding of cultural production that combines cultural and literary studies by *contextualization*.

[Die Praxis der Kontextualisierung] betrifft erstens den Wechselbezug zwischen Texten bzw. Ausdrucksformen und übergreifenden kulturellen Zusammenhängen ..., zweitens die Einbindung der

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<sup>462</sup> Cf. Clifford Geertz, *Dichte Beschreibung – Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme* (transl. Brigitte Luchesi and Rolf Bindemann), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987).

<sup>463</sup> For the differentiation between cultural studies and *Kulturwissenschaften* see Assmann, Einführung 25. Against the usual practice of cultural poetics I do not include alternative practical texts into the interpretation as I am not in search of a specific sociohistorical interpretation of a given culture, but in search of a criterion underlying all cultures with respect to the individual and to ethics.

<sup>464</sup> Cf. Assmann, Einführung 206-209, 217. The notion of *becoming* might be misleading, because the individual is linked to her mind (and consciousness) in communicative reality. Before entering social discourse (at least partly) consciously, no individual as such exists. Individuality must be understood as a social construct, only possible within the social context.

<sup>465</sup> Cf. Searle, Geist 134-160. Still, an individual first has to develop an understanding of herself as a person. This aspect will be discussed in detail in part IV.

<sup>466</sup> Berel Lang, *WRITING and the moral self* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 12 (hereafter: Lang, Writing).

Texte in umfassendere kulturelle Deutungs- und Inszenierungsformen .... Schließlich geht es drittens um eine detailbewusste Ausdeutung von Gefühlsbegriffen, religiösen Vorstellungen und Verhaltensmustern in literarischen Texten unter dem Aspekt der Verdichtung kultureller Bedeutungen, aber auch ihrer fiktiven Brechungen.<sup>467</sup>

This study approaches the contextualization of texts in a mostly theoretical and epistemological way. Author and critic Christine Brooke-Rose describes the concentration on linguistic contexts initiated by the general relativistic tendencies as follows:

‘[S]tory’ has replaced ‘philosophy’, ‘model’, ‘paradigm’, ‘theory’, and may even swallow up the supposedly non-paradigmatic Fact of the matter: It is the case, say the philosophers, it is a case-history, say the psychoanalysts, it is a model, say the scientists, it is a story say the poets and some philosophers, it is the repetition of an absent story, say the post-Lacanian deconstructivists.<sup>468</sup>

When put in metaphorical phrases like this, speaking, existing, and acting as a human seem to be very closely connected to the human faculty of imagination. Indeed, one could propose that the human being is a “*Homo imaginans*” – as the creation of a story is an act of imagination.<sup>469</sup> Yet, if there is one lesson to be learned from the late-postmodern intellectuals than it is that there is no story without context and that there is no fact without a story.

Communicative foundationalists could expand this assertion by stating that the mere fact that human beings (thereby reducing would-be realistic universalist assertions to human reality) have always told stories points to universal foundations. These stories reveal imaginative faculties, yet, these faculties are realized (and thus exist) only through narration. Moreover, the fact that everyone can somehow understand the others’ stories – at the very least recognize them as stories – must be significant. A fictional text is only fictional as a whole, whereas each sentence or each word is actual (or a variation of the actual). Its existence in the sociohistorical environment is actual by its being accepted as fictional, therefore it can serve as a field of research on the question how the self narrates its way into being.<sup>470</sup> The position of literature as always existing in-between expresses a deep truth about language (and communication) as well as about human beings – neither would exist without the other. Communication has always and will always stand between human beings as well as human beings will always stand between their acts of communication. It is thus all the more interesting to investigate how *they speak themselves* as individuals.

The novels discussed in the following are thus divided into two thematic groups according to the creation of the pivotal individuals through narration. In III.ii. a fractured in-

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<sup>467</sup> Doris Bachmann-Medick, “Kultur als Text? Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften jenseits des Textmodells,” Nünning/Sommer 147-159; 152.

<sup>468</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, *Stories, theories and things* (New York et al.: Cambridge UP, 1991) 6 (hereafter: Brooke-Rose, *Stories*).

<sup>469</sup> Colin McGinn, *Mindsight – Image, Dream, Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass. a. London: Harvard UP, 2004) 5.

<sup>470</sup> Brooke-Rose, *Stories* 25. No distinction between reader-focused or text- respectively author-focused theory will be made. For an insight into the different approaches see *ibid.* 16, ff; 204-211.

dividual who cannot answer the forceful moral norms of her society can be detected. The individuals' relation to themselves is characterized by aloofness and insecurity. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen*, and Jeffrey Eugenides' *Suicides* will serve to elucidate this rather postmodern *individualness* existing in a rather traditionally realistic reality. The character's storytelling nevertheless displays coherence and motivation, which will be important points to analyze. Other aspects of interest will be the influence of intersubjectivity on the ethics of a person and her community. In contrast to this, III.iii. will provide the possibility to explain the conflict of coherent characters with the dubious norms of their environment. In Atwood's *Handmaid*, Pirsig's *Lila*, and Eugenides' *Middlesex* the *other* and the role of the subjective as well as objective perspectives on a certain moral order will be discussed.<sup>471</sup> Additionally, possibilities to change ethical norms and to understand them through alternative concepts will be investigated. Whereas the first subsection will focus on a relative subject in relation to stable moral norms, the second subsection will discuss coherent subjects in relation to relative moral norms. They form a study of the individual with regard to content and with regard to functional aspects. The substantial side will be scrutinized in the chapters called "Development of the Central Character as an Individual" and the creation will be discussed in the chapters entitled "Important Aspects of Narrational Style." If individual life frames are changed, this must have an effect on the way personal life is possible in a community. Individualness thus becomes synonymous with the narration of personal identity. Even though a lot of additional communicative strategies support this narration, it is nevertheless the narration that is central. How it is designed and which possibilities it offers to the narrators shall be examined in the literary analyses.

### **III.i.ii. Introduction to the Authors and the Research to Date**

All of the chosen novels are popular novels, but Margaret Atwood is by far the most acknowledged author in the literary field of research. Jeffrey Eugenides has been taken more and more seriously by recent literary scholars, whereas Robert M. Pirsig is at best academically known for his philosophical ideas. However, there is only one person having conducted comprehensive, academically renowned research on his philosophical concept, the Metaphysics of Quality. Anthony McWatt "is the only person in the world with a Ph.D.

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<sup>471</sup> Pirsig's *Lila* is an exception to self-writing and will be discussed in relation to *Zen*. This exceptional setting will be further explained below. Eugenides' *Suicides* will be discussed with regard to the creation of individuality and not with regard to the chronology of publication.

on the Metaphysics of Quality.”<sup>472</sup> McWatt is thus the chief resource used in this study to explain the philosophical framework.<sup>473</sup> It will be mainly discussed with regard to *Lila*, whereas *Lila*’s protagonist will be interpreted in relation to the narrator featuring in *Zen*. The discussion of Jeffrey Eugenides’ works will be carried out with references to various critics. Contrary to Margaret Atwood’s novels to be analyzed in the following, which only represent a fraction of her work, the discussions of Eugenides’ and Pirsig’s books refer to the main part of their oeuvre. This fact and the differences in the quantity of secondary literature available necessarily lead to a far more strict selective process regarding Margaret Atwood.

Atwood was born in Ottawa, Canada in 1939 and has become one of the most versatile and influential contemporary Canadian authors. Her oeuvre includes poetry, critical essays, prose, short-stories as well as novels. She has been shortlisted for and has been awarded numerous awards, among them the 2000 Booker Prize for *The Blind Assassin*.<sup>474</sup> Her works are often analyzed in terms of typically Canadian topics, such as survival, a menacing wilderness, but also in terms of identity problematics and emancipation.<sup>475</sup> She critically engages in discussing social, economic, and other shortcomings of western socie-

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<sup>472</sup> The quoted information is found in the staff biographies in the “July 2009 News,” <http://robertpirsig.org/news.htm> on Anthony McWatt, *Website about Robert Pirsig’s Work*, 2005, <http://robertpirsig.org/> (10. August 2009) (hereafter: McWatt, Website).

<sup>473</sup> Both works McWatt has written on Robert M. Pirsig can be purchased via his website. Anthony McWatt, *A Critical Analysis of Robert Pirsig’s Metaphysics of Quality*, Diss. U Liverpool, 2004, <http://robertpirsig.org/PhD.htm> (hereafter: McWatt, PhD) and *ibid.*, *An Introduction to Robert Pirsig’s Metaphysics of Quality*, 2005, <http://robertpirsig.org/Textbook.htm> (28. August 2009) (hereafter: McWatt, Textbook). Additionally, papers by Pirsig himself and by other intellectuals on the MOQ can be found on McWatt, Website. They will be referred to in the following by using this short title and the respective deep links.

<sup>474</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000). For the biographical information and the facts on her literary career see Jeromy H. Rosenberg, *Margaret Atwood* (Boston: Twayne, 1984) (hereafter: Rosenberg, Atwood); Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Virago, 2004) Blurb (hereafter: Atwood, Oryx).

<sup>475</sup> “Reviewers of Atwood have attempted to place her in many different categories: she has been called a feminist writer, for her incisive commentaries on sex roles; a religious writer ...; a gothic writer ...; a writer of the Canadian wilderness; a nationalist writer; a regionalist.” Rosenberg, Atwood 15. Atwood has also been associated with a new feminism, avouching for a true equality of the sexes. Cf. Christina Strobel, “‘It’s time to like men again’: ueber Margaret Atwood,” *Women’s Studies and Literature – Neun Beiträge aus der Erlanger Amerikanistik*, Erlanger Studien 73, eds. Fritz Fleischmann and Deborah Lucas Schneider (Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1987) 229,ff. For an overview of the many different approaches to the interpretation of her various works see e.g. Reingard M. Nischik, ed., *Margaret Atwood – Works and Impact* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2000) (hereafter: Nischik, Atwood). Her work is frequently associated with Canada as a motif as well as a country, a social and natural habitat. Cf. e.g. Petra Wittke-Rüdiger, *Literarische Kartographien des kanadischen Nordens*, Kieler Beiträge zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik 21 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005); Anke Karrasch, *Die Darstellung Kanadas im literarischen Werk von Margaret Atwood*, Diss U Wuppertal, Schriftenreihe Literaturwissenschaft 29 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995); Theodore F. Sheckels, *The Island Motif in the Fiction of L. Montgomery, Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Atwood, and Other Canadian Women Novelist*, Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature 68 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) 75-105.

ties.<sup>476</sup> Yet, she sees herself as rather reflecting critical discourses than literally taking part in them.<sup>477</sup> Because of her engagement in current social debates and her diversity in themes and genres, she has been interpreted in a myriad of ways.

Though her novels are often taken to be realist, with their central, psychologically and socially convincing focus on women, Atwood incorporates elements of genre fiction (Gothic, thriller, fairy tale, historical romance) that connect with her extensive symbolic use of food and eating to highlight themes such as the commodification of women, the duplicity of sexual predation or the negative power of the victim.<sup>478</sup>

The novels which will be discussed in the following have not been chosen for their use of a genre or a specific set of motifs. They are not going to be discussed in the traditional hermeneutic way, but as documents of a phenomenon in a sociohistorical period of time. Moreover, they are supposed to reveal universal elements of humanity and the therein included ethics.

Thus, the novels have been chosen for their interesting narrative situations. *The Handmaid's Tale* is special in this respect, as it renders the act of storytelling a "survival tool."<sup>479</sup> This treatment of the act of narrating as a means of life is also present in other Atwood novels. Additionally, "*Life Before Man*, *Bodily Harm*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* concern themselves with the necessity for the individual to reject individual retreats from the external world and to become involved in resistance to power."<sup>480</sup> What makes *Handmaid* stand out is the reflection of the actual narrating as a construction that can serve personal needs within the novel. In the end, the idea that the individual is powerless is rejected in many of Atwood's novels. This is something that both *Surfacing* and *Handmaid* share. It is this relationship between the individual and her surroundings that needs to be explored to adequately understand the human condition within communicative reality. Whereas *Surfacing* dwells on the powerlessness of the individual and the effect of the social environment for most of its plot, *Handmaid* presents a much stronger individual from the start. Additionally, the role of (religious) fundamentalism and insanity are picked out as central themes. Both issues play an important role in determining the autonomy of an individual. The secondary literature chosen helps to illuminate the development of the central characters in the narrations. It focuses on identity, narration, and the various stages of specific psychological states the protagonists experience. For the discussion of *Surfacing* Annis

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<sup>476</sup> Cf. e.g. Evelyn Finger, "Rettet den Himmel! Ein Gespräch mit der Dichterin Margaret Atwood über die Zukunft der Natur," *DIE ZEIT* 29 March 2007, 43,f.

<sup>477</sup> In a personal interview she stated "literature reflects rather than causes anything" in 2009. Appendix 357.

<sup>478</sup> Sarah Sceats, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 4.

<sup>479</sup> Alice M. Palumbo, "On the Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, Atwood 73-85, 81.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.* 78.



Pratt and Robert Lecker will provide a guideline; for *Handmaid* Dunja M. Mohr and the already quoted compilation edited by Reingard M. Nischik will be important.

Robert M. Pirsig has presented a new philosophical idea in the two novels he has written. His Metaphysics of Quality (MOQ) is already implied in *Zen*, but only fully developed in *Lila*. Yet, as both novels are interwoven with metaphysical discourse, their discussion will be generally much more theory-laden than the discussions of the other authors' work. His ideas must be positioned with regard to ethics and philosophy as far as they have been discussed so far. They can be understood as a project equally seeking to reconcile relativism and realism, yet starting from a basically realistic framework. It is an interesting move to have one's theoretical ideas presented in the form of novels and not as academic essays. Pirsig himself speaks of *camouflage* with regard to *Zen*.

Though what I was writing about was camouflaged as the biography of a madman, underneath that camouflage was a serious attempt to describe a newer and better way of looking philosophically at the world.<sup>481</sup>

The *camouflage* as well as Pirsig's own lack of engagement in public discourse led to the sparse and slow appreciation of his ideas by academia. Even *Zen* itself was only a belated success after having been turned down by one hundred and twenty-one publishers and thus "setting a Guinness World Record for editorial rejection."<sup>482</sup>

Recognition for *Lila* was equally controversial – New York *Newsday* journalist Dan Cryer commented: "Like the village crank hanging out at the public library, the guy really believes he has discovered the secret of the universe."<sup>483</sup> Reactions from Eastern cultural backgrounds have been more favorable – or at least less disbelieving.

Schopenhauer said that truth is that short interval between the time an idea is a heresy and the time it is a platitude, but the MOQ has managed to be both a heresy and a platitude simultaneously, depending on which culture you view it from.<sup>484</sup>

Pirsig's novels have mainly been discussed with regard to his life and to his philosophy. Neither an analysis of the combination of novel and theory nor an analysis of the narrational strategies has been done as far as I know. Yet, especially as this study attempts a combined research on philosophy and literature with regard to ethics, his work seems as if it were created for this purpose. The main difficulty of the following discussions will be to relate the level of narration to the level of theory in Pirsig's novels and to appreciate the

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<sup>481</sup> Robert M. Pirsig, "Conference Opening Statement," McWatt, Website <http://robertpirsig.org/preface.htm> (28. August 2009).

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Quoted after Anthony McWatt, "An Introduction to Robert Pirsig's Metaphysics of Quality," McWatt, Website <http://robertpirsig.org/Intro.htm> (28. August 2009).

<sup>484</sup> Letter from Robert M. Pirsig to Anthony McWatt, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1995, quoted after *ibid*.

change of narrational style from *Zen* to *Lila*. *Lila* is clearly *Zen*'s sequel, yet the philosopher-narrator speaking in the first-person singular is suddenly changed into a third-person narrator, only allowing for the protagonist's self-writing through soliloquy. Additionally, curious changes of perspective from the protagonist to other characters have to be analyzed with regard to the philosophical theory.

Jeffrey Eugenides is described as a hybrid artist by Denis Scheck.<sup>485</sup> Eugenides is a US-American author with Greek origins now living in Germany. He has published three novels and a collection of short stories.<sup>486</sup> His work is often listed among the young generation of American authors, such as Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace. As Scheck quotes from an interview, Eugenides also understands himself as producing *hybrid fiction*. He dismisses the formal *pirouettes* often found in postmodernist literature and explains that he could only imagine creating something truly new and original through a mixture of postmodern and traditional elements.<sup>487</sup> Thus, he describes himself as one of the post-postmodern authors, reinstating traditional techniques to treat postmodern topics. *The Virgin Suicides* was Eugenides' debut, and approximately ten years later he published *Middlesex*, which has been awarded several prizes, among them the Pulitzer Prize. As his books do not (yet) form a firm part of the canon of literary studies, rather few scholarly works have been published on them so far, even though they have been well received critically.<sup>488</sup> Much of the material that can be found refers only indirectly to his novels and directly to the film adaptation of *The Virgin Suicides*.<sup>489</sup> The most important sources used in the following will be Scheck and Katharina Grabbe's *Geschwisterliebe*.<sup>490</sup>

The novels treated in this study are mostly homodiegetic, i.e. they are narrated in the first person singular. In *Suicides* the narrator takes on a strange first person plural. Because they all tell about major events in the story of the narrators' lives, they could be in-

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<sup>485</sup> Cf. Denis Scheck, "Nachwort von Denis Scheck," Jeffrey Eugenides, *Air Mail – Erzählungen* (transl. Walter and Eike Schönfeldt), (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2003) 107-119, 110 (hereafter: Eugenides, *Air Mail*).

<sup>486</sup> Cf. the personal data record about "Eugenides, Jeffrey" Katalog der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek, <http://d-nb.info/gnd/123706017> (3.4.2009); Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

<sup>487</sup> Cf. Denis Scheck, "Nachwort von Denis Scheck," Eugenides, *Air Mail* 107-119; esp. 110.

<sup>488</sup> Cf. Lisa A. Kirby, "Interrogating Suburbia in *The Virgin Suicides*," *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, Volume 11, Issue 1 2007, <http://www.rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/cho3350w6.htm> (3.4. 2009) (hereafter: Kirby, *Suburbia*).

<sup>489</sup> For example David Walsh, "Generalities – The Virgin Suicides, directed by Sophia Coppola, screenplay by Copolla, from the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides," *World Socialist Website* 23. June 2000, [www.wsws.org/articles/2000/jun2000/virg-j23.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/jun2000/virg-j23.shtml) (3.4.2009) (hereafter: Walsh, *Generalities*).

<sup>490</sup> Katharina Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe – Verbotenes Begehren in literarischen Texten der Gegenwart* (Bielefeld: Asisthesis Verlag, 2005) (hereafter: Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe*).

terpreted as fictional autobiographies.<sup>491</sup> Especially *Middlesex*, *Suicides*, and *Handmaid* seem to fit this category, as they are all told from an advanced point in life or even a possible end point told in retrospect. *Surfacing* is only partly told in retrospect, yet, could fit the category of fictional autobiography as it has the quality of a narrator concerned with telling her story. *Zen* and *Lila* cross this definition as they are hybrid novels (partly fictional, partly autobiographical) in this hybrid genre. All novels except *Lila* and *Suicides* share the narrative situation of identicalness between narrators and protagonists. The narrators mostly tell their stories in retrospect; yet, the aspects of time, place, and posture are rendered ambiguous in *Handmaid* and *Surfacing*.

Fiction, history, and theory are mingled in these six novels as the narrators of *Handmaid* and *Middlesex* are directly or indirectly involved in the descriptions of historical events. First-person narrative focuses on the narrative voice, yet, does not necessarily involve a greater autobiographical intention of telling a life or making important aspects of this life intelligible.<sup>492</sup> In live communication there is always such an autobiographical *life frame* (of a single individual) to every stance of first-person *narration*. Exactly as life within communicative reality is open-ended for as long as consciousness remains (and allows for communicative embeddedness, which characterizes human existence) the novels as fictional autobiographies are necessarily open-ended.<sup>493</sup> The configuration and the creation of the autobiographical life frame will be central in the analyses and can be understood as a synonym for individualness.

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<sup>491</sup> In a purely theoretical way, any piece of homodiegetic fiction could be called a fictional autobiography. Yet, I understand the autobiographical project as a conscious intention of telling one's life or an important part thereof. The concern to make a life (or certain actions) intelligible seems to be the main motivation to engage in such a narration. Another aspect of *realist* autobiography is, of course, the perpetuation of certain (personal) events or the perpetuation of history from a subjective perspective.

<sup>492</sup> Cf. Hampel, *Autobiography* 27-33.

<sup>493</sup> I hereby want to suggest a new communicative foundationalist dualism. Body and mind are not to be understood as they were in classical dualism. However, the fact that our conscious existence is the only thing relevant to human thinking (and to creating communicative reality) means that body-related matters can only be a sub-foundation of our existence. This might sound strange at first reading; yet, the idea can be seen in analogy to the radical materialism of Epicurus, who disproved the possibility of the soul's survival in the afterlife. Even though this study takes on a view explicitly opposed to traditional materialism, communicative foundationalist reality can be interpreted as a closed system in the way materialistic reality is. The moment consciousness disappears forever the respective individual seizes to be. As Nietzsche put it in a negative perspective: "[E]s gibt für jenen Intellekt keine weitere Mission, die über das Menschenleben hinausführte." *Friedrich Nietzsche, Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne* (unpublished: 1873) quoted according to Richard David Precht, *Wer bin ich – und wenn ja, wie viele? Eine philosophische Reise* (München: Goldmann, 2007) 2. For a discussion of the opposition between materialism and dualism see Searle, *Geist* 53-70; for a discussion of Epicurus' philosophy see David Konstan, "Epicurus," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2009, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epicurus/> (25.4.2009). A more modern analytical approach to this theme is made by Thomas Nagel, *Letzte Fragen – Mortal Questions* (ed. Michael Gebauer) (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2008) 17-28 (hereafter: Nagel, *Fragen*).

### III.ii. Relative Individuals and Founded Moral Norms

In the following three chapters three novels initially published from the 1970s until 1993 will be analyzed. As the most important human feature for ethics is individuality, the *individualness* as it is presented in the books will constitute the main focus of the interpretations. The development of the central characters as individuals as well as the mode of presenting them as individuals by applying certain narrational styles will be discussed. They all share a certain weakness with regard to their environment: They undergo various intensive changes, altering their views of themselves and of the world. Thus, especially the parts of their individuality that remain constant will be of interest. As will be explained, the three novels contain information about the question how norms can be applied by human beings, about the importance of emotions for individuality, and about the way in which humans perceive their reality. In addition, the power exerted by existing social norms, the notion of sanity, and the importance of solidarity will be scrutinized. With regard to Robert M. Pirsig's work the role values play in the humanly possible explanations of life shall be looked at closely.

#### III.ii.i. The Ego and Unwanted Memories: *Surfacing*

Margaret Atwood's second novel, *Surfacing*, exhibits a certain duplicity in the creation of characters, their world-views, and the organization of events. The story is told by a curiously nameless protagonist. Haunted by troubling memories from the past, she can uphold the appearance of a well-adjusted person less and less as the narrative unfolds. Her duplicity becomes clear through the ideal of wholeness which is implicit in her way of telling her story. She presents herself as a split personality with serious psychological problems in search of reunification. It will be enlightening to compare this personality to another nameless female Atwood created in a short story some years later, "The Sin Eater."<sup>494</sup> Here, a psychoanalyst seems to comment on the past events of the older narrator's life.<sup>495</sup> What has been described as a rebirth journey by Annis Pratt will provide an important lead to understanding the character's development.<sup>496</sup> It can be understood as a journey or quest

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<sup>494</sup> Margaret Atwood, "The Sin Eater," *Bluebeard's Egg* (Toronto: Seal Books McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1983) 206,ff (hereafter: Atwood, Egg).

<sup>495</sup> "Atwood tends to create self-reflexive works which comment on each other...." Robert Lecker, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels," *The Art of Margaret Atwood*, eds. Cathy N. Davidson and Arnold E. Davidson (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1981) 178 (hereafter: Davidson/Davidson).

<sup>496</sup> Cf. Annis Pratt, "*Surfacing* and the Rebirth Journey," Davidson/Davidson 139,ff.

from an instable personality to a loss of identity towards resurfacing as a fragile but mentally grounded human being.<sup>497</sup> Robert Lecker's critical analysis of the paradoxes surfacing in *Surfacing* will provide a basis for interpreting the heroine's change.<sup>498</sup>

### III.ii.i.i. Development of the Central Character as an Individual

I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning [...]

I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place....<sup>499</sup>

They'll mistake me for a human being....<sup>500</sup>

The above quotations illustrate the loss of feeling of self that the nameless female first person narrator suffers towards the end of her story. Such a breakdown seems astonishing, yet, in the course of events persuasive reasons for the psychological crisis are given. In the beginning of her mental journey – which is reflected in an actual journey on the level of narrated events – her sense of self is already affected by past traumatic experiences. Accompanied by two friends – Anna and David, who are married – and her boyfriend Joe the protagonist returns to the island of her childhood in search of her missing father. The island's natural, even idyllic environment seems like a refuge to her, a place where she is safe from the civilizing and destructive forces represented by the city she just left when the narrative starts. All through the story she finds evidence for man's distortion of nature, natural behavior, and knowledge. This negatively identified civilized man is represented by "the Americans."<sup>501</sup> What starts as a critique of civilization turns into an obsession when she stays behind as her friends leave the island because she wants to hide from the negative influences of mankind. During this period of returning to nature she feels as though she becomes part of it, and imagines herself to be an animal.<sup>502</sup> She loses her sense of being a human individual, even tries to discard it.

That is the way they are, they will not let you have peace, they don't want you to have anything they don't have themselves. I stay on the bank, resting, licking the scratches; no fur yet on my skin, it's too early.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> For an interpretation of *Surfacing* as a quest see Sonia Mycak, *In SEARCH of the SPLIT SUBJECT: Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, AND THE NOVELS OF Margaret Atwood* (Toronto: ECW, 1996) 249.

<sup>498</sup> Cf. Robert Lecker, "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels," Davidson/Davidson 178.

<sup>499</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 175.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.* 177.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.* 110.

<sup>502</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 154-184.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.* 179,f.

What causes this aversion to her own kind and her own self as a human? From the start there is a sense of unease about the protagonist. She definitely believes in a stable social order in the beginning of the novel. This clearly shows through the statements she makes on how people are supposed to behave: "I'll start crying, that would be horrible," "[t]hey all disowned their parents long ago, the way you are supposed to..." "I lift my cup, they are watching me anxiously: it's imperative that I mention the tea."<sup>504</sup> Yet, she cannot easily meet these standards. She has to hurt herself so that she will not start crying in public, she has not properly disowned her parents, and she has to remind herself what to say at social gatherings. She feels out of place, as if she does not belong into this world.

I've driven in the same car with them before but on this road it doesn't seem right, either the three of them are in the wrong place or I am.<sup>505</sup>

In a social sense, she can be described as *deviant* as she cannot easily live up to the respective norms. She completely subordinates herself to the social order and does not allow herself to deviate from it. Therefore, she does not allow herself to access her suppressed emotions. Without access to her emotions, she has no access to how she really feels as an individual and thus cannot influence the concept of reality around her. As she does not really have a functioning point of view, she can only react to what happens to her.

The emotional disturbances connected to her inability to adequately participate socially are visible in her curious detachment from her emotions.<sup>506</sup>

Now we're on home ground, foreign territory. My throat constricts, as it learned to do when I discovered people could say words that would go into my ears meaning nothing. To be deaf and dumb would be easier.<sup>507</sup>

Her unease when interacting with others only increases her victimization. The more she withdraws, the less influence can she exercise. Already in the beginning, when she is still in contact with others, her social relationships seem to be at best uncommon: "She's my best friend, my best woman friend; I've known her two months."<sup>508</sup> As she describes sexual pleasures with her boyfriend, her emotional detachment shows in the way she does not refer to herself and him, but only to various body parts. Additionally, she actually declares that she is not able to properly feel love. Until the end of part one she thus believes herself to be *abnormal*. She even questions herself up to the point of insinuating her own mental

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<sup>504</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 16, 11, 14.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>506</sup> Alice M. Palumbo describes the narrator's initial state as absolutely affectless. Cf. Alice M. Palumbo, "On the Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, *Atwood* 73-85, 75.

<sup>507</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 5.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

derangement, or at least her highly unreliable memory. Only in part two she starts to ally with nature against society and starts to believe that the others are wrong.<sup>509</sup> This can be interpreted as an act of self-defense. She cannot properly act within the social relations she has and within the reality they generate. The childhood environment brings her past traumas partially to the surface and unsettles her precarious self even more. As the reality becomes unbearable, she completely withdraws because she cannot deal with her past traumas and the new emotional shocks she experiences. This seems coherent as part two is written in retrospect from the evening when she is shocked to learn of her father's death. She refuses to believe this, and engages in remembering and reinterpreting the past days including several disturbing incidents.

She intentionally adjusts her memories to escape the feeling of helplessness in the face of old and new blows. These include distorted recollections of the abortion she had in her childhood, and serious disappointments she has in her current friends. Finally, she has come to face the fact that she had lied to herself about her past. Additionally, when Joe proposed to her she could not appropriately react to this, and consequently hurt him severely. As she starts her retrospect with the words "I am not sure when I began to suspect the truth, about myself and about them, what I was and what they were turning into," it becomes clear that she artificially opposes herself to the others, to the whole of society.<sup>510</sup> She will realize this as another act of suppression in the end. Yet, at this point of the story she simply denies the whole reality in which the horrible events have taken place and intentionally misinterprets her friends' intentions in order to be able to believe that they are lying about her father's corpse. In the following she realizes that at some point in her life her rational ability to think of herself as an individual was disrupted from her emotions, but she does not consider the possibility that this happened because she suppressed the traumatic experience of her abortion and thus suppressed her feelings. She simply absolves herself from all responsibility and becomes increasingly paranoid in her accusations of other people.<sup>511</sup>

She is obviously not strong enough to face reality immediately and all at once. Therefore, she constructs a detour that enables her to deny her own mistakes and responsibility. She fools herself into believing that she is the only one who really knows what is real, and the others are viciously trying to beguile her. The functionality of the concept of reality stays the same. In the beginning, it is a real social reality she has no access to, and

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<sup>509</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Surfacing* 62, 67, 146. Part Two comprehends pages 70 to 153.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>511</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 73,f; 80,ff; 93; 102; 116,f; 142,f; 143-149; 151; 153.

in the next section of the narration it becomes the *natural* order of which she can be a knowing part (as she does not have to communicate with other human beings). The second section is a transition to her becoming part of the natural order. Her real transformation only happens in part three. Whereas she was always exposed to the judgments of others when she believed in a stable social order without being able to properly act, she can dismiss the judgment of other human beings when she starts believing in a higher natural order. For the first time in the narration she sees that others are insecure, whereas she is sure of herself. She can feel superior and invulnerable for no other reason than her imaginative connection to some spiritually sacrosanct natural meaning. It is important to note that she does not expose reality as a construct to free herself from all outer influences. Instead, she conceives of a new sense of reality and creates her own imaginary world; she creates an alternative meaning for life. In this world she is by no means more independent than before. On the contrary, she imagines strict rules so that she is even less free.<sup>512</sup>

To be able to cope with the fact that she has lost her child, she sleeps with Joe to get pregnant again. After the act she feels her “lost child surfacing within [her], forgiving [her] ....”<sup>513</sup> Additionally, she claims that the two halves into which she was split are combined again, that she is whole again. Yet, this is not true. What she was separated from before were her feelings. She felt as though her head was curiously detached from her body. She felt separated from love, yet, also separated from hate and the destruction it generates, which she suddenly understands as the essence of mankind. After her imaginary separation from humanity she still does not experience emotions. Even though she admits that she loves Joe at the very end of the narration, she can for example not tell him so when she uses him for pregnancy.<sup>514</sup> She does not even realize her emotions at this point. She suddenly sees love as a mere ritual, and only focuses on the child she is sure to have conceived. She plans not to tell anyone about it, because the Americans would strap her to the “death machine” again.<sup>515</sup> She thus ascribes the responsibility for her abortion to the *others*, who curiously appear increasingly *impersonal* as *Americans*. This psychological strategy shows her need to “order things into neat binaries”<sup>516</sup> very clearly.

Her new identity rests on the violent exclusion of all other human possibilities, that is to say on her own violent exclusion from humanity. She completely identifies with na-

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<sup>512</sup> Cf. e.g. Atwood, *Surfacing* 154,f; 173,ff. Part three comprehends pages 154 to 186.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.* 156.

<sup>514</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 70; 140,f; 186.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.* 156. Although she consciously formulates “American, they are all Americans now” later in part three, she can be supposed to have made that judgment unconsciously much earlier. *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>516</sup> Alice M. Palumbo, “On the Border: Margaret Atwood’s Novels,” Nischik, *Atwood* 73-85, 75.



ture. Yet, instead of becoming a whole person through passing over to some natural realm she is no more capable of feeling or facing her mistakes than before. It is only her attitude towards her perturbation that has changed. While she has acknowledged it as a fault before, she now understands it as being natural. She seems even more distanced towards herself than before. When passed over to the *natural* understanding of herself, she does not even feel basic needs such as hunger like a human being does.<sup>517</sup> The identity formed through opposition and exclusion of others thus does not really offer any more emotional (or rational) stability than she had before. Additionally, it becomes even more precarious when her *friends* have left and she cannot directly contrast herself with them any longer.

I don't know what to do now. [...] There must be something that comes next but the power has drained away, my fingers are empty as gloves, eyes ordinary, nothing guides me.<sup>518</sup>

This identification through the other as it was discussed in chapter II.iii.ii. stays the same until the end of the novel, even though her state of existence in the natural realm changes. First, she feels guided by gods, and then she merely feels she is a natural creature. Her sense of human responsibility is necessarily dissolved as long as she believes herself to be guided by higher natural forces and imagines being “a tree.”<sup>519</sup> But she still feels herself to be pure, separated from the *Americanness* of human beings, after having lost the spiritual guidance.<sup>520</sup>

The self-debasement she continuously acted out in the beginning of the narrative has changed into hatred towards *others* in the second stage of her development. Slowly she also begins to transmit her emotional incapacity to the *Other*. In part one she describes herself as callous like a machine while making love.

[M]y body responds that way too, anticipates him, educated, crisp as a typewriter. It's best when you don't know them. [...]two people making love with paper bags over their heads .... Would that be good or bad?<sup>521</sup>

Even though she understood herself as a typewriter while making love, she later ascribes this machine-like quality to the *Americans*. When a search party is sent for her she asserts that “they are Americans. They can't be trusted. [...] They are evolving, they are halfway to machine, the leftover flesh atrophied and diseased, porous like an appendix.”<sup>522</sup> She relates their aggression to the fact that she would not let go of her purity, and thus begins to under-

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<sup>517</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Surfacing* 166, 180.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>520</sup> “They'll mistake me for a human being ....” *Ibid.* 177

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.* 177,f.

stand herself as able to evoke reactions. When she is once again confronted with other human beings, this also makes her realize her state as it would appear to the human eye: “They’ll mistake me for ... a naked woman wrapped in a blanket ... running around loose, ownerless....”<sup>523</sup> The violent exclusion of all other humans has rendered her unable to reclaim her body and her human individuality as they would identify her as one of them. By such an act of psychological transfer of all she hates in herself, she can reevaluate herself without having to face her own problems. She constructs this bad *Other* by defining what is an improper way of existence and locating it in the *Americans*. In this way she tries to define and justify herself by demonstrating what she is not.

Accordingly, she actually shows all the characteristics she criticizes in the *Other* herself.<sup>524</sup> Thus, she cannot rationally distance herself from the *Americans* and reacts in a very emotional (aggressive) and irrational way towards them. As is also demonstrated in an earlier scene, in which she mistakes fellow Canadians for American citizens, she needs the negative other to define herself.

That was their armour, bland ignorance, heads empty as weather balloons: with that they could defend themselves against anything. Straight power, they mainlined it; I imagined the surge of electricity, nerve juice, as they hit it, brought it down, flapping like a crippled plane. The innocents get slaughtered because they exist, I thought, there is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them, no conscience or piety; for them the only things worthy of life were human, their own kind of human .... [...] My arm wanted to swing the paddle sideways, blade into his head: his eyes would blossom outwards, his skull shatter like an egg.<sup>525</sup>

As it happens, the other group mistook the protagonist and her friends for Americans as well. When the identities are clarified, the others react in a friendly manner, they are even relieved. The protagonist reacts with surprising aggressiveness: “I was furious with them, they’d disguised themselves.”<sup>526</sup> It is almost comical that in her need for a surrogate from which to distinguish herself she ascribes all her aggression to the supposed *Americans*. Additionally, she describes their access to power in much the same way she describes her own access to the natural power later – like a drug flowing through the veins. “As soon as I stepped inside it I sensed the power, in my hands and running along my arms ....”<sup>527</sup> While thinking about the Americans, she condemns their supposed urge to slaughter all “innocents.” Yet, when she formulates her hatred of them in a bigger context, she expresses a similar urge to kill them.

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<sup>523</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 177.

<sup>524</sup> For the paradoxes in her self-definition and her construction of reality see also Robert Lecker, “Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood’s First Three Novels,” *Davidson/Davidson* 187-193. Yet, Lecker interprets these paradoxical constructions in terms of postmodern relativism.

<sup>525</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 121, f.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.* 122.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.* 150.

[T]hen I realized it wasn't the men I hated, it was the Americans, the human beings, men and women both. They'd had their chance but they had turned against the gods, and it was time for me to choose sides. I wanted there to be a machine that could make them vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them, ... that way there would be more room for the animals ....<sup>528</sup>

The impression of her irrationality is emphasized by the absence of any real Americans in the novel and the absence of any memories of the protagonist's actual acquaintance with American citizens. As her own aggressiveness and emotional response to the shocking events on that island increase, the part of herself she negates increases as well. Similarly, the group of *Americans* increases, in the end comprising all human beings including those next to her. While developing their increasing negative identity, she denies more and more of herself until she has lost her humanity.

Before she can regain her sense of being human, the protagonist has to come to terms with the conflicts she had with her parents and with the other old and new traumas she has lived through. She experiences several emotional outbreaks and repeatedly retreats from reality again.<sup>529</sup> After the period in which she feels completely absorbed by nature and believes that her individuality has dissolved, she finally begins to face the memories and the related emotions. The surfacing from her existence as "a place" can be understood as a turning point in her personal development.<sup>530</sup> After one last apparition she finally faces herself, her humanity, her memories, and her emotions.

When I wake in the morning I know they have gone finally, back into the earth, the air, the water, wherever they were when I summoned them. The rules are over. I can go anywhere now .... I am the only one left alive on the island.<sup>531</sup>

As she takes leave of her imaginations she finally accepts herself as a human being again and also accepts her parents' deaths. She comes to the conclusion that she owes it to them "[t]o prefer life ...."<sup>532</sup> She decides to take better care of herself and finally thinks about some of the conflicts from her past.

She has already overcome the shock of David's and Anna's true characters. "I remember them, but indistinctly and with nostalgia, as I remember people I once knew."<sup>533</sup> She has gotten over the trauma of her liaison with her art teacher as well: "[N]ow I feel nothing for him but sorrow."<sup>534</sup> She can now understand that she had believed her teacher to be perfect, which is why she was devastated and could not accept it when he turned out

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<sup>528</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 148.

<sup>529</sup> Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 166-182.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

to be an average human being. “I was not prepared for the average, its needless cruelties and lies.”<sup>535</sup> She can finally confront her emotions regarding her parents as well. It was the same conflict; she has believed them to be perfect, to be omniscient and omnipotent. When she now accepts that they were just human and realizes that this is something she “never gave them credit for;” she can understand that “their totalitarian innocence was [her] own.”<sup>536</sup> She can now put their *failure*, the fact that they died, in perspective and forgive them. She can finally let go of the grudge she has born against them all the time and this also helps her to stand back from the totalitarian vilification of all the *other* human beings. She still perceives them to be a “menace,” but she can at least imagine herself able to deal with them now: “They exist, they’re advancing, they must be dealt with, but possibly they can be watched and predicted and stopped without being copied.”<sup>537</sup>

Moreover, a socially realistic assessment of her own situation is suddenly possible for her. She understands that the real danger will not consist of anti-natural tendencies she might have to face, but of the allegations of insanity she will be confronted with.<sup>538</sup> The return towards civilization has started with her surfacing from the being dissolved in nature. While she has first still felt herself to be part of nature rather than humanity after that turning point, she now trespasses the threshold to human individuality. When she realizes the impression she makes according to social standards, she returns to the cabin and changes into her own clothes again, she “re-enter[s] [her] own time.”<sup>539</sup>

I turn the mirror around: in it there’s a creature neither animal nor human, ... eyes staring blue as ice from the deep sockets; the lips move by themselves. This was the stereotype, straws in the hair, talking nonsense or not talking at all. To have someone to speak to and words that can be understood: their definition of sanity.<sup>540</sup>

It is as though looking at her own reflection in the mirror re-installs her sense of self. The most important step towards being a person again seems to be her refusal to see herself as driven by external forces, as an individual not able to decide and act at her own will and thus not responsible for what happened to her and around her.

This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which was always more disastrous than the truth would have been. The word games, the winning and losing games are finished; at the moment there are no others but they will have to be invented, withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 183.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.* 183,f.

<sup>537</sup> Both quotes *ibid.* 183.

<sup>538</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 184.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.* 185.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.* 184.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.* 185.

At last she understands that the suppressions of the past and the alternative realities she invented are nothing but *games*. She also understands the need to face other human beings as a person who understands herself not as a victim, but as an acting and responsible individual in order to be sane. Isolating herself from others as she has done means insanity. What she has above termed “their definition of sanity” she now realizes as the only way to be human: communicating with others and responding to their versions of reality. When she regains or maybe only forms a sense of herself as an individual responsible for her actions, she is finally forced to accept her own faults and mistakes as well. After having accepted her parents and all other human beings as faulty creatures living in normal ways, she can finally forgive herself for her own mistakes as well. She can ponder what she has done in the past, probably most urgently in the past five days, without panicking or even reproaching herself. She does not perceive the social standards, such as wearing clothes, as a burden any longer, but as a part of social normality she takes part in of her own free will. Her feeling of self and self-respect become possible as she opens herself to other people again.

When Joe returns in a final effort to find her, she can also access her emotions again, which she could not even do when the narration began. She appreciates his coming as an affectionate, positive act. “[W]hat’s important is that he’s here, a mediator, an ambassador, offering me something: captivity in any of its forms, a new freedom?”<sup>542</sup> She is not immediately sure what awaits her with him, and her psyche is not suddenly whole again. She feels her love for him as something “useless as a third eye or a possibility.”<sup>543</sup> But she feels it at least and she manages to assess her relationship to him and the changes that will be necessary.

If I go with him, we’ll have to talk ... we can no longer live in spurious peace by avoiding each other, the way it was before, we will have to begin. For us it’s necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That’s normal, it’s the way it happens now and I don’t know whether it’s worth it or even if I can depend on him, ... [b]ut ... I can trust him.<sup>544</sup>

She finally understands that the possibility of failure is normal and even though it might be frightening, she will not find perfection in life. She must completely let go of that request for perfection she has guarded and that has traumatized her so long. The protagonist is willing to “begin,” to try, “to let go.”<sup>545</sup> Access to her emotions and thus to her self as a com-

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<sup>542</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 186.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.* 186.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*

plete individual is only possible for her through his presence. True life without “avoiding each other” will only become possible through communication.

She understands herself and what it means to be an individual while Joe is calling out her name. She has tried to appeal to herself by saying that name, “repeating it like a chant” when she panicked just before she let herself cross over to nature in the second part of the novel.<sup>546</sup> That same name she cast away after undergoing the imagined transformation into some natural creature: “Joe comes up the steps, shouting; Anna shouts too, shrill, ... my name. It’s too late, I no longer have a name.”<sup>547</sup> As she responds to her name again, this shows that she is about to reclaim the individuality assigned to her by society. Even though she only “tense[s] forward, towards the demands and questions,” and does not actually move over to meet Joe before the novel’s end, the reader is sure that she will do so. It is clear because in her mind she has already accepted her human individuality again, and has accepted it in a more profound and healthy way than she had when the novel began. The fact that the actual taking of that identity is only implied seems to suit the fact that throughout the whole narration she has not been a sane and healthy person. So the story of that period of her life should end before she actually becomes such a *normal* individual. The very last sentence of her account of this journey tells about her final acceptance that the spiritual forces she encountered in the wilderness were not real, but only sprang from her imagination: “The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing.”<sup>548</sup>

### III.ii.i.ii. Important Aspects of Narrational Style

Annis Pratt’s and other literary scholars’ interpretation of the protagonist’s development as a rebirth journey implies a human being torn between nature and culture.<sup>549</sup> When read in the way proposed above, these notions become unclear. The problems seem to be located within the protagonist rather than within nature or culture. The ambiguity expressed until the end of the novel could be understood as a confirmation of “her continuing existence in a world where definition has been lost.”<sup>550</sup> Literary scholars such as Robert Lecker have proposed that the obscure depiction of nature, of society, and of the protagonist’s mental state should be interpreted as signs of the relativity of all norms.<sup>551</sup> According to

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<sup>546</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 67.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.* 162.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.* 186.

<sup>549</sup> Annis Pratt, “*Surfacing* and the Rebirth Journey,” Davidson/Davidson 139.

<sup>550</sup> Robert Lecker, “Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood’s First Three Novels,” Davidson/Davidson 187.

<sup>551</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 188.

this point of view all standards are rejected, as the protagonist rejects the idea of perfection. Yet, I propose that the individual perspective, in which the narration is presented, is not about the dismissal or idealization of either nature or society, but about the understanding and the imagination of an individual. While understanding standards and norms as essential, she realizes that it is neither possible, nor healthy, for her to try to answer them perfectly. She experiences that a perfectly stable identity, answering any standard exactly and excluding the dynamic exchange between individuals, is not human any longer.

The style of her narration is very rational and cold, not showing any emotions in the beginning. During the middle part, the present tense narration is interrupted. Thus, the process of even increased suppression is highlighted. Her outbreaks of hatred against the Americans seem not as sudden and immediate as they would have had they been presented in present tense. They represent a further strategy to deny this emotional part of herself. When she moves over to the natural realm, her style dissolves into poetry and incoherent sentences as was conveyed by the opening quotes to the previous chapter. Additionally, long stretches of the story remain untold. Thus, the overpowering character of both the social and the natural order are demonstrated. Only when she (re)gains the status of individual can she regain her coherent narration. But the fact that her imagination of the natural order is so overpowering that she cannot even tell the reader about it in a coherent way, does not tell us anything about nature or the nature of norms as such. The social order has proven hard to cope with for her because she could not access all the capacities of a self. The ambiguity expressed through the content as well as the form of the narration seems to indicate problems in the protagonist's approach to the norms around her rather than within these norms or realms of reality.

It will be enlightening to compare what is narrated in *Surfacing* to Atwood's short story *The Sin Eater*. Another nameless female first person narrator experiences anger because she does not know how to cope with her environment. It is possible to suppose that the reader is faced with the same character as in *Surfacing*, only some years later. Her psychoanalyst, Joseph, seems to definitely comment on some of the events during that journey. The *Sin Eater's* narrator expresses a deep unhappiness and insecurity: "It was only because I found reality so unsatisfactory; that was my story. So unfinished, so sloppy, so pointless, so endless. I wanted things to make sense." Joseph advises her to "[t]hink of it as a desert island. [...] You're stuck on it, now you have to decide how best to cope."<sup>552</sup> The protagonist of *Surfacing* suppressed a vital part of herself because she found reality not only unsa-

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<sup>552</sup> Margaret Atwood, "The Sin Eater," Atwood, Egg 209.

tisfactory, but shocking. On the island of her childhood she learns to accept the reality of the past as well as her own responsibility for it. During that process she at first only accepts what really happens without taking credit for her actions. Instead, she creates the natural order to which she submits her humanity so that she can claim to have been governed by civilization's negative influences before. The whole concept of the natural realm as governed by gods and especially the solemn style in chapter twenty-six evoke strong images of a religious kingdom ruled by higher beings. "No total salvation, resurrection, Our father, Our mother, I pray, Reach down for me ...."<sup>553</sup> If she was powerless with regard to the Americans in the social realm, she now has submitted to higher beings. Thus, she is even more secure from having to claim responsibility for her own actions.

Another quote from *The Sin Eater* seems to comment on this situation.

I think of myself, standing on a street corner, ringing a bell, swathed in floating garments. Selfless and removed, free from sin. Sin is this world, says Krishna. This world is all we have, says Joseph. It's all you have to work with.<sup>554</sup>

An ironic picture of a *pure* or *perfect* person is designed and simultaneously discarded. There is no way to create a natural state and also no way to perfectly answer the norms and standards of society. But the prospect of failure should not discourage the will to work towards answering them. The world might be full of sin, but man has to live there and has to cope with it. No higher being will judge the errors of some and rescue the innocent. Hence, human beings will never live in a perfect environment because they cannot behave perfectly. As this exchange is set in a psychoanalytical framework, the question arises as to what a healthy state of mind can mean in such a reality. Has *Surfacing's* protagonist achieved wholeness? Could she be said to have become purified through her *rebirth*? To pinpoint what has really changed in her life the changes in the narrational style must be closely examined once again. The narration itself does not definitely tell us anything about what sort of a person she was before the abortion and remains silent on the future developments as well. The only secure statements that can be made about her complex and contradictory development are that she can consciously acknowledge her love at the end and that she regains control of her narrational style after losing it during her *natural passage*. She also gets rid of her disproportionate ideas of order and perfection and forgives herself for past

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<sup>553</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 183.

<sup>554</sup> Margaret Atwood, "The Sin Eater," Atwood, *Egg* 215,f.



mistakes. Additionally, the exaggerated denial of some *other* human nature is overcome.<sup>555</sup> In this way, she is not *reborn*, but rather restored or healed.

It could be argued that the protagonist struggles with traditional values and believes (of a perfect marriage for example) in a paradoxical postmodern world that renders these concepts futile. But I think this point can only be pushed up to a certain limit. The unambiguous and autonomous individual is challenged when her failures are integrated into the concept of a coherent self. Yet, running counter to the popular postmodern argument for the ambiguity of human beings, that no one can ever access all her memories from the actual *beginning* of her life story, this narration underlines the importance of accessing memories of the past. What *really* happened must be known and integrated into the narration of the self to be able to act and live as a human individual. Additionally, what is underlined is that responsibility for her actions must be claimed by the individual for a satisfying life and that traumatic experiences of the past must not be used as an excuse to shy away from it. Being a whole person means to be able to access emotions and rationality and to have a personal perspective from which a coherent narration can be told. The narrator's ideal of wholeness is only challenged in the sense that cultural norms or ideals cannot be perfectly lived up to. The narration does not comment on the unambiguity or ambiguity of the social standards themselves. Moreover, they seem to be confirmed when the protagonist claims to "refuse to be a victim" in the future.<sup>556</sup> She obviously plans to answer the standards of responsibility set by society, which means that the cultural content of her personality obviously plays an important role for her self. She realizes that she might fail in doing so, but is convinced that this is the right and only thing to do. Thus, she certainly becomes whole with regard to her personality, yet, she is in no way purer than before – purity is exposed to be an illusion.

Even though *Surfacing* is no example of high postmodernist literature, the postmodernist feature of commenting on itself exists within the novel. Yet, it takes on a special form as a comment on language. One of the most striking examples of the protagonist's confusion is her attitude towards language. To find silence seems to be her only way to find freedom from a world, she initially understands as a place in which everything is named, tamed and finally dominated (by *Americans*). When she decides not to teach her

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<sup>555</sup> It can be objected that her paranoia is not completely overcome until the very end. At least for a moment she hesitates because she thinks he might be sent to trick her into captivity when she sees Joe appear. The idea of herself as an animal hunted by the *Americans* does not vanish all of a sudden when she decides to return from the natural realm. Nevertheless, the signs of these misapprehensions and their effect are reduced drastically. Just before the end of her narration she is absolutely sure: "But he isn't an American, I can see that now; ... I can trust him." Atwood, *Surfacing* 186.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.* 185.

supposedly conceived child any words, things become duplicitous. She is speaking about the urgency to remain speechless; she is telling a story about the value of remaining wordless in the first person voice.<sup>557</sup> In the opening chapter she thinks of negative experiences in her childhood and concludes that to “be deaf and dumb would be easier.”<sup>558</sup> Back then this idea had symbolized a form of self-escape for her. But through the course of the narration she finds that “without language the whole notion of the self is jeopardized, because for her, as for the Americans,”<sup>559</sup> “a language is everything you do.”<sup>560</sup> At the end of the journey the narrator responds to the calling of her name, and returns to the world of words and labels that she seemed so intent upon rejecting. Despite her claims to the contrary, the narrator is constantly reminding herself that the absence of human communication puts her presence into doubt.

[S]he soon realises that she must transcend the ambivalence which has characterised her .... In fact, she has always been trying to choose sides and define things ....<sup>561</sup>

Even though definitions might be sometimes wrong they are presented as the only way to cope with the world. Yet, the narration also shows us that the black and white definition in positive and negative that the protagonist tries to install with regard to the *Americans* does not work. Without an individual perspective in terms of a rational and emotional human individual, there is no alternative but insanity either in callousness or in plant- and animal-like existence. Thereby, the negative definition of mankind as Americans is brought to a *reductio ad absurdum* as it endangers her own self. In conclusion, it can be said that a *whole* personal perspective is absolutely necessary for a stable sense of self, whereas the cultural contents and definitions are also important, but must remain flexible to some extent.

### III.ii.ii. Deconstructing Traditional Values: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance – An Inquiry into Values*

The real cycle you’re working on is a cycle called “yourself.”

The study of the art of motorcycle maintenance is really a miniature study of the art of rationality itself. Working on a motorcycle, working well, caring, is to become part of a process, to achieve an inner peace of mind. The motorcycle is primarily a mental phenomenon.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Surfacing* 156, 175.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>559</sup> Robert Lecker, “Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood’s First Three Novels,” Davidson/Davidson 191.

<sup>560</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing* 123.

<sup>561</sup> Robert Lecker, “Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood’s First Three Novels,” Davidson/Davidson 191,f.

<sup>562</sup> Opening quotes by Richard M. Pirsig to Pirsig, *Zen*. Derived from *ibid.* 84, 88, 293.

Pirsig starts his MOQ subtly in the road novel *Zen*, even though it is only developed in detail in *Lila*. He combines philosophical theory and literature. This is a very interesting move in the light of Richard Rorty's suggestion that literature is the way in which what is today called philosophy and was before called religion will be negotiated in the future.<sup>563</sup> In *Zen* Pirsig focuses primarily on the problems of any metaphysics based on the subject-object dichotomy, which is typical for most western traditions. This directly engages in the central philosophical problems discussed in chapter II.ii.ii. Even though the books are to some extent autobiographic and even though the philosophy within them is identical to Robert M. Pirsig's *real life* philosophy, the actual author shall be neglected in the following.<sup>564</sup> As I wish to focus on the narrative devices with regard to human communication in general, the relation between author and actual reader has been reduced to that between abstract narrator and abstract reader. The question why a narrator develops his philosophy in novel form can still be discussed. Apart from philosophical questions, the involvement of emotions in the creation of a sense of self, already apparent in the discussion of *Surfacing*, shall be analyzed further in the following. Instead of solely focusing on the integration of feelings into an individual, the significance of the rationality it must be combined with shall be highlighted in the following. Additionally, the importance of such a balanced individuality for intersubjective communication will be further scrutinized. It should be noted in advance that the term *Quality* as it is used in the novel includes not only moral evaluations but also evaluations of profane quality, which have been discerned for the communicative foundationalist approach from ethics after Tugendhat in chapter II.ii.iii. The actual philosophy formulated in *Zen*, therefore, remains too vague to be considered a theory of ethics in the sense of this study.

### III.ii.ii.i. Development of the Central Character as an Individual

Everything's got to be measured and proved. Oppressive. Heavy. Endlessly grey. The death force. Within the classic mode, however, the romantic has some appearances of his own. Frivolous, irrational erratic, untrustworthy, interested primarily in pleasure-seeking. Shallow. Of no substance. Often a parasite who cannot or will not carry his own weight. A real drag on society. [...] Persons tend to think and feel exclusively in one mode or the other and in doing so tend to misunderstand and underestimate what the other mode is all about.<sup>565</sup>

In *Surfacing* the romantic and the rational also seem to collide and it is especially the rational that is described as utterly negative through the metaphor of a machine-like *death force*. Nonetheless, the romantic recourse to the natural was ineffective for the name-

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<sup>563</sup> Cf. Rorty, Philosophie 160-185.

<sup>564</sup> Cf. McWatt, Website.

<sup>565</sup> Pirsig, Zen 62.

less female protagonist as it did not reunite her with her emotional self. For the individual in *Surfacing*, the only way to live sanely was a combination of the rational and the emotional in the end. What Pirsig's narrator suggests in *Zen* is the categorical disjunction of these modes of understanding reality in the everyday world. "There is no point at which these visions of reality are unified."<sup>566</sup> I agree with Richard Rorty that, on the contrary, both approaches to reality share the same concept of a transcendent truth. As argued in chapter II.ii.iv. the romantic as well as the rationalistic concept agree that there is a transcendent *real* reality outside of language and the immediate situation described by communication. The only difference consists in the way this truth can be found. Whereas the rationalistic approach supposes reason to be the key to this reality, romantic theorists would see it in the emotions.<sup>567</sup> *Zen*'s narrator, however, initially presents them as follows.

The romantic mode is primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative, intuitive. Feelings rather than facts predominate. [...] It proceeds by feeling, intuition and aesthetic conscience. [...] The classic mode, by contrast, proceeds by reason and by laws – which are themselves underlying forms of thought and behavior. [...] Although motorcycle riding is romantic, motorcycle maintenance is purely classic.<sup>568</sup>

Already at this early stage of the novel it becomes clear that the theoretical distinction of the male protagonist who remains nameless for most of the narration is actually not so clear cut.<sup>569</sup> The reason why he ponders this problem is his occasional emotional conflict with his friends Sylvia and John. The protagonist is on a motorcycle road trip with these two friends and his son Chris. He tells about this trip in the first-person and in the present tense. Sylvia and John are representatives of the romantic understanding, whereas the narrator is an example for the rational approach to reality. He is the one actually interested and competent in motorcycle maintenance and technology in general, whereas his friends just enjoy the ride from the point of view of a "groovy dimension."<sup>570</sup>

We were both looking at the same thing, seeing the same thing, talking about the same thing, thinking about the same thing, except he was looking, seeing, talking and thinking from a completely different *dimension*.

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<sup>566</sup> Pirsig, *Zen* 62. It is interesting though, that many intellectuals shared that antagonism and opposed technology for long stretches of the twentieth century. Cf. e.g. the attitude of Berel Lang expressed as follows: "Admittedly, nostalgia is one of the few sentiments that technology encourages"; "the conciseness of technological advances provides a ready vehicle for totalitarianism." Lang, *Writing* 11, 116.

<sup>567</sup> Cf. Rorty, *Philosophie* 157. For my thesis it is not necessary to further differentiate this concept of reality, even though it should be stated that emotivism, also assuming truth to be accessible through emotions is decisively different from romantic approaches. For romantic and rationalistic similarities see also chapter II.iii.ii.

<sup>568</sup> Pirsig, *Zen* 61.

<sup>569</sup> He remains nameless only to the extent that he is indeed fictional. As can be understood from the Afterword, the first person narrator is based to a great extent on Robert M. Pirsig himself. Cf. *ibid.* 375-380.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

[John] really does *care* about technology. It's just that in this other dimension he gets all screwed up and is rebuffed by it. [...] He will not or cannot believe there is anything in this world for which grooving is not the way to go.<sup>571</sup>

As this fundamental difference is asserted, it must be considered to comprehend its own challenge. If people from different dimensions can establish a common topic, the modalities of thinking must match to a considerable extent. Still, the assertion of these different dimensions points to a level of characteristics with regard to existence and a level of characteristics with regard to the evaluation of this existence. Apparently, these two levels can be identified as fundamentally different, because even though consent on one of them can be reached between two persons, they can still completely disagree on the other.

The philosophical theories the narrator develops throughout the story are ascribed to a character named Phaedrus from the beginning.<sup>572</sup> It is initially unclear how the narrator got this intimate knowledge of Phaedrus' thoughts, but he ponders them all through the road trip. Yet, inspiration is not all the mysterious philosopher offers – he is also linked to insanity from the start. Chris seems to have psychological problems, which is one reason why the protagonist took him on this trip, and these problems trigger a curious defense reaction within his father.<sup>573</sup> He falls from a very rational and accurate way of narrating into a disconnected and metaphorical style.

... Surprising word, I think to myself, never used it before. Not of *kin*... sounds like hillbilly talk... not of a *kind*... same root... *kindness*, too... they can't have real *kindness* toward him, they're not his *kin*... That's the exact feeling [all ellipsis by Pirsig].<sup>574</sup>

This elliptical style is also adopted when the protagonist thinks of Phaedrus, whereas the latter seems to be intrinsically linked to Chris' mental difficulties as well as to insanity as such.

But it is a figure I recognize even though I do not let on. It is Phaedrus.  
Evil spirit. Insane. From a world without life or death.  
The figure fades and I hold panic down... tight... not rushing from it... just letting it sink in... not believing it, not disbelieving it... but the hair crawls slowly on the back of my skull... he is calling Chris, is that it?... Yes?...<sup>575</sup>

Hence, Phaedrus is introduced as the source of enlightenment as well as of menace. As he is the protagonist's source of very rational philosophical ideas as well as of obviously irrational feelings which are somehow linked to insanity, a connection between the two

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<sup>571</sup> Pirsig, Zen 48.

<sup>572</sup> "The terms classic and romantic, as Phaedrus used them ..." – the thoughts are thus presented as developed by Phaedrus from the start. Ibid. 61.

<sup>573</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 54.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.* 54, f.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

modes of understanding opens up. Even though the rationalistic and romantic modes are presented as distinct, they both seem to take on the side of sanity, whereas insanity waits behind these options. Even though the romantic mode is described as *irrational*, neither Sylvia nor John shows any signs of mental disturbance. They even argue for the continuation of Chris' psychological treatment when the protagonist admits he has stopped it because of an inexplicable dislike and thus seem to take on a very rational approach to the matter. The distinctions made are not absolutely clear, but remain to a certain extent ambivalent. Yet, they are at the outset of the story presented as a legitimate sociohistorical description of the reasons for the cultural developments of the 1960s.<sup>576</sup>

In recent times we have seen a huge split develop between classic culture and romantic counter-culture – two worlds growingly alienated and hateful toward each other with everyone wondering if it will always be this way, a house divided against itself.<sup>577</sup>

These two modes of understanding the world are thus described as the driving forces of sociohistorical reality. At the same time Phaedrus seems to be their legitimate discoverer, who was rewarded for this realization with social disrespect and retribution.

It is within this context that what Phaedrus thought and said is significant. But *no* one was listening at that time and they only thought him eccentric at first, then undesirable, then slightly mad, than genuinely insane. There seems little doubt that he was insane, but much of his writing at the time indicates that what was driving him insane was this hostile opinion of him. [...] In Phaedrus' case there was a court-ordered police arrest and permanent removal from society.<sup>578</sup>

The distinction between classic and romantic is later also nullified by the narrator when compared to his idea of quality. The apparently definite characterization of Phaedrus as insane is called into question when he and the narrator turn out to actually be the same person. Yet, the ardent opposition of the two *dimensions* in the beginning of the narration makes the achievement generated through their combination appear all the more valuable. In the same way the narrator is opposed to Phaedrus at the beginning of the story, the two approaches to reality seem to be opposed. This analogy is reflected in the formulation of the two approaches as *a house divided against itself*, and, later, of the narrator as “*a mind divided against itself*.”<sup>579</sup> Throughout the narration the protagonist first acknowledges Phaedrus as his former personality, which was destroyed by involuntary shock treatment at a mental institution. He is on this trip not only to spend time with his unsettled son, which he will more intensely do when their friends leave them, but also to investigate his past, to meet the people who knew his former self. By degrees, Phaedrus reenters the narrator's life

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<sup>576</sup> Cf. Pirsig, Zen 49, 54.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid. 298.

first as a threat, a wholly mysterious entity, then as a source of memories, then as involuntary talk in his sleep witnessed by his son, and finally as his emotional self. The protagonist is afraid of being replaced by his former self a.k.a. Phaedrus because he has always believed his old personality to have been a threat to his son.<sup>580</sup> Yet, as it turns out, this is a misconception because his son actually did not perceive his father as a threat or his absent-mindedness as dangerous. Instead, he even thinks of their confused trips together before his father was taken to the mental institution as “fun.”<sup>581</sup>

Above all, the narrator set out on this trip (and the recording of this trip) to tell his interpretation of Phaedrus’ theory regarding Quality. He tells the reader right at the beginning that he intends to do this in the form of a “Chautauqua ..., an old-time series of popular talks intended to edify and entertain, improve the mind and bring culture and enlightenment to the ears and thoughts of the hearer.”<sup>582</sup> As he later thinks of this trip and his account of it as an “archeological excavation” this is most probably an attempt to give sense to his life as a whole again.<sup>583</sup> He feels that Phaedrus took himself to be a “goddamned Messiah,” but recalls his thoughts as a starting point to dissolve “the chaotic, disconnected spirit of the twentieth century.”<sup>584</sup> As he identifies this ambition as hypocrisy in the end, the reader must conclude that from the start he has never actually intended to find out so much about the twentieth century, but rather about his own chaotic, disconnected spirit.<sup>585</sup>

In the beginning he proves to be emotionally instable, threatened by the recollections of his own past and as an insensible and remote father.<sup>586</sup> Just when he feels that he might as well kill himself, Phaedrus, or rather his emotional self, returns and saves him by enabling him to finally speak the kind words, which his son has longed to hear for so long.

I want to run for the cliff, but fight that. I have to get Chris to the bus, and then the cliff will be all right.  
*Everything is all right, now, Chris.*  
 That’s not my voice.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Zen* 77, 298, 300. See *ibid.* 154,f for the departure of the Sutherlands and 128,ff for his design of the trip as an “archeological excavation” *ibid.* 128. “But who was the *old* personality whom they had known and presumed I was a continuation of? [...] I have never met him. Never will.” *Ibid.* 77; “In this place [his former university] he is the reality and I am the ghost. [...] He *is* here now. He’s aware of everything I see.” *Ibid.* 157. “I step inside and an avalanche of memory ... begins to come down.” *Ibid.* 160 “What was it Chris said I told him last night? [...] ‘I’ll *meet* you at the top of the mountain.’ How could I meet him at the top of the mountain when I’m already with him? Something’s very strange about that.” *Ibid.* 216. “The dreamer isn’t me at all. It’s Phaedrus. He’s waking up. *A mind divided against itself... me....*” *Ibid.* 298. “Be one person again!” *Ibid.* 370.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.* 360.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.* 221, 230.

<sup>585</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 363.

<sup>586</sup> Cf. *ibid.* e.g. 121, 200, 244,f. The peak of his misunderstanding his son is reached on pages 365-368.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.* 368.

After he has finally managed to explain his past strange departure to the hospital or has at least managed to reassure Chris of his love for him, the coldness definitely leaves him.<sup>588</sup> The growing awareness of his former self, or rather of the lost part of himself has allowed him to express some more positive feelings already before the final breakthrough: “How can I love all this so much and be insane?”<sup>589</sup> Before the growing sense of insanity, which represents his awareness of the growing presence of Phaedrus within him, he was only experiencing anger or anxiety, always rationalizing himself and thus trying to control if not to suppress his feelings.<sup>590</sup> His relation to other people and to his own feelings is clearly disturbed in the beginning.

Chris seems to understand my remoteness better than they do .... In his face I sometimes see a look of worry, or at least anxiety, and wonder why, and then discover that I am angry. If I hadn't seen his expression, I might not have known it.<sup>591</sup>

The first sign of the narrator understanding this emotional block and the end of his interpretations of his son in purely rational terms occurs when he faces his conflict with Phaedrus directly. He terms it as an actual confrontation and brings in the issue of authenticity.

If I hadn't turned on him, I'd still be there [in the mental institution], but he was true to what he believed right to the end. That's the difference between us, and Chris knows it. And that's the reason why sometimes I feel he's the reality and I'm the ghost.<sup>592</sup>

Chris, whom he has seen in a very rational way until this point, was always interpreted as another adult before, not knowing how to behave himself and without an emotional connection to the narrator. The relationship to his son seems to be difficult as well, because in terms of his philosophy he cannot conceive of any learning process. Even though he treats Chris as a student sometimes, he has defined Quality as a level everybody can understand and transcend towards. The idea of education as actually showing something to others is alien to his quality concept of reality.<sup>593</sup> He thus overburdens his son when he tries to interpret his emotional despair in the face of his father's coldness as a se-

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<sup>588</sup> For the reassurance see Pirsig, Zen 369.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid. 318.

<sup>590</sup> Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 109.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid. 263.

<sup>593</sup> For his occasional attitude towards Chris as a student see *ibid.* 249. The nonexistent concept of education becomes clear in discussions such as: “‘How did you know how to do that?’ he asks. ‘You just have to figure it out.’ ‘I wouldn't know where to start,’ he says. I think to myself, That's the problem, ... where to start. To reach him you have to back up and back up, ... until what looked like a small problem of communication turns into a major philosophic enquiry. That, I suppose, is why the Chautauqua.” *Ibid.* 59. Even though what is discussed here is not just a *small* problem of communication, it still *is* a problem of communication. Just because some of the inquirer's feelings could be linked to quality, he would not automatically feel his approach toward technical questions (John is the romantic inquirer about a question regarding motorcycles here). It would still be necessary to show him (and that means to communicate with him about) the nature of the approach in which the problem could be solved.



ries of rational acts. But finally he understands that his son needs his emotional attention, and he also understands that Chris has never thought him to be insane. When the narrator manages to respond to Chris' emotional needs, Phaedrus has eventually taken over – he feels the suppressed part of himself again, i.e. experiences emotions again. He understands that his son was of course deeply troubled by the accusations his father was alleged with and that he needs reassurance. He realizes his love for his son and also that he only made the effort to get out of the mental institution for his sake. Father and son can finally really enjoy the trip and be absorbed in the beauty of their surroundings.<sup>594</sup> The narrator even verbalizes that his reservations and mental suppression mechanisms are *melting* away: “It seems like I’ve been bone-chilled by that ocean damp for so long I’ve forgotten what heat is like.”<sup>595</sup> The narration ends on a very positive note.

[T]here is a feeling now, that was not here before, and it is not just on the surface of things, but penetrates all the way through: We’ve won it. It’s going better now. You can sort of tell these things.<sup>596</sup>

It is interesting that the narrator initially set out to investigate not the emotional, but the rational aspects of his former self. His former self even nick-named himself *Phaedrus*, which refers to a Platonic dialogue and is translated as *wolf*.<sup>597</sup> Consequently, Phaedrus is actually characterized as a lone wolf, a wild animal setting out “to prey upon the poor innocent citizens of this intellectual community.”<sup>598</sup> Yet, this predator-part of the narrator’s personality, even though he repeatedly condemns it as having been insensitive, grim, egotistical, and arrogant, still holds all his emotions.<sup>599</sup> Denying the humanity of his former self, he thus only wants to deal with the purely rational aspects of Phaedrus’ existence – his Quality theory. However in the end, emotional deliverance turns out to be the reward for his endeavors.

It was intended earlier simply to restate some of [Phaedrus’] ideas ... and make no reference to him personally, but the pattern of thought that occurred last night has indicated this is not the way to go. To omit him now would be to run from something that should not be run from. [... G]hosts appear

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<sup>594</sup> Cf. Pirsig, Zen 361; 369,f; 370-373. On *ibid.* 364 he formulates blatant accusations regarding Chris, thus ranking him among the part of his personality he has so far tried to suppress: “[W]hat comes to me know is the realization that he’s another Phaedrus, thinking the way he used to, looking for trouble, being driven by forces he’s only dimly aware of and doesn’t understand.”

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.* 371.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.* 373.

<sup>597</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 346,f. Besides the general discussions of Plato’s philosophy, the dialogue entitled and featuring *Phaedrus* is not specifically important for the narrator’s philosophical theories. The reference mainly functions as a doubly telling name as Plato’s Phaedrus displays wolfish characteristics and as the protagonist Phaedrus is compared to Plato’s Phaedrus, who also appears in other dialogues. The subjects discussed within this dialogue (e.g. madness and rhetoric vs. dialectic) are indeed important for Zen and Lila; yet, they are differently conceived. Especially in my interpretation the narrator’s concepts are much closer to twentieth century philosophical theories than to Plato’s work. However, the narrator mistranslates the Greek name.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.* 354.

<sup>599</sup> For such depreciative statements see e.g. *ibid.* 220,f, 311, 332.

when someone has not been buried right. [...] He never *was* buried right, and that's exactly the source of the trouble.<sup>600</sup>

Thus, the initial distinct opposition of the romantic and classic dimensions actually serves another purpose than theoretical enlightenment. It is later in the development of the theoretical level of the narration (or the Chautauqua level) resolved in a trinity with Quality anyway. This distinction and its later dissolution are important as the protagonist builds and maintains a boundary between his present and his former self. Had the narrator not confined the level of rationality in this way, he could not have located Phaedrus safely encapsulated there. By erecting this clear boundary the narrator can cling to the illusion that he is able to deal with the recollections of his past on a purely objective level without any subjective involvement.

All in all the distinction between classic rationality and romantic *grooving* seems to match the modern meaning of the terms objective and subjective. This view is supported by the fact that the narrator picks objectivity as one of the central issues of his Chautauqua. As a substitute for rationality objectivity seems to imply emotional coldness and ignorance of Quality, whereas subjectivity is equated with feeling one's way through life and ignoring the underlying order of the world. By intertwining the respective terms in this way, the protagonist actually ensnares himself in a basic contradiction. Without going into details regarding his vague definition of Quality, it can be stated that he presents a practical lifestyle of *peace of mind* as an ideal.<sup>601</sup> "What your actual solution is is unimportant as long as it has Quality."<sup>602</sup> He thus advocates an *ethics of doing* rather than an ethics of values. Unfortunately, it is logically impossible to stick to the notion of a *solution* to some problem and to promote peace of mind as the highest goal at the same time. Either, the above quoted sentence needed to be extended to "What your actual solution is is unimportant as long as it [works and] has Quality" or it needed to be reduced to "What[ever you do] ... is unimportant as long as it has Quality." In the way he tries to combine both dimensions, the narrator incorporates a lack of a qualitative standard, as such a standard cannot be at the same time subjectively and objectively defined.

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<sup>600</sup> Pirsig, Zen 58.

<sup>601</sup> "[R]omantic attitudes toward Quality ... are, by themselves, hopeless. You can't live on groovy emotions alone. You have to work with the underlying form of the universe, too, the laws of nature .... In the past our common universe of reason has been in the process of escaping, rejecting the romantic, irrational world .... It's been necessary since before the time of Socrates to reject the passions, the emotions, in order to free the rational mind for an understanding of nature's order which was as yet unknown. Now it's time to reassimilate those passions which were originally fled from." Ibid. 263,f. Cf. ibid. 264,ff.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid. 258.

The term Quality cannot refer to the quality of work with regard to its functionality and at the same time encompass the ideal of living peacefully. Yet, in Pirsig's *Zen* it sometimes refers to the practical value and sometimes to moral values.<sup>603</sup>

[C]lassical subject-object knowledge, although necessary, isn't enough. You have to have a feeling for the quality of the work. You have to have a sense of what's good. [...] This sense ... you *are* born with. [...] It's the direct result of contact with basic *reality*, Quality, which dualistic reason has in the past tended to conceal.<sup>604</sup>

Here another ambiguity, visible at several points of the narration, surfaces: If the basic contact with Quality occurs through feelings and feelings are clearly related to the subjective realm, the narrator eventually cannot be interpreted to create a metaphysical *trinity*. His claim to truly dissolve the classical and the romantic mode in a combination through Quality is thus challenged. The romantic approach seems in some way to occupy a position prior to classic reasoning. Furthermore, the peaceful state of mind is contradictorily at some point defined as *caring* about one's work and at others as a performance of one's work without any desires. On the one hand, an emotional level of the quality performance is indicated and on the other it is completely denied, as the notions of absolute peace of mind and enthusiasm must necessarily contradict each other.<sup>605</sup> Thus, the "dynamic reality" of Quality eventually described bears too many ambiguities to be an adequate philosophical concept.<sup>606</sup>

The clear distinction of subjectivity and objectivity that is initially made and through the notion of a *trinity* maintained on the Chautauqua level of the story is thus logically unconvincing. It seems all the more probable that this distinction has been applied and maintained by the narrator for other reasons than theoretical enlightenment. Psychological differentiation between his ability to reason and his emotional recollections seems to be the prevalent motive. It is interesting that the above mentioned conflict between motivation and peace of mind surfaces in the conflict with his son. Before their reconciliation Chris accuses him of never doing anything, of not going anywhere – which fits nicely with the mostly meditatively connoted ideal of peace of mind.<sup>607</sup> A lack of the protagonist's emotional involvement throughout the book has already been addressed. Through a con-

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<sup>603</sup> In Pirsig, *Zen* 261 he talks about the "conflict between human values and technological needs."

<sup>604</sup> Ibid. 255.

<sup>605</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 253. "[N]ot really caring about anything..., seems to draw out the inner tensions and frustrations that have prevented you from solving problems ...." Ibid. 265. Yet, as mentioned, preserving the interest in solving actual problems would mean that the agent necessarily cared about something.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid. 255.

<sup>607</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 360.

versation between the narrator and his son the protagonist's strange lack of enthusiasm and of motivation is evidenced.

"I'm so tired of just sitting and ..." His voice has trailed off.  
"And what?"  
"And ... I don't know. Just sitting ... like we're not really going anyplace."  
"Where should we go?"  
"I don't know. How should I know?"  
"I don't know either," I say.  
"Well, why don't you!" he says. He begins to cry [all ellipsis by Pirsig].<sup>608</sup>

It is exactly his inner disruption – the fact that he only acknowledges his rational side – that makes him unable to actually (emotionally) engage in his life.

Besides the fact that the metaphysical trinity is not theoretically satisfying, the terms subjectivity and objectivity should be handled with more cultural sensibility. It is obviously true that the emotional and rational side of a human being must be linked together to ensure a full engagement in life and a sensible interaction with other people. Moreover, these spheres of the personal can to some extent be separated (although this causes mental effects). Yet, the link of the technical/scientific, the rational, and the objective and its opposition to the artistic, the emotional, and the subjective is a framework of thought that culturally came into being only in the nineteenth century. "[D]ie Begriffe [objective/subjective] bedeuteten ursprünglich fast das genaue Gegenteil dessen, was sie heute bedeuten."<sup>609</sup> A special and historically young form of objectivity, Lorraine Daston explains, seeks to exclude all forms of human influence on the natural reality that is examined. As the subjective human influence can also be termed a culturally influenced approach to the world, it is interesting to see that the distinction between science and culture was not at all times as rigorous as it is today. Isaac Newton (and many philosophers) tried for example to infer arguments for the existence of God from his work.<sup>610</sup>

The classical understanding of all science was a theological one – the motivation for scientific work was to get closer to God.<sup>611</sup> Thus, the special connection between rationality and objectivity must be interpreted as a sociohistorical development.<sup>612</sup> The creative or aesthetic side was equally not at all times connected with emotions, but functioned as a

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<sup>608</sup> Pirsig, Zen 360.

<sup>609</sup> Lorraine Daston, "Die Kultur der wissenschaftlichen Objektivität," *Naturwissenschaft, Geisteswissenschaft, Kulturwissenschaft: Einheit – Gegensatz – Komplementarität?* Ed. Otto Gerhard Oexle (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998) 9-41, 30.

<sup>610</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 18, 34. Objectivity is also conceptually criticized by Paul Grice. Cf. Grice, *Conception* 35-39.

<sup>611</sup> Cf. Wallner, *Verwandlung* 231,f.

<sup>612</sup> This is also an argument against replacing the old sort of objectivity with a new postmodern objectivity based on relativity. One of the many attempts to formulate such a relative objectivity (or an objectivity based on the fragility of the subject) in literary theory is Mohanty, *Theory*. My approach, which includes the complete discard of the traditional notion of realist objectivity, seems to be more fruitful for a new understanding of ethics.

more technical term for example for the old Greek philosophers, but also for Elizabethan writers.<sup>613</sup> Yet, the connection of emotions and rational abilities within human beings seems inextricable. Hence, the association of this existing structure with other sociohistorical contents seems only natural and has always been conducted in some way or other. The narration's philosophical content thus shows that there are structures of human consciousness that can be filled with varying cultural content. But there is more to the dualistic structure in question, as the connection between emotions and rationality is essential to the narrator finally having a *real* life.<sup>614</sup>

### III.ii.ii. Important Aspects of Narrational Style

In the following, I will further investigate these structures of human consciousness. The narrational setting with regard to the philosophical content contains valuable information regarding the manner in which philosophical or reality concepts are generated in general. This mode of analysis suggests itself as the narrator discusses the generation of philosophical concepts himself. Furthermore, the structure of the narration is an interesting topic as it renders the theoretical points made by the protagonist ambivalent to a certain extent. The narrator's purely rational voice is interrupted by elliptical passages when he thinks about insanity or about Phaedrus. Phaedrus is at the same time the source of the protagonist's rational ideas, as he is the source of the protagonist's fear and panic with regard to his son and the topic of mental problems in general. This impression of ambivalence is even increased when it becomes clear that Phaedrus is not a menacing person from the narrator's past, but actually his alter ego. The competence of the narrator, who is presented as intellectually capable at first, is thus subverted.<sup>615</sup> His intellectuality is underlined by the interspersions of catchphrases in German, of poetry, and of various sources of his ideas.<sup>616</sup>

When trying to recreate a whole pattern by deduction from fragments I am bound to commit errors and put down inconsistencies, for which I must ask some indulgence. [...] Today now I want to take up the first phase of his journey into Quality, the nonmetaphysical phase .... [...] Using his class notes

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<sup>613</sup> Cf. e.g. Aster, *Geschichte* 33-108; Ina Schabert, *Shakespeare Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1978).

<sup>614</sup> The question what *real* can mean in this context will be discussed in detail in part IV.

<sup>615</sup> For the frequent allusions to the situation of a professor lecturing an audience see e.g. Pirsig, *Zen* 63, 69, 71, 73, 86,f, 92-94, 114,ff, 169,f, 188, 193, 199, 200, 205, 221, 229, 232, 247,f, 254, 268, 272.

<sup>616</sup> This focus on intellectuality serves to contrast the craftsman's image evoked by the extensive explanations of motorcycle maintenance given for example in *ibid.* 37, 64, 83,ff, 95,f, 320,f. For the intellectual image see *ibid.* 47, 191, 251, 271, 108, 114, 234, 232-229, 237. There even is an extract from the beginning of Goethe's "Erlkönig" on *ibid.* 55. Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Der Erlkönig," *Goethezeitportal e.V. der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München* (1782) <http://www.goethezeitportal.de/index.php?id=4063> (25.03.2009). This is an elegant way to increase the atmosphere of father and son being haunted by ghosts. Even though in Pirsig, *Zen* in contrast to Goethe's lay it is the father and not the son who is menaced.

as reference material I want to reconstruct the way in which Quality became a working concept for him ....<sup>617</sup>

Yet, by making the position of lecturer an issue of the narration, his competence is already undercut. His professionalism is further rendered doubtful by the meta-comments he makes, judging his lectures. His narration on the level of events is equally taken up as an issue by stating that he does not intend to actually write a novel.

That would be quite a novel, but for some reason I don't feel quite up to it. They're friends, not characters, and as Sylvia herself once said, "I don't like being an object!" So a lot of things we know about one another I'm simply not going into. Nothing bad, but not really relevant to the Chautauqua.<sup>618</sup>

The protagonist also indirectly explains why he does not publish his thoughts as philosophical essays.

The trouble is that essays always have to sound like God talking for eternity, and that isn't the way it ever is. People should see that it's never anything other than just one person talking from one place in time and space and circumstance. It's never been anything else, ever, but you can't get that across in an essay.<sup>619</sup>

The intentionality of his narration actually belies his resolution not to turn his friends into characters. At the same time, an inconsistency on another level becomes apparent. If the protagonist really thinks that the philosopher's personal perspective should always be indicated as such in his theory, his initial deliberation not to refer to Phaedrus personally was absolutely misdirected. Unless, of course, he thought that personal reference to his later ego would be sufficient to establish the former ego's "place in time and space and circumstance." As Phaedrus developed his thoughts mainly in the 1950s, whereas the protagonist develops his ideas based on Phaedrus' thoughts well in the 1970s, this would be a curious evaluation.<sup>620</sup> Again, the priority of psychological motives over literary or theoretical motives becomes clear. As will be evident in the following, such psychological intention is interestingly a guiding principle of the generation of conscious concepts.

The idea of creating a sociohistorical setting for the account of philosophy as well as the apparent critique of objectivity is a very postmodern idea.<sup>621</sup> Therefore, it seems ade-

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<sup>617</sup> Pirsig, Zen 169,f.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid. 121.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid. 153.

<sup>620</sup> For the historical setting see *ibid.* 135.

<sup>621</sup> It is interesting that although most postmodern theorists adhere to the importance of the cultural setting and the inherent dependency of the human individual, very few of them ever pick out their own position as a speaker within a cultural framework as a central issue. Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialists have taken on the role of writer in addition to their purely philosophical work. Cf. Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/> (02.03.2009). As the narrator establishes the *real* reality as a dynamic reality connected with the human ability of perception, similarities to phenomenology in general must be assigned to his philosophy. For a well informed overview

quate that the narrator's position in discourse is rendered ambivalent on several levels. This ambivalence is brought to its apogee when the protagonist finally verbalizes a general doubt about his own personality and his narration.

I can imitate the father [Chris is] supposed to have, but subconsciously, at the Quality level, he sees through it and knows his real father isn't here. In all this Chautauqua talk there's been more than a touch of hypocrisy. Advice is given again and again to eliminate subject-object duality, when the biggest duality of all, the duality between me and him, remains unfaced. A mind divided against itself.<sup>622</sup>

The deconstructive gesture apparent in his narrational strategy undercuts the consistency of his character's individual personality. Yet, his position in discourse is obviously stable enough to enable him to understand and criticize traditional philosophy. He deconstructs the objective twentieth-century science and all rationalistic philosophy, starting at the time of the old Greeks. Additionally he refers to topics such as authenticity, which feature an important role in postmodern theories, such as existentialism.<sup>623</sup> Nevertheless, his narration takes on a realistic stance in the end. This becomes clear as he does not doubt his own position as scholar and as he eventually installs Quality as the *real* realistic level behind classical and romantic ideas. Thus, he uses a narrational setting that reveals the constructedness of some elements of philosophy, while he tries to establish a new foundation strongly connected to normative issues at the same time. Yet, as already highlighted, this theoretical foundation already contains its own ambivalences because the narrational style involves psychological motives.

Man's seemingly objective theoretical capacities oppose his subjective personal motives. This opposition is highlighted as the narrator makes his personal perspective an issue of his philosophy. Thereby, the universal contradiction of psychologically influenced and emotional beings who try to formulate neutral science is focused. This focus is inherent in the act of narrating from a personal point of view. The relevance of this personal point of view for the generation of philosophical concepts shall be considered in a more theoretical vein at this point. To do so, I will consider how conscious processes can originate concepts. As the narrator sticks to a realistic framework, which is traditionally supposed to be neutral and objective, it is especially interesting to scrutinize the significance of the subjective perspective. Within realistic approaches, distinguishing right and wrong – differentiating a

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of historical and intra-disciplinary phenomenological positions see [David Woodruff Smith](#), "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/> (02.03.2009).

<sup>622</sup> Pirsig, Zen 363.

<sup>623</sup> For a detailed discussion of existentialism see Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/> (02.03.2009).

level of perceiving pure appearance and what truly transcends this level and lies behind it – is actually impossible until a personal perspective is adapted. By just impersonally describing a state of natural existence an evaluation would be impossible. By, for example, neutrally stating *the sky is blue* there would be no way of evaluating that statement. This would simply mean to state impersonal information to an anonymous listener. Evaluation needs a person who can compare a statement to an observed fact. What Rorty described as the realist characteristic of all human concepts of reality can only be generated by a person who individually looks at the world. As stated above, this leads to an inherent contradiction with regard to the position of observer as well as with regard to the objective existence of values. *Zen*'s narrator tries to solve this problematic situation by supposing a level of evaluation that is already part of the world that can be observed. Yet, he can thus only solve the question of the objective existence of values. His project remains ambivalent as his philosophical insight is necessarily entangled with his ambivalent personal perspective. Actually, the whole project of (objective) realism seems to be ambivalent as it necessarily originates from a subjective perspective.

Still, the narrator sticks to his realist framework. In the following I want to discuss exactly this reflex to presume a *real* reality behind observations. It will turn out to be psychologically motivated in very much the same way as the protagonist's narrational style is. The realistic reflex is only possible if one assumes several observers with different points of view. If a human being were all alone, she would probably just observe the color of the sky and memorize (or forget) this information. In such isolation it would not really make a difference whether she gave the sky a name and understood the changing colors as a change of state or whether she understood the process as a change of substance (or even as an existential change). It would just be stored information. Whether the way in which information is stored is *right* or *correct* or *true* can only be pondered if there is an alternative view held by someone else. The realistic model does not only presuppose subjectivity, but also intersubjectivity, as alternatives are needed to discuss truth. I would even propose that human consciousness can only take shape as the consciousness of a person with personal views. The first-person point of view must already exist when we talk about human beings. Any abstraction toward a third-person or objective point of view must be derived from subjective perception.<sup>624</sup> Still, different personal views do not necessarily lead to supposing a *real* reality behind the diverse perceptions or explanations. Causations for human percep-

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<sup>624</sup> As John Searle has aptly argued, the mere fact that all data is received in personalized ways would in itself not necessarily be an argument against external realism. Cf. Searle, *Geist* 41,ff. See *ibid.* 56 for an alternative argument that all consciousness must always be subjective.



tions might very well exist in a realist sense, but all humans ever perceive is not a causation, but a perception (i.e. the representation of the supposed causation). We can thus ask why arguments are usually not formulated in terms of representations. Why do we formulate them in terms of reality at all? The narrational strategy in *Zen* offers an interesting answer with regard to the comparison of perceptions. If they were simply formulated as subjective perceptions, no standard to compare them could be conceived at all. The urge to adapt different perspectives and to combine them in one concept seems to underlie this procedure. As the philosophical idea of quality intends to replace traditionally realistic notions of reality, it seems to be an advantage in comprehensibility as well as an advantage in credibility that quality can actually *take the place* of objectivity in a world increasingly characterized by neutral objectiveness. Faced with an explicit conflict between romantic and classic understanding, it would not be very convincing to simply state that both concepts are merely constructs of the human mind. Replacing existing concepts is always easier by offering an alternative concept with regard to content while keeping the conscious structure of how the world is understood.

Comparing observations might thus be identified as a basic by-product of social life. As normative arguments are only challenged by normative arguments, it seems logical that the idea of external reality is included in human consciousness. Additionally, the variation of human perceptions must be compulsory. If all human beings naturally perceived everything in the same way, they would simply have to share their experiences to come to exactly the same opinions on everything. There must be individual differences in either perceiving sensual information (i.e. the actual process of gathering the sensual data, processing the data, or linking the data to feelings) or in using this information to construct concepts to intelligently think about reality. The perception can actually not be essentially differentiated from person to person. As language philosophers like Donald Davidson have argued, the moment several human beings are talking about something, most of the actual properties attributed to that thing must be true according to the convictions of all persons involved. Otherwise they would not understand themselves to be talking about the same thing.<sup>625</sup> This means that the process of perceiving must exhibit crucial similarities for all human

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<sup>625</sup> Cf. Davidson, *Subjective* 28,f; 95-105 or for a similar point Rentsch, *Konstitution* 159. See also Richard Rorty's discussion of Davidson in Rorty, *Philosophie* 187,f. Kuno Lorenz describes Davidson's philosophy in this respect as the attempt to evaluate intentions as a special type of causes. Cf. Lorenz, *Einführung* 100. This was also evidenced by the initial distinction between classic and romantic understanding.

beings.<sup>626</sup> Thus, the decisive variations must lie in the formation of concepts that make reality intelligible.<sup>627</sup>

Yet, the concepts of reality cannot be absolutely unlike each other either. Communication between the protagonist and his friends would otherwise never have been possible.<sup>628</sup> At least the functional system constituting these concepts must remain unchanged. As has been argued, external reality is presupposed in realism and in relativism alike. Notwithstanding the narrator's references to postmodern relativism, the philosophical concept in *Zen* remains realistic throughout. As has been argued above, the idea of external realism even seems to be automatically included in human thought about reality.<sup>629</sup> I quite agree with John Searle that external realism cannot simply be a theory, but must be understood as a background condition or precondition of human communication.<sup>630</sup> Thus, the basic communicative situation includes the subjective point of view, which is linked to evaluation through social existence, and to external realism as a concept of consciousness. This implies that whenever human beings come into contact, differing concepts of reality become possible. To solve the differences the idea of a *real* reality seems to be automatically applied. Thereby, a psychological motive can be assessed. This is also implied in the narrator's interpretation of the history of western philosophical concepts.<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> Otherwise, the practice of explaining something to someone might have been tried at some point in the history of mankind, but would have fallen into oblivion a long time ago. The same would hold true for the practice of trying to understand and the practice of trying to advise others.

<sup>627</sup> There are various types of conceptual frameworks relevant for man's notion of reality in philosophy. My idea of concepts of reality is thus not new. Yet, the frameworks used to distinguish certain forms of relativism usually do not have such a specific neurobiological or natural or communicative foundationalist sense as the concept of reality used here. I really mean to say that without a concept of reality no human interaction would be possible. Thus, the idea has a biological edge – as we are humans, we have a concept of reality. If we don't, we won't be able to act as humans, and thus won't be human. "Terms that have been used in related ways include worldview (*Weltanschauung*) and categorical scheme. There are also similarities to Wittgenstein's forms of life, various phenomenologist' notions of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), R. G. Collingwood's sets of absolute presuppositions of a given culture and time, Thomas Kuhn's paradigms, Michel Foucault's episteme, and Nelson Goodman's world versions." Chris Swoyer, "Relativism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/> (25.03.2009).

<sup>628</sup> Even though a lot of cases show that a consensus or even an understanding between differing concepts of reality can be very difficult, it cannot be pronounced to be impossible.

<sup>629</sup> Such a human inclination to realist transcendence (as opposed to the kind of intersubjective transcendence that is maintained with regard to communicative reality in this study) or *illusionary* realist transcendence can also be seen in the concept of *fullness* introduced by Charles Taylor to explain the structure of belief in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge and London: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007) 6,ff. Taylor's whole narration of the relation between secularity and religion as referring to underlying human capacities in fact supports the tendency of the here presented very concise sketch of the functionality of human reasoning.

<sup>630</sup> Cf. Searle, *Geist* 45. Whereas Searle takes this as an argument for the actual existence of reality (as we perceive it), I rather set it down as a component of human perception. As was already discussed in part II. of this thesis, a debate about the actual existence or non-existence of reality is fruitless. As was shown, what is decisive about reality is the perception of it in different sociohistorical concepts of reality. Humans are only affected by their environment in terms of their concepts of reality.

<sup>631</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Zen* 336,ff.

The protagonist states that “in reality [the immortal philosophical principles] are just as much an artistic creation as the anthropomorphic Gods they replaced.”<sup>632</sup> The Greeks started to replace the religious belief as an explanatory concept with philosophical explanations, and this philosophy had to be created in the same terms (as an underlying, transcendent reality) as the religion to be comprehensible. The whole history of philosophy can be described as a continuation of this process.<sup>633</sup> Yet, the “just” in the above quotation seems to be out of place. I would propose that it is *the* great human characteristic that we are able to create a reality to live in.<sup>634</sup> At the time of the old Greeks the philosophical concept had to be complex enough to compete with an all-encompassing religious concept of reality.<sup>635</sup> In one way or another, religious systems as well as philosophical systems have always tended to formulate rules to regulate communal life. The mental ability to *artistically* create such systems could thus even be ascribed to a biological function: the survival instinct.<sup>636</sup> The organizing principle of religion, philosophy, and the natural sciences has always been transcendent; therefore, truth has always been conceived as *shining through*, as being hidden behind the concept’s surface reality.

This explains why even a theory that sets out to mediate between rational and emotional understanding as in *Zen* easily rests attached to realistic understanding. Yet, as the above discussion has shown, this is not due to realism’s truth, but rather seems to be connected to a natural human inclination. Realism seems to answer the psychological motive of persuasion nicely, yet, it cannot be supposed that this is the only reason. It is rather un-

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<sup>632</sup> Pirsig, *Zen* 337.

<sup>633</sup> I a similar way, modern philosophers could be understood to have replaced the divine obligation by secular rational obligation. Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 225.

<sup>634</sup> Even though he is a realist, John Searle also identifies the pivotal role of such human creativity within postmodern conceptions of the individual. Yet, he assumes that this concept of human power (implicitly or explicitly) shared by all postmodern intellectuals is an illusion. He assumes that this *creativity* is not a human characteristic, but reflects the theorists’ will to power by formulating such possibilities. He links it to the wish to solve the skepticist discrepancy dilemma (referring to the discrepancy between human representation and represented reality) or alternatively to the humanists’ desire to produce results of equal importance as the natural sciences. Cf. Searle, *Geist* 22-31. Obviously, I do not share his view, but believe in this sort of creativity as the most noticeable human trait.

<sup>635</sup> Contrary to the European concept, other religions proposed the complete suppression of emotions so that a meditative disengagement could be created and devastating feelings would no longer be experienced. For an overview of Indian and Chinese philosophy see e.g. Aster, *Geschichte* 1-32. The major difference between western and eastern religious concepts with regard to motivation is that in eastern religions *better* means less emotionally attached to the world.

<sup>636</sup> Obviously, this link between the conscious creation of moral rules and survival relates to social contract theories, in which social survival is linked to the formulation of rules as a contract. For an overview of such theories see Ann Cudd, “Contractarianism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism/> (03.04.2009). As social contract theorists, such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, belong to political realism, the postmodern philosophical realists have further worked on this conception. The formulation in this thesis can actually be linked closely to realist John Searle’s idea of the human consciousness as a biological function for survival. Cf. Searle, *Geist* 80.f. Natural scientists such as Antonio Damasio, of course, understand consciousness in this vein as well. Cf. e.g. Damasio, *Entschlüsselung*.

likely that every person in the history of concepts of philosophy, religion, and the natural sciences rationally and completely comprehended the cognitive situation in times of change. A completely intentional motive of persuasion would suppose such complete comprehension. As this cannot have been the case, there is no rational explanation for the supposition of a transcendent reality other than a natural inclination. It is certainly not convincing that transcendent conscious concepts come into being because they correspond to *real* reality, as is insightfully commented on by the narrator as follows.

The formation of hypotheses is the most mysterious of all the categories of scientific method. Where they come from no one knows. [...] Until it's tested the hypothesis isn't truth. For the tests aren't its source. [...] Nature provides only experimental data.<sup>637</sup>  
The more you look, the more you see.<sup>638</sup>

There is no more chance that an unselective observation of facts will produce science than there is that a monkey at a typewriter will produce the Lord's Prayer.<sup>639</sup>

As the realistic structure has prevailed for such a long time, it must be connected to the human mind. Additionally, it corresponds to the psychological motives of persuasion that can be identified in concrete situations. The protagonist preserves this pattern as he elaborates Quality as the third and essential part of “the metaphysical trinity of subject, object and Quality ....”<sup>640</sup> The attractiveness of realistic concepts of transcendence is also apparent in the immense popularity of (alternative) religions in the west in postmodern times and in the comeback of ethics that has been one of this study's initial points.<sup>641</sup> Apparently, it is not natural to stick to one's subjective concept of reality just because there is no objective reason against it. Instead, a *real* reality that objectively justifies this subjective concept against all other possible concepts is generated. Communicative foundationalism acknowledges that this model of external transcendence is natural, but opposes it as a model to actually explain communicative reality. Besides these insights into the structure of human consciousness, an important conclusion from *Zen's* analysis is that perception and evaluation are interconnected. This means that their separation – as evidenced by the identification of

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<sup>637</sup> Pirsig, *Zen* 99.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.* 214.

<sup>641</sup> “While interest in eastern spirituality has been observable in Western societies for centuries, it has enjoyed a renewed popularity since the 1960s.” Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions – A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004) 138. See also *Adam, Eva und die Evolution – Kreationismus auf dem Vormarsch*, dir. Dirk Neumann and Hans-Jürgen von der Burchhard, broadcasted on Phoenix 30 March 2010 10.15pm, [http://www.phoenix.de/content/phoenix/die\\_sendungen/adam\\_eva\\_und\\_die\\_evolution/288125?datum=2010-03-30](http://www.phoenix.de/content/phoenix/die_sendungen/adam_eva_und_die_evolution/288125?datum=2010-03-30). One could describe realism and relativism (or the assertion of truth vs. skepticism, in other words, the tendency to objectify perception vs. critical thought) as genuinely human rational practices that need to be balanced, as proposed by Stanley Cavell, *Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

romantic and classic understanding by the narrator – although rationally possible, will never be complete or even completely logical.

### III.ii.iii. The Inscrutable *Other*: *The Virgin Suicides*

Jeffrey Eugenides' first novel is set in a 1970's suburb of Detroit. By employing an out-of-genre topic – the suicide of five sisters – he deconstructs the implications of the setting of the suburb as a refuge for liberal dreams.<sup>642</sup> It is unmasked as the shelter of a parochial community, which is lurid and uncaring. Not only the five Lisbon sisters are deeply affected by the antagonism in which they exist toward this community, but also the group of neighborhood boys who tell the story of the girls' deaths. The narrator is constituted in a curious first person plural, evoking the appearance of a homogeneous group. Additionally, the narrators cannot easily be identified as the central characters of the story, as their narration is devoted to the mystery of the sisters' early departure from this world from the first to the last sentence.<sup>643</sup>

It didn't matter in the end how old they had been, or that they were girls, but only that we had loved them, and that they hadn't heard us calling, still do not hear us here in the tree house, with our thinning hair and soft bellies, calling them out of those rooms where they went to be alone for all time, alone in suicide, which is deeper than death, and where we will never find the pieces to put them back together.<sup>644</sup>

The boys are unified through their task of tracing the girls' story. Even though their feelings are partly very personally described, the *we* encompasses about a dozen boys.<sup>645</sup>

The whole narration is set as a criminal investigation in retrospect – the effect is intensified by the ninety-seven *Exhibits* they use to support their reasoning.<sup>646</sup> The investigation's objectivity is challenged frequently by mention of the “faulty memory bank” from which it draws.<sup>647</sup> And yet, the narrators feel obliged to conduct it. They believe themselves to be “custodians of the girls' lives” and want find out “why” the girls committed suicide.<sup>648</sup> They seem to be in love to the point of obsession and act as reporters at the

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<sup>642</sup> Cf. Denis Scheck, “Nachwort von Denis Scheck,” Eugenides, *Air Mail* 107-119, 111.

<sup>643</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Suicides* 3.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.* 249.

<sup>645</sup> Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 240, 246.

<sup>646</sup> For example “We have a few documents from the time (Exhibits #13-#14) – Therese's chemistry write-ups, Bonnie's history paper on Simone Weil, Lux's frequent forged excuses from phys. ed.” *Ibid.* 101. For the total number of exhibits see Eugenides, *Suicides* 246. They examine and describe each exhibit meticulously – displaying the care of a detective in a murder mystery. Cf. *ibid.* 101.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.* 245.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.* 224.

same time. This is apparent in their frequent direct address to the reader, as if she was part of an audience watching a boulevard program on TV.

We'd like to tell you with authority what it was like inside the Lisbon house, or what the girls felt being imprisoned in it. Sometimes, drained by this investigation, we long for some shred of evidence, some Rosetta stone that would explain the girls at last. [...] Trying to locate the girls' exact pain is like the self-examination doctors urge us to make (we've reached that age). [...] Hardly have we begun to palpate their grief than we find ourselves wondering whether this particular wound was mortal or not, or whether (in our blind doctoring) it's a wound at all.<sup>649</sup>

In this way, the narration rather resembles a mediated story than a directly experienced world. The effect is intensified by the large gap of several decades between the time when the suicides took place and the moment the men have decided to tell the story of their boyhood infatuation with the Lisbon girls. The effectiveness of arousing the audiences' curiosity and craving for sensations is proven by some critics' consternated reactions. David Walsh actually complains that Eugenides is not giving a sufficiently detailed psychological account of the reasons for the suicides.<sup>650</sup> Even though Walsh expresses his critique framed by social concerns, it nevertheless proves that the novel functions like a sensational report.

### III.ii.iii.i. Development of the Central Characters as Individuals

The narrators tell the story of the girls' suicides, yet their feelings, thoughts, and reasons are always only as much as suspected. Both groups are actually created interdependently – the girls would not be talked about if it weren't for the boys, and the boys are only talking about themselves in relation to the girls. Thus, the two groups must be identified as central. On the time level of narrated events, the development of the Lisbon girls' individualities will be analyzed. On the time level of the narrating process, the development of the boys will be discussed. The girls' fates can only be seen through the eyes of their observers, whereas the narrators can only be understood through their narration, which is at least as much about the girls as it is about themselves. For the girls' development, the concept of the family as moral community, “in the sense of a group with which the members identify and with which they are emotionally involved,” will be important.<sup>651</sup> For the boys' development, the concept of a meta-familial community, which also plays a role in the interpre-

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<sup>649</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 170.

<sup>650</sup> “Mass suicide of the young is that much more horrifying and unimaginable. At that point such an episode, by the logic of its own implications, becomes a social tragedy. One would want to know all about the circumstances, to make sense of them, to do everything in one's power to ensure that such an event never took place again. One might even be obliged to ask: why are so many people so unhappy in the ‘greatest nation on earth?’” Walsh, *Generalities*.

<sup>651</sup> Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2005) 55 (hereafter: Burke, *History*).

tation of the girls' fate, will be central. The community of the suburb is the source from which both groups derive their collective identities. Obviously, no community can ever be absolutely homogeneous in attitude or free of conflicts; nor can it be totally steeped in solidarity.<sup>652</sup> Yet, in the present case, in which the narration leads to *mass suicide of the young*, it is obvious that the existing antagonisms get out of hand. The individual and collective identities must be scrutinized from the outside as well as from the inside to understand the ensuing catastrophe. The reader is presented with a purely outside view of one group of individuals (the girls) and a purely inside view of another group of individuals (the boys). This setting seems to illustrate the postmodern hypothesis that an individual can only completely understand herself, whereas her fellow human beings remain cryptic, but essential *others*.<sup>653</sup> In this sense, the Lisbon girls could be seen as the truly inscrutable *other* for the narrators.

Lisa A. Kirby describes the antagonism between the groups of individuals and the suburban community, which she sees as an environment of “failed dreams, illusions, and isolation.”<sup>654</sup> After the youngest sister's suicide, the novel surveys approximately one year of suburban life in retrospect. During this time the boys observe and even interact with the Lisbon girls, who are confined to the family home after they have been to a school dance from which Lux returns late.<sup>655</sup> In her anger her mother nearly strikes her on this occasion, only controlling herself when she remembers that neighbors might be watching.

[T]hen Mrs. Lisbon's hand fell limply to her side, and Lux saw her chance. She shot by her, up the stairs, into her room.<sup>656</sup>

This front-porch scene clearly shows that mother and daughter have no relation of understanding or even communication. This is the first time the parents allow their daughters to date, their eldest already being almost eighteen years old. As the youngest daughter Lux disobeys their orders, they sit up waiting for her, playing funeral music, and finally making that scene on the porch.<sup>657</sup> Mrs. Lisbon's ensuing reaction is clearly out of proportion – she “shut[s] the house in maximum-security isolation” and her daughters are not even allowed

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<sup>652</sup> Even minor inner differences can threaten a community's sense of identity as it is in itself generated through determining differences. Cf. Burke, *History* 57-60.

<sup>653</sup> Such positions have already been discussed in previous chapters and Butler's position will be analyzed as an example in part IV. Additionally, Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy and his harsh critique of the western ideal of a self-sufficient individual, who is able to understand and relate to fellow human beings, can be mentioned. Cf. e.g. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ausweg aus dem Sein – De l'évasion* (transl. and ed. Alexander Chucholsowski) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2005) 5,ff (hereafter: Levinas, *Ausweg*).

<sup>654</sup> Kirby, *Suburbia*.

<sup>655</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Suicides* 118-137.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>657</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 7; 135,ff.

to go to school any longer, let alone to see a doctor on their own.<sup>658</sup> Additionally, the household's order and normality dissolve successively. Besides the fact that the family stops ordering milk and groceries and their house shows unmistakable signs of decay, a stench makes it more than obvious to the neighborhood that something is wrong. Additionally, Lux has sex with various partners on the roof and her sister confusedly wanders around the house at night.<sup>659</sup>

As the situation gets so thoroughly out of hand, it is not easy to tell who is responsible. Numerous differing and even contradicting explanations are given.<sup>660</sup> It is most striking that even the parents, who so clearly seem to harm the girls, are vindicated. On the one hand, they are obviously shown as suffering themselves as they let their house and family fall apart. On the other hand, the confinement that seems to be worsening the situation turns out to be at least double-edged.

Mrs. Lisbon maintained that her decision was never intended to be punitive. "At that point being in school was just making things worse," she said. "None of the other children were speaking to the girls. Except boys, and you knew what they were after. The girls needed time to themselves. [...] I thought if they stayed at home, they'd heal better."<sup>661</sup>

It is clear that the whole community notices the Lisbon family's development and it is strange that no one reacts to the girls' misery.<sup>662</sup>

At once narcissistic and voyeuristic, the neighbors of the Lisbons both pity the family and yet find a strange sense of fascination, dare I say, even enjoyment in their tragedy.<sup>663</sup>

The community's compassion actually excludes the girls. When a day of grieving is held after the first suicide, it is not even related to their sister's death, as the teachers feel "it inappropriate to single out the girls' tragedy."<sup>664</sup> This inertia in addressing the Lisbons directly must finally be identified as the reason why the girls have to die. As Kirby puts it: For the community, the sisters' deaths – if anything – are a "temporary diversion from other societal concerns."<sup>665</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 141.

<sup>659</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 145-161, 164,f. At first the whole family still goes to church on Sundays, cf. *ibid.* 143, 145. Eventually, their father quits his job as well, and they are all confined indoors. "Now the house truly died." *Ibid.* 162.

<sup>660</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 156,ff.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

<sup>662</sup> Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 154,ff.

<sup>663</sup> Kirby, *Suburbia*.

<sup>664</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 104. Psychological training is integrated into normal classes, but "[n]one of the teachers insist[s] on their participating, with the result that all the healing [is] done by those ... without wounds." *Ibid.* 105.

<sup>665</sup> Kirby, *Suburbia*.



The most striking example for the sisters' increasing isolation is Lux, who at the end only communicates with her fellow human beings through disturbed sexual action.<sup>666</sup> Besides these encounters on the roof of her house, Trip plays an important role for Lux. As his telling name suggests, he functions as the catalyst of her sexual trauma. Their infatuation has been going on for some time when the daughters are allowed to go on the group date, including Lux and Trip. On the night of the dance they sleep with each other on a "soggy football field."<sup>667</sup> She is emotionally overwhelmed during "the act" and begins to cry; telling Trip she would always "screw things up."<sup>668</sup> Instead of comforting her in any way, Trip confesses years later that despite really liking her, he "just got sick of her right then."<sup>669</sup> He obviously cannot deal with this emotional outburst. Instead of communicating in any attentive way, he simply leaves her alone after the act and does not care what happens to her or how she gets home. Despite his claims to like her, he never speaks to her again. This is true for the other dates as well. As the sisters express that they are "having the best time" of their lives at the dance and are locked in after this night, it can be supposed that the abandonment must have made them feel even more acutely alone.<sup>670</sup> When the girls finally make contact with the narrators almost a year after this, Lux's first statement concerns Trip. As she asserts that she wants him to know she is over him, it is fairly clear how much this episode meant to her. In his coldness and inability to respond to her emotional disturbance, he represents the whole community. It seems as though they all conspire not to let the Lisbon sisters tell their story. Everybody is interested in their fate in a detached and lurid way, but no one wants to take responsibility. Even their parents react with harshness and coldness to their daughters' despair.<sup>671</sup> This leaves the girls with no opportunity to express their emotions in a coherent way as there is no one to address them to. The next catastrophe seems inevitable, which is also reflected in the anticipation displayed by the whole community.

When the Lisbon household sinks into chaos, no standard of orientation is left to guide the daughters.<sup>672</sup> The community does not perceive them as human beings any longer, but as "feverish creatures, ... succumbing day by day in their isolated ward."<sup>673</sup> Except for the narrators and the sexually interested boys, the whole community distances itself from

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<sup>666</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Suicides* 149.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.* 138.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.* 132.

<sup>671</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 131; 142,ff; 192. Their parents still want to be responsible, but seem overburdened. Especially their father seems to be unbalanced and distanced from reality, cf. e.g. 142, 161.

<sup>672</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 147,ff.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.* 157,f.

the family. Yet, the boys who meet Lux on the roof can by none of her “signs of malnourishment or illness or grief” be “detracted from Lux’s overwhelming impression of being a carnal angel.”<sup>674</sup> They do not see her as a vulnerable girl who obviously does not know what she is supposed to do. The narrators only mirror their community’s sensation-seeking when they hope to catch the “virus” themselves so that they “might share their delirium.”<sup>675</sup> It is an interest that can hardly be described as more honest than the curiosity of the rest of the neighbors. This might be partly due to their youth at the time. Their reflex of compassion is distorted by the way in which everybody is treating the Lisbon girls as objects, which they use as a model. Still, the narrators seem to feel for the girls.<sup>676</sup>

Even though it is true that the boys are profoundly affected, I do not think that it is the girls’ fate as such that has traumatized them. They feel that the Lisbon sisters should have been treated differently and are shocked by the realization in retrospect of their community’s and their own failure to have done so. The personal fascination they have displayed by observing them in their lifetime and re-observing them after their deaths does not show a real interest in the girls as human beings. They make no effort to get to know them *as persons*. After the first suicide a year before the rest of the Lisbon sisters kill themselves, the boys dream about how they could help the surviving girls. Yet, as no one in their community openly admits that there must be a reason for this tragedy and that the sisters obviously need help, they do not try. They do not approach them at school and much later, when they finally make contact, they never broach the subject of the sisters’ trauma. Even though they should have noticed Lux’s pathological relation to sex by then, a boy she approaches does not object to having his belt unbuckled by her. Moreover, even the girls are infected by their community’s behavior. As no one acknowledges the extent of their tragedy, they pretend to ignore it as well. Everyone seems to talk about it behind their backs at first, but no one actually includes them in this production of reality.<sup>677</sup> When their parents decide on the girls’ “incarceration,” no one seems to even care about them anymore.<sup>678</sup> The sisters’ exclusion at the time is contrasted with the racism apparent in their community by the narrators.<sup>679</sup> The suicide appears to be just one more shocking event, reflecting more on the impersonal society as a whole than on the individual lives of its members.

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<sup>674</sup> Both quotes Eugenides, *Suicides* 148.

<sup>675</sup> Both quotes *ibid.* 158.

<sup>676</sup> Many critics agree on this point. Cf. e.g. Kirby, *Suburbia*.

<sup>677</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Suicides* 53, 100, 211.

<sup>678</sup> Quote *ibid.* 111; cf. *ibid.* 111,ff.

<sup>679</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 99.

In spite of the boys' realization of this mistreatment and lack of real compassion and inclusion, they are not able to breach the communal behavior.

Thinking back, we decided the girls had been trying to talk to us all along, to elicit our help, but we'd been too infatuated to listen. Our surveillance had been so focused we missed nothing but a simple returned gaze. Who else did they have to turn to? Not their parents. Nor the neighborhood. Inside their house they were prisoners; outside, lepers. And so they hid from the world, waiting for someone – for us – to save them.<sup>680</sup>

The boys are the only people in a likely position to help, as they receive secret light signals and later messages from the girls. They are the only ones who have at least some contact with them. Yet, as it takes them a week to come up with the possibility of phoning the Lisbon sisters, they do not seem to have adequate social skills to really do anything. Moreover, as they have never asked the girls how they actually feel or if they could do anything for them, it is rather arrogant to presume they knew anything about their wishes. The narrators attend the school dance that ends so catastrophically for the girls and would have had time to talk to them there. Instead, they only want to dance with them, to feel themselves reflected in their mystic presence. The way of discussing them in the style of a detective story in retrospect is not in any way more complementary. When they finally visit the girls, they feel like part of an army mission and not as acting out a secret night-time visit. It seems as though the sisters realize that these boys cannot help them, and that there is no other chance to be rescued. They have not invited the narrators for any real company, but merely to make them witnesses to their suicides. When the boys realize this, they feel guilty and finally understand that they have never known the neighborhood girls. But even though they have seen the first sister's dead body and know where Lux is at this moment, not even this shock shakes them out of their distanced relationship to the girls. They leave and simply forget to stop at the garage, where they could probably still have saved her.<sup>681</sup>

The fact that narrators never relate to the objects of their desire as human beings but treat them merely as objects sheds a dismal light on their community and on themselves. Even before the last daughter is actually dead – Mary's suicide attempt in the group fails and she repeats it successfully about a month later – everybody closes the book on them already.

After that night, people spoke of the Lisbon girls in the past tense, and if they mentioned Mary at all it was with the veiled wish that she would hurry up and get it over with.<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>680</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 199.

<sup>681</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 132, 193, 205-216.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.* 219.

Until they narrate the story, the narrators have remained voyeurs and rest in that position in their endless reconsiderations of what has happened. When they call the girls selfish at the very end of the novel, they explain this charge by the fact that they will never know what their objects of desire actually felt. They “went to be alone for all time, alone in suicide, which is deeper than death, and where we will never find the pieces to put them back together.”<sup>683</sup> This reveals their own selfishness, as they have never wanted to understand the girls properly. In the beginning, they wanted to satisfy their longing and now they would like to put their minds at rest. Nevertheless, they are shocked, and the rest of their community is shocked too. They are forever trapped in the loop of the tragedy they have witnessed, unable to start a new story.<sup>684</sup> They are “scarred ... forever, ... happier with dreams than wives.”<sup>685</sup>

“The Lisbon girls became a symbol for what was wrong with the country ....”<sup>686</sup> Their story is used as a metaphor for social disintegration and lack of solidarity in the communities that used to symbolize the American dream: the suburbs. Kirby even speaks of the girls’ tragedy as revealing to the narrators the stale taste and disagreeable side of suburban life.<sup>687</sup> They are presented as an example of how the deficiencies of postmodern communities can only turn their inhabitants into deficient creatures: “Something sick at the heart of the country had infected the girls.”<sup>688</sup> This point is strengthened when the narrators continue this analysis by stating that mass suicides of the young have always been a foreboding sign of an empire’s decline.

The girls, whose demises really came about due to isolation, are symbolic of the isolation that is inherent in the modern suburban community, an environment that in its need to escape the corruption of the larger world in fact becomes so insular that it can no longer survive.<sup>689</sup>

At this point the question of responsibility reveals itself in its full complexity. On the one hand, the isolation of people within a community is described, showing the way in which social routines no longer include, stimulate, and induce solidarity and humane emotions, such as compassion. Fellow citizens are no longer human beings who can be related to and thereby supported, but merely mediated others that can only be observed. If they are degraded to true postmodern *others*, who cannot be understood and consciously related to,

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<sup>683</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 249.

<sup>684</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 230,f; 238; 245. Their being trapped is also documented by the fact that they still feel obliged to talk about the suicides incessantly, i.e. by the very existence of the narrative.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.* 169.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.* 231.

<sup>687</sup> Cf. Kirby, *Suburbia*.

<sup>688</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 231.

<sup>689</sup> Kirby, *Suburbia*.

there is no way in which solidarity can be stimulated.<sup>690</sup> They remain elusive, yet strangely interesting and even shocking if they behave in unexpected ways. The question of responsibility cannot be answered without an underlying ethical standard against which the fellow citizens' failure to act can be judged as wrong. In *Suicides* this ethical backdrop is provided as the narrators understand that they should actually try to help. Their dilemma ensues because they do not know how to do this.

As the narrators are teenagers at the time the tragedy happens, they remain in a state of partial responsibility and the reader is tempted to be shocked rather than indignant about their behavior. Yet, the time level of the actual narrating shows them to be much older. The reader expects them to have come to a more acute insight of the tragedies in retrospect. It seems irrational and slightly neurotic that they are still unable to describe the girls as human beings and that they cannot stop talking about them. Their allegations of selfishness with regard to the sisters' suicides are grotesquely unfair. This preoccupation with themselves becomes the core of the story in the end. "The reader becomes even more interested in why this 'we' persists in its fascination with the five Lisbon sisters ..., than in why each of the girls 'took her turn at suicide.'"<sup>691</sup> The fact that they are a collective narrator and the fact that the Lisbon girls are seen as a catalyst by most of their community for the neighborhood's decline underlines their symbolic character.<sup>692</sup> As the girls are not perceived as actual human beings who could have been reached by communication but as parts of the tragic development of society itself, the single individual seems powerless to intervene, and the community can ignore its responsibility. Yet, what seems a simple and promising strategy of repression at first glance falls back on society in the end as it nevertheless declines. Actually, it declines precisely because the single members do not carry out their share of solidarity and moral courage.

This rebound can be acutely observed in the narrators' fate. They are unable to react to the anticipated catastrophe because their community does not provide adequate models of action towards the girls. The moment the first suicide happens, the Lisbons are singled out and nobody really relates to them any longer. Therefore, they remain elusive to the boys. The only strategy of action they manage to apply is closely mimicking the community's behavior of lurid observation. In retrospect they try to evade responsibility by stating a desire to do the Lisbon sisters justice at last and by depicting them as victims of their social

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<sup>690</sup> Cf. Levinas, *Ausweg*.

<sup>691</sup> Suzanne Berne, "Taking Turns at Death," *The New York Times* 25 April 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/25/books/taking-turns-at-death.html> (16.05.2009) (hereafter: Berne, Turns).

<sup>692</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Suicides* 243, ff.

environment. Besides brief moments of reflection they do not ponder the fact that they have been part of that social environment themselves. It is indeed a vicious circle of thought: When they permit themselves to develop the idea that they should have been there for the girls, they must admit that they wanted to contact them all the time. Yet, this highlights the inefficiency of their endeavors, because the girls did not reveal their feelings to them. Instead of asking if their efforts of getting in touch with the sisters were perhaps inadequate, they ignore this inadequacy and verbalize their anger at the girls for not wanting to really communicate.

The essence of the suicides consisted not of sadness or mystery but simple selfishness. The girls took into their own hands decisions better left to God. They became too powerful to live among us, too self-concerned, too visionary, too blind. [...] They made us participate in their own madness, because we couldn't help but retrace their steps, rethink their thoughts, and see that none of them led to us.<sup>693</sup>

The reference to God at this point shows the narrators' desperate effort not to take on responsibility themselves. Throughout the whole narration religion has only been either ridiculed, has appeared as negligible, or has been used to underline the manic quality of Mrs. Lisbon's measures. Suddenly using the argument of a higher responsibility to condemn the girls shows the irrationality of the boys' repression. As they all approached the Lisbon sisters as objects, the girls had to react as objects. Whenever they wanted to show their feelings, the boys evaded or ignored them. To regain a normal position in their community the girls desperately tried to pretend that nothing had happened. Instead of insisting on their being traumatized, they accept the *objectification* offered to them. Hence, Lux's treatment of herself as a sexual object without even feeling abused can be explained.<sup>694</sup> She is interrogated by a psychologist as she shows "signs of malnourishment [and] illness," and her "hair clearly [needs] washing."<sup>695</sup> A gynecologist has just found out that she is very sexually active, obviously not handling contraception properly. Yet, when addressed as though her problems were not of any consequence, it becomes impossible for Lux to admit that she has problems at all. Even though the doctor is aware that there is something wrong, he treats her like any stable patient and does not arrange for anything to be done about her situation.

Along with the rest of their community the narrators expect the sisters to do something dramatic and are therefore part of the wall of expectations and inhuman communication the girls are faced with.<sup>696</sup> Yet, their denial of their own responsibility for the suicides

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<sup>693</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 248.

<sup>694</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 105; 132,f; 143; 156,f.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.* 148 and 151.

<sup>696</sup> Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 152.

does not help the boys. They remain incarcerated in their never-ending narration, still meeting as adults in their tree house and are clearly being isolated themselves. The denial has actually prevented them from ever truly loving anybody. When others are truly understood as the elusive postmodern *other*, as happens to the Lisbon sisters, there is no way of approaching them reasonably and emotionally. Instead of being able to help them in emotionally difficult situations, their exclusion is only increased by further attention when this attention remains based on their concept as elusive *others*. Thereby, the *others* are bereft of a possibility to relate to their fellow human beings. Without this means of communication, they cannot solve their emotional problems and are devoured by them.

Yet, having indirectly led them to their destruction, their fellow human beings – in this case the boys and the community – can no longer live peacefully either. The neighborhood declines and the boys stay forever psychologically and emotionally impaired. It was obvious that the sisters were traumatized and that their family was emotionally overburdened. Everybody has just been waiting, has been expecting them to inflict harm on themselves. This suggests that human beings know what kind of situations are potentially stressful to their fellow men and that such situations can only be overcome by communication, i.e. inter-action with other humans. If the boys really believed that the Lisbon sisters were truly elusive and that they have had no chance to communicate with them, there would be no need to feel guilty. This fact only makes sense because they know they have failed because they ignored the inter-connectedness of human beings. A community cannot survive if the members do not feel responsible for each other and regard each other as persons. Respect for the other as a human being can only grow out of understanding the inter-connectedness of a community. It is therefore counterproductive to conceptualize the other as a postmodern, elusive *other*. Individuals seem to be very well able to estimate what every human being basically needs to be able to deal with problematic situations.

### **III.ii.iii.ii. Important Aspects of Narrational Style**

The collective narrator tells the girls' story in a light and conversational tone.<sup>697</sup> The voices of several boys form the group of narrators, and these numerous voices seem to be totally merged at times and seem to displace each other in other passages.<sup>698</sup> The setting is contrasted with an opera by Scheck, because of the chorus-like narrational style, which

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<sup>697</sup> Cf. Kirby, Suburbia.

<sup>698</sup> This is why the collective narrator has been compared to the narrator of William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*. Cf. e.g. Berne, Turns.

also echoes Greek tragedy.<sup>699</sup> Here, the choir functioned as a conservative style element. In *Suicides*, elements of Greek culture are referred to directly as well – for example when Cecilia is described as having cut her wrists “like a Stoic....”<sup>700</sup> Yet, at the end of the twentieth century, the conservative narrative position would have been the first-person singular, which is curiously challenged by adopting the *we*. In the same vein, the conservative detective manner is challenged by the sensationalist attitude employed. Additionally, the positively connoted suburb as well as the ideals of a caring community, of love, and of adolescent innocence are challenged on the level of content.<sup>701</sup> Thus, an interesting tension between convention and innovation is created. Additionally, the actual mode of narrating creates a tension between internal and external focus. Usually, the narration is focused on the internal perspective of one person or on the perspective of a narrator without introspection.<sup>702</sup> In *Suicides*, these two possibilities are curiously mixed. The boys narrate self-reflectively, but the story is actually focused on the girls about whose perspective the narrators only speculate.

The girls are dead because they could not communicate their narration. It was unclear what was expected of them by the community and their actions and intentions could not be interpreted by their environment. This lack of understanding (based on a lack of communication) destroyed them in the end. Yet, it also destroyed the boys who worshiped them. They continue to verbalize the story as they think the girls might have told it, because they know that communication could have saved them when they were still alive. As the narrators were part of the community that made it impossible for the Lisbon sisters to engage in this communication themselves, they act as substitute narrators. They are locked up in this eternal punishment as the girls were locked up in their house, in turn symbolizing the silence they were condemned to. Hence, eternal silence versus eternal narration. Under different circumstances communication could have spared the girls. Were the boys able to change the narration into their own, they might be able to heal themselves. Yet, both positive scenarios are eternally obstructed as the community who could support their own story has already crumbled and as the introspection into the sisters’ personalities needed for their story is forever out of reach.

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<sup>699</sup> Cf. Denis Scheck, “Nachwort von Denis Scheck,” *Eugenides*, Air Mail 107-119; 112,f.

<sup>700</sup> *Eugenides*, *Suicides* 3.

<sup>701</sup> Cf. Kirby, *Suburbia*.

<sup>702</sup> For these and other theoretical concepts of perspectives in narratology see e.g. Wolf Schmid, “Erzählperspektive,” Interdisciplinary Centre for Narratology 2004, [http://www.icn.uni-hamburg.de/images/download/w\\_schmid\\_erzaehlperspektive.pdf](http://www.icn.uni-hamburg.de/images/download/w_schmid_erzaehlperspektive.pdf) (29.07.2009).



Obviously, the question whether no one reacted properly to the girls' need to communicate because a sense of solidarity was already missing from the community, or if the community lost all cohesion because it did not manage to communicate with the Lisbons, remains elusive. The fact remains that it would have only been possible for the boys to break out of the circle of isolation by assuming the ability to know what the girls needed and the confidence to take on responsibility for them. The whole community was unable to accept them as normal human beings and to include them into communal solidarity even though they all knew that catastrophe was approaching. Therefore, it must be supposed that it is not purely an act of emotion to understand the other, but an act of reason to draw the right conclusions and to react. The standard providing the knowledge of which behavior is adequate must be contributed by an ethical institution. Although it is still unclear why these three elements of human communities were unbalanced, it is obvious that they were not properly connected. Moreover, it can be concluded that the disequilibrium of these three parts does not only lead to the destruction of the individuals excluded through personal crises, it also destroys those excluding them. Psychology offers an additional explanation for situations in which a lot of people witness a crime, a tragedy, or a moral shortcoming, but no one helps or even reacts. Such behavior is called *bystander-effect* or also *Genovese syndrome*, named after the brutal rape and murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. If too many people hear a cry for help, that is to say if the recipients of the cry know or firmly believe that numerous others also hear it, no one feels personally responsible. Moreover, if no one reacts, the single recipient often believes that there actually is no emergency. Abraham Biggs' suicide in 2008 is just another example of this effect. It was announced online and broadcasted via webcam.<sup>703</sup> Just so in *Suicides* the community does not react, thereby wrongly making each other believe that nothing is wrong. From a socio-communicative perspective this is a perfect example of the communal creation of reality. Unfortunately, it is not the whole community engaging in the production in this case, but only the part which wants to deny the excluded part, i.e. the girls. Nevertheless, as the girls increasingly retreat from the community in general and their schoolmates in particular, this group reality is not challenged until the suicides prove that something was actually repressed.

Hence, the creation of any communicative reality is not enough to ensure the unharmed survival of those included in it. The reality obviously must answer to ethical standards and must allow their members to access their emotional and rational abilities. The

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<sup>703</sup> Cf. Annabel Wahba, "Der letzte Chat – Der Student Abraham Biggs wollte nicht mehr leben, im November 2008 kündigte er im Internet seinen Selbstmord an. Auf der ganzen Welt sahen ihm Menschen beim Sterben zu. Wie konnte es dazu kommen?" *ZEIT Magazin* 26 (2009) 11-18; esp. 17.

communicative reality created in the novel before the final suicides lacks these factors. Therefore, the girls die and the boys cannot really live. This becomes clear when they muse over the lack of a first person singular in the narrative of Cecilia's diary.

As the diary progresses, Cecilia begins to recede from her sisters and, in fact, from personal narrative of any kind. The first person singular ceases almost entirely, the effect akin to a camera pulling away from the characters at the end of a movie, to show, in a series of dissolves, their house, street, city, country, and finally planet, which not only dwarfs but obliterates them.<sup>704</sup>

This passage can be read as a comment on their own lack of a first person singular, on their eternal incarceration in a group identity which is singularly determined by its substitute for life. They are obliterated as they have no personal individualities. Their way to relate to reality has become an endless "chasing after the wind ...."<sup>705</sup> They cannot even emotionally relate to the girls and their own feelings in retrospect – instead of narrating a tragedy, they resort to the objective and passionless style of the detective story. The need to develop a singular individuality is thereby highlighted besides the three above mentioned institutions of humane behavior. The relation between them is further clarified as well. Ethics is related to the rationality which is needed to overcome the bystander-effect and is producing emotions at the same time.<sup>706</sup> When the boys assert: "They made us participate in their own madness," they are mistaken.<sup>707</sup> The very fact that the girls had no communicative reality in which they could have overcome their trauma directly reveals their community's and therefore also the boys' responsibility. Additionally, the girls could not have forced the boys to do anything after they had died. This reveals the inescapable nature of socio-communicative reality that functions reciprocally. Madness never has a fixed origin as it does not rest statically in one part of the discourse.

As has been argued above, the reader expects something to happen when she is given all the clues of the Lisbon's misery that were visible to the community. This puts her in a position of unease. She is addressed as a voyeur with scandalous and scandalously imaginative details, such as a minute description of Lux's gynecological results.

The simple appraisal "mild abrasions" reports the condition of her uterine walls, and in an advancement that has since been discontinued, a photograph was taken of her rosy cervix, which looks like a camera shutter set on an extremely low exposure. (It stares at us now like an inflamed eye, fixing us with its silent accusation.)<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 44.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.* 248.

<sup>706</sup> Cf. also Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 42,f.

<sup>707</sup> Eugenides, *Suicides* 248.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

The reader is subject to a mounting excitement as she unbelievably turns page after page of what must plainly seem to be cries for help (especially as she knows from the beginning that the development will lead to the suicides eventually).<sup>709</sup> This only strengthens the fact that the ethical standards referred to implicitly are generally human. As the reader cannot react in any way to the displayed misery, she is successfully put on a level with the inertial community, also speculating about what will happen next and why. She is even addressed as if she were as sensationalist as the rest of the community. An old neighbor for example regularly sees Bonnie wandering about at night, carrying a damaged cushion, saying a rosary, continuously losing weight. When the narrator reveals: “She came out every morning, though sometimes, if a Charly Chan movie was on, Uncle Tucker would *forget to check* [emphasis added],” it becomes clear that he only sees her as a diversion that he watches regularly and deliberately.<sup>710</sup> In the same vein, the reader is addressed as though she wanted to touch the pictures she is *shown* by the narrators. Thus, she is addressed by them as follows: “Please don’t touch. We’re going to put the picture back in its envelope now.”<sup>711</sup> If at all, the community seems to be concerned with what the suicides might tell about itself.<sup>712</sup> Even though the narrators have set out to solve the mystery and to appreciate the girls’ fate, they engage in that same process in the end. Therefore, they are affected by the madness and can never stop reliving their trauma of having lost the girls. As the reader is given the role of voyeuristic bystander, the novel leaves her disturbed as well. This effect is obviously increased by the implied comment on western postmodern society the reader might also live in. The first person plural even intensifies the reader’s involvement. In this way, *Suicides* again points to the emotional involvement, which is needed to be compassionate, and can be said to have a moralizing effect. It is not only the individual herself, who needs a narration to sustain and control her personality, but ethics and emotions are also characterized as narrational. Yet, it is not only for the sake of others that individuals should care for their communities, but also for their own sake. Not taking care of the Lisbon girls led them not only to suicide, but the boys into severe psychological problems and the community into decay. In addition, it is important to see that the reader can only thus understand the narration and be forced into the peculiar position described above because she shares the ethical standards involved.

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<sup>709</sup> Apart from the title, already the first sentence of the novel shows that they are all going to die. Cf. Eugénides, *Suicides* 3.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid. 165.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>712</sup> Cf. also Kirby, *Suburbia*.

### III.iii. Coherent Individuals and Relative Moral Norms

In the following three chapters I will analyze three novels originally published between 1980 and 2002. Individuality will constitute the main focus of the interpretations. In an analogous fashion, the development of the central characters as individuals, as well as the mode of presenting them by applying certain narrational styles will be discussed. With regard to the issue of this thesis, the main point of the analyses is to find more transcultural and transhistorical elements within the present organization of communication, and to prove that these elements include valid information regarding ethics. So far, part III. has already shown that “action becomes meaningful in the process of narrating constitutive stories of the self.”<sup>713</sup> Whereas the nameless protagonist in *Surfacing* saw herself as being close to a natural divinity, her fellow human beings only interpreted her behavior as irrational and crazy. When she tried to be fully absorbed by her emotions it became clear that rational abstraction is needed to stay in contact with one’s communicative environment (i.e. other people) and in control of one’s narration. *Zen* has revealed that the creation of reality always means *giving sense to the world*, which in turn refers to different levels of the created reality. Meaning is installed through narration, and the meaning rationally ascribed to one’s life is closely linked to the emotions produced through interaction with other human beings. These other human beings can also forestall the development of an adequate narration as was discussed in *Suicides*. Thus, the first section of part III. focused on the dynamic relation between the dependent individual and her social environment providing existing norms.

Whereas the environmental influence on the individual was focused so far, the following will focus on the individual and her means of power. This power is chiefly constituted by the possibility to arrange a personal narration, which – in turn – influences the communicative environment. The environment’s power on the individual and her need to adjust to the given situation has already been clarified. In juxtaposing these two phenomena it should not be forgotten that they are fundamentally interrelated. The power that an individual can assert is provided by her individuality which springs from a given sociohistorical situation as much as from the underlying universal structures of humanity. It is always a power that comes into being through a communicative situation, i.e. intersubjectively.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> Christopher S. Browning, *Constructivism, Narrative and Foreign Policy Analysis – A Case Study of Finland* (Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 2008) 45 (hereafter: Browning, Constructivism).

<sup>714</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (trans. Kathleen Blamey) (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 165-168. For an insightful discussion see Bernard Dauenhauer, “Paul Ricoeur,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Such an understanding of reality necessarily attributes more importance to the shared humanity than to the differences between humans (respectively their *otherness*).<sup>715</sup> A communicative foundationalist approach to personal identity designs the possibilities of action and change through the narrative character of individuals. In the following analysis of the narrative style, a map of possible human behavior and the implied moral responsibility will be designed. Moral engagement is conceived then as a struggle to be recognized properly by others and to recognize others properly.<sup>716</sup>

### III.iii.i. A Question of Perspective: *The Handmaid's Tale*

On a desert island a bag of vegetables is worth more than gold, in the city gold is more valuable than the bag of vegetables. [...] Where's the value? [...] It's in the city itself. The city says: in exchange for that gold, you will have all these things. The city is the magician, the alchemist in reverse. It turns worthless gold into... everything. [...] It was a dream, but [...] if you could sell the dream to enough people, no one dared wake up.<sup>717</sup>

It is a nightmare rather than a dream that is sold to the women in the heteronormative patriarchy of Margaret Atwood's unconventional dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale*.<sup>718</sup> As humorously depicted in the above quotation, her novel also deals with the power of social sets of thinking. Atwood shows the fragility of cultural frames in which personal narrations are interwoven. By using a homodiegetic (that is to say autodiegetic) narration from the perspective of the female Offred, Atwood additionally shows how the perspective is decisive for a specific evaluation. Already by this rather early novel Atwood proves her ability to act as a "spokeswoman for human rights ... who ... questions conventional modes of perception and evaluation ...."<sup>719</sup> The foundation of the state is the female capacity of reproduction in the fictive Republic of Gilead, replacing North American societies as we know them at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>720</sup>

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2005, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/> (24.5.2009). Ricoeur also highlights the fact that a narrative personality always implies at least two persons.

<sup>715</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (transl. David Pellauer) (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005).

<sup>716</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 258. See also Taylor, *Unbehagen* 54-59.

<sup>717</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Making Money* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2008) 146 (hereafter: Pratchett, Money).

<sup>718</sup> Coral Ann Howells observes that the female narrator "turns the traditional dystopia upside down, engaging in the debate about gender and genre ...." Coral Ann Howells, "Transgressing Genre: A Generic Approach to Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, Atwood 139-156, 141. Cf. also Dunja M. Mohr, *Worlds Apart? Dualism and Transgression on Contemporary Female Dystopias*, *Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy 1* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2005) 230 (hereafter: Mohr, *Worlds*).

<sup>719</sup> Reingard M. Nischik, "'Flagpoles and Entrance Doors': Introduction," Nischik, Atwood 1-11, 1.

<sup>720</sup> The time period of the narration remains dubitable. Gilead is termed a *Late-Twentieth-Century Monothocracy* in the fictive Symposium held in June 2195 at the end of the novel. Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 312.

[S]ociety is constructed to maximize the possibility of reproduction, while making it obvious that women are merely extensions of their reproductive organs. All of society is run on the lines of the patriarchal family, and Offred's name is derived from the man to whom she belongs.<sup>721</sup>

Men (in Offred's case it is a *Commander*) can own different types of women: *Wives*, *Marthas*, and *Handmaids*.<sup>722</sup> *Wives* are supposed to supervise the household and educate the children if the *Handmaids* produce any, whereas *Marthas* cook and perform other household chores. Offred describes the absolutely functional purpose of the *Handmaids* as follows.

We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. [...] There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowerings of secret lusts; ... there are to be no footholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.<sup>723</sup>

In contrast to the other women, *Handmaids* are dressed completely in red and need to cover most of their bodies. This coverage reminds the reader of burqas, which are worn, for example, in Islamic countries, to which Gilead is explicitly compared at the end of the novel.<sup>724</sup> The only differently colored dress parts are devices to shield their faces. "The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing but also from being seen."<sup>725</sup> *Marthas* are dressed in green and *Wives* in blue. In this color-coded system women are simply labeled as goods clearly destined for a purpose. The codes of behavior are not yet precise, as Offred's narration is set at the recent formation of the Republic.<sup>726</sup> The beginning of the story describes one of the protagonist's retrospects on the reeducation camp, the *Red Centre*, where female guardians called *Aunts* instruct fertile women. She provides the reader with some of the women's real names, and as all of them except one are later identified as others, it can be deduced that her real name was June.<sup>727</sup> The fact that it is now forbidden to use women's names, makes the labeling even clearer. In *Suicides* the environment was also treating the protagonists as objects. Yet, instead of killing herself, Offred devises modes of resistance.

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<sup>721</sup> Alice M. Palumbo, "On the Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, Atwood 73-85, 81.

<sup>722</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 19-22. There are also *Econowives*, but they are not central to the story. Cf. *ibid.* 54.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.* 146. More neutrally, Offred also calls herself a "national resource." *Ibid.* 75.

<sup>724</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 312. The Biblical reference of the name *Gilead* also refers to Arabic regions.

<sup>725</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 18. Alice M. Palumbo aptly compares this red clothing signaling the *Handmaid's* status with the way Hawthorne's Hester Prynne is marked as an adulteress by the red letter *A*. Cf. Alice M. Palumbo, "On the Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, Atwood 73-85, 81. She is of course referring to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

<sup>726</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 19, 23. The people in the Colonies are dressed in grey and thus equally labeled. Cf. *ibid.* 261. The fact that they lose their personal belongings, their names, and are forced to perform certain chores reminds the reader of the National Socialist regime in Germany under Hitler. Parallels to the literature created by survivors of this regime could be drawn, especially with regard to the importance of narration. Yet, as previously explained, this study is not interested in the comparison of genres.

<sup>727</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 13,f; 37; 138,f. This is not verified in the narration, even though she talks about her name in general and it seems to be very important to her. Cf. *ibid.* 94, 282.

### III.iii.i.i. Development of the Central Character as an Individual

It was clear from internal evidence that [Offred] was among the first wave of women recruited for reproductive purposes and allotted to those who both required such services and could lay claim to them through their position in the elite. The regime created an instant pool of such women by the simple tactic of declaring all second marriages and non-marital liaisons adulterous, arresting the female partners ....<sup>728</sup>

Apart from the brief interlude at the reeducation camp (comprising only two pages), the narration starts after Offred was accommodated at her Commander's house for five weeks. She talks about her experiences at this house in the present tense and offers glimpses of her past through retrospective passages (in the past tense). Through this two-fold narration the reader learns that Offred used to be someone completely different. There are many instances of the protagonist's direct comment on her terror because of this change. The only source of respect, basically the only meaning of the Handmaids' existence in this new social role is their ability to reproduce. Due to pollution and unspecified radiation less and less women are fertile and more and more malformed babies are born.<sup>729</sup> Handmaids are forced to sleep with men (in the presence of their Wives on "Ceremony nights"<sup>730</sup>) in regular intervals and must leave any of their birthed children with them. If any children from earlier marriages, which were declared illegal, or even *illegitimate* children existed, they were taken away. Handmaids are not even allowed to eat, drink or organize their personal hygiene to their wishes. Their entire life is regulated according to their social role, and consequently, any form of education unrelated to their function is banished. In contrast to the other women they are actually branded with a tattoo so that they cannot easily escape. All women, who did not want to join the new social order, were offered the choice to leave society for *the Colonies* where they are subject to starvation and other deprivations. They can also be sent there as punishment – if they are caught breaking the rules, fail to reproduce, or give birth to a malformed child.<sup>731</sup>

In the *big brother* atmosphere of total observation Offred feels surveyed at all times. She is thus torn between accepting the new social role for fear of being punished and the emotional attachment to her former social role that offered control over her life. Yet, her environment frequently reinforces the new social role. She has accepted being reduced to a reproductive machine in that she wants a baby like all the other Handmaids.<sup>732</sup> She admits

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<sup>728</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 316.

<sup>729</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 22,f; 122.

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.* 162. Cf. *ibid.* 104-106.

<sup>731</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 24, 49, 69, 71-75, 107, 137, 147, 260, 321.

<sup>732</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 28, 71.

that “the expectations of others ... have become [her] own.”<sup>733</sup> Motherhood is also a protective device as Handmaid mothers are not to be declared *Unwomen* or sent to the Colonies. Nevertheless, the perspective of her old social role never vanishes and is inherent in her frequent criticism and spite of her new situation. Before a *Ceremony night*, for instance, she describes herself ironically: “I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig.”<sup>734</sup> She even allows herself a vision of killing her owner at one point and associates the blood streaming out of his body with sexual lust.<sup>735</sup> Towards the end of the narration she also engages in an illegal love affair with her owner’s chauffeur, Nick. The very fact that she engages in a personal narration seems to be a sign of rebellion. Therefore, one is tempted to read her story as an increasing revolt against, or at least uneasiness with, the new social order eventually leading to her escape. Yet, it is not so easy, as she is torn between the perspectives of her old and new social roles and as her escape cannot simply be identified as an act of bravery.

I feel serene, at peace, pervaded with indifference. Don’t let the bastards grind you down. I repeat this to myself but it conveys nothing. You might as well say, Don’t let there be air; or, Don’t be.<sup>736</sup>

In fact, she seems stunned, impassive, and actually tired of her existence when she faces her escape. “Fatigue [...] is what gets you in the end. Faith is only a word, embroidered.”<sup>737</sup> Yet, she does not seem to have lost faith completely, because she speaks about her escape in terms of necessity.

Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can’t be helped.  
And so I step up, into the darkness within, or else the light.<sup>738</sup>

The very last words of her narration convey the idea that some core of her old sense of self is left intact. The image of light seems to indicate that she is still hoping for a better future and that she is not completely *indifferent*.

Her acquiescence in the escape could, however, also be explained by increased fear. Her Commander’s Wife has just found out that Offred has been meeting the Commander secretly at this point and threatens her life. The protagonist cannot even be completely sure whether the men collecting her are actually real officers or friends of Nick, who has spontaneously devised an escape plan to save her. The most acute danger seems to be the death

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<sup>733</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 83. She also states that she feels completely determined by her body. Cf. *ibid.* 73. For the identification with this role see as well *ibid.* 137.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

<sup>735</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 150.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.* 303.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.* 304.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.* 307.



or disappearance of Ofglen, a Handmaid with whom the protagonist has carefully started forming a friendship, sharing forbidden information. She is not sure whether Ofglen, who was engaged in the resistance, might have given away any information regarding her.<sup>739</sup> Thus, it is possible she is not prompted by inner resistance to seize the chance to escape. Then again, the mere fact that she is talking about all this points out at least some resistance. She talks about her narration frequently, making it absolutely clear that narrating is her way of staying alive, of staying sane.

I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. [...] If it is a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. [...]  
It isn't a story I'm telling.  
It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. [...] But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else.  
Even when there is no one.<sup>740</sup>

In this way she uses story-telling as a “survival tool.”<sup>741</sup> It is not only conveying to her that she has some control over her life but also putting the catastrophe in perspective. Narrating means that Offred can adapt what is happening to her and can connect to the world in which these things are happening. Yet, it also reveals the fact, that such a concept of reality needs a listener.

Offred is not the only one lacking resistance to the new system. Due to the slow and gradual change of the social order, there were not even riots when the new regime killed all members of government and suspended the Constitution under the pretense of terrorist attacks. This new regime comes with a religious message meant to restore traditional values.<sup>742</sup> By slowly spreading its propaganda about women, it achieves a certain amount of credibility, even on the part of the women. Although she is not overtly rebellious, Offred experiences *hope* whenever she sees evidence in her new life that some things from her past have persisted. Yet, acknowledgment in terms of her old self is sparse. In the beginning she feels safer when Moira, whom she knows from her old life, is brought to the re-education camp.<sup>743</sup> Later, there are some clandestinely exchanged words with Ofglen and there is a message in mock Latin carved into the wood of her cupboard by some any-

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<sup>739</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 210,ff; 294-299; 305,ff.

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

<sup>741</sup> Alice M. Palumbo, “On the Border: Margaret Atwood’s Novels,” Nischik, *Atwood* 73-85, 81.

<sup>742</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 17; 29; 66; 73; 92; 101,ff; 183; 186; 210; 215; 224,f; 232,f. The routines of the ceremony night and the birth process (where the Handmaid is supposed to lie between the Wife’s legs respectively sit on a special stool together with the Wife, who is towering over her) are actually based on the custom of maids bearing children on their mistresses’ knees described in Genesis. Cf. *ibid.* opening quotes, 104-106, 135.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 24, 47,f; 81, 186.

mous predecessor: “Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.”<sup>744</sup> She later finds out that it translates into *Don't let the bastards grind you down* and often uses it as a motto to reassure herself. The importance of the environment's respect is highlighted through the description of the devastating force of betrayal.

The moment of betrayal is the worst, the moment when you know beyond all doubt that you've been betrayed: that some other human being has wished you that much evil. It was like being in an elevator cut loose at the top. Falling, falling, and not knowing when you will hit.<sup>745</sup>

If someone else proves not only to not care about a person's existence but actually wants that person destroyed, then the addressee is absolutely unsettled. Moreover, if a person realizes that great parts of her community have ceased to believe in the communicative reality as it once was established, her own belief in it is necessarily shaken, resulting in her feeling estranged from others.<sup>746</sup>

This importance of context and consequently the meaning of perspective in relation to perception and evaluation are frequently highlighted by the narrator.<sup>747</sup> First of all, her own belief in the reliability of her narration is subverted. She is so unsure about her perception and her memory that she keeps retelling certain events, cutting herself off with remarks like: “I made that up” or “It didn't happen that way either.”<sup>748</sup> When the Commander suddenly wants to clandestinely spend some time with her, she cannot classify his behavior at all.

He wanted me to play Scrabble with him, and kiss him as if I meant it. This is one of the most bizarre things that's happened to me, ever. Context is all.<sup>749</sup>

She lacks perspective even though she emotionally still holds her old perspective and rationally understands the new one she is expected to have developed. At another point she actually wonders whether she will get used to the new context so completely that she will not perceive it as context any longer but as normality. The fact that she translates her new role

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<sup>744</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 62. Cf. *ibid.* 196,f.

<sup>745</sup> *Ibid.* 203.

<sup>746</sup> Cf. also *ibid.* 191. The idea of such communicative encouragement evokes the notion of a reality that is created through socially executed communicative acts. This notion is reminiscent of Clifford Geertz' idea that rituals enable humans to have confidence in their way of being, that rituals as a model can explain the human “worlding the world.” Clifford Geertz, “‘To Exist Is to Have Confidence in One's Way of Being’: Rituals as Model Systems,” *Science without Laws: Model Systems, Cases, Exemplary Narratives*, eds. Angela Creager, Elizabeth Lunbeck, and Matthew Norton Wise (Durham et al.: Duke UP, 2007) 212-224 (hereafter: Creager/Lunbeck/Wise) 222.

<sup>747</sup> Cf. The stress on intersubjectivity in *Handmaid* and the implied concept of intersubjectivity is frequently discussed. Mohr directly relates to psychoanalytic theories and explains that “*Otherness* is ... not exclusively an external category” with regard to this novel. Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 233.

<sup>748</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 273, 275. Sometimes she is not even sure whether she might be drugged. Cf. *ibid.* 119.

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid.* 154.

in terms of *household chores*, *national resources*, and *reproductive machines* shows that she has not accepted it like other Handmaids.<sup>750</sup> The lack of a definite angle, from which to tell her own plot (i.e. evaluate her new existence) destabilizes Offred. She is too afraid to engage herself in the resistance, but she nevertheless suffers from the fact that she is not behaving differently.

I wish this story were different. [...] I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia. I wish it had more shape. [...] I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it.<sup>751</sup>

All she seems to be able to do is keep going by holding on to the narration, even though it may seem meaningless.

By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are. So I will go on. So I will myself to go on.<sup>752</sup>

Her initiation into the old social system has obviously been strong enough to enable her to imagine the necessary listener who will share her response to the new system.<sup>753</sup> Even though this system terrorizes her and forestalls almost all possibilities for communications and actions beyond the established rules, she manages to hold on to a differing view of reality by telling her story.<sup>754</sup> Even though she receives some appreciation for her role as an object, this role does not allow access to the reality that is produced by men. Women, let alone Handmaids, cannot change the evaluations belonging to this new system. The only position of power is her old sense of identity. As she has not completely lost it yet, it seems strange that the protagonist states in the above quotation that she cannot do anything to change her story. She actually demonstrates potential to change when she tries to escape shortly after she states this.

The chronology of the story is not perfectly clear, though. There are some passages of her *present* life (indicated by her general use of the present tense) also narrated in past tense, but the general notion is Offred telling the story as she experiences or vice versa.<sup>755</sup> Her continuous reviews of the *present* from an obscure point in the future and her comments on her own narration give the impression that she might reflect these events of her life shortly after they have actually happened, even when she is using the present tense.

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<sup>750</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 202, 227. Once, she even calls it *normal* then cutting herself short immediately. Cf. *ibid.* 294.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.* 279.

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid.* 279, f.

<sup>753</sup> Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 255.

<sup>754</sup> Cf. Alice M. Palumbo, "On the Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, *Atwood* 73-85, 81.

<sup>755</sup> Cf. e.g. Atwood, *Handmaid* 159, 169.

Yet, she also affirms that her story “is a reconstruction” indicating that she is creating it long afterwards.<sup>756</sup> When finally reaching the annexed *Historical Notes* at the end of Offred’s narration, the reader realizes that the whole story was in fact told in retrospect from a moment after she had already left the Commander’s place. Obviously, the conscious ponderings on questions of perspective are still relevant to her now. Maybe they really became relevant to her only in retrospect. Had she significantly clung to her new identity throughout the related events, the retrospect concentration on perspectives would gain another level of meaning. Ordering and evaluating her life in Gilead retrospectively would then include not only doubts and critiques, but could convey a rejection of her past behavior. Thus, her obvious diremption of herself becomes even more comprehensible.

It is clear from the way she comments on her own narration that she tries to infuse meaning, tries to put in some more personality in retrospect.

In fact I don’t think about anything of the kind. I put it in only afterwards. Maybe I should have thought about that, at the time, but I didn’t. As I said, this is a reconstruction.<sup>757</sup>

She might have still been in a kind of mental paralysis when the actual *present* life events happened. If neither certainty (of her priorities and of the success of this undertaking) nor courage led her to escape, then what was the trigger for her attempt to break free? The protagonist is neither entirely sure about what she experiences nor how to evaluate these events.<sup>758</sup> She simply is acting out her part. Yet, when pondering her secret meetings with the Commander she cannot help but admit that she is “happier than [she] was before;” which is not only due to the more satisfying occupation for her thoughts, but also because she is “no longer merely a usable body” to him.<sup>759</sup> By her mere existence (and the ensuing addresses) in the new communicative reality she undergoes a transformation that leads to identification with the new social role. Still, the instances of spontaneous feelings according to her old life, i.e. aggression towards the new society, outweigh the opposite emotions. At least she can be described as being in doubt most of the time about the new order. Her new self actually *is* the unstable identity meandering between differing perspectives as well as perceptions, between feelings and evaluations. The process of change in the society she lives in and the imminent danger to be cast out – her acute sense that her existence is up to the whim of her owners – are drastic alterations of her life.<sup>760</sup> Offred thus is a self in trans-

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<sup>756</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 144.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.* 150.

<sup>758</sup> Leaving aside the exact point at which conscious reflection of her situation began, the following passages will return to the present tense with regard to her story.

<sup>759</sup> Both quotes *ibid.* 172.

<sup>760</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 29; 82; 92,f; 171; 202; 286; 289-293.

formation, but also an already transformed self. It is important to understand that she is not a split, disturbed, broken or shattered subject, as postmodern critics have suggested.<sup>761</sup> It might be precarious, but the reader can definitely identify the narrator's perspective as a point *from* which Offred sees and evaluates the world. Without a stable core around which the personality elements – influenced by the changing culture – could revolve, the protagonist would simply dissolve.

As she longs for a more stable point of view, she creates her own standards of alternative orientation and idealizes those resisting the new regime.<sup>762</sup> One object of idealization is her friend Moira, who alone managed to escape from the reeducation camp.<sup>763</sup>

Moira had power now, ... she'd set herself loose. She was now a loose woman. I think we found this frightening. [...] Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure.<sup>764</sup>

Although Offred admits to appreciate the security the new social role offers within the new social order, she still admires Moira's power, rationality, and courage. The protagonist often asks herself how Moira would advise her in certain situations, turning her friend into sort of an inner compass. So when the narrator meets Moira again several years after the reeducation camp it is a very significant event. It is during one of the clandestine nights with her Commander, who takes her out, making her dress up and even use make-up for the occasion. She is taken to an unofficial place of amusement for men, which is described as a perverted version of the past. Men of the elite go there to live out their more unconventional sexual phantasies, and, predictably, the Commander brings her there to sleep with her in private.<sup>765</sup> Moira comments: "They like to see you all painted up. Just another crummy power trip."<sup>766</sup> She is one of the women working in this "little" men's "club", amusing the men and rendering them sexual services.<sup>767</sup> Amazingly, all women in there are sterile – if they were not already sterile, they have been operated. In spite of the official propaganda viable ovaries are destroyed for the sole purpose of men being able to amuse themselves without any inexplicable pregnancies messing up the official order. Yet, Offred is first and foremost shocked by the fact that Moira seems to have given up.

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<sup>761</sup> Cf. e.g. Mohr, *Worlds* 8.

<sup>762</sup> Cf. Barbara Hill Rigney, "Alias Atwood: Narrative Games and Gender Politics," Nischik, *Atwood*, 157-165, 163.

<sup>763</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 62; 140,ff.

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>765</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 180,f; 228,f; 244-267.

<sup>766</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 255.

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.* 248.

She is frightening me now, because what I hear in her voice is indifference, a lack of volition. [...] But how can I expect her to go on, with my idea of her courage, live it through, ... when I myself do not?  
I don't want her to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin. [...] I want gallantry from her, swash-buckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack.<sup>768</sup>

It could not be clearer that the idealization of other women – especially Moira but also Ofglen to some extent – serves as an excuse for Offred not to do anything herself. It is not only a question of loyalty to her feelings and the old self she used to be (or the old reality she used to live in), but also a question of losing contact to her old reality when she is confronted with the fact that her most prized heroine of the old way of living is gone. The knowledge (or belief) that there are still others who could theoretically truly sympathize with her helps her to keep up this part of herself. The confrontation with Moira makes her realize that she will have to actually act herself.

This shock is part of what makes her actually want to leave in the end. This wish must be seen in the context of her not acting on it autonomously, but only experiencing it in the course of events that help her flee. Yet, there is an inner development to the extent that she did not really ponder an escape as an attractive option beforehand and that she seems to have overcome her fear. As she imagines her predecessor's ghost talking to her just before she is taken away, she seems definitely less frightened, yet also more distanced from herself. The apparition states: "There's no one you can protect, your life has value to no one. I want it finished."<sup>769</sup> She acutely feels that she has lost the vague place she had accepted in Gilead. She cannot make *sense* of it – she cannot help anyone by maintaining her position, not even herself. When Nick reveals his escape plan to her she is not sure whether she can trust him.

"Trust me," he says; which in itself has never been a talisman, carries no guarantee.  
But I snatch at it, this offer. It's all I'm left with.<sup>770</sup>

Thus, she actively decides to take part in the attempted escape – at least emotionally. She regains her emotional self and welcomes this chance, positively imagining a possibly brighter future by evoking "the light" with the very last words of her narration.<sup>771</sup>

This emotional change happens on the level of disenchantment with the new system. Of course, the fact that this system destroys two of her heroines strongly counterbalances the fact that so far it has delivered communicative reinforcement for her new personality. However, the disenchantment also functions on an indirect level. Seeing the *club* where

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<sup>768</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 261.

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid.* 305.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.* 306.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.* 307.

Moira works and being brought there for purely sexual reasons by her Commander makes Offred lose faith in the new social order. Handmaids have to bear many deprivations with the justification that procreation must be made accessible as a national resource. When she finally realizes that this argument is not valued higher than male desires, Offred understands that women do not have any rights at all and are simply exploited. Additional aims formulated by the regime are “camaraderie among women” and the pretext to return everything to a supposed *natural order*.<sup>772</sup> Yet, the women are working against each other and the *natural order* argument is perverted during the outing. Her Commander explains to Offred: “Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it’s part of the procreational strategy.”<sup>773</sup> She is taken aback by this blunt sexism, especially as she cannot do anything about it. She resents his behavior and the way the other men “review” her exposed body parts “as if there’s no reason why they shouldn’t.”<sup>774</sup> All of a sudden she realizes the shallowness of the promise that the official clothes are meant to protect the Handmaids as if the social order was really designed *for* them. Since her Commander used to be some source of appreciation Offred wants to believe that “his motivations are more delicate than that.”<sup>775</sup> As he turns out to be as lewd as the other men, the whole night out definitely disenchant the new system, the Commander, as well as Moira for Offred.<sup>776</sup> In a way, this also disillusion her position and her *self*. For her soliloquy it is dramatic, as she can no longer draw her energy from a person she knows and adores. At first, there is still Ofglen to look up to, but at last, she must fall back solely upon the imagined listener of her story for support of the old part of her personality. Still, the new part of her personality is now deeply shaken as well. Communicative support has hence not simply been established through acknowledgement by others. Offred’s acceptance of these others – for example the Commander – as to some extent worthy counterparts has also been an important factor for its creation. Establishing and sustaining a personal identity obviously requires *mutual* respect.

Additionally, her affair changes the protagonist’s mind about the system. The fact that she attaches great importance to this is clear when she describes her feelings for Nick as love. It becomes even more obvious when the effect of this affair is considered: She rejects Ofglen’s offer to escape because of it. Obviously, it makes her feel safe and reinforces her personality. At other points she has already mentioned the power of clandestine

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<sup>772</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 234.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.* 249.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.* 248.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.* 255.

<sup>776</sup> *Cf. ibid.* 267.

actions.<sup>777</sup> As the “pleasure” she seeks is forbidden and thus a deliberate defiance of the Commander’s rights at the same time, it also stabilizes her sense of a self who is not his object.<sup>778</sup> This defiance of the man who has deeply disappointed her is of course also a defiance of the social role of the Handmaid. Therefore, her defiance is an act of rebellion and even of self-defense.<sup>779</sup> Yet, this act in the end is futile. While she is privately disobeying the system on the moral grounds of her old life and her old self, these moral grounds are slowly but surely vanishing. Thus, the interim identity fueled by the love Offred feels for Nick cannot last. Especially not as Ofglen – the only alternative heroine in Moira’s tenor – is killed or at least replaced by a new Handmaid. The fragile equilibrium Offred had created drawing on love is now completely destroyed. She feels “abject” when she realizes that her affair might emotionally reassure her on an individual and private basis, but sadly it is not enough when her life is threatened by a whole social system that denies these feelings.<sup>780</sup>

Through the emotions directly shared with Nick she even dared to engage in rebellious behavior for some time. The tremendous importance of the emotional appreciation of others is clearly shown through Offred’s memories of a conversation with Moira as well: “You were always such a wimp, Moira says, but with affection. It does so good. It does.”<sup>781</sup> Affectionate appreciation functions on a different level than rational appreciation: The actual informational content of Moira’s utterance – which is an insult – does not matter at all at this point. Individuals do not only need rational reinforcement for their convictions supporting their personality, but also emotional encouragement for their personalities as they present themselves. The lack of emotional as well as rational appreciation results in a lack of ethical security apparent in Offred’s indecision while waiting for the Wife’s verdict. She thinks about setting the house on fire, about begging for mercy, about killing herself, and about killing the Wife. “I consider these things idly. Each of them seems the same size as all the others. Not one seems preferable.”<sup>782</sup> Since other people do not properly relate to her, she cannot accurately relate to them or to herself. Ethical standards have become slippery to her. Yet, when Nick’s colluders arrive she feels that she needs to go along with them in order to survive. She positively evaluates the possibility to escape. What standards help her to make up her mind or at least to feel this way? Even though it works for

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<sup>777</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 234, 273-275, 283. Even though she is not absolutely sure that she correctly remembers their first meeting, she clearly asserts her emotions for Nick.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.* 296.

<sup>779</sup> Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 256, f.

<sup>780</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 298.

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.* 234.

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.* 304.



some time, Offred's identity feels like a rag rug to her. The way it functions is summed up in one sentence just before she realizes that she cannot go on like this. "Keep your head down, I used to tell myself, and see it through. It's no use."<sup>783</sup> She knows that continuing to *keep her head down* would destroy any chance of ever looking up again and influencing reality, of ever again becoming a *whole human being*. This is very clear in her retrospective evaluations of her narration.

I would like to be without shame. I would like to be shameless. I would like to be ignorant. Then I would not know how ignorant I was.<sup>784</sup>

She is ashamed of her self during her official life in the Republic of Gilead. She might not be able to express this clearly at all times, yet she is still disappointed enough with herself to consider suicide.

What she misses most are not material things, her human rights, or even physical attention, but rather affectionate appreciation. "[N]obody dies from lack of sex. It's lack of love we die from."<sup>785</sup> Somehow she knows that she needs to be affectionately as well as rationally appreciated by others, and that this encouragement must be established through a communicative reality sufficiently self-consistent so that its members can believe in it. This is the underlying standard by which she judges her existence. She knows, or at least feels, that she should participate in the communicative reality. Given that she is not allowed to express her personal feelings and to tell her personal story, she is not allowed to *be* a person. She also knows that she is not the only one being excluded. She feels that she should be outraged and that she should revolt, like Moira and Ofglen, but is too afraid to do so, which causes her shame.<sup>786</sup> Even though she neither formulates these things clearly in the present nor in retrospect, she still feels what is right and what is wrong. Thus, she knows that she *must* leave in the end.

### III.iii.i.ii. Important Aspects of Narrational Style

Even though there thus obviously is a hidden universal ethics in the book's narration, many values organizing the narrative reality are also exposed as relative. In this vein religion is discussed as a tool of reeducation, a tool to oppress women, and as a justification of atrocities. At the same time, religious faith appears as the stimulus of revolutionary

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<sup>783</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 297.

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.* 275.

<sup>785</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>786</sup> She even feels that it is a "betrayal" to enjoy herself with Nick while ignoring all questions about her husband and child. *Ibid.* 275.

tendencies.<sup>787</sup> This shows that cultural habits and functionalities can be used to incorporate very different values. It also shows that feelings can be deceptive about what is good. As it has been established that the protagonist somehow felt the underlying ethics, this seems problematic. This element is at the same time a frequently identified characteristic of the author's style. "Everything for Atwood is two-sided," assesses Barbara Hill Rigney.<sup>788</sup> More postmodern relativistic-minded critics even argue that Atwood is not only creating binary, but multi-faceted universes, too.<sup>789</sup> This tendency of ambiguity is evidenced in the protagonist's shifting perspectives. She actually changes into a person who feels protected by the Handmaid's attire. This becomes perfectly clear in her account of a meeting with tourists from Japan.

It's been a long time since I've seen skirts that short on women. [...] We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this. Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom. *Westernized*, they used to call it.<sup>790</sup>

Compliance to the other women's perception and to the socially accepted frame of mind is signaled by the change from first person singular to first person plural. In the plural the socially accepted feelings and perceptions are expressed, which are then contrasted by memories from the past in which the narrator was still a person expressed in the singular.

The almost indifferent attachment of the term *freedom* to a manner of dressing in the face of a regime that commits crimes against humanity is curious. Such a use only empties the word of meaning – as *West* vs. *East* is emptied of its former meaning. There are many such instances of the narration in which the old values are exposed as interchangeable, inconsistent and meaningless. Especially the discussion of love is striking because this feeling is vital for the narrator's survival.<sup>791</sup>

Falling in love, I said. [...] As if it was trivial for us .... It was, on the contrary [...] the central thing; it was the way you understood yourself; if it never happened to you, ... you would be like a mutant. [...] *Falling in love*, we said; *I fell for him*. We were falling women. [...] The more difficult it was to love the particular man beside us, the more we believed in Love, abstract and total.<sup>792</sup>

In the old system women were already to some extent enslaved by men; they enslaved themselves by believing in the concept of love. Since love was also understood as a way to express one's personality, the way it subordinated women to men contradicted their free-

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<sup>787</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 259.

<sup>788</sup> Barbara Hill Rigney, "Alias Atwood: Narrative Games and Gender Politics," Nischik, *Atwood*, 157-165, 164.

<sup>789</sup> Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 232.

<sup>790</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 38.

<sup>791</sup> For the importance of love with regard to identity see Taylor, *Unbehagen* 60,f.

<sup>792</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 237.

dom. As she does in the passage about the tourists, the narrator here expresses her being part of a group by using the first person plural. An evaluation of the situation from some rational distance is suggested by the mixed use of *you* and *we*. The old system also had its contradictions, and it put women at a disadvantage, as well. Moreover, the same love that is presented as a lifesaver in other passages is exposed as a tool of oppression and as a justification of oppression here. Another inconsistency of the old system is shown when Offred states “Change, we were sure, was for the better always. We were revisionists; what we revised was ourselves.”<sup>793</sup> Ironically, a built in risk of the old society turning into totalitarianism is thus created in the retrospect.

This manner of showing two sides of things seems to contradict the underlying ethics as it relativizes values and evaluations. Yet, there is a difference between the values presented as relative and those underlying the emotional knowledge of ethics. “I’m a refugee from the past ... [...] I am a blank, here, between parentheses. Between other people.”<sup>794</sup> The protagonist is not torn between her old and her new life because of the way she has to dress, but because she is not affectionately appreciated as a person. This becomes absolutely clear when she describes her feelings as she is allowed to regard a picture of her daughter from her past life for a moment.

[T]here will be family albums, too, with all the children in them; no Handmaids though. From the point of view of the future history ... we’ll be invisible. [...] Time has not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away, as if I’m nothing more than a woman of sand, left ... too near the water. [...] I am only a shadow now, far back behind the glib shiny surface of this photograph. A shadow of a shadow, as dead as mothers become. You can see it in her eyes: *I am not there*. [...] I can’t bear it, to have been erased like that [emphasis added].<sup>795</sup>

In such moments of the narration she feels herself disintegrate; she feels herself vanish. She feels she has lost her place in a communicative reality – the affectionate role of the mother was taken from her. It was a social role linked to affections and appreciation not only through the children but also through other members of society. She used to have an existence that was acknowledged and from which she could express her feelings towards the reality in which she lived. Reality now functions in ways designed by others and her influence in it is appallingly small. Right after this she indirectly ponders possibilities of killing herself. The lack of a sense of *really being there* leads directly to the wish to completely erase her existence.<sup>796</sup> This shows that the consciousness of oneself as a person is in a sense always already the awareness of existing at all. Emotional starvation, which is part

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<sup>793</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 237.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.* 239, f.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.* 240.

<sup>796</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 240.

of communicative starvation, leads to death just like physical starvation. Without the acknowledgement and appreciation of the communicative environment a person's consciousness is necessarily constrained. A lot of individual personalities thus are in transition in Gilead, because the communicative reality as such is in a phase of transition, too.<sup>797</sup> When the lower levels of perception are changed so drastically that individuals become unsure of their own perceptions, spontaneous judgments, and feelings the whole world as they know it crumbles. This, of course, affects the way they perceive, rationalize, feel, and judge.

Interestingly, the above monologue implies that it would be a comfort to Offred if she knew that she would be remembered in the future. Thereby, the individual's inner power to resist is highlighted. It is possible to maintain a personality to some extent opposed to one's communicative environment at least for a certain period of time. This seems possible provided that the individual has gotten enough communicative support in the past, provided that there are still some glimpses of communicative reinforcement in the present, and provided that there is some hope of future communicative encouragement. The possible future communicative support though is discarded by Offred because she does not think later generations will know about the Handmaids. However, it is the Handmaids that are considered by later historians in the annexed part of the novel rather than the rest of the republic. They are to an extent invisible; yet, the historians try to find out about their personal living conditions, which is why they consider Offred's account in the first place. By leaving her account Offred, in the end, actually acts against the oppressive communicative environment. She changes her fate by telling her story. She actually makes sure that she does not vanish in two ways. First, her transformed personality, which is to a great extent not accepted by her environment even though it has been changed, stays alive and conserves some of her power by telling her story. Second, by leaving her account for ensuing ages she makes sure that she and all the other Handmaids are not forgotten. Although she cannot be sure that her story will be found, she opens up the possible space that her creation of a future listener becomes reality. In reading the story the reader fulfills her wish for a sympathetic listener. Despite the ambiguity of her narration and her personal feelings, she finds the courage to keep telling her story. She develops a way to command and control herself – at least to a certain extent – even in these difficult times.

It can thus be concluded that there is a difference between cultural identity and human identity. Even though these two are socially communicated and learned together in socialization, there is an element that links the underlying human identity deeper to the indi-

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<sup>797</sup> Of course, communicative reality can never be pronounced static, but there are times like those of social revolution in which it is especially dynamic.

vidual personality than the cultural identity. Whatever keeps Offred from personal disintegration seems to be contained in the very way she narrates. She is part of the present communicative reality and cannot deny it. Yet, she can distance herself to some extent and can judge this communicative reality. What enables Offred to stick to some eventual judgments about the monstrosities of the regime functions at the very core of the narrational style and of the novel's split organization.<sup>798</sup> In retrospect the reader learns from the annexed symposium that Offred's narration has not been genuinely shared but is supposed to be read as a historical document.<sup>799</sup> The title and the order which the narration has been brought into were applied later by the fictive historians. Moreover, Offred's voice is doubled – she tells the reader or audience about her life at the Commander's house in the present tense, but frequently wanders back into the past. In the past she and her life were synchronized, whereas in the present she is only a fragile shadow of herself, which – according to the demand of her present life – is supposed to be totally destroyed.

Offred's voice is doubled in her continual re-telling and re-visioning of the past; she often tells several versions of the same story, and the "Historical Notes" section at the close of the novel makes it clear that Offred's voice is in itself a construction, and not a simple unitary confession.<sup>800</sup>

This distinguishes at least three levels of narrating and/or meaning.<sup>801</sup> First, there is the past in which the protagonist (supposedly called June) entered communicative reality and was able to form a stabile personality and narrational perspective. Second, there is the present in which her name has been usurped by a label and her personality oppressed.<sup>802</sup> The third level sets the homodiegetic narration in perspective since it displays it as a historical artifact. As the reader has been allowed to identify uninterrupted with the protagonist up to the close of her narration, the historians' following judgments are deeply affecting. A western reader could identify with Offred's hardship all the more easily as the initial cultural background can be supposed to be very similar. Shocked and troubled by the effects the Gileadean way has on the protagonist, the reader feels rebuffed when the scientists

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<sup>798</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 293.

<sup>799</sup> Actually, it initially was composed of tape records. Cf. *ibid.* 311-324.

<sup>800</sup> Alice M. Palumbo, "On the Border: Margaret Atwood's Novels," Nischik, Atwood 73-85, 81.

<sup>801</sup> Other critics have established that by taking the dedications and epigraphs into consideration even more levels of meaning and reference to the author's actual sociohistorical background can be differentiated. Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 236.f. Yet, as this interpretation is about finding a stabile core of reality behind all its dynamic elements, it is more important to focus on the stability implied in the many layers of the narration. Therefore, these extra-references will not be discussed.

<sup>802</sup> Even though the third level actually shows that this second level is not set in the present after all, but a historical document analyzed by scientists, I will continue to refer to it as the present for reasons of simplicity. Additionally, the protagonist's narrational style is the main issue of analysis in this study – therefore it is reasonable to see it from the inside perspective of narration created in most of the book.

evaluate the story in absolutely objective terms.<sup>803</sup> They are even joking about the way one of them has chosen the title with reference to Geoffrey Chaucer and the “archaic vulgar signification of the word *tail* ...”<sup>804</sup> Additionally, the scientists explicitly state that they do not intend to pass any judgment on the document. This must unsettle the reader to a certain extent. She is directly addressed by the words of the symposium’s keynote speaker – even more so, as she now also knows the historical document and is invited to interpret it. The sharp opposition between personal agony, described in an emotionally touching way, and the distanced, even arrogant point of view of the scientists shows the abyss between a humane and a (natural) scientific discussion of mankind, which will be systematically discussed in chapter IV.iv. It is already very clear at this point that a theory guided by an objectivity implying value-neutrality and by first and foremost material and logical matters cannot adequately discuss human life.

[W]e must be cautious about passing moral judgment upon the Gileadeans. Surely we have learned by now that such judgments are of necessity culture-specific. Also, Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure .... Our job is not to censure but to understand. (*Applause*.)<sup>805</sup>

Intuitively, the reader feels that there is also a moral side to understanding human behavior. By explicitly insisting on the need of neutrality when discussing foreign cultures the historical notes oppose the personally touching heterodiegetic narration. Whereas Offred’s tale seemed to highlight the fragility of the norms of a specific culture, the historical perspective underlines the fact that some part of these norms is not fragile and not at all culture-relative. To oppose the narration to such a scientific framework creates an interesting effect: Even though the framework uses an objective tone, it does not support neutrality. Contradictorily, the protagonist’s purely subjective narration seems to deliver a neutral and non-relative normative ground. By feeling compassion the reader is addressed on a human level transcending any culture-specific influences. By appealing to an affectionate communicative partner Offred reinvents herself as an individual being, which she might not have fully been for the time of her captivity. At the moment she tells her story, Offred obviously has still not recreated absolutely firm grounds for her personality again. Nevertheless, she occupies the space of an individual in her communicative reality and helps creating it by her own affirmations of herself as a Handmaid and as a person. On the one hand, she is still part of the daily life she lived in Gilead. On the other hand, she is evaluating her behavior at that time and is trying to understand it herself. Maybe she was already much more of the

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<sup>803</sup> On another level of meaning Atwood also comments on the impossibility of textual objectivity. Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 238.

<sup>804</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 313.

<sup>805</sup> *Ibid.* 314,f.

Handmaid when the shock of Ofglen's death destroyed her confidence in that social role. Of course, the fact that she betrayed the Commander shows that she could not have completely identified with that role as his servant. Yet, how she exactly felt at the time level on which the narration seems to take place is unknown to the reader as her first person singular voice in the present tense is a reconstruction. The only certain thing is that she eventually finds a voice again. With this voice she consciously retells what has happened to make it part of herself, to give it some sense. Thus, narrating is still a survival strategy. It is a strategy to painfully incorporate even the moments she is now ashamed of in her personality.<sup>806</sup>

She is probably still in an environment in which confirmation and communicative interaction are sparse. Otherwise her sense of self as a person and not as an object would probably be much stronger.<sup>807</sup> This is also hinted at in the scientific discussion as her story was found within the former borders of Gilead.<sup>808</sup> Her process of reliving her past is accompanied by doubts: "If my life is bearable, maybe what they're doing is all right after all."<sup>809</sup> Even though she has already left captivity when she is narrating this, interpreting it is still a struggle. Her personality has indeed been transformed.

I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born.<sup>810</sup>

Offred shows that her old self used to feel natural and that this feeling has been completely destroyed. She is absolutely aware of presenting herself now. In this way she is treating herself as an object too. Of course, if her self was inborn she would not need communicative reinforcement in order to sustain it. Still, the usual feeling of one's self as firmly and naturally located within communicative social reality is highlighted. The creation of the idea that someone is no more than an inanimate object is also directly taken up as an issue throughout the narration.

[B]ecause he said *it* instead of *her*, I knew he meant *kill*. That is what you have to do before you kill, I thought. You have to create an it, where none was before. You do that first, in your head, and then you make it real. So that's how they do it, I thought.<sup>811</sup>

This strategy highlights the fact that it is not easy for a human being to ignore another being's right to exist. Killing is difficult, and denying someone else affectionate appreciation as a person is difficult as well. Human beings somehow know that other human beings

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<sup>806</sup> Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 261.

<sup>807</sup> The dehumanizing quality of the treatment Offred endures is frequently highlighted in criticism of *Handmaid*. Cf. Mohr, *Worlds* 230.

<sup>808</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 313, f.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.* 197.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.* 76.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.* 202.

must be appreciated and must be allowed to take part in the intersubjective creation of communicative reality as persons. This knowledge is not only based on reason but also on emotional and moral knowledge. If a purely objective concept is applied to the other being as a thing and not as a person, this knowledge then can be ignored for some time. “That’s one of the things they do. They force you to kill, within yourself.”<sup>812</sup>

This is not only happening with regard to women and their now unwanted personalities but also with regard to all undesirable people in the new regime. It is perfectly symbolized in Offred’s description of a Particution, where a man – a subversive element – is torn apart alive by Handmaids.<sup>813</sup>

I keep back [...] and look around, I see the Wives and daughters leaning forward in their chairs, the Aunts on the platform gazing down with interest. They must have a better view from up there. He has become an *it*.<sup>814</sup>

The narrator is taken aback and does not participate, but still is adjusted enough to the communicative reality allowing this practice to consider the question of the best view in the face of bestial murder. In her case the reader can ascribe this to numerous traumas and to the shock of the immediate event. Still, Offred expresses “shock, outrage, nausea” shortly after this and denounces the practice as “Barbarism.”<sup>815</sup> When the historians discuss the practice of Particution they only slightly refer to the horror of it. Mainly, they are interested in its social use and in the question who invented it.

It is Judd who is credited with devising the form ... of the Particution ceremony, arguing that it was not only a particularly horrifying and effective way of ridding yourself of subversive elements, but that it would also act as a steam valve for the female elements in Gilead. Scapegoats have been notoriously useful throughout history, and it must have been most gratifying for these Handmaids, so rigidly controlled at other times, to be able to tear a man apart with their bare hands every once in a while.<sup>816</sup>

It seems as though the historians are also *leaning forward* and *gazing* at the practice *with interest*, having a more distanced and objective view from their later point in history. It is absolutely clear through the opposition of these accounts that they miss an important part of reality when they exclude emotions and ethics from their discussion. They must be placed on the side of the regime from Offred’s point of view as they do not express compassion for the Handmaids and even refer to them as *female elements* and not as persons.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>812</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 203.

<sup>813</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 320.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.* 292.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.* 292.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.* 320.

<sup>817</sup> Nathalie Cooke also comments on the similarities between the scientists’ attitude and official opinion in the republic of Gilead. Cf. Cooke, *Atwood* 133,f.



Offred has implicitly and explicitly begged the reader for affectionate appreciation and for forgiveness for her unsteady behavior, and it is clear that she needs this communicative support to survive. Yet, the historians express objective interest without affections and without appreciation toward her. When her fate is discussed more directly they only ask themselves if she has been able to leave the republic and if she might have become a recluse because of her trauma.<sup>818</sup> They do not even humanely appreciate Nick's helping her but judge it as entirely utilitarian. As Offred was in danger of being arrested after Ofglen's association with resistant forces, they understand the protagonist as a risk of his security as she could give their relationship away.

He could, of course, have assassinated her himself, which might have been the wiser course, but the human heart remains a factor ....<sup>819</sup>

Such neutrality would have destroyed Offred's personality even more had she been confronted by it. The historians are not at all the appreciative communicative partners she imagined.

Even though layers of Offred's old personal identity are presented as culture-relative, not all of her judgments are without secure foundations. It is absolutely clear that the lack of affectionate appreciation kills others or at least harms them severely in their quality of being a human person. This cruelty of the objective scientific approach *inter alia* becomes visible through the two descriptions of the Particitation. The reader has already experienced compassion for the Handmaids (i.e. for Offred and Ofglen) and for the victim of the scene. As the scientists consider the ceremony neutrally by referring to its social function, the reader cannot help but be repelled. She has responded through the created communicative reality in emotional, rational, and moral ways. Underlying all the cultural contents of the protagonist's individual being is an ultimate demand for appreciation. It is a basic human need and the fact that it is not fulfilled induces compassion in the reader. She longs to appreciate Offred as a person so that she can live fully and freely again. Therefore, the contemplation of Offred's tale as a historical document, not appreciating her as a person, feels extremely inhumane (and immoral) to the reader. Although there are literal comments on the fact that moral judgment is necessarily culture-specific, this is not supported by the narrative strategy of the novel as a whole.<sup>820</sup> On the contrary, it implies a transcultural and transhistorical ethics as a stable framework of personal appreciation.

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<sup>818</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Handmaid* 323.

<sup>819</sup> *Ibid.* 323.

<sup>820</sup> In this way it cannot be confirmed that Atwood especially supports constructionist concepts of reality as is proposed in Klaus Peter Müller, "Re-Constructions of Reality in Margaret Atwood's Literature: A Construc-

### III.iii.ii. The Creation of a New Ethics: *Lila – An Inquiry into Morals*

*Lila* can be called a sequel to *Zen*. There are numerous intertextual remarks that identify the protagonist Phaedrus as the narrator (and narrator's alter ego) of the previous novel.<sup>821</sup> The protagonist even quotes from his previous book how he "once called metaphysics 'the high country of the mind' – an analogy to the 'high country' of mountain climbing."<sup>822</sup> Just as the first-person philosopher-narrator related his own past as a tale in the third person about Phaedrus in the beginning of *Zen*, *Lila*'s third-person narrator tells the reader about the protagonist. A total of 357 of 468 pages are devoted to this third-person narration of Phaedrus, who is undoubtedly the most prominent mind into which the reader acquires an insight (restricted as it might be through the third-person).<sup>823</sup> The glimpses of third-person narration devoted to other characters – among them Lila as the most prominent – seem only to illustrate some of the ideas he develops.<sup>824</sup> As the title suggests, Lila functions as promoting Phaedrus' ideas on his Metaphysics of Quality.<sup>825</sup> Moreover, the quest for an organization of the thoughts he has collected after having written *Zen* more or less coincides with the journey he makes with Lila on the level of the narrated events. This quest is introduced almost directly at the beginning and only concluded in the very last paragraph.

He saw that her suitcase had shoved all his trays of slips over to one side of the pilot berth. [...] It would actually be easier to lose the boat than it would be to lose those slips. There were about eleven thousand of them. They'd grown out of almost four years of organizing and reorganizing so many times he'd become dizzy trying to fit them together. He'd just about given up. Their overall subject he called a "Metaphysics of Quality," or sometimes a "Metaphysics of Value," or sometimes just "MOQ" to save time.<sup>826</sup>

Good is a noun. That was *it*. That was what Phaedrus had been looking for. [...] Of course, the ultimate Quality isn't a noun or an adjective or anything else definable, but if you had to reduce the whole Metaphysics of Quality to a single sentence, that would be it.<sup>827</sup>

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tionist Approach," Nischik, Atwood 229-257. Of course, no general statement about the author's intentions can be made. They would be irrelevant to this study anyway.

<sup>821</sup> The name is first mentioned in Pirsig, *Lila* 5 and through numerous remarks about this Phaedrus as author of the book *Zen* it becomes clear that they must be the same character. Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 31, 74, 80, f, 112, 123, ff.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.* 172; the original statement can be found in Pirsig, *Zen* 111.

<sup>823</sup> Phaedrus occupies pages 3-77, 94-140, 157-190, 222-233, 243-263, 278-324, and the whole Part Three of the novel (341-468). Third-person narration focusing on Lila happens on pages 141-156, 191-221, 264-277 and 325-337. Richard Rigel and Jamie are focused on pages 78-93 respectively 237-242.

<sup>824</sup> The terminology is introduced in Pirsig, *Lila* 24. Her function as example is suggested by remarks such as "Lila's battle is everybody's battle." *Ibid.* 412.

<sup>825</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 94-99, 159, 186, 222, 230-233, 342, ff, 462.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.* 23, f.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.* 468.

It is obvious that the quest has actually begun four years before the start of this narration; yet, the journey can be understood as the final stage that leads to a conclusion. This final stage, in which he obviously regains new motivation, is initiated by Lila's suitcase.

Intertextual statements establish the identity of the character Phaedrus in *Lila* as the narrator of *Zen*, who eventually finishes his philosophical oeuvre.<sup>828</sup> Instead of narrating the account of his intellectual quest (and coinciding boat trip) in the first-person, he chooses to appear as a heterodiegetic narrator and even attempts to give insights into other characters' minds.<sup>829</sup> His development as an individual will be discussed with relation to *Zen*. This development will actually only occupy a part of the analysis and will be complemented by the discussion of the narrator's philosophical ideas. These ideas intersect with communicative foundationalist ethics. The element of relativism is developed as a central issue of the MOQ in relation to anthropology. This is not surprising, as relativism is very common to the "philosophy of social science concerning the understanding and interpretation of alien cultures or distant historical epochs."<sup>830</sup> Yet, the narrator also accomplishes a true combination of relativist and realist arguments, drawing strongly on spiritual ideas. Therefore, a somewhat extensive critique and distinction with regard to communicative foundationalist ethics is necessary. The peculiar narrational situation will be analyzed in detail in III.iii.ii.ii. It will become clear that *Lila* can be read partly as a meta-fictional discourse on *Zen*.

### III.iii.ii.i. Development of the Central Character as an Individual

In *Lila* the level of the narration of events (in this case a trip on a sailing boat including many retrospections) and the level of Phaedrus' inner life concentrating on philosophizing are separated. No purpose of the narration is stated (as the Chautauqua in *Zen*) but it is seemingly unintentional. On the level of the narrated events Phaedrus himself states the aim to write a book about the MOQ.<sup>831</sup> As the novel actually turns out to be this book for the abstract narrator, the identicalness of the character Phaedrus and *Lila*'s abstract narrator is further underlined. His central development as an individual is deeply linked to the

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<sup>828</sup> Cf. also Pirsig, *Lila* 31, 278-284, 379.

<sup>829</sup> As has been explained in the introduction and the chapters subsumed under III.i., I have chosen to interpret the narrator as an abstract narrator. Therefore, the level of the actual author – Robert M. Pirsig – is completely excluded from the analysis. Nevertheless, the reader is confronted with these intersecting narrators and has to organize their status.

<sup>830</sup> Chris Swoyer, "Relativism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/> (25.03.2009).

<sup>831</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 24.

development of the MOQ as he is absolutely preoccupied with it.<sup>832</sup> It is only through the interplay of contact to other characters (especially Lila) and moments of solitude that this project is successful. Apparently, there was a time when Phaedrus “didn’t have anybody” since his journey on a motorcycle with his son, narrated in *Zen*.<sup>833</sup> He is no longer married and his son is curiously omitted.<sup>834</sup> As *Zen*’s narrator accepted Phaedrus as part of himself in the end, it seems only natural that he should return to Phaedrus’ philosophical preoccupation. He even voices that the slips on which he notes his ideas create a world of their own for him.

The buildings out there on the shore were in one world and these slips were in another. This “slip-world” was quite a world and he’d almost lost it once because he hadn’t written any of it down .... Now he had reconstructed what seemed like most of it on these slips and he didn’t want to lose it again.<sup>835</sup>

Yet, until *Lila* the protagonist was unable to organize the ideas originating in his previous book. He assesses that the enthusiastic response of his readers has kept him from doing so.<sup>836</sup> He experiences a motivational low at the beginning of the second narration. Even though he ponders the idea of giving up (which obviously does not occur for the first time) an urge to finish his thoughts possesses him.

There’d been times when an urge surfaced to take the slips ... and file them into the door of the coal stove .... Then it would all be gone and would be really free again. Except that he *wouldn’t* be free. It would still be there in his mind to do.<sup>837</sup>

Phaedrus’ initial intention was to go on the boat trip alone, but he meets Lila and she travels with him for a while. The story told in *Lila* is as much the story of his finding a way to organize his thoughts into a philosophical theory, as it is the story of his developing acquaintance with Lila. Except for brief glimpses of the memory of Lila in a streetcar, all retrospections refer to instances important for the MOQ. His motive for taking the trip (and thus the catalyst for the narration of events in *Lila*) was to find out how to shape his philosophy. As will become clear, his occupation with Lila is very much linked to his philosophical design, too. Her importance for his philosophy is additionally underlined, since it is her suitcase that starts his intellectual considerations in the narration. One of the categories in which he tried to organize his slips is named after an old friend and fellow intellectual – Verne Dusenberry. Dusenberry was interested in anthropological matters and studied Na-

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<sup>832</sup> *Lila* is as much about the development of the MOQ as anything else. This becomes clear as Phaedrus’ inspiration for such a project is related to his former philosophical book. Cf. e.g. Pirsig, *Lila* 56, 66.

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>834</sup> He only alludes to his family breaking up because of his insanity in the past. Cf. *ibid.* 379.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>836</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 31.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

tive Americans. The development of Phaedrus' MOQ actually starts with considerations about Indians. Consequently, the first retrospective is looking back on the time Phaedrus spent with his friend. During this passage the reader gets an understandable and likeable perspective of Phaedrus. In the department both men work at, he is the only one to socialize with Dusenberry and to kindly endeavor to understand his work. Phaedrus finds sympathetic words for him when he describes his sympathy and concern for the Indians.<sup>838</sup> As the first impression of Phaedrus is not as positive, it can be stated that the narration of the MOQ's development is in a way the medium through which true interest in other people respectively friendship is revealed. Intersubjective relations are thus curiously mediated through intellectual considerations.

The very first impression of the protagonist is mediated to the reader through the opening scenes in which he gets to know Lila. After a short flirtation, Phaedrus takes her to his boat and spends the night with her, even though she behaves rather eccentric. In these scenes, Phaedrus is thus not necessarily presented as someone predestined to write a work about morals. Nevertheless, during the sailboat trip and especially because of a dispute with another sailor, Richard Rigel, the centrality of morality for the MOQ becomes clear.<sup>839</sup> Already in his discussions of Indians the protagonist is talking about a "root source of American feelings for what is good," which very much implies *morally* good.<sup>840</sup> Yet, two aspects of Phaedrus' behavior in the first scenes imply a certain inconsistency of character contradicting moral conventions. First, in the very opening scene Phaedrus watches Lila in her sleep in the berth of his sailboat. He expects that she "wouldn't even remember" him the next morning, implying that he took advantage of her drunkenness.<sup>841</sup> When he describes the feelings he expects her to experience the next morning, he puts neither her nor himself in a very favorable light.

Her nausea and headache might produce some remorse and self-contempt but not much ... – she'd been through this many times – and she'd slowly try to figure out how to return to whatever life she'd been leading before she met this one. [...]  
He wanted to wake her and take her again but as he thought about this a sad feeling rose up and forbade it. The more he hesitated the more the sadness grew.<sup>842</sup>

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<sup>838</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 23,f; 32-65; 34,f; 278,ff. At this point it should be noted that the term *Indians* is frequently used in *Lila* from page 34 on without any debasing intentions. This becomes clear as it appears interchangeably with the actual tribe names. Therefore, it is sometimes also used in the discussion of the narrator's ideas. Even though the author exhibits a certain ignorance of recent standards of political correctness – he for example also uses the term *Negro* on *ibid.* 52 – *Indian* might also be used to highlight the relation that is established between Native Americans and eastern philosophy. Cf. *ibid.* 36.

<sup>839</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 3-20; 90,f; 94-96.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

<sup>841</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.* 3,f.

He also distances himself from Lila as an actual person by explaining her in terms of a spiritual model and showing a somewhat detached interest in her.

These half-forgotten images are strange, he thought, like dreams. This sleeping Lila, whom he had just met tonight, was someone else too. Or not someone else exactly, but someone less specific, less individual. There is a Lila, this single private person who slept beside him now, who was born and now lived and tossed in her dreams and will soon enough die and then there is someone else – call her *lila* – who is immortal, who inhabits Lila for a while and then moves on. [...T]he waking Lila, who never sleeps, had been watching him and he had been watching her for a long time.<sup>843</sup>

The one-night stand with Lila, which develops into a curious affair, is actually the catalyst causing Phaedrus to realize the centrality of morality for his MOQ. Contrary to the setting, which is also used by novels concerned with love, the relationship between the protagonist and Lila is not (or only very superficially) romantic. Through these experiences a level of intersubjective contact deeper than the actual surface of the narrated events and somehow impersonal is evoked. Referring to the idea of an immortal soul thus implies a religious or mystic background. Thereby, the level of the narrated events from the start seems to allude to another level of reality. Phaedrus' frame of experiences seems vague with regard to the time level of narrated events and much clearer with regard to the narration of the development of his MOQ. Additionally, he seems inconsistent as he originally planned to seek solitude on his sailing trip, but now has taken Lila onto his boat.<sup>844</sup> She has entered the story in a foreboding way, which is told in a short-term retrospect from the berth. Phaedrus sits at a table with Richard Rigel and his crewman Bill Capella.

After a while, it began to feel cold. The door was open. A woman stood there, her eyes combing the room as though she was looking for someone.<sup>845</sup>

This initial physical coldness is joined by coldness in the way she is greeted by the other sailors in the bar. Richard Rigel seems to know her and finally tells her that the shouts to close the door are addressed to her. Instead of greeting they just stare at each other “for a long time,” but Lila only slams the door shut when she furiously spots what she is looking for.<sup>846</sup> Then she shouts “That SUIT you?”<sup>847</sup> The hostility of these addresses is underlined by capital letters. Rigel's only comment to Phaedrus questions is: “Don't have anything to do with her.”<sup>848</sup> Phaedrus watches this strange, cheap looking woman who sits down all alone. He immediately assumes that it must be a sexual interest holding his attention. When he watches her dispute with the man she seems to have been looking for and who

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<sup>843</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 6.

<sup>844</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 3, 9.

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.* 12.

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*

came to the bar with yet another girlfriend no feelings of sympathy or emotional involvement are expressed.

He said something to [Lila] and she said something back to him and then he nodded and nodded again, then he and the woman looked at each other and turned to the bar and said nothing to Lila at all. The others around them gradually turned back to talking again.<sup>849</sup>

This emotional detachment reminds the reader of the emotional problems Phaedrus experienced in the course of *Zen*. At the end of that narration it seemed as though the protagonist was about to start an emotional healing process.<sup>850</sup> However, he does not seem balanced in *Lila*. His emotional instabilities are yet no longer directly connected to mental instabilities. Phaedrus thinks about his “time of insanity” as something definitely in the past.<sup>851</sup> By now he clearly understands that he had been acting to get out of the insane asylum. This acting developed into a habit and he slipped into constant “role-play” with everybody even after his discharge.<sup>852</sup> He is aware that this behavior “made it impossible to ever really share anything with them.”<sup>853</sup> Therefore, he has rationally expanded on the realization of his emotional detachment at the end of *Zen*. Yet, neither his actual behavior nor his emotional reaction towards others seems to have changed very much. Even though he is characterized as sympathetic in the retrospections of Dusenberry, there are signs of Phaedrus’ general unsociability even in these passages.

Phaedrus had never learned how to make small-talk like that and as soon as he got into it his mind always drifted off into his own private world of abstractions and the conversation died.<sup>854</sup>

His intentions for working on the MOQ are mostly formulated as a development of a tool to “light a way through the darkness for mankind.”<sup>855</sup> Yet, his ideal for this philosophical work is to think in solitude.

Even though there is a sympathetic side to Phaedrus, he is not cast as an emotionally normal person. With regard to his *time of insanity* he summarizes the effects as follows.

[Phaedrus at the time of *Zen*] has trouble coping with his own life because he has destroyed his ability to deal honestly with it. It was this isolation that indirectly broke up his family and led to this present life.<sup>856</sup>

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<sup>849</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 14.

<sup>850</sup> Cf. my interpretation in chapter III.ii.ii.i.

<sup>851</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 390.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.* 379.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>854</sup> *Ibid.* 56.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.* 301.

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.* 379.

In retrospect this *present life* is clearly understood as holding *more isolation* than the time in the asylum by Phaedrus. Yet, he feels that there is nothing he can do to change this. His self-awareness is thus much more developed than in *Zen*. He for example explains that his resentment against his treatment has lessened considerably. Immediately after this consideration he pronounces his aim to be a *reform* of society. Besides other interesting parts his reform seems to be focused on a new understanding of insanity. This reevaluation is associated with his past illness in some passages, but mainly focused on Lila as someone identified as insane by her environment at the time of narrated events. Phaedrus actually states that anthropology would be a good starting point for his reform. The reader cannot help but notice that this is exactly how *Lila* has started – with a retrospect on Native Americans and anthropology almost right at the beginning.

The eventual motive of reevaluating his own life shines through the protagonist's narration of his feelings of shock and disappointment when his beloved ones rejected him. Because he remembers the injustice that was inflicted on him, he decides to care for Lila even after he has realized that she has what is generally described as mental problems.

[Lila]'s causing an interruption of other more important purposes in life. No one admits it, but that's really the reason the insane get locked up. [...] What makes them "insane" is that they have [absurd] ideas *and* are a nuisance to somebody else.

The only thing that's illegitimate is the cover-up, the pretense that you're trying to help them by getting rid of them. But there was no way Lila was going to sink him. [...] He had no chance but to try to help her .... Otherwise he would just injure himself. You can't just run off from other people without injuring yourself too.<sup>857</sup>

Following these rather general thoughts he acutely remembers how he was personally affected by "the righteousness of the sane."<sup>858</sup> He explains his social isolation as an effect of his intellectual disagreement. Even though "the sane" can provide "great comfort and protection," as long as one does not contradict them, they can also become self-righteously "dangerous" according to Phaedrus.<sup>859</sup>

The sinister thing that struck the most fear in him was that they'd do it all in the name of *kindness*. The ones he cares about most and who cared about him most suddenly, all of them, turned against him .... They kept saying, "There's no way we can reach you. If only we could make you understand."

He saw that the sane always know they are good because their culture tells them so. Anyone who tells them otherwise is sick, paranoid, and needs further treatment.<sup>860</sup>

This fear has only further estranged him from a social life, turning him into an emotionally detached role-player. Indirectly, this reaction and the ensuing time in the asylum are the

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<sup>857</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 366.

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.* 367.

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*



reason why the protagonist destroyed his family and why he finally ended up living on a sailing boat.<sup>861</sup> In a way, he decides to try to help Lila to save her from this destiny. At the same time he decides to save himself from getting further involved in the habits of *the sane*, who seem to be injuring themselves as well as those they pronounce to be insane. His discussions of insanity (starting with anthropological considerations) and his discussion of the reason why it is good to help Lila function as structuring characteristics for the whole body of thought on the MOQ. The topic of insanity helps to clarify epistemological and ontological questions, whereas the matter of justification leads to the question of morals. In this manner, his MOQ is a tool to understand what has happened to him and to reevaluate the way in which his environment treated him. Therefore, the narration of *Lila* is another quest for his self in the end.

Close to the end of Phaedrus' philosophical deliberations and of the narration as a whole *Lila* is officially included as a part of the MOQ.

He thought some more about Lila's insanity and how it was related to religious mysticism and how both were integrated into reason by the Metaphysics of Quality.<sup>862</sup>

The protagonist clearly ascribes the insanity to Lila (and not to himself) even though considerations of his own past led him ultimately to take care of Lila, which in turn resulted in the inclusion of insanity in his philosophy. Therefore, the development of his philosophy seems to lead to a justification of his emotional detachment, i.e. a further repression of his emotions disguised as a quest for justice. To conclusively defend this perspective, a closer look on the development of the protagonist, his MOQ, and his relationship with Lila is necessary. In the beginning Phaedrus feels that Lila's immortal part has been watching him for a considerable period of time. This immortal part is accompanied by him imagining a light that recurs several times in the novel. It becomes clear that the light symbolizes her insanity to him, and that it is this mental quality that strikes him about her as it is a characteristic that he once shared. He agrees to let her stay on his boat because of this and not because he romantically (or erotically) feels something for her.<sup>863</sup>

When he drifts into the first long passage of the discussion of his metaphysics, his anthropological considerations lead him to a differentiation of separate levels of values and to a consideration of different versions of mysticism. Afterwards, he discusses the problem of a scientifically neutral evaluation of values also scrutinized in this study and likewise

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<sup>861</sup> Cf. e.g. Pirsig, *Lila* 284, 369.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.* 432.

<sup>863</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 16, 24. This also becomes apparent as she is drunk, loud, aggressive, and angry – were it not for the insanity, it would seem very strange that he agrees to take her at all.

concludes that it is an impossible concept.<sup>864</sup> Phaedrus argues that metaphysics could be the bridge to reconcile the opposed notions of mysticism and science. Through a confrontation with Rigel about Lila, which is presented from inside Rigel's mind, the element of morality is clearly focused. Rigel presents her as a reckless and completely immoral woman and presents Phaedrus with the question that will guide his metaphysical considerations of moral value: "Do you *personally* think Miss Lila M. Blewitt ... has Quality?"<sup>865</sup> Within the official Northern American value system Lila cannot be described as having quality. Therefore, Phaedrus has to design a quality frame of reference that encompasses cultural differences and offers a superior standard for judgment. The relativity implied in Phaedrus' earlier descriptions of reality is leading to problems with respect to ethics (as has been explained in theory in part II.).

The difficulties in the relation between quality and actual persons in tangent situations clearly strike Phaedrus for the first time after this argument. He ponders Rigel's self-righteousness with regard to morals and exposes the potential aggression and self-centeredness underlying the belief that the values of one's culture could be used universally.<sup>866</sup> He exposes cultural codes of conduct as superficial and insists that Quality and morality are the same thing.

And if Quality is the primary reality of the world then that means that morality is also the primary reality of the world. The world is primarily a moral order. But it's a moral order that neither Rigel nor the posing Victorians had ever, in their wildest dreams, thought about or heard about.<sup>867</sup>

This means that quality is naturally in the world. He differentiates an eloquent rejection of what he calls subject-object metaphysics as just one set of cultural codes of thinking.

The Metaphysics of Quality varies from this by saying that the values of art and morality and even religious mysticism are verifiable, and that in the past they have been excluded for metaphysical reasons, not empirical reasons. They have been excluded because of the metaphysical assumption that all the universe is composed of subjects and objects and anything that can't be classified as [such]... isn't real.<sup>868</sup>

What this comes down to is the basic assumption of postmodern cultural studies: what is abnormal or morally condemned in one culture does not necessarily have to be abnormal or

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<sup>864</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 60. The arguments underlying these considerations will not be discussed in detail with regard to *Lila*. They are systematically revisited in chapter IV.iv. with respect to biology. It is interesting to note that Pirsig convincingly argues for a direct development of white American values from Native American values. Cf. *ibid.* 48,f.

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.* 89. Rigel also directly challenges the author on the philosophical views the latter expressed in *Zen*. He thus exhibits the attitudes that are probably also experienced by the reader. This is even underlined as he criticizes Phaedrus for his morally dubitable engagement with Lila. For the significance of Rigel's question see *ibid.* 94, 99, 341.

<sup>866</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 95,f.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid.* 111.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

morally condemned in other cultures. To describe these variations Phaedrus designs a model of reality structured in value patterns.

It is interesting that a passage from Lila's point of view shows that Phaedrus, immersed in his thoughts about morality, would not actually act morally and help a little girl picked up by a staff member in a shop. It is not clear why the girl had been ordered to stay away from the shop, but the woman is treating her rather unkindly. Had it not been for Lila, he would not have gotten involved at all. Thus, for all his theoretically stated intentions, he is not characterized as straightforwardly engaging himself for his fellow human beings. Through his conversations with her Phaedrus learns more about Rigel's and Lila's relation. Apparently, some romance has happened between them, which explains Rigel's strong antipathy. On one occasion Lila gets drunk again and reveals herself as a very vulnerable person with low self-esteem.

All these questions you're asking are just a waste of time. I know you're trying to find out what kind of a person I am but you're never going to find out anything because there's nothing to know.<sup>869</sup>

She also admits that she is often role-playing, which anticipates Phaedrus' own recollections. Interestingly, she seems to feel pressured by the protagonist as she asserts that he wants to turn her into something that she is not. She even accuses him of trying to destroy her, although she relativizes her accusations by assessing that all men are like that with respect to women.<sup>870</sup>

Apart from the implied gender discourse, it seems interesting that Phaedrus is insensitive enough to harm her or at least to distress her. At this point his ignorance of the intersubjective state of all beings is apparent. He does not see that he can harm others just by addressing or not addressing them – therefore he did not bother to get involved in the conflict with the girl in the shop. He is stronger than Lila; therefore it can be supposed that he was afforded more appreciation in the time before his insanity. With regard to the appreciation as scholar and author this is still (or again) true at the time level of narrated events. He has the strength to seek solitude for rational abstraction without losing his sense of self. The relationship with Lila oscillates between arguing and making love. At one point, she even states that she likes him very much. Gradually, he gets to know more about her. He notices the scars on her forearms and supposes that she must have tried to kill herself a long time ago. Through an episode in which Lila suggests her old pimp Jamie as an additional crew member she and the protagonist get into a huge fight. This episode is told from

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<sup>869</sup> Pirsig, Lila 219.

<sup>870</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 195,ff; 216,ff; 219-221.

Jamie's perspective, which is why information between him and Lila can be exchanged without Phaedrus knowing about it. Lila explains to Jamie that she wanted him to be on the sailing boat so that they could act when a good opportunity to get rid of Phaedrus would show up. As the protagonist is not afraid of her, he seems to misread her and to actually be as naive as Rigel pronounced him to be earlier. Yet, he is very angry with Lila, which the reader finds out through retrospection from Lila's perspective. The reader does not know whether she has just left or whether he kicked her off his boat. But it becomes clear that she has told him of her past career as a whore. She is very angry with the protagonist and expresses her general hatred of men. The reader also learns that she needs medication and that she spent some time in a hospital.<sup>871</sup>

While she is experiencing visions intertwined with bad memories from her past, Phaedrus is further working on his MOQ.<sup>872</sup> The description of how the world is structured gradually grows into an evolutionary explanation of different levels of reality – inorganic matter, biology, society, and intellect – with according patterns and goals. Instead of understanding reality as divided in objects and subjects, it is divided into four levels of values. “Objects are inorganic and biological values; subjects are social and intellectual values. [...] They have a matter-of-fact evolutionary relationship.”<sup>873</sup> Evolution is equated with morality – the dominance of higher levels of evolution is thus morally *good* in terms of the MOQ. “It states that intellect is a higher level of evolution than society; therefore, it is a more moral level than society.”<sup>874</sup> Yet, not every intellectual pattern will lead to a moral orientation of existence. As the “subject-object science,” which has been one of the most successful intellectual patterns of the twentieth century, “has no provision for morality,” it is impossible to understand or even describe morality with it.<sup>875</sup> Phaedrus even explains the general interest in cultural relativism through the moral course of evolution – which is expressed through intellect ruling society. Such cultural relativism had to spring from a heightened interest in the intellectual pattern of neutral and objective science, as it does not provide an understanding of morality.<sup>876</sup>

The last part of the novel is solely occupied with narration from Phaedrus' perspective. He meets Lila again, realizes her insanity and finishes his MOQ. In addition to the four levels of values that structure reality, he specifies them as static (qualities) and adds to

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<sup>871</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 226,ff; 237-242; 264-277. For the appreciation still granted to him see also 291.

<sup>872</sup> Another passage from her perspective is given in *ibid.* 325-337.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.* 342.

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.* 317.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.* 317.

<sup>876</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 317-324.

this structure a notion of dynamic evolution, which he also terms Dynamic Quality.<sup>877</sup> According to the MOQ it is moral to develop an existing system towards a higher level of reality (that is in the direction of social or, after having reached that level, intellectual values). Not only is the direction of this development moral, but so is the act of introducing Dynamic Quality (i.e. evolution itself or at least change) to the already existing static patterns of any system. Any system of organizing reality (e.g. organisms or society) has to establish static patterns of quality in order to prevail. Yet, constant development ought to be aspired to maintain the morality of any organization – the established patterns are thus to be taken as provisional. The definition of mankind according to the MOQ reads as follows.

[M]an is composed of static levels of patterns of evolution with a capability of response to Dynamic Quality. ...[B]iological patterns and cultural patterns are often grouped together, but to say that a cultural pattern is an integral part of a biological person is like saying the Lotus 1-2-3 program is an integral part of an IBM computer. [...] Cultures are not the source of all morals, only a limited set of morals. Cultures can be graded and judged morally according to their contribution to the evolution of life.<sup>878</sup>

The protagonist thus disintegrates a human individual into the different sets of values that form a particular person. Evolution is the ethical standard which actions and situations can be evaluated with. This means that progress in the direction of greater intellectual freedom (freedom is also an intellectual value in itself) is moral. Consequently, Phaedrus is eventually able to describe his time of insanity as a time “when he had wandered freely outside the limits of cultural reality ....”<sup>879</sup> Body and mind, as well as social, cultural, and inorganic cell-characteristics of man are separated. They are not part of a single man, but the single man is part of a greater order of reality. With regard to the overall structure of man this is a very similar concept to poststructuralist intersubjective understandings of an individual as a subject. Along the lines of the MOQ it also remains as dubious how a single human being can actually realize the whole scope of reality.<sup>880</sup> The Dynamic Quality that underlies all reality is related to mysticism and *lights* the way towards greater morality. The foundation thus provided is designed to overcome the concept of reality as divided in mind and matter. The only real value or the common source of all reality levels lies in the Dynamic Quality shining through everything in the only morally *good* direction.

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<sup>877</sup> The last part starts on p. 339. Phaedrus explains that the Hippie movement of the second half of the twentieth century for example misunderstood that social values and intellectual values are not to be mixed up, which is why it failed. Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 346-349.

<sup>878</sup> *Ibid.* 356,f.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.* 390.

<sup>880</sup> Furthermore, the MOQ can be interpreted as a completion of Friedrich Nietzsche’s project to reevaluate the western moral and ethical concepts with regard to the humanities instead of a religious agenda. The concept of cosmological evolution is used to give values a foundation that does not depend on subjective evaluations. Cf. McWatt, *Textbook* 19,f.

The mystic quality of reality cannot be completely named or explained. Yet, if a human being can only open herself mystically to Dynamic Quality how will she be able to distinguish between the biological moral codes that are inferior to social or intellectual moral codes? Phaedrus accepts the (postmodern relativist) idea that the “culture in which we live hands us a set of intellectual glasses to interpret experience with” and states that “the concept of the primacy of subjects and objects is built right into these glasses.”<sup>881</sup> If our intellectual understanding of the universe can be thus easily misled, we can never be sure whether any assessment of reality is in compliance with a systematic understanding that will eventually lead to Dynamic Quality. In fact, it is impossible to trust the human perception to identify value patterns, their content, and even the direction of their development beyond all doubt. As values are synonymous with every evaluation (be it biological or social or moral) in the MOQ, the whole sphere of existing things is encompassed by morality (or by quality). The question whether a cell should have developed into a higher organism (such as a human being) is basically the same question as whether a human being should kill another human being. Referring to the preservation of life this might make sense although such cosmic evolution must not necessarily mean that all life has to be preserved under all circumstances.<sup>882</sup> Additionally, the participating observer introduced with Dusenberry – who socially interacts with the Native Americans for his anthropological studies – seems unlikely to come to conclusions about himself in relation to others. Other human beings cannot eventually be evaluated in terms of their humanity, but only in terms of their relation to quality patterns and Dynamic Quality.

The foundation of omnipresent and all-inclusive Dynamic Quality offers a great starting point from a realistic perspective. It also includes the postmodern relativist critique as is witnessed in statements like “Seeing is not believing. Believing is seeing.”<sup>883</sup> Yet, besides the above mentioned problem of differentiation, another aspect is problematic. When ordering the levels of reality according to their morality and formulating norms such as the condemnation of the debasement of others because of their genetic disposition, Phaedrus uses the verb *matter*. To define which characteristics matter it is necessary to already believe in the standard of cosmic evolution towards a greater intellectual freedom (wherein the direction must remain dubious). Besides this precondition, there are other problems of self-referencing. Intellectual activities ordering existence, such as the subject-object meta-

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<sup>881</sup> Pirsig, Lila 113.

<sup>882</sup> Moreover, in a pragmatic universe it must remain doubtful whether the sacrifice of human lives is not the moral thing to do under certain circumstances. In this case they would be sacrificed for the greater good of Dynamic Quality.

<sup>883</sup> Pirsig, Lila 386.

physics, can also lead to very wrong and disastrous forms of social and intellectual life. If intellectual activity does not automatically lead to the right understanding of Quality, how can we prove that the MOQ is correct?<sup>884</sup> How can human beings ever be sure that every single person is able to live truly morally? How can they make others find the right path? Is there even such a responsibility to help others get to a higher evolutionary level? From a pragmatic point of view it could be argued that a higher level of evolution in one society could be endangered through close contact with lower-level societies. Therefore, one could argue for the neglect of whole societies as they prove to be a hindrance to evolution. The moment evolution is not related to the whole of humanity (respectively to every human being) it can be moral to let a nation die or to exploit it to increase evolution in other nations. Phaedrus defends his MOQ with regard to existing debates by stating that all existing western moral discourses are wrong.<sup>885</sup> Yet, it is impossible to logically defend the position that certain human beings have been intellectually wrong for centuries as they developed the subject-object metaphysics (or no metaphysics at all) and that Phaedrus, who is also a human being, can suddenly be right. If everybody has access to mystic Quality, it is unlikely that it has been thus widely overlooked by western philosophical tradition, whereas eastern traditions have always understood it.

It is also a logical contradiction that an evolution develops more or less accidentally if a moral component is attached to evolution.<sup>886</sup> The man who is able to understand and live according to morality must always already be a rational being according to the MOQ. This is illogical as man is made out of discrete value patterns and can misjudge a situation. Racism exists, even though it is explained as a misunderstanding of the role of biological patterns.<sup>887</sup> Should man be understood as a single human being, who acts according to the

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<sup>884</sup> This point seems dubious especially as Phaedrus himself considers it immoral to describe the mystic permeation of existence by a necessarily less moral intellectual structure. Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 457.

<sup>885</sup> It must be conceded that the MOQ does not take itself as an absolute truth, but considers itself the best intellectual explanation (i.e. the one with the highest quality) until a better explanation appears.

<sup>886</sup> If no moral values are involved, evolution can be understood as developing randomly.

<sup>887</sup> Moreover, it is not intuitively understandable that an action such as racist aggression should be condemned because it is incompatible with the principle of cosmic evolution. The fact that such conflicts involve aggression and possibly compassion on a larger scale is not conceivable from the point of view of Dynamic Quality. Impulsive feelings belong to Dynamic Quality in Phaedrus' MOQ. It is thus incomprehensible how an individual (experiencing feelings that urge her to attack her fellow beings) is to distinguish correctly between Dynamic Quality and feelings evoked by a value pattern that is to be overcome. This problem is also criticized in Anthony McWatt, PhD 95. Feelings of compassion would simply not *matter*, as the decision to answer the call of Quality is entirely directed at a greater good. The lack of compassion as a central element of moral understanding in the MOQ is criticized by McWatt as well. Mystic worldviews suppose that through a stronger realization of the way in which people are connected to a mystic source of being the sense of self decreases, whereas compassion and social obligation increase. Cf. McWatt, *Textbook* 106, 115,f.

MOQ or is anonymous mystic quality acting through him?<sup>888</sup> And is it morally good when a man reigned by biological patterns dies so that a man reigned by intellectual patterns can live? Such questions remain irresolvable. The system of Phaedrus' philosophy is in this respect very similar to the concept of power structures in so many postmodern relativist theories, which especially exist in the social sciences. "There is no good and evil, there is only power ...."<sup>889</sup> This literary quote could be altered to describe the MOQ as follows: *There is no good and evil, there is only Quality*. This is of course directly opposed to an understanding of communicative foundationalist ethics, which focuses exclusively on a human notion of ethics.<sup>890</sup>

Especially the description of intersubjective communicative relationships is very difficult – and even impossible in moral terms – with regard to cosmological evolution. This fact becomes blatantly clear if the behavior of the protagonist is to be interpreted after the MOQ. To differentiate this philosophical concept from communicative foundationalist ethics, the interpretations according to both frameworks will be contrasted in the following. The MOQ detaches ethics from the intersubjective nature of human life and reorganizes it as (a curiously unemotional) cosmic interaction. The description of Phaedrus, as Lila finally leaves him, reflects this curious detachment between human beings. He experiences an exhilarating feeling of freedom – this freedom is understood rationally, even mystically. The protagonist talking to an imaginary idol symbolizes mystic understanding. The intersubjective bond with Lila seems to have been broken even though it will turn out that this is not true.<sup>891</sup> To actually break that bond would mean that human beings could live a moral life without taking on responsibility for their fellow men, which can hardly be an ethical viewpoint.

In general, the narrator establishes Lila's problems as everybody's problems in terms of his MOQ. As he realizes her insanity, he also reevaluates his own insanity as a

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<sup>888</sup> Freedom of will is granted through the understanding of evolutionary advancement (also of intellectual space). Yet, a single human action does not seem to *matter* with regard to the greater frame of existence. This cosmic relativization is not compatible with ethics as every action might mean harm to another person.

<sup>889</sup> Joan K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000) 313.

<sup>890</sup> In this way, the MOQ is self-referential and circular. As it is a pragmatic and mystic theory, such self-referentiality is not as easily integrated as it is in a communicative foundationalist theory. Still, the MOQ provides valuable attempts to reconcile realist and relativist ideas. In the novel the protagonist very closely links his philosophy to American pragmatism, as he includes extensive discussions of William James. Cf. e.g. Pirsig, Lila 372-375, 414-419. Cf. also McWatt, PhD 96-102. In the end the MOQ has to prove that Dynamic Quality exists and is really the source of the whole universe, which is done indirectly. Communicative foundationalist ethics has to prove that human beings are first and foremost communicative human beings, which is done directly. It seems far more *realistic* from a postmodern point of view to deduce conclusions concerning human (communicative) nature from human descriptions and perceptions of the world than to deduce conclusions concerning the universe. In addition, the communicative foundationalist world view can explain the human individual who is able to describe and understand reality far more clearly than the MOQ.

<sup>891</sup> Cf. Pirsig, Lila 456-464. Phaedrus even thinks to himself "The bond of obligation was broken." Ibid. 456.



problem of the value patterns that everybody is confronted with. Insanity becomes a path to greater intellectual freedom. “From an internal point of view insanity isn’t the problem. Insanity is the solution.”<sup>892</sup> The MOQ thus offers the possibility to develop a new branch of philosophy: “the philosophy of insanity.”<sup>893</sup> Since perception is not defined as the perception of objects but as the perception of value patterns, insanity is simply a deviation from the value patterns that are accepted as *normal* in a given society.<sup>894</sup> Problems arise as other people are affected in the maintenance of this *normal* universe by such intellectual deviation.

[N]o culture wants its legal patterns violated, and when they are, an immune system takes over in ways that are analogous to a biological immune system. The deviant dangerous source of illegal cultural patterns is first identified, then isolated and finally destroyed as a cultural entity.<sup>895</sup>

Intellectual patterns, such as insanity, are more valuable than cultural patterns. Hence, this is an immoral action. Still, as a balance between stability and Dynamic is needed, it is important for evolution (and thus moral) that not every deviance immediately corrupts a static quality pattern such as a given culture.

The notion of a cultural immune system describes the treatment of the *other* quite adequately. Yet, Phaedrus’ idea to send human beings diagnosed as being insane to a culture that can handle their specific deviation more adequately seems unrealistic.<sup>896</sup> Even though a deviant intellectual pattern might be more compatible with part of the prevailing intellectual patterns in other cultures, these also contain social and cultural value patterns, with which deviants must cope. It seems unlikely that, given a friendly intellectual climate, all differences in cultural and social value patterns would cease to matter. Additionally, the moral message in such an idea is at best dubious.

[A] philosophy of insanity generated by a Metaphysics of Quality states that all these conflicting intellectual truths are just value patterns. One can *vary* from a particular common historical and geographical truth pattern without being crazy.<sup>897</sup>

First and foremost, it must be stated that if *crazy* means a deviation from the existing cultural and intellectual value patterns, then one cannot vary from the existing patterns without being crazy. Otherwise *being crazy* simply ceases to exist in terms of the MOQ. It seems odd to develop a branch of philosophy (i.e. an intellectual value pattern) about cultural value patterns. The actions of a cultural immune system could hardly be called intel-

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<sup>892</sup> Pirsig, Lila 409.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid. 376.

<sup>894</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 432. “Sanity is not truth. Sanity is conformity to what is socially expected.” Ibid. 384.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid. 376.

<sup>896</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 380.

<sup>897</sup> Ibid. 382.

lectual activities according to these terms. The whole talk about insanity within the MOQ seems superfluous unless the contents of cultural and social value patterns matter intellectually. Obviously, they do matter. This is implied in a communicative foundationalist individuality composed of cultural meanings and ethics. It is thus impossible to install the superiority of intellectual value patterns over cultural and social value patterns unless it is already presupposed that intellectuality is more valuable.

Besides, by suggesting that a deviant should leave her society, it is implied that neither she nor her community are in any way responsible for the deviance. Neither moral responsibility to deal with this deviant in a certain way nor a moral responsibility of the deviant towards her community is formulated. Such morality could hardly lead to a stabile, close, and identifying communal life. Human interaction would have to be led by intellectual considerations only. Phaedrus actually seems to lead such an emotionally detached existence. He has set out on the sailing trip to be alone and the more the MOQ develops, the more isolated he seems to become. Moreover, his treatment of Lila is emotionally irresponsible. In spite of the fight, Jamie tries to join the crew at one point. Yet, Lila, being in a haze of hallucinations, attacks him. Phaedrus is not immediately concerned either about Lila or about Jamie. Even though he knows that Jamie used to be her pimp, he lets him go below to Lila, whom he knows to be completely unaware of the present moment. Even when Jamie announces that he will get the police, Phaedrus does not react although he knows that Lila would be brought to a mental institution and although he has previously condemned such treatment. He is not very much concerned at all; even though Jamie reappears from below bleeding and shouting that he is going to kill Lila.

Phaedrus looked up at Rigel and at the other man [Jamie] who was still staring. "I'd better go down to see what happened," Phaedrus said.  
"You had better get out of here," Rigel said.  
"What? Why? I haven't done anything."  
"That doesn't matter," Rigel said. His face had that same angry look he had had at breakfast in Kingston.<sup>898</sup>

The protagonist thinks only of himself in this stressful moment and is not concerned about what might happen to Lila. He at least goes below to check on her, yet, leaves her after a short moment of deluded conversation. He is finally persuaded by Rigel to leave, but only by the argument that it might be trouble for him to wait for the police.<sup>899</sup> It is Rigel, who shows emotions in this stressful situation, even though it is anger. He reacts to the moment in a humane and involved way.

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<sup>898</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 393,f.

<sup>899</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 392-395.

When thinking about his situation while leaving the harbor Phaedrus still does not voice concern about Lila. Even though he has witnessed her serious nose bleed and insane behavior, has seen a pocket knife in her hand, and knows that she has previously attempted suicide, he does not think it is in any way urgent to look after her.

He wasn't even dressed yet. [...] He saw there was some blood beginning to dry on the deck by the cockpit. He slowed down the engine, tied off the rudder, and went below and found a rack. He found his clothes on the bunk, and brought everything up on deck. Then he freed the rudder and put the boat back on course again. Then he scrubbed away all the blood spots he could find.

There was no hurry now. So strange. All that rush and calamity, and now suddenly he had all the time in the world. No obligations. No commitments.

... Except Lila, down there, But she wasn't going anywhere. [Ellipsis by Pirsig]<sup>900</sup>

The protagonist simply assumes that Lila can help herself. Thus, he reasons that she can “stay there in the forecabin if that's where she [wants] to be.”<sup>901</sup> When he finally talks to her and gets no reaction he actually compares her to a frightened cat.<sup>902</sup> It is difficult to describe what happens here in terms of the MOQ – the borders of an individual are difficult to grasp, as it is interwoven with different quality patterns. Phaedrus tries to understand the intellectual value pattern of Lila and is thus able to assess her in purely unemotional terms. That he compares her to an animal, a form of existence absolutely governed by biological and social value patterns, seems strange – as he should acknowledge her intellectually.

In terms of a communicative foundationalist ethics it can be stated that Phaedrus continuously understood Lila as a project and not as a person. First and foremost he associated her with an immortal element. He was fascinated by her because of his own memories and his interpretation of her insanity as *spiritual freedom*. After the argument with Rigel she is openly part of the protagonist's quest to finish the MOQ. This treatment, as an interesting subject matter, becomes very clear when he describes his thoughts about her as an “archaeological expedition” in which he ponders how much cosmic “garbage” people can take.<sup>903</sup> When she comes back to his sailing boat visibly disturbed, he views her as a problem. “He didn't like it. She was supposed to be gone for good. He wondered what she had in store for him now.”<sup>904</sup> At first he thinks she needs money, but then he realizes her *insanity*. He is not emotionally but rather intellectually concerned. He does not think about her but only himself. This becomes clear in formulations such as “How could he leave tomorrow? What was he going to do with *her*?”<sup>905</sup> He sincerely ponders the possibility of calling

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<sup>900</sup> Pirsig, Lila 397.

<sup>901</sup> Ibid. 398.

<sup>902</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 405.

<sup>903</sup> Ibid. 222.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid. 361.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid. 363.

an asylum as “the easiest legitimate way out of the whole mess” but shrinks back as he has no idea how to persuade her into this and is worried that they would not take her, since she has no money.<sup>906</sup> When he finally begins to ponder her reasons for coming to him, no signs of compassion or even an earnest attempt to put himself in her position can be detected. His final ethical evaluation of his *predicament* consists of understanding her (and her insanity) as a sign that is meant to tell him that he has become too static. He realizes that his culture is not morally wrong in not accepting Lila’s Dynamic input, but would be morally wrong in condemning (her for) it. He feels that the situation is “too much” for him, but does not realize that this is the influence of her (and others) not appreciating his concept of reality.<sup>907</sup> He acts as though he were distinct from Lila. In order to create appreciation for himself he works on his MOQ for long periods of time.<sup>908</sup> His obligation to her does not consist of emotional recognition of her as a person who must narrate her own story but of metaphysical considerations with regard to the cosmos. He has participated in her loss of an individual point of view – her loss of an individual personality in command of her story (at least to some extent). Phaedrus insists that she is narrating her own story in her head (about a doll she supposes to be a baby), yet, she has lost her ability to tell a story that is appreciated by others. She must rely on him, obliging her to go where he steers his boat. This forces her to be an object (problem, task, obligation, etc.) within his narration.

This is why she retreats into a private universe. It is not independent of the reality to which she once belonged. For example, she recognizes the similarity usually ascribed to dolls and babies in western societies. Additionally, she rocks her doll and reacts very aggressively when Jamie *attacks* it – all socially acceptable behavior in relation to little children. Yet, she has been pushed into a sub-plot, without any control of her life. If Phaedrus had called a hospital, he could have gotten her institutionalized. Now, she is at his mercy. This is easily understandable when one considers the lack of appreciation of her as a person who is able to narrate. Obviously, she had not been appreciated unanimously before she met him, but Phaedrus has constantly treated her as an object, and she did not have the money or the friends to leave him easily. In the end, she becomes the case study for which he singled her out. In terms of communicative foundationalism this is not a morally acceptable position. It is a neglect of her human nature that, too, can help to understand the uneasiness and suffering she experiences. A further contradiction in Phaedrus’ thinking ap-

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<sup>906</sup> Pirsig, Lila 363.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid. 414.

<sup>908</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 362, 365, 387. There are more philosophical passages than passages of narrated events in the third part of the novel.

pears when he finally manages to talk to her again. “She’s not only talking, he thought, she’s complaining. That’s real progress.”<sup>909</sup> Lila is gradually letting go of her *intellectual freedom* and returns to established social and cultural patterns of communication. In terms of the MOQ this cannot be called *progress*. It makes absolutely no sense at all that Phaedrus tries to keep Lila in a state of communication, as communication between human beings has not been assigned a special significance within the MOQ. For the first time he is actually making an effort not to destroy her attempts to establish the position of a narrator, which is perfectly sensible and even moral in terms of a communicative foundationalist ethics.

The slight appreciation shining through Phaedrus’ behavior leads to a greater amount of trust and a better ability to converse on Lila’s side. Yet, he almost immediately drifts off into his theoretical thoughts again.

Lila’s problem wasn’t that she was suffering from lack of Dynamic freedom. It’s hard to see how she could possibly have any more freedom. What she needed now were stable patterns to *encase* that freedom. She needed a way of being reintegrated into the rituals of everyday living.<sup>910</sup>

It is doubtful how the equilibrium between Dynamic freedom and stable value patterns can be reached in a moral manner. Additionally, it is contradicting that her intellectual freedom brings about total social, cultural, and personal bondage. In the end, it is Rigel who seems personally concerned about Lila. He has not forgotten that Phaedrus had insisted on Lila having quality during their argument, although he had condemned her on the basis of cultural moral norms. Rigel is concerned that he has misjudged Lila. He reveals his and Lila’s story to Phaedrus, which dates back to school. As Rigel knows her friends and family he wants to take care of Lila being institutionalized.<sup>911</sup> Phaedrus starts an argument as Rigel states that Lila wants to come with him.

Finally he said, “I think that’s an exceptionally poor idea. She’s all right on my boat.”  
“She *wants* to go back.”  
“Because you talked her into it.”  
“Absolutely not!”  
“The last time I talked to her she said she wants to go south ....”  
“That isn’t what she wants,” Rigel said.  
“I know what she wants,” Phaedrus said.<sup>912</sup>

Apart from the fact that it is quite arrogant of both men that none of them thinks about consulting Lila directly, it must be mentioned that Rigel has just talked to her about this decision. Phaedrus completely over-estimates himself when he supposes that he can decide

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<sup>909</sup> Pirsig, Lila 422.

<sup>910</sup> Ibid. 441.

<sup>911</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 423-432, 445-449.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid. 449.

what is best for Lila better than someone who has known her most of her life. Again he denies Lila a narrator's position from which she could voice her personality.

Lila's wish to leave Phaedrus might have something to do with her interest in Rigel. Yet, it also shows that she knows Phaedrus is not doing what is best for her. As Rigel reveals, she believes Phaedrus even wants to kill her. In terms of a communicative foundationalist ethics this is true, as he does not let her be free to narrate a story of consequence to other people. He finally talks to her on Rigel's boat.

[S]he looked as nervous as Rigel had been. [...] "I hear you want to go back."  
She looked down. Guilt. This was the first time he had seen her look guilty.<sup>913</sup>

Obviously, she is guilty that she has made him take her and then backed out of her decision. She feels some responsibility toward him as a person, whom she might have disappointed. This is especially so, as she has used him to get to Rigel, and has at least to an extent acted as though she liked Phaedrus. She has manipulated his narration through pretense. Yet, he does not realize this as an emotional or even affectionate moment. He judges her intellectually as stupid and heading toward disaster. As he formulates his condemnation in terms of suicide, it seems as though he is regretting the loss of Dynamic freedom much more than what she might lose personally when she is institutionalized. He is not even thinking of the loss of company or the relief it might be when she leaves. It is as if he is regretting this not on a personal basis, but on the level of his own ability to respond to Dynamic Quality. He feels paralyzed when he watches the boat sail away – as if regretting the loss of the one element that dynamically furthered his philosophical work.<sup>914</sup>

Later he ponders his fate and feels let down, as he was willing to sacrifice his life to *take care* of Lila and in response to this she *lied* about him wanting to kill her, which he judges to be immoral. Even in terms of the MOQ her statement cannot be unproblematically identified as a lie. She had total intellectual freedom, reevaluated her life, and thus changed the way she perceived things. She might easily have perceived him as aggressive. There is no way Phaedrus can understand her dynamic intellectual value experience with absolute certainty. Additionally, it is not directly understandable why a lie should be such a big deal. Of course, existing western intellectual value patterns include norms of truthfulness. Yet, as she obviously wanted to be with Rigel rather than with Phaedrus, she changed this situation by using her intellectual freedom without removing his. As inter-personal communication is not important in the MOQ and as intersubjectivity does not exist, it

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<sup>913</sup> Pirsig, Lila 450.

<sup>914</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 449,ff.

seems as though no real harm is done. Thus, Phaedrus displays a lack of motivation, which is unproportional in terms of his own theory. In terms of a communicative foundationalist ethics Lila has just revealed that she is not really supporting his concept of reality and that she had used him as an object in her narration to a certain extent. This lack of appreciation easily could have caused the degree of demotivation the protagonist experiences.<sup>915</sup>

In terms of his own individuality Phaedrus does not accept Lila's and Rigel's rejection as he has enough past appreciation to draw on. Instead, he declares himself free of obligations towards them. In an imaginary conversation with an idol (which is actually the doll Lila has left behind) he even manages to reevaluate the situation neutrally.

“[T]his is a happy ending for everyone,” the other voice said.

“Why?”

“Because everybody gets what he wants,” the voice said.

“Lila gets her precious Richard Rigel, Rigel gets his precious self-righteousness, you get your precious Dynamic freedom, and I get to go swimming again.”<sup>916</sup>

The idol answers to Phaedrus' question of why he feels bad about Lila getting locked up stating, “You're just waiting for your medal.”<sup>917</sup> Thus, the importance of appreciation through other human beings is underlined. In addition to this the idol assures him that Lila will not let Rigel destroy her. It assesses that Lila will become a “*repentant sinner*” and will thus possess a position to narrate from with regard to Rigel – her freedom therefore will not be fully compromised.<sup>918</sup> The reader cannot help but think that she will be less restricted with Rigel compared to Phaedrus' paternalism. Even though Rigel's Victorian moralism is static and constricting according to the MOQ, it becomes clear that two human beings can communicate and create their concept of reality with the help of such cultural standards. It is interesting to see that it was not Rigel who reacted self-righteously toward Lila in the end – at least he asked her what she wanted to do. In terms of the MOQ Phaedrus' conclusion is that inter-personal differences do not matter in the end – what it comes down to are negotiations between value patterns and Dynamic Quality. Phaedrus cherishes that he has done a moral thing in telling Rigel that Lila has Quality as he has thus given something to her.<sup>919</sup> This is an evaluation that could be made in terms of communicative foundationalist ethics – as he has strengthened her position as a narrator in this respect. In terms of the MOQ this could only be regarded as moral if it had led to an increase of evolution, which is by no means sure.

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<sup>915</sup> Cf. Pirsig, Lila 452-455.

<sup>916</sup> Ibid. 461.

<sup>917</sup> Ibid.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid. 462.

<sup>919</sup> Cf. ibid. 452-455, 462.

All in all, it is hard to understand Lila's situation as spiritual freedom. On the one hand she's been experiencing great anger and then great fear in the passages narrated from her perspective. The reader has become acquainted with her as a frightened and panicking woman. At best she seems at peace, yet, vulnerable during her hallucinations, since others can disturb her calmness at any moment. If she really let an intellectual quality pattern dynamically take possession of her, it would be inconsistent with the preservation of life that she attacked another human being (Jamie) in this state.<sup>920</sup> Moreover, it seems awkward that a morally superior state goes along with so little peace of mind. She designs a solution to her problem of having lost a child by intellectually creating a new reality in which her child comes back to her (in the form of a doll to the other characters). This unambiguously shows that concepts of reality (or intellectual value patterns) cannot be maintained by single human beings. Additionally, these concepts also respond to the emotional side of human nature. They change the understanding of reality and thus, the perception and implied cultural ethics when they are successfully collectively installed. It is far more adequate to describe insanity as a deviation in terms of communication – a temporary (or permanent) loss of contact to the sources of appreciation as also experienced by Atwood's *Handmaid*. Such deviations can happen when different concepts of reality converge.

An ethics that links the question of what ought to be done to a higher purpose – in this case cosmic evolution – allows for situations in which this purpose is contrary to a fellow human being's needs.<sup>921</sup> If an individual's wishes and her personality thus have to be judged as irrelevant for cosmic evolution, the question why an individual should actually adhere to such ethics arises. Why should everybody necessarily accept the advancement of cosmic evolution as a goal if they are content in the static quality pattern they live in at the moment? Additionally, the fact that compassion and responsibility for other human beings as persons are mainly neglected is not consistent with reality as it has been analyzed in the literary examples in this study. The intersubjective nature evident (also in *Lila*) cannot be understood in terms of the MOQ either. Phaedrus feels absolutely free of Lila and Rigel after some time of contemplation and the imaginary episode with the idol. In the end, he

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<sup>920</sup> Cf. e.g. Pirsig, *Lila* 334-337. At this point it should be conceded that Phaedrus is not absolutely sure that her intellectual freedom is actually an improvement of her situation. Cf. *ibid.* 405. Still, in terms of his MOQ and in his general discussion of insanity the conclusion must be drawn that Dynamic freedom on an intellectual level, i.e. insanity, is morally good.

<sup>921</sup> This is true unless the human being is absolutely dissolved in the concept of interchanging quality patterns. In this case it would not even exist as a substantial entity and the cultural or biological needs formed with regard to a(n in the end virtual) personality could be neglected. Lila's wishes would simply not *matter* compared to the possibility of intellectual freedom offered through the junction of quality patterns addressed by her name. Following Adorno and Derrida, Christoph Menke discusses this contradiction as fundamental for liberal ideas of equality. Yet, if an ethical concept is fundamentally linked to human nature and human identity as in communicative foundationalism, this dialectics of equality can be avoided. Cf. Menke, *Spiegelungen*.



even finds the final words for his MOQ all alone. Yet, his feeling contradicts their previous importance for the protagonist. He could only organize his philosophy in relation to his argument with Rigel and meeting Lila. These inter-personal relationships can be adequately described by communicative foundationalism as it accepts the basic postmodern intersubjectivity. Succinctly, the MOQ is a relativist realism also solving the dilemma of the opposition between relativist and realist theories, whereas communicative foundationalist ethics is rather a realistic relativism.<sup>922</sup>

The only sense in the whole narration, in Phaedrus' actual development of the MOQ, lies in his intersubjective bond to others. He states that it is actually impossible and even morally wrong to try to capture the Dynamic Quality of cosmic evolution in a static pattern such as a philosophy. "You never get it right. So why try?"<sup>923</sup> He answers this question at the end of the narration as follows.

Maybe when Phaedrus got this metaphysics all put together *people would see* that the value-centered reality it described wasn't just a wild thesis ... but was a connecting link to a part of themselves which had always been suppressed by cultural norms and which needed opening up [emphasis added].<sup>924</sup>

Other people's expected reactions can be the only motivation to engage in communication. Whether a narrator wants them to understand something (e.g. to be happy) or to change their behavior (e.g. to make others happy) a communicative act must be directed at some communicative partner. Were the cosmic evolution as such the only goal of existence, it would not matter how or how quickly it was fulfilled. Besides, it would not matter whether people could understand it or not. An evolutionary impasse, such as the temporary cultural paralysis described by Phaedrus with regard to America, could never lead to Phaedrus' wanting others to see it without true intersubjectivity. Without a personality and its connection to others, it would make more sense for Phaedrus to seek solitude and nurse his own insanity. Thus, it has to be concluded that the narrator has not managed to overcome his emotional detachment. Moreover, he even philosophically justifies that this detachment from other people is a good thing. It seems interesting that an individual, such as Phaedrus, is actively searching solitude – at least to a certain extent. Solitude is important for the moments of the actual formulation of the philosophy. This relationship between temporary solitude and abstraction leads us to the level of the design of the narration.

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<sup>922</sup> Cf. Pirsig, Lila 464-468. The most attractive characteristic of the MOQ is its compatibility with existing natural scientific concepts. They cannot easily be included in a communicative foundationalist epistemology. As this study is simply meant to clarify the ethical interests of such an epistemology, the concept of a comprehensive communicative foundationalist reality rests sketchy.

<sup>923</sup> Ibid. 457.

<sup>924</sup> Ibid. 466,f.

### III.iii.ii.ii. Important Aspects of Narrational Style

The motif of the protagonist withdrawing from civil society is frequently used in American literature. Catherine Zuckert argues that this setting is often created to reflect the *state of nature philosophy* upon which the American nation as a political organization originated. It is interesting that she locates it in such novels as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, which is cited by Phaedrus with regard to the basis of American values, which he locates in Native American culture.<sup>925</sup> *Lila* can be interpreted in this tradition as the protagonist returns to nature and seeks to find the principles of justice in nature. Admittedly, he stays on a very modern sailing boat and has easy access to money, but he compares his abode to nature frequently by statements such as "in this little floating world, whatever you needed you had to get for yourself."<sup>926</sup> Pirsig does not try to argue that the principles of American rights can be founded on natural rights, in contrast to *state of nature philosophers* such as James Fenimore Cooper, but rather insists on the fact that nature shows us a different ethics than all culturally established laws. Still, in the MOQ intellectually formed value patterns promoting freedom are part of such natural ethics. Thus, the content of the Declaration of Independence as the philosophical basis of American political principles and the natural right of the MOQ are not completely different.<sup>927</sup> This leads to reasonable doubts about the universality of Phaedrus' philosophy. The narrational organization ranks *Lila* among an important American tradition. Far from intending to suggest that all culturally formed traditions must contain only relative information, it must be stated that *Lila* offers a perspective that seems particularly Northern American. Even though he specifically and openly discusses American pragmatism and other American scholars, Phaedrus does not take up his very American manner of narrating as an issue. It seems inadequate that he does not reflect his American roots and the very *Americanness* of his situation.

At this point the focus should turn to *Lila's* peculiar narrational design. Through the intertextual references to *Zen* a greater scope of reality seems to be included in the present novel. By referring to the actual critics and reader response to the first novel, a greater independence and abstraction from the level of the narration of events is created. Therefore, the intertextuality can be said to create the effect of a greater level of abstraction for the MOQ. The philosopher-narrator chose to change from the more autobiographical setting of

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<sup>925</sup> Cf. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Natural Right and the American Imagination – Political Philosophy in Novel Form* (Savage Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990) 1 (hereafter: Zuckert, Right); Pirsig, *Lila* 48, 53.

<sup>926</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 23. See also "Traveling across America by water was like going back in time and seeing how it must have been a long time ago." Ibid. 12.

<sup>927</sup> Cf. Zuckert, Right 4; 11,f.

*Zen* to a rather literary setting in *Lila* for the ultimate detailed discussion of his philosophy.<sup>928</sup> The autobiographical effect is especially counteracted as insights into other characters' inner lives are given in addition to that of the protagonist. Compared to *Zen*, *Lila* is the more philosophical book. First, the MOQ is a comprehensively developed philosophical system and its development is clearly made one of the subjects or even *the* subject of the narration. In *Zen* the roots of the MOQ are located in the narrator's suppressed alter ego – the protagonist's philosophical quest is thus a quest for himself. The theoretical level is interwoven with the character narrator's development as an individual. In *Lila* these levels are still interwoven with respect to the character Phaedrus, yet, the narrating voice distances itself from its identity with this character. Therefore, the novel at first seems to have a more literary and less *credible* or more relative touch than *Zen*.<sup>929</sup>

In order to begin understanding the significance of relativity a paragraph from *Zen* shall be recalled.

The trouble is that essays always have to sound like God talking for eternity, and that isn't the way it ever is. People should see that it's never anything other than just one person talking from one place in time and space and circumstance. It's never been anything else, ever, but you can't get that across in an essay.<sup>930</sup>

Arranging the narration in the third person and adjoining the protagonist's perspective by other characters' critical views successfully prevent the impression of an omniscient and neutrally objective scientist in *Lila*. There is no doubt that Phaedrus is no such omniscient philosopher-narrator but just a man on a journey who has some ideas about morality. Yet, at the same time the actual narrator's voice (which has been identified as Phaedrus' voice nevertheless) is rendered objective and neutral. The perspective given of Phaedrus' MOQ and the other characters' reaction to him and his philosophy evoke the impression of an objective evaluation of the theory and the narrator. Thus, the third-person narration indirectly counteracts the impression of relativity mediated by the novel's setting. The systematic discussion and reevaluation between the different third-person perspectives imply that any set of individual persons could discuss the MOQ and would eventually be persuaded of its superior explanatory powers. To explain the narrational organization in detail a previously examined passage shall be reconsidered in some more detail.

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<sup>928</sup> Again, this interpretation does not refer to the author as Robert M. Pirsig with regard to the narrational setting, but to the narrator as he appears in the narration – as abstract narrator or abstract author. Still, a realist first-person narrative creates the effect of autobiographical writing, whereas a realist heterodiegetic narration does not.

<sup>929</sup> Credibility is meant in the sense in which it is communicated by (apparent) autobiography.

<sup>930</sup> Pirsig, *Zen* 153.

Now he was more isolated than he had been in the insane asylum .... In his first book he had cast this isolated role-player as the narrator, a fellow who is likeable because he is so recognizably normal, but who has trouble coping with his own life because he has destroyed his ability to deal honestly with it. It was this isolation that indirectly broke up his family and led to this present life.<sup>931</sup>

Obviously, Phaedrus avoided to talk about himself in the first person again as he did not want to relate the narration about the MOQ's development directly to this man who could not deal honestly with life. Even though the protagonist has developed enough self-reflection to understand his past situation, it is striking that the narration as such is on the surface completely differentiated from insanity. The intention not to present the narrator as *divided against himself* again could be interpreted as a strategy to increase his credibility. In *Lila* the doubts voiced against Phaedrus' philosophical attitude (i.e. his obvious belief to be able to explain the world) are not formulated by the protagonist himself against his alter ego, but are attributed to other characters, for example Rigel. In *Zen* Phaedrus called his alter ego a "goddamned Messiah."<sup>932</sup> Now he voices (almost) without self-criticism that he wants to use his MOQ to "light a way through the darkness for mankind."<sup>933</sup> He allows for the fact that this "torch" is somehow "ridiculous" but that does not keep him from honestly trying to use it.<sup>934</sup>

Rigel continuously calls him "the Great Author" in the thoughts the narrator ascribes to him and makes ridiculing mental comments such as "oh my, what *smart talk*" or "Could the Great Author really be so stupid?"<sup>935</sup> Especially the frequent use of capital letters indicates that Rigel is constantly mocking Phaedrus. Lila actually uses this device in the thoughts the narrator ascribes to her as well. She calls Phaedrus "Captain" with a capital C all the time.<sup>936</sup> Lila even suggests that Phaedrus is self-opinionated when she observes: "Arguing with him seemed to make the Captain mad. He didn't want anybody to argue with him."<sup>937</sup> She also accuses him to be a "phony" as if she knew about his play-acting.<sup>938</sup> Yet, through this inner view of Lila it is also suggested that she gets mad when Phaedrus is describing their society in his MOQ-terms. This creates the impression that Lila is confronted with truths that are painful to her and slips into insane anger because of Phaedrus' honesty. This would actually fit the MOQ's definition of insanity and the image of the natural outcast. Even though she emotionally wants to stick to her social quality

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<sup>931</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 379.

<sup>932</sup> Pirsig, *Zen* 221.

<sup>933</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 301.

<sup>934</sup> Both quotes *ibid.*

<sup>935</sup> All quotes *ibid.* 88,f.

<sup>936</sup> *Ibid.* 142. See also e.g. *ibid.* 143,ff.

<sup>937</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

<sup>938</sup> *Ibid.*

standards her intellectual Dynamic Quality takes over and is liberated. By locating the doubts outside the protagonist's own self, *Lila's* narrator creates the illusion that he tells a tale that is more objective and neutral than in *Zen*. On top of that, alternative doubts can be voiced and discussed. By making the other characters respond emotionally ambivalent and even hostile to Phaedrus without any obvious reasons despite his crankiness, he immediately seems pitiable. The reader develops feelings of compassion for Phaedrus as he reacts openly to Lila, Rigel, and Dusenberry, and is even intellectually touched by what Rigel and Lila tell him. Phaedrus seriously wonders about the other characters, who at times display different degrees of unkindness. Thereby, the narrator develops an air of misunderstood genius around Phaedrus, even though he is somehow unable to openly emotionally relate to others. Additionally, the use of the above mentioned *state of nature motif* functions only because Phaedrus is not narrating his story and his philosophy in the first person. He could not have stylized himself as an outcast, who has a special relation to the order of the universe, and kept his credibility if he had not given the impression of someone else neutrally talking about him.<sup>939</sup>

In retrospect it could be stated that in *Zen* the narrator's duality was used as an allegory to illustrate the subject-object duality. Consequently, in *Lila* the narrator's change to third-person narration is used to illustrate his intention of abstraction. By trying to approach the level of narrated reality from different points of view, the appearance that all characters can reach the level of Quality lying behind it is created. The narrational organization also evokes the significance of intersubjectivity for rational abstraction. This interpretation of the narrational strategy complies with a communicative understanding of existence. The abstraction is evoked by the invocation of alternative third-person narrations. Yet, none of these characters can ever be uninvolved. The interweaving of different perspectives does not reflect the process of commenting objectively – even though objectification is invoked. It rather demonstrates the intersubjective nature of abstraction and reasoning. Phaedrus does not consciously understand this, as he believes he simply needs solitude to develop his philosophy. Even though the main part of his ethics could only be formulated after his talk to Rigel and with regard to Lila's situation, Phaedrus is exhilarated when he is alone again at the end.<sup>940</sup> He does not realize that he needed the contact to the other characters to be able to refine his philosophical ideas. In the end, he concludes that

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<sup>939</sup> For the significance of the outcast in the literary tradition of the state of nature philosophy see Zuckert, Right 135,ff.

<sup>940</sup> Cf. Pirsig, *Lila* 464.

“Good is a noun.”<sup>941</sup> Morality is thus ultimately related to an absolute truth independent of (other) human beings.

Since the narrator believes that he is not responsible to the other characters but to Dynamic Quality in the end, he does not have scruples to utilize them to his agenda. As it has been established that the narrator of *Lila* is none other than Phaedrus himself, it might seem interesting to scrutinize his use of the other characters, whose inner lives he invents as enrichment to his narrational strategy.<sup>942</sup> Supposing that he has met these (or similar) people on his journey to finalize his philosophical theory, he decided to utilize them to render the narration more functional respectively more accessible as a *light for mankind*. Apparently, he has estimated imagining their inner lives as unproblematic. Daring to tell their stories means nothing less than using them as objects in his story. This is, of course, a rather speculative approach to the text. Yet, it fits the behavior of the protagonist who behaves disrespectful towards Lila that he would disrespect the other characters as a narrator as well. In conclusion, it can be stated that the third-person narrative perspective is not convincing as a neutral outside of the characters’ perspective. Sometimes the first-person narrator even becomes visible through the third-person narration. When Phaedrus is meeting Robert Redford the narrator slips as follows.

“Come on in,” Phaedrus said, feeling a real wave of stage fright. This was suddenly real time. This is the *present*. It is as though this is opening night and the curtain has just gone up and everything is up to him now.  
He feels himself force a smile.<sup>943</sup>

How could the third-person narrator suddenly slip into Phaedrus’ present tense if they were not the same person?

The narrated events have shown that an idea of cosmic evolution can actually lead the characters away from each other. As the narrator has been identified with the protagonist, the question arises whether he intended to show such unemotional personal contact as desirable. Apparently, calmness and indifference about social and cultural life is the goal of such a philosophical concept as the MOQ. What is important happens on the intellectual level of evolution and at the moment Dynamic Quality is admitted. Even though it is possible that the world consists of quality patterns, such a *real* reality behind the reality human beings culturally, socially, and biologically perceive does not solve the problems discussed

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<sup>941</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 468.

<sup>942</sup> Even though one might argue that Phaedrus could just have invented the whole story and the characters therein, a communicative foundationalist perspective must suppose that an individual can only use the cultural material she has been confronted with. Even though Phaedrus may have altered the situations he has experienced, he could not have invented his narration out of thin air.

<sup>943</sup> Pirsig, *Lila* 279.

with regard to traditional forms of realism. The role of the observer remains problematic, especially since the individual is supposed to be some dubious entity crossing the quality patterns. At some points it seems as though the MOQ addresses the morally able agent exclusively in terms of her intellect. When racist discourses are exposed as biological value patterns it seems as though the moral human being is supposed to solely cling to her intellectual value patterns. Yet, this would turn the individual into an ethereal entity supposed to cast off her non-intellectual (and truly emotional) impulses to merge into the Dynamic fulfillment of cosmic evolution. This is a description of the individual that contradicts the literary constructions of personality. Moreover, it crosses the idea that human beings can consciously and knowingly act towards what is good. People will always have to cohabit within cultural realms. A living space entirely ruled by intellect seems absurd, cold, and even cruel. The exhilarating feeling of freedom that Phaedrus expresses at the very end is preceded by hallucinations and results in his complete isolation. Apart from the fact that intersubjective emotion and attachment are completely erased from the equation, it seems an absolutely inhuman and impractical goal to seek intellectual solitude. It is necessary for abstraction, but should not be understood as a situation of permanence.

The whole development of the MOQ in *Zen* and *Lila* can also be interpreted on a larger scale. The philosophical outcome of the first narration has been identified and criticized as a systematic ethics of doing. According to this first description the relation to Quality rested on individual or subjective endeavors and thus implied a systematic subjective element respectively relativism. Especially the comparison of different cultural practices would have seemed difficult in this framework as it was problematic to exactly locate the Quality. This was due to a lack of a definition of Quality and the lack of a definition of human nature with regard to Quality. *Lila* is in a way an answer to these problems. As the philosophical development starts with anthropological ideas, it seems as though the narrator wants to address the problems of (cultural) relativity resulting from *Zen*. The *ethics of doing* actually lacked *ethical* direction. This central moral deficiency is addressed by Richard Rigel in the argument he has with Phaedrus. When the doing is not linked to a cultural framework it cannot have ethical content. The MOQ tries to solve this problem by diffusing the moral content into all existence. Apart from the problems that appear with regard to the specific philosophy, the development of thought reflects the development of western culture in the twentieth century to a certain extent. The first novel was published in the middle of the 1970s and the second in the beginning of the 1990s. Whereas relativism has been a strong cultural and theoretical current until the 1980s, the ethical crux of relativism

caught up with the cultural reality. The development of Phaedrus' philosophy reflects this development from relativism to ethics that has been the starting point of this study.

### III.iii.iii. Dubious Norms: *Middlesex*

Gladys was a golem, a clay man (or, for the sake of not having an argument, a clay woman) who was nearly seven feet tall. She – well, with a name like Gladys 'it' was unthinkable and 'he' just didn't do the job – wore a large blue dress. [...] And thus, with the addition of one extremely large cotton print dress, a golem became female enough .... The odd thing was that Gladys *was* female now, somehow. It wasn't just the dress. She tended to spend time around the counter girls, who seemed to accept her into sisterhood despite the fact that she weighed half a ton.<sup>944</sup>

In the following the ascription and incorporation of identities with regard to the example of gender identity shall be at the center of the discussion. As the above quotation by Terry Pratchett suggests, identities are always linked to certain cultural characteristics and depend on the appreciation of the communicative environment. Additionally, the communicative partners tend to think in traditional categories. When the above narrator is confronted with the traditional gender choices of male, female, and neuter she has no choice but to opt for the female one as Gladys shows signs of femininity such as her name, dress, and peer group. She becomes female by occupying the culturally assigned position of femininity. In this context it is of course interesting to discuss the search for identity of a hermaphrodite as it is narrated in *Middlesex*. Jeffrey Eugenides has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his second novel. It incorporates historical topics such as the eviction of Greeks from Asia Minor, the Turkish massacre of Greeks in Smyrna in 1922 and the ensuing immigration to the United States. Marriage arrangement of Ford's industrial workers, prohibition and the rise of the Black Panthers in Detroit are also broached.<sup>945</sup> The first-person narrator strikingly knows the historical and private details of her grandparents' youth in the manner of an omniscient narrator. This question of narrational style will be discussed in more detail in chapter III.iii.iii.ii. The narrator's development as an individual regarding his/her search for identity will be discussed without detailed recourse to the background of his/her family saga.<sup>946</sup>

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<sup>944</sup> Pratchett, Money 18.

<sup>945</sup> Cf. Nils Minkmar, "Mein großes, fettes, griechisches Buch – Alles kann, nichts muss: Der amerikanische Autor Jeffrey Eugenides, sein Bart und sein Erfolgsroman 'Middlesex'," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 4 May 2003. <http://www.faz.net/s/Rub79A33397BE834406A5D2BFA87FD13913/Doc~E52AF34291298441AABAE915EACD8102B~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html> (24.11.2009) (hereafter: Minkmar, Buch).

<sup>946</sup> Cf. Denis Scheck, "Nachwort von Denis Scheck," Eugenides, *Air Mail* 107-119, 111.



### III.iii.iii.i. Development of the Central Character as an Individual

Cal/Calliope Stephanides is the protagonist and first-person narrator of *Middlesex*. Although she is blessed with prenatal vision and tells about her grandparents lives, it is clear from the start that she does so only to situate herself within a larger context. Already at the very beginning of the story the protagonist assesses: “before it’s too late I want to get it down for good: this roller-coaster ride of a single gene through time.”<sup>947</sup> Since her grandparents enter an incestuous relationship and her parents are cousins, the narrator is a pseudohermaphrodite, a sufferer of 5-alpha-reductase deficiency syndrome.<sup>948</sup> The details about Greek history seem to be ranged from the start as an explanation for the narrator’s Greek inheritance. “Sing now, O Muse, of the recessive mutation on my fifth chromosome. [...] Sorry if I get a little Homeric at times. That’s genetic, too.”<sup>949</sup> By putting her cultural inheritance on a level with her genetic predisposition, the protagonist breaches the topic of *nature versus nurture*, which will become significant for her as well. Laura Miller comments this passage as follows.

By mimicking an ancient author equally preoccupied by the tension between preordained fate and self-determination, Cal telegraphs a very modern question: Is “Middlesex” – or any novel, for that matter – the story of its hero/ine or the history of a particular configuration of DNA?<sup>950</sup>

The narrator actually opposes the autonomy of an individual with genetic or cultural influences, thereby alluding to the philosophical and the neurobiological discussion of ethics in the postmodern era. As will become clear, Cal/Calliope is developed as an individual who can use her cultural and genetic inheritance as a means to narrate her own story, in which she regains freedom to some extent.

Her narration can be classified as a family saga, but it is aimed at the personal reinterpretation of the protagonist’s life. She provides her story with a certain suspense that always refers to her, even in those prenatal passages.

[T]he gene which carries the possibility of androgyny becomes ... like a revolver brandished in the first act of a play. During the long first half of family history before we reach the eventual hermaphrodite – Calliope Stephanides, born apparently female in 1960 in Detroit, later living in Berlin as a man called Cal – we’re watching out nervously for that weapon of inheritance to go off as it passes between grandparents and parents.<sup>951</sup>

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<sup>947</sup> Eugenides, *Middlesex* 4.

<sup>948</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 3.

<sup>949</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>950</sup> Laura Miller, “My Big Fat Greek Gender Identity Crisis,” *New York Times* 15 September 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/15/books/my-big-fat-greek-gender-identity-crisis.html> (3.04.2009) (hereafter: Miller, Gender Identity).

<sup>951</sup> Mark Lawson, “Gender blender,” *The Guardian* 5 October 2002. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/oct/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview15> (4.04.2009) (hereafter: Lawson, Gender).

The story evokes the feeling of a “gun on the wall,” that will “go off” sooner or later.<sup>952</sup> Thus, the genetic predisposition gains some negative and oppressive force, which constrains man’s free will.<sup>953</sup> Mark Lawson even talks of Cal/Calliope as a prisoner of inheritance – “while his split-narrator really is a victim of her DNA, science (or, rather, our civilian interpretation of it) is at risk of making us all prisoners of inheritance.”<sup>954</sup> I disagree with this interpretation as the narrator is neither defeated by her DNA nor by her environment’s cultural expectations of gender. The narrator clearly sets out to reevaluate her life and fight for a position outside of the traditional cultural classification of gender identity. She begins by stating that she was born twice – first as a girl, and then later as a teenage boy – thus indicating that she even intends to rewrite her birth.<sup>955</sup> While narrating her story the protagonist concedes: “Writing my story isn’t the courageous act of liberation I had hoped it would be.”<sup>956</sup> She feels that she is in a way withdrawing from society by leading the solitary life of a writer. At the same time she directly addresses her audience.

If this story is written only for myself, then so be it. But it doesn’t feel that way. I feel you out there, reader. This is the only kind of intimacy I’m comfortable with. Just the two of us, here in the dark.<sup>957</sup>

In a way, the feeling of solitude and timidity is underlined by this passage. At the same time, it is rendered dubious as it is clear that there will be more than one reader. Publishing a narration always also means publicity and is the direct contradiction of a life in *the dark*. The narrator finds her own voice and develops the ability to deal with the terrors of her life in the course of narrating.

When Calliope is confronted with her differentness consciously for the first time, she is shocked and unable to react. She believes that a teenage boy she was getting intimate with has noticed her condition and is utterly helpless.

It was all over now. There was nothing I could do. [...E]veryone ... would know that Calliope Stephanides was a freak.<sup>958</sup>

This passage highlights the protagonist’s fundamental dependency on the other people in her environment. Still, she is not completely powerless. Through retelling her story Calli-

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<sup>952</sup> Eugenides, *Middlesex* 396.

<sup>953</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 479.

<sup>954</sup> Lawson, *Gender*. Several other literary critics interpret the subject this way, for example Hubert Spiegel, “Bügelbrett mit Bartwuchs – Kein kleiner Unterschied: Jeffrey Eugenides’ Roman ‘Middlesex’,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 9 May 2003. <http://www.faz.net/s/Rub79A33397BE834406A5D2BFA87FD13913/Doc~E8382076F7CF24DE9AB593DF1A8D1BFC7~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html> (2.04.2009) (hereafter: Spiegel, *Bügelbrett*).

<sup>955</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Middlesex* 3.

<sup>956</sup> *Ibid.* 319.

<sup>957</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.* 375,f.

ope creates a very emotional and very convincing love life. With tenderness and sensitivity she tells about her first love in the tradition of romantic or coming-of-age novels. The love of her life is romantically described as the “Obscure Object” à la Luis Buñuel and stays a more or less innocent passion.<sup>959</sup> Later relationships in which the sexual differentness is openly acknowledged are described with more sadness and much adolescent timidity. In his later life as a boy Cal also has horrible experiences and faces violence because of his condition. The term *freak* reappears on these occasions. Cal even feels impelled to be part of some sort of freak show for a period of time. Yet, the final love story with Julie is characterized by tenderness, sincerity (at least after an interlude), and even happiness.<sup>960</sup> “We got under the covers and held each other, petrified, happy.”<sup>961</sup>

The narrator thus succeeds in creating a dual position within reality that even enables her to lead a happy sexual relationship in the end. She thereby successfully defends herself against the binary gender concept of her society, which desperately wished to assign a distinct gender to her. After an accident Calliope’s condition is detected at last and she is supposed to be operated into a woman. “The chief imperative in cases like mine was to show no doubt as to the gender of the child in question.”<sup>962</sup> She is diagnosed to be female because of the primary cultural imprint, and her parents are anticipating the solution of the *confusion*. Calliope is shocked and traumatized by her time in medical care. The fact that people in her condition are classified as monsters by her society disturbs her. Intuitively she seems to understand that her environment judges her as abnormal and tries to destroy her condition as soon as possible because she is a threat to the system.<sup>963</sup> Minute differences can be the cause for major identity conflicts, as has often been the case in religious disputes.<sup>964</sup> She seems to understand that they do not abhor her because of anything about her but because of the way they think. At least she has as much self-esteem to think that she has a right to continue living in exactly the same condition she is in. This becomes clear as she judges the medical decision to be “false.”<sup>965</sup> She decides that she is a boy and runs away from home. By changes in her appearance and behavior she successfully takes on the role of a young man.<sup>966</sup> It is important to understand that the protagonist does not decide to render her gender identity dubious at any point. Here, she decides that she is a

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<sup>959</sup> Eugenides, *Middlesex* 331.

<sup>960</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 319,f; 331-396; 476; 484,ff; 497,f; 513,f.

<sup>961</sup> *Ibid.* 514.

<sup>962</sup> *Ibid.* 413.

<sup>963</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 424; 429; 430,f; 433; 435,ff. The concept of a cultural immune system discussed in *Lila* seems highly appropriate to describe her situation.

<sup>964</sup> Cf. Burke, *History* 59.

<sup>965</sup> Eugenides, *Middlesex* 438.

<sup>966</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 439,ff; 441,ff. See also Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 121.

boy. Later, Cal insists that he is what he is and at no point of his narration does he state or imply that gender identities are instable.

Cal fully accepts his role as a hermaphrodite like an additional gender identity when he contradicts his mother after months of absence. He had run away from home as he feared that they would not accept him the way he was.

“Don’t you think it would have been easier just to stay the way you were?”  
I lifted my face and looked into my mother’s eyes. And I told her: “This is the way I was.”<sup>967</sup>

This does not mean that the narrator’s position is unproblematic or that Cal is in full possession of control over his life. He even admits that he is traumatized by the events of his youth. Still, he is not an individual torn apart, who could not tell his story in a comprehensive manner. He has managed to create a sense for his life that contradicts the established social order and understanding of genetics. He has understood that his body crosses the existing order of understanding. Based on this understanding he tells a tale deeply entrenched in accepted traditions. Thereby, he opens up traditional understanding and works towards the acceptance of hermaphrodites as an additional gender identity. This means that through the narration of his story, in which he also includes his many hardships, the cultural norms of his society are changed. From someone who calls herself a freak and is terrified that others might find out about her condition he develops into someone who is at first proudly and authoritatively assessing his gender (“I am not a girl. I’m a boy.”) into someone who is satisfied and confident (“‘I like my life,’ I told [my grandmother]. ‘I’m going to have a good life.’”).<sup>968</sup>

In conclusion, I again wish to highlight that Cal/Calliope is not simply a victim of the circumstances as the individuals in section III.ii. have been.<sup>969</sup>

[S/he] is a soul who inhabits a liminal realm, a creature able to bridge the divisions that plague humanity .... That utopian reach makes “Middlesex” deliriously American; the novel’s patron Saint is Walt Whitman, and it has some of the shagginess of that poet’s verse to go along with the exuberance. But mostly it is a colossal act of curiosity, of imagination and of love.<sup>970</sup>

As in *Lila*, the narrator is deeply entrenched in American (but also alternative western) traditions. Like in *Handmaid*, whose protagonist is torn between different cultural orders,

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<sup>967</sup> Eugenides, *Middlesex* 520.

<sup>968</sup> *Ibid.* 439 and 528. It might be argued that Cal is to an extent trying to console his grandmother, who has just confessed her incestuous relationship. Nevertheless, it would be notable that he has the confidence and power to do so. Besides, other passages (for example his relationship with Julie) show that he has established a life that actually makes him happy – at least to a certain extent.

<sup>969</sup> The central characters of *Surfacing*, *Zen*, and *Suicides* all had to adapt to the communicative circumstances, were destroyed, or lastingly affected by them. None of them changed their fate by changing the circumstances – instead, they had to change themselves.

<sup>970</sup> Miller, *Gender Identity*.

*Middlesex*'s protagonist is in-between cultural and biological orders. *Lila*'s philosopher-narrator is standing in-between several value patterns, the ensuing patterns of understanding, and Dynamic Quality as a higher order. By the sheer existence of the respective central characters, the underlying normative systems are challenged as to their validity. All three protagonists manage to establish an order different from the accepted cultural understanding and are thus able to act against it. Offred manages to be brave enough to voice her discontent and to escape. Phaedrus manages to establish a whole different system of reality, even though he does not manage to share it with his fellow men. Cal/Calliope actually manages to change the established order by adding an additional gender possibility. She inscribes this position within mystic and literary as well as scientific and cultural traditions by creating an alternative story of her life that embraces such culturally existing narrations. This assessment directly leads to the narrational style of *Middlesex*. Yet, before starting the next chapter it should be highlighted that of the three individuals that have been analyzed in section III.iii. Cal/Calliope is definitely the most successful in changing the existing communicative reality to her advantage.

### III.iii.iii.ii. Important Aspects of Narrational Style

*Middlesex* ist nicht nur ein Text der mehrdeutigen Identitäten und scheinbar widersprüchlichen Erzählkonzepte, sondern auch der mehrdeutigen Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen aufgrund von inzestuösen Verbindungen....<sup>971</sup>

Critics have not unanimously appreciated the wide range of material and traditions incorporated in *Middlesex*.<sup>972</sup> It is indeed a myriad of functions that the first-person narrator fulfills. She is quasi autobiographer, omniscient narrator, lover, historian, and scientific lecturer at the same time. *Middlesex* can be described as a novel of ideas, an epic saga, a coming-of-age novel, and even as a road novel concerning the passages of Cal's flight.<sup>973</sup> Some critics judge it as problematical that comic and epic elements are mixed and find the novel's style self-opinionated. As so many different perspectives are incorporated in one single narrator's voice, it has been described as too rational to seem fully human.<sup>974</sup>

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<sup>971</sup> Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 95.

<sup>972</sup> Cf. e.g. Minkmar, Buch or Ulrich Greiner, "Auf breiten Reifen: Der Amerikaner Jeffrey Eugenides erzählt in seinem Roman *Middlesex* die Geschichte eines Zwitter," *DIE ZEIT* 15 May 2003. <http://www.zeit.de/2003/21/L-Eugenides> (24.11.2009).

<sup>973</sup> Cf. Miller, *Gender Identity*.

<sup>974</sup> Cf. Minkmar, Buch.

*Middlesex* berichtet in postmoderner Manier aus Sicht eines allwissenden Erzählers, der seine Erzählung beständig als solche ausstellt und seine Allwissenheit als Spiel mit der Fiktion kenntlich macht.<sup>975</sup>

It is true that Cal/Calliope does not hide the intention of designing her own myth. She even reevaluates the incestuous relationship of her grandparents as mythical origin of the saga that culminated in her existence.<sup>976</sup> However, it is also true that the narrator leaves no doubt that she was deeply terrified and traumatized in her childhood, and that she needs to reevaluate her own story to survive (as she is). Therefore, it is no wonder that her style is rather rational and not overtly romantic or emotional.<sup>977</sup> She needs to create a certain comical distance between herself and her fear to overcome the trauma. Moreover, the narrational style is stringent and realistic in that the impression of a person telling the story of her life is not destroyed by would-be *postmodernistic* references to its character as a narration.<sup>978</sup>

The stylistic devices apparent as stylistic devices and the fact that the narrator actually knows more than would be physically possible only highlight the fact that a human being is deeply engaged in inscribing herself in existing communicative traditions. The use of the epic is, for example, linked to the narrator's identity as Greek from the start. Whenever Cal/Calliope lets the reader understand that she is reading a story created with a certain purpose, this very purpose and the way it is realized only refer back to Cal's/Calliope's intentions and identity. The realistic frame is not destroyed. The narrational style that has been referred to in this study as new realism is also referred to as *postpostmodern* narration. It is a narration that stays within the realistic realm, but virtuosically uses narrational techniques – such as change of perspective, retrospects, and cinematic cuts. It is a carefree use of such realistic techniques as part of communicative reality.<sup>979</sup> Even though very postmodern themes – such as gender identity – are debated, the narrator takes on the role of messenger again, and at least tries to communicate an intelligible tale. The form of the tale is not – as in postmodernist style – rendered doubtful as dubious subjects are treated. In the case of Cal/Calliope the narrator most certainly does not seem to decide all questions of the

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<sup>975</sup> Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 128.

<sup>976</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 114.f.

<sup>977</sup> “The narrative tone – best characterized as a sardonic empathy – has possible progenitors in Muriel Spark and John Irving, but bears the individual imprint of Greek America.” Lawson, *Gender*.

<sup>978</sup> This style can be described in the historical sense used in this study as a (late) postmodern manner, yet, not in the philosophical (postmodern relativistic) sense Grabbe intends. In Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 113 she even admits that the narration is stringent – implicitly contradicting herself. There is no meta-comment in the way the narrator uses fiction. It is simply the way in which human beings tell stories.

<sup>979</sup> Cf. e.g. Gustav Seibt, “Fischmensch im Designeranzug,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 7 May 2003. [http://sz-shop.sueddeutsche.de/mediathek/shop/Produktdetails/Buch+Middlesex+Jeffrey\\_Eugenides/179229.do;jsessionid=B27CF770E7EA604D7A09EAA45C1961C1.kafka:9009?extraInformationShortModus=false](http://sz-shop.sueddeutsche.de/mediathek/shop/Produktdetails/Buch+Middlesex+Jeffrey_Eugenides/179229.do;jsessionid=B27CF770E7EA604D7A09EAA45C1961C1.kafka:9009?extraInformationShortModus=false) (2.04.2009) (hereafter: Seibt, *Fischmensch*) and Spiegel, *Bügelbrett*. Spiegel compares *Middlesex*'s narrator with Tristram of Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

debated topics precisely, yet, this does not reflect on her role but rather evokes the impression that these topics are not easily decided.

Das Postpostmoderne daran ist nun, dass die Muse Kalliope im griechischen Mythos fürs Erzählen – das Epos – zuständig ist, dass auch der blinde Seher Teiresias in der griechischen Tragödie zweigeschlechtlich gewesen sein soll (die junge Calliope spielt in einer Schüleraufführung der „Antigone“ selbstredend den Teiresias), und dass der übergeschlechtliche, „sehende“ Ich- Erzähler daher eine mythologisch hochbewusste Wiedergeburt des klassischen allwissenden Autors mit seinen unbeschränkten Möglichkeiten darstellt.<sup>980</sup>

Cal's/Calliope's retrospective retelling of her life is a careful self-dramatization. A seemingly neutral perspective, such as that of an omniscient narrator, is necessary, as the protagonist wants to address a world where she does not exist by its standards. Her position as a hermaphrodite, which she wants to establish as an acceptable and livable position, only excites her environment's wish to destroy it. Therefore, she needs a "big tent" that offers traditional set-up and fabrics to which the new piece of cloth can be matched; I agree with Laura Miller that this *tent* is indeed *pulled tight*.<sup>981</sup>

The story of the protagonist's development is embedded in mythology and symbolic relationships. The mythological part can be interpreted as references to her Greek ancestry and to existing literary examples of hermaphrodites. The division and in-between stage marked by the ambiguity of the narrator's gender is thus symbolized on many levels beginning with mythological roots. Furthermore, the motif of siblings' love as a symbol of love that is devoid of erotic affection and at the same time ambiguous with regard to sexuality is introduced to the story through the affection between her grandparents.<sup>982</sup> The incestuous marriage puts an end to the ambiguity of their sisterly and brotherly love and creates new ambiguity with regard to the genetic predisposition of their children. The kinship of the next generation – the protagonist's parents – symbolizes the ambiguity of cousinship and love anew. The special bond of kinship is sinfully mixed with erotic desire just like the special bond of friendship is mixed with erotic desire in Calliope's relationship with her Object. Ambiguity is also symbolized in Cal's location when he finally decides to write his story down. He does so in Berlin – a city once divided and now reunited.<sup>983</sup> Already the name of the street and mansion in which Calliope lived in her childhood, which is also incorporated in the novel's title, marks the in-between stage. Of these symbols especially the symbol of an incestuous relationship signifies breaking with an established social order. It

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<sup>980</sup> Seibt, Fischmensch.

<sup>981</sup> Miller, Gender Identity.

<sup>982</sup> For the mythos and history of sibling's love cf. Grabbe, Geschwisterliebe 7-24.

<sup>983</sup> Cf. Eugenides, Middlesex 40.

signifies challenging the way meaning is generated in a given communicative reality.<sup>984</sup> As Cal/Calliope challenges her position in the given order and creates a position in which she can exist, this use of symbolically charged motifs must be understood as highlighting this endeavor.

A project to redefine her life must thus definitely be assessed in the narration. Incestuous relationships cross the established order of kinship and render the exact denomination of degrees of kin impossible.<sup>985</sup> In the same way the existence of a hermaphrodite crosses the established order of gender and renders the exact declaration of (one of the two existing types of) gender impossible. The narrator stylizes herself as girl, man, mythological character, scientific object, immigrant, emigrant, and last but not least as firmly integrated in the history of her family.<sup>986</sup>

Wie in "Die Korrekturen", dem Roman seines Freundes und Altersgenossen Jonathan Franzen, überstehen auch in "Middlesex" die Familienbande am Ende alle Wirren, nur die Väter müssen dran glauben.<sup>987</sup>

Cal not only returns to his family in the end and finally confronts his mother with his gender identity, but he also discovers the incestuous secret of his family from his grandmother after this return. The final direction as well as the final knowledge of the reason why his life has taken its course is disclosed in the family.<sup>988</sup> The home coming scene at the end of the book obviously only marks the symbolic ending of the story, as different levels of retrospects replace each other in the course of the narration. Starting the narration as he has, the protagonist must have begun his autobiography after this confession. The very last sentence symbolically returns to the very beginning: "I lost track after a while, happy to be home, weeping for my father, and thinking about what was next."<sup>989</sup> The reader knows what Cal is going to do next – he will start to write the very novel that has just ended. On the one hand this ending highlights that he really still feels very close to his family. On the other hand it discloses beyond doubt that the narration is purposefully organized.

*Middlesex* is the retelling of a story and therefore an obvious attempt to (re)gain control over a life. This is the final rebirth the narrator implies at the very beginning.

I was born twice: first as a baby girl, ... and then again, as a teenage boy .... [...] But now, at the age of forty-one, I feel another birth coming on.<sup>990</sup>

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<sup>984</sup> Cf. Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 14, 94 and Seibt, *Fischmensch*.

<sup>985</sup> Cf. Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 37.

<sup>986</sup> For the opposition of scientific object and mythological character see Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 94.

<sup>987</sup> Spiegel, *Bügelbrett*.

<sup>988</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Middlesex* 527, f.

<sup>989</sup> *Ibid.* 529.

<sup>990</sup> *Ibid.* 3.



The revaluation of traditional birth to this world clearly shows how a new life story, which deviates from traditional understanding, is aimed at. This is the *next* thing indicated in the last words of the novel, which simultaneously recall another passage. When Cal asks Zora, one of his *co-stars* in the *freak show*, why she ever told anyone about her differentness, she is very sure of the significance of telling one's story.<sup>991</sup>

“Why did you ever tell anybody? [...] Look at you. No one would ever know.”

“I want people to know, Cal.”

“How come?”

Zora folded her long legs under herself. With her fairy's eyes, paisley-shaped, blue and glacial looking into mine, she said, “Because we're what's next.”<sup>992</sup>

Thus, the narrator's story can be interpreted as part of a project to establish hermaphrodites as the next possibility of gender. As it becomes clear through the scientific passages and also through the description of Zora and the other attractions at the freak show, being a hermaphrodite is not as precise a gender option as male or female (yet). It is highly dubitable whether generalized descriptions of male and female human beings could ever comprise any individual man or woman. Still, it should be conceded that the third option is rather constructed as a collection of those who do not fit the binary order at all; or, to say it even more precisely, it is a collection of those whose primary sex characteristics do not fit the binary order. The *freaks'* appearance and role behavior do not necessarily deviate from the norm. People come to stare at their bodies because it is the sexual organs, which do not fit the norm.<sup>993</sup>

In this atmosphere of sensation there is a place where hermaphrodites can be themselves without anybody wanting to *destroy* them. It is this experience of appreciation that enables Cal to overcome his initial trauma. One night he exhibits his body in the tank designed for this occasion and he watches the audience for the first time.

[T]hat night I did something I didn't normally do. I opened my eyes underwater. I saw the faces looking back at me and I saw that they were not appalled. [...] It was *therapeutic*. [...] Traumas of the locker room were being released. Shame over having a body unlike other bodies was passing away. The monster feeling was fading.<sup>994</sup>

It is the public appreciation and acceptance (albeit a sensation) that at last has a therapeutic effect on Cal. Along with Zora's example of self-confidence and righteousness, this healing turns the intuitive knowledge that he had been treated wrongly as Callie (when they wanted to operate her) into certainty. Even though he is finally taken out of this existence

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<sup>991</sup> Zora also intends to publish a book on the subject. Cf. Eugenides, *Middlesex* 489.

<sup>992</sup> *Ibid.* 490.

<sup>993</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 484-495.

<sup>994</sup> *Ibid.* 494.

as a sensation by a police raid, Cal and Zora have already decided before that they want to quit of their own accord.<sup>995</sup> Cal goes on living as a boy respectively as a man later and only his family (and much later Julie) knows that he is different. He comes to the conclusion that “gender [is] not all that important.”<sup>996</sup> Actually, Cal even admits that the social roles of man and woman – son and daughter – are sometimes not easily distinguishable.<sup>997</sup> It is important that he tells the reader clearly that he needed a distinct definition of his condition and the appreciation of his environment to regain a place in his communicative reality. As long as Callie did not know what exactly was wrong with her and was simply threatened to be changed (i.e. part of her would be destroyed), she could not help herself but run away and live incognito. When he learns from Zora that there is a long cultural and literary tradition of hermaphrodites and even this name for them and his family finally accepts him, gender becomes less important. The different condition can no longer shock him or his parents or even his later relationships as there is now a description.

The difference has only been threatening as long as there was no place within their culture for it. The mythological and scientific explanations have the same purpose for the audience. Even though the exact scientific name seems disturbing in the beginning, the term *hermaphrodite* is from the start given as an identification. A whole tale of incest is spun to scientifically explain how Cal came to be the way he is. He even redefines this development as far as suggesting at one point that it was necessary to happen this way for him to come into existence.<sup>998</sup> A Greek family saga is told to entrench the state of a third sex in myths about hermaphrodites. The story of the narrator’s grandparents is told feelingly and including the many doubts especially on the part of the grandmother, who much later distances herself from her husband – always awaiting a punishment for her sin. As it is depicted in such sensitive tones and as the story is told from Cal’s point of view growing up to be happy and optimistic, the incestuous relationship is not condemned. It is another example of individuals at a loss of what to do with their feelings, as society offers them no place. They dramatize their love affair with new identities and make up a different life for themselves. This functions as myth of origin for Cal’s strange sexuality. As Katharina Grabbe aptly observes, their son, Cal’s father Milton, can be described as a self-made-man. The son of immigrants manages to build up a hotdog-empire. In a way his son Cal is a *self-made-man* as well, both psychologically and physically.<sup>999</sup> In a family tradition of men and

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<sup>995</sup> Cf. Eugenides, *Middlesex* 495,f.

<sup>996</sup> *Ibid.* 520.

<sup>997</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 41,f; 520,f.

<sup>998</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 42; Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 114.

<sup>999</sup> Cf. Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 103-107, 115, 123.

women who take their lives into their own hands, Cal sets out to rewrite the story of his life. By relating it to many existing traditions, he makes it easier for his readers to accept, while he makes it absolutely clear that he (and people like him) need the appreciation of their communicative environment.

In this way Middlesex is “preoccupied with rifts.”<sup>1000</sup> The main subject – the establishment of a new gender possibility – is embedded in the question of nature versus nurture. Dr. Luce, who wants to conduct the operation on Callie, puts it as follows.

Gender identity is very complex. It’s not a matter of sheer genetics. Neither is it a matter of purely environmental factors. Genes and environment come together at a critical moment.<sup>1001</sup>

This is described by the narrator as an example of the unisex attitude popular in the early seventies. It was widely believed that environmental factors could dramatically change the personality (and gender identity) of a child. She dedicates a brief theoretical passage to the discussion of this scientific movement and its replacement by evolutionary biology.<sup>1002</sup>

My own medical story was only a reflection of what was happening psychologically to everyone in those years. Women were becoming more like men and men were becoming more like women. [...] But then another thing happened.

It was called evolutionary psychology. Under its sway, the sexes were separated again .... [...] This is where we are today. Men and women, tired of being the same, want to be different again.<sup>1003</sup>

This assessment cleverly diminishes the shocking difference the people of his environment perceive between Cal and themselves. The way in which he has been treated is not a natural reaction to a monster but culturally mediated behavior. In this manner the differences between men and women are culturally mediated as well, as long as evolutionary psychology is understood as one cultural concept among many. At the same time Cal states: “it’s not as simple as that. I don’t fit into any of these theories.”<sup>1004</sup> He highlights the existing inadequacies of the scientific means of understanding. Then he describes the return of the notion of free will as a consequence of these inadequacies similar to the way in which communicative foundationalism understands the return of ethics as a consequence of the opposition between realist and relativist theories.

Compromised, indefinite, sketchy, but not entirely obliterated: free will is making a comeback. Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind.<sup>1005</sup>

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<sup>1000</sup> Miller, *Gender Identity*.

<sup>1001</sup> Eugenides, *Middlesex* 464.

<sup>1002</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 478, f.

<sup>1003</sup> *Ibid.* 478, f.

<sup>1004</sup> *Ibid.* 479.

<sup>1005</sup> *Ibid.*

The significance given to free will actually highlights the fact that people are able to change their lives – as Cal has done himself.

Even though free will is not hailed as an absolute possibility of deliverance (as Cal is not stylized either as a completely autonomous individual), it is nevertheless a chance to change something. By even addressing this conflict theoretically, the writer's intentions to change society are made perfectly clear. Through appreciation and the development of means of definition the narrator has managed to change her life and her direct environment. If the possibility of developing new definitions respectively new descriptions is thus equated with free will, it is this freedom at the mercy of the environment's appreciation that defines mankind. I thereby oppose most interpretations, claiming that *Middlesex* leaves this question undecided.<sup>1006</sup> The recurrent theme of transformation leads to the understanding that an individual can transform herself if she manages to transform the understanding of her communicative community by using this community's traditions. The use of historical traditions highlights the fact that there are lasting standards influencing the generation of personality.<sup>1007</sup> Even though history enters the narration manifold, the way it is perceived in is directly related to the personal experience of individuals or of one individual, the narrator. The traditions are not reduced in the course of the transformation Cal subjects them to. On the contrary, the understanding of gender is most definitely broadened by Cal's tale. Interpretations based on gender studies would argue that *Middlesex* challenges the naturalness and binary organization of gender identity.

[Es] wird nicht nur die Naturhaftigkeit und Binarität von Geschlechtsidentität, sondern Identität überhaupt als performativ annehmbar vorgeführt.<sup>1008</sup>

This is an interpretation I would also like to challenge. Naturalness has been established as a state of negotiation between an individual and her surroundings, controlled by as much free will granted by each other. Identity has thus been cleared of a simple biological or environmental nature. The way in which gender identity matters is this negotiation between human beings. As long as they all appreciate each other *gender is not all that important*. Additionally, identity is not depicted as simply performatively practicable. It is a delicate state of negotiation included in the naturalness, for which appreciation, understanding, and the embedding in traditions is needed.

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<sup>1006</sup> Cf. e.g. Miller, *Gender Identity and Seibt*, Fischmensch.

<sup>1007</sup> The idea of such a *greater sense of self* is in a related way formulated by many literary critics concerned with the historical. Systems like these are needed when issues such as identity and especially national identity are broached within functional questions (these might be historical or for example psychological). Cf. e.g. Harris, *Fiction* 27.

<sup>1008</sup> Grabbe, *Geschwisterliebe* 124.

Last but not least I wish to underline that in contrast to the *Handmaid's Tale* the past existence is not discarded in *Middlesex*. Offred had no choice but to leave part of it behind as her whole society changed, and she was bereaved of the possibility to live on in the past ways due to a lack of communicative reinforcement. In the case of Cal, who does not live in times of social revolution, a personal niche is created, from which he influences communicative reality to answer his needs. This can never be done alone. Yet, a growing awareness of hermaphrodites, at the time in which this novel was written as reproduced in the novel, is in the end part of the overall communicative reality. The niche in which Cal can pronounce himself to simply be what he is necessarily has to conform to communicative reality. On the one hand, he does not have any other means of communication than those he has been socialized with. On the other hand, he could not communicate a change to others if he was to use means of communication unintelligible to them. In this way the change Cal initiates can be understood as an act of education through the transformation of existing traditions.

#### IV. Communicative Reality and the Foundation of Ethics

In the following, the information regarding the individual that has been obtained in the preceding literary analyses will be evaluated with regard to a postmodern context for ethics and a coherent frame of communicative reality. Central to this is the problematic position of the observer or theorist. Critique focuses on the contradiction of scholarly practice which has deconstructed the autonomous subject, but still speaks from an objective and strangely unified position. This has also been discussed in literary studies.<sup>1009</sup>

Ein wirklicher Verzicht auf die autoritative wissenschaftliche Ich-Position müsste einhergehen mit einer radikalen Umformung des Diskurses über literarische Texte; es müssten Schreibweisen entwickelt werden, welche die Unterscheidung zwischen Subjekt und Objekt, Kritiker und Werk, Inhalt und Form, Signifikat und Signifikant, auflösen und das sprechende Subjekt in den Wirbel dieser Auflösung hineinziehen würden.<sup>1010</sup>

Such a reshaping has not yet taken place as radically as necessary. On the contrary, strategies of either rewriting criticism as quasi literature or considering research results as only temporarily valid have been currently applied.<sup>1011</sup> If such temporary validity is taken as the basic structure of ethics, moral norms lose their moral character and mutate into mere social practices that can be replaced any time.<sup>1012</sup> As will be discussed, the literary texts analyzed in part III. complement the preliminary theoretical considerations of part I. The analyses clearly show that universal ethical demands must be understood as inherent in intersubjective human existence. Individual personality can be positively identified. Therefore, the relations between individuals can be understood as positive relations based on mutual recognition and appreciation. The empirical results will be compared to the two main postmodern approaches to ethics developed by poststructuralism and theories that take communication as a positive basis. Thereby, their deficiencies and problems and the advantages of communicative foundationalist ethics will be revealed in detail.

Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib will be discussed as examples in the next two chapters. Being feminists, they both roughly work within a feminist epistemology. This epistemology can be understood as the paradigm of postmodern relativist critique in the way it has been discussed. Feminist epistemology challenges all typical ideas of external realism, such as objectivity and neutrality as well as the subject/object dichotomy discus-

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<sup>1009</sup> Cf. e.g. Brooke-Rose, *Stories* 28-44 or Ina Schabert, "Hardliners – Selbstzweifler – Traumtänzer – Lesende: Literaturwissenschaftler und Literaturwissenschaftlerinnen im Zeitalter des Poststrukturalismus," *Nünning/Sommer* 161-176, esp. 171,f.

<sup>1010</sup> Ina Schabert, "Hardliners – Selbstzweifler – Traumtänzer – Lesende: Literaturwissenschaftler und Literaturwissenschaftlerinnen im Zeitalter des Poststrukturalismus," *Nünning/Sommer* 161-176, 171.

<sup>1011</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 171-175.

<sup>1012</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter II.ii.iv.

sed with regard to Robert M. Pirsig's books. Despite its clearly feminist intentions, the details of the postmodern relative paradigm of pluralism are typically realized.<sup>1013</sup> To structure the problems for the following presentation of a communicative foundationalist ethics the chapter on Butler will focus on the individual's motivation and the chapter on Benhabib will be organized around the question of justice. To render this critique viable, Butler's theory will be challenged with regard to her understanding of the individual. Additionally, poststructuralism will be exposed as deeply entrenched in the postmodern situation it seeks to criticize. The two main books referred to are *Giving an Account of Oneself* and *Kritik der ethischen Gewalt*, whereas the one is a later, but substantially revised version of the other. The most important critics discussed are Annika Thiem and Slavoj Žižek.<sup>1014</sup> Benhabib also focuses on an individual who is characterized by her intersubjective relation to her community. Therefore, the implications of justice as well as responsibility for a networked community will be discussed. In the end, the insufficient analysis of the observing individual turns out to be the most problematic point. The most important book by Benhabib is *Situating the Self*, the main critics discussed are Nancy Fraser and Ernst Tugendhat.<sup>1015</sup> When Butler can be said to focus on the other as a starting point, and Benhabib understands the community as origin, communicative foundationalism draws on both notions, yet starts with the individual person and focuses on narrativity.

By applying communicative foundationalist ideas to the literary analyses, a new metanarrative within the tradition of postmodern relativist thought is developed. Following the two chapters on Butler and Benhabib the different levels of (cultural) morality and (transcultural) ethics will be discussed in chapter IV.iii. To complement this discussion, a more differentiated glance at the natural sciences (in chapter IV.iv.) must be cast. The natural sciences have not given up their basically realist view, even though the naive positivism of the early twentieth century has been cast off. New theories have been developed but the basic problems of realism addressed by postmodern relativist critique have not been solved. The problem of the objective and neutral subject as observer in the natural sciences still remains – in much the same way as it is also still a problem for postmodern relativist

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<sup>1013</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-epistemology/> (07.12.2009); Benhabib, *Self* 178,ff; 203,f. For the critical stance of feminists with regard to natural explanations in ethics and the typically feminist concept of intersubjectivity see also Conradi, *Care* 68; 87,ff and Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship* 55,f.

<sup>1014</sup> Their content is to some extent interchangeable as Butler, *Kritik* is an earlier and abridged version of Butler, *Account*. Still, one is not simply a translation of the other. As they appeared in a process and with considerable time passing between them, I have decided to include both versions (cf. Butler, *Account* vii).

<sup>1015</sup> As communicative foundational ethics is rather close to Benhabib's approach, the chosen critics address problems of communicative identity in general. In this way, the communicative foundationalist framework can be justified at the same time as Benhabib's concept is criticized. Such combined argumentation is also applied to an extent in the chapter on Butler.

theories. Therefore, the currently popular (neuro-)biological discourse about ethics must be understood as comprising basic realist deficiencies.

In conclusion, chapter IV.v. will summarize the characteristics of a communicative foundationalist ethics. It is different from Butler's poststructuralist approach as it opposes normative positivism and the ensuing cultural relativism.

Normative positivism leads to cultural or moral relativism. Such relativism gives no ground for criticizing the positive norms of any society. [...]t permits only internal criticism. This limitation is the most serious defect of normative positivism and cultural relativism. We cannot be content with an internal critique of Nazi Germany or of our own culture.<sup>1016</sup>

Theoretically, the statement that a normative theorist could not be *content* with relativism is not a valid argument. Yet, after having seen that there is more to human nature than reason and that all elements of humanity are inextricably interrelated, another form of critique emerges. The normative positivist description simply does not apply to what human beings do when they judge morally. Culturally relativistic judgments of others do not exist in regard to morality. The argument that normative relativism must follow from the fact that human beings are always already in the world has been categorically criticized in preceding chapters.<sup>1017</sup> This move of deconstructing the basis of the deconstruction has been suggested by many critics.<sup>1018</sup> It is inspired by the lack of inherent categories within deconstruction that signal where to stop the act of deconstructing (also called the *exemptions problematic*).<sup>1019</sup>

Poststructuralist scholarship calls into question not only the nonlinguistic referents of moral discourse but also the traditional understanding of language as representing a material reality outside language itself. Foucault, Derrida, and Butler, among others demonstrate how discourses produce and not merely represent the realities to which they relate.<sup>1020</sup>

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<sup>1016</sup> Seung, Intuition 214.

<sup>1017</sup> For an insightful overview of substantial critical arguments in this vein, with which communicative foundationalism shares the approach to *argue from within* see Reiner Wimmer, "'Relativismus der Moralurteile' – eine plausible These?" Rentsch, *Einheit* 260-283. It should be noted that Wimmer actually concludes that moral realism is a sensible idea.

<sup>1018</sup> Cf. for example Dieter Mersch, "Dekonstruktion der Dekonstruktion," *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Semiotik*, <http://www.semiotik.eu/index.php?id=329,23&PHPSESSID=66e11p6v7kofp28ci8dcp16d634dpfak> (20.05. 2009). This is one of the many texts which discuss the fact that postmodern theories (in this case Derrida's work) usually do not analyze the basis of their own argumentation. Pongratz discusses this problem of circularity with regard to system theory and constructivism. Cf. Pongratz, *Untiefen* 56; 130,f.; 196-198. See also Bernhard Waldenfels, "Was sich der Dekonstruktion entzieht," *Menke/Kern* 331-344.

<sup>1019</sup> Cf. Chris Swoyer, "Relativism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/> (25.03.2009).

<sup>1020</sup> Thiem, *Subjects* 204.



#### **IV.i. The Individual Acting Morally – Problems of Motivation in the Light of Judith Butler’s Deconstructive Ethics**

In her insightful work on Butler’s ethics, Annika Thiem observes that turning to this theorist means turning to the poststructuralist return to ethics, especially considering Levinas.<sup>1021</sup> In the wake of this turn ethical questions are no longer considered as demands made by or rights of autonomous persons. Postmodern relativists have taken to describing ethical situations roughly as situations characterized by the intersubjective relation between individuals (or, more postmodernly put, between *subjects*). Consciousness or even the state of being a subject only develop through becoming aware of the other and/or the other’s vulnerability in poststructuralist theories. As I will show in the following by discussing Judith Butler’s arguments, this leads to a negative identification with responsibility. Even though desires for the other underlie the process of becoming a subject, such desires are for unspecific others and do not lead to an identification with the other.<sup>1022</sup> In the end, the only elements of a common human nature acknowledged are mutual inadequacy and vulnerability. In this way, a positive answer to the question where the responsibility springs from cannot be given. As I will argue, relying on someone else’s vulnerability does not necessarily evoke responsibility for this vulnerability. Butler’s work in general “intervenes in ontological questions and makes them legible as political and social problematics by interrogating how there is no facticity of bodies and subjects that does not already rely on socially produced and administered ontologies.”<sup>1023</sup> However, I believe that there is a facticity of communication that precedes even the socially produced ontologies. By thus inserting a positive foundation into postmodern relativist critique ethical arguments become possible. Moreover, in this way ethical arguments are consistent with the nature of communication as it has been analyzed in part III.

Thiem argues that it is not possible to confront postmodern relativist critique by retrieving the subject as an intersubjective individual.

The ensuing difficulty for practical philosophy cannot simply be overcome by recovering the subject as always developing in relation to others, because such a recovery would not take seriously how radical the critique of the subject as a nodal episteme and epistemological anchor is. Even with a re-

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<sup>1021</sup> Levinas’ focus on alterity has decisively contributed to the ethical turn of postmodern relativist theories. Cf. Thiem, *Subjects* 7.

<sup>1022</sup> The question of desire in this constitutive sense of humanity enters the discussion only in psychoanalytically organized frameworks explaining subjectivation. For the historical development of this focus on desire in psychoanalysis and its critique see Phillips/Taylor 47, 52-70. Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor show that the conflictive ambivalence of human nature in such perspectives can be linked to the sociohistorical environment in which psychoanalytical theories were first formulated. Cf. *ibid.* 90-95; 99f.

<sup>1023</sup> Thiem, *Subjects* 9.

lational subject, we still ground our inquiries in a framework that presupposes the existence of distinct subjects who experience, act, and know, even if their experiencing, acting, and knowing happens only in relation to others.<sup>1024</sup>

I endeavor to take the radicalness of Butler's critique as seriously as possible. Yet, I insist that the distinct subject exists as a communicative category. As the literary analyses have shown, the subject position is the position human beings communicate from. Without this position, communication between individuals would not be possible. The way in which a person understands and evaluates her life is by forming a personal point of view. This communicative reality cannot be ignored for critical purposes. The way in which poststructuralist (as a radical form of postmodern relativist) critique absolutely challenges the subject as a category that must be presupposed is only partly correct. It must be conceded that the subject does not come first and that it is part of a communicative process. Moreover, I agree that this process is entrenched in specific social and cultural power networks. Subjectivity never actually exists without such connections to specific sociohistorical settings. Yet, once the subject state is established, an individual can abstract from her cultural situation and can understand which processes constitute human nature. Within the communicative reality (which builds the *Lebensraum* respectively the *Lebenswelt* of humanity) the formation of subjectivity still has an ontological/epistemological priority.<sup>1025</sup> It is rather the process of building subjectivity (or personal identity) which is focused on instead of a prior subject as a specific form existing in reality. However unstable the actual subject might be, the process of subject formation stays stable and certain. A moral order implied in this formation would then be a *natural* ethics prior or superior to all social and cultural moral norms.<sup>1026</sup> It would have to be an ethics of communication, an ethics demanding a certain way of communicating with each other. Even though this idea of a communicatively functional ethics is not adequately founded and differently developed in Butler's work, I agree with Thiem that it is contained within her ethics.<sup>1027</sup>

The individual has been described as having many different faces in the preceding analysis. Yet, there were key elements each face shares. Thus, the postmodern fragmented subject cannot be the ideal model. The individuals cannot be comprehensively described as "messy, imbricated, invisible systems of operation" as postmodern relativist theory has

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<sup>1024</sup> Thiem, Subjects 10.

<sup>1025</sup> As I have argued throughout this paper, the distinction between ontology and epistemology cannot be made in the same way in a communicative foundationalist framework as it is made in traditional philosophy.

<sup>1026</sup> It should be kept in mind that all human *nature* is meant to be a communicative nature.

<sup>1027</sup> Cf. Thiem, Subjects 142,f. The idea that ethical responsibility manifests itself in the way others are addressed is certainly part of Butler's argument.

it.<sup>1028</sup> As argued in part II., this is a necessary precondition for the understanding of morality.<sup>1029</sup> For Butler “being addressed constitutes us as subjects from the very beginning” of our existence.<sup>1030</sup>

There is no making of oneself (poiesis) outside of a mode of subjectivation (assujettissement) and, hence, no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take.<sup>1031</sup>

It is not enough that we are in rhetorical contact with the other from the beginning of our emergence as subject. This only brings us into contact with *any* other who is part of our communicative community. Yet, it does not make us dependent on a specific other in a concrete situation. If the other shall be respected in any given situation, this ethical call for respect needs to be rooted in the self. The sense of self might be mediated to a self by her communicative community, yet, it is the point of view of the self that makes her aware of the other.

[T]here is an other before us whom we do not know and cannot fully apprehend, one whose uniqueness and nonsubstitutability set a limit to the model of reciprocal recognition offered within the Hegelian scheme and to the possibility of knowing another more generally.<sup>1032</sup>

It has become very clear in chapters III.ii.iii. to III.ii.iii.ii. that a concentration on the way in which others are different and cannot be known does not lead to a humane treatment. One might argue that the way in which the Lisbon girls are treated is actually respectful. Yet, as the others cannot survive without their community and a feeling of belonging to this community, respect does not suffice. The Lisbon sisters are stylized as the complete and unknowable other without any possibility for them to tell their story. Not knowing the other always implies not being able to understand or even listen to their story. Not signaling a willingness to listen to them, and simultaneously signaling that they are completely inscrutable does not leave them with any possible ground for a narration. “Mere difference leads ... to a sentimental charity, for there is nothing in its logic which necessitates our attention to the other.”<sup>1033</sup> Even though it might not be possible to formulate every experience of their life into a conscious narration, without a narration individuals die.

In Butler’s work the address of the other is always traversed by the self’s desires and the self’s past – therefore the self is never fully aware of the way in which she address-

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<sup>1028</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, “Democracy and Postmodernity: The Problem,” *Rewriting Democracy – Cultural Politics in Postmodernity*, ed. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007) 1-21, 1.

<sup>1029</sup> Cf. also Nagel, *Fragen* 60.

<sup>1030</sup> Thiem, *Subjects* 97.

<sup>1031</sup> Butler, *Account* 17.

<sup>1032</sup> *Ibid.* 31.

<sup>1033</sup> Mohanty, *Theory* 141.

ses the other. Equally, the address by the other touches us in such manifold ways.<sup>1034</sup> Yet, for a communicative foundationalist ethics this diagnosis only applies to the culturally and socially mediated level of the communication. No responsibility and no universal ethical norms can spring from this level. Underlying such sociohistorical information must be foundationalist aspects of communication to uphold the idea of universal ethics. What is even more interesting is that Butler's argumentation shows such an underlying foundation. Otherwise she could not come to ethical conclusions either. She also merges the terms *human* and *ethical* as it is done in a communicative foundationalist ethics. What is ethical must in the end be a part of human nature to make any claim to be morally binding for all human beings.<sup>1035</sup> Yet, this implication of a universal human nature makes no sense from a relativist perspective such as hers as she insists that the other is not knowable.<sup>1036</sup> It is only in the inability to know that human beings resemble each other in Butler's perspective. And even this should be a dangerous conclusion from her point of view, as the scientist describing this state does not really know anything either. It is exactly the loss of a feeling of autonomy, of sovereignty – the acceptance of human restrictions – what makes us human in her perspective. Yet, as a true feminist she argues that this loss of sovereignty is no real loss – autonomy has always been a mere illusion. Thus, no death of an actual subject has to be mourned according to her thesis but simply the seizing of a fantasy. The moral norms she describes are all just part of the sociohistorical situation – cultural norms defining the lines along which a subject can be addressed and thus made a subject. Norms can no longer be seen as given or natural.<sup>1037</sup> Therefore, the subject has to confront these norms critically although she has to adjust her behavior along those lines as they generate her existence.

Butler describes the social and cultural relations in which a subject finds herself as the venue of one's own ethical responsibility.<sup>1038</sup> Yet, how can she talk of *responsibility*? As long as norms are socially and culturally installed and as they necessarily generate an influence on the subject's behavior, no responsibility with regard to the normative content of those norms can be established. Critically confronting those norms could mean any sort of behavior. No orientation springs from such a discussion of norms. Another norm must be hidden somewhere to which individuals can refer critically to evaluate the cultural

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<sup>1034</sup> Cf. Butler, Account 50-65.

<sup>1035</sup> Cf. Butler, Kritik 144.

<sup>1036</sup> White also criticizes the contradictions of a negative ontology and a positive reaffirmation of certain values or aspects of individuality in Butler's theory. Cf. White, Affirmation 13, 75-105. See also Benhabib, Self 203-241.

<sup>1037</sup> Cf. Butler, Kritik 11; 20,f; 71.

<sup>1038</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 29.

norms. Besides, it rests dubious on which personal grounds such confrontation could happen as individual autonomy is harshly restricted in Butler's theory.<sup>1039</sup> Sovereignty alone could not turn anyone into a responsible person – just as the loss of (the idea of) sovereignty cannot turn anyone into a responsible person either. Responsibility implies action that can be judged as *good* according to some standard. Butler does not introduce such a standard and simply defines responsible action as action that is aimed at the other and is somehow influenced by the existing norms. She further defines the possibility of acting according to these norms, which demand that subjects give a (necessarily fragmentary) account of themselves. Such an account is always infested and no individual can explain why they have become the person they turned out to be. Their aspirations at a narrative reconstruction of this identity have to be constantly revised.<sup>1040</sup> This infestation seems to be a very negative vision of human existence. Autonomy and absolute self-knowledge have been illusions all along. As they can thus not be the standard for evaluating existence, there is no need to understand the described intersubjectivity in such negative terms.

Butler describes the realization of the limitations of one's self as a self-restrictive act and as the experience of the general limitations of knowledge. According to her, this insight can lead to modesty and generosity as everyone needs forgiveness for what they cannot completely know. In a similar way she formulates a duty to forgive others for what is not knowable to them.<sup>1041</sup> But to gain an insight into the way one's self exists could only be described as a self-restrictive act if the autonomous and self-knowing standard would still function as measurement. In the same way the term *forgiveness* loses its meaning when an individual knows that she cannot expect anything else from herself and others. Moreover, a *duty* only makes sense when norms have been accepted as a legitimate orientation. If this intersubjectivity is accepted as the true state of existence of the human race, there is no need to *forgive* anyone for not fulfilling unrealistic standards of self-knowledge. If we are indeed able to realize this situation, we simply have to cut down our expectations to a realistic level. Accordingly, it would make much more sense to describe such behavior as *realistic* instead of using terms such as *modesty* or *generosity*.

Having been socialized according to given social and cultural norms, it might never be possible for an individual not to respond to the implied categories. Human beings will

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<sup>1039</sup> For a discussion of several problems regarding the freedom to act that occur in Butler's theory see Nina von Dahlen, "Judith Butler und die Probleme des ethischen Handelns – eine Einordnung der Probleme der Motivation und der Urteilskraft," *Ordnungen des Denkens – Debatten um Wissenschaftstheorie und Erkenntniskritik*, Verhandlungen mit der Gegenwart 2, eds. Ronald Langner et al. (Berlin: LIT, 2007) 227-235.

<sup>1040</sup> Cf. Butler, Kritik 53.

<sup>1041</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 56.

always demand accounts of other human beings. Yet, Butler argues that given our foundational intersubjectivity we *ought not to* judge someone else in a way that she loses her subject position. A communicative foundationalist ethics argues for exactly the same version of a foundationalist ethical duty. Yet, Butler's argumentation connecting the subject to a theoretical other would not necessarily lead to the appreciation of a concrete other. The psychoanalytic logic of absolute connectedness might give anyone an insight into her need to be accepted as a person. Yet, being an accepted member of a larger group, nothing would actually oppose excluding individuals who show signs of non-normative behavior that unsettle the group. On the contrary, the logic of excluding those who are not accepted and who will thus probably not be able to give me full acceptance because of their precarious subject positions rather obviously springs from Butler's argument.

If we forget that we are related to those we condemn, even those we *must* condemn, then we lose the chance to be ethically educated or "addressed" by a consideration of who they are and what their personhood says about the range of human possibility that exists, even to prepare ourselves for or against such possibilities.<sup>1042</sup>

Besides the illogical reference to a foundational communicative norm (which is nowhere taken up as an issue, let alone foundationally justified), she talks about the *need to condemn* others at this point. Yet, according to which of the social and cultural norms that have been exposed as relative and that have been critically challenged by the subject is she supposed to judge? This actual practice of judgment and evaluation is not further explained in Butler's work. Additionally, it remains dubious how the subject actually gains insight into her limitations. The thought about norms more or less automatically leads to this knowledge in Butler's ethics. Yet, the fact that the subject is always in a critical relation to the norms (as she is never able to conform to them exactly) is hardly enough to come to this self-awareness. According to Butler, the demand for revenge is an automatic reaction to suffering from ethical violence. Therefore, such an experience can neither lead to the awareness of one's limitations. This point could obviously only be clarified by introducing ideas of education or maturing, which are both incompatible with Butler's limited self.<sup>1043</sup>

It is interesting that she actually argues for fighting the above described impulse of revenge respectively that she picks it out as an important ethical claim. Butler concedes that by understanding the limitations of the self, a certain acceptance of the inevitability of

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<sup>1042</sup> Butler, Account 45.

<sup>1043</sup> Cf. Žižek, Suspension 48,f. One must keep in mind that it is usually not enough to tell members of a community what is ethically *correct*, but that such new forms of behavior have to be practiced. Cf. Reiner Wimmer, "Anthropologie und Ethik – Erkundungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände," Demmerling 215-245; 236.

suffering, or as the case may be, of traumas, will occur.<sup>1044</sup> Yet, would it not be stoicism regarding the other's account that occurred? As the subject knows how any account is limited and can be recounted in different ways, she would certainly approach any actual account with indifference. Butler's definition of being human and moral includes a constant awareness of one's deficiencies in judgment, one's inscrutability, and dependency. Constantly being aware of these limitations could not lead to enough self-confidence nor to the motivation to actually come to a judgment in any case. First, an individual would not trust herself to identify the standards according to which a situation could be judged, and second, she would never trust herself to evaluate any situation with her limited knowledge of herself and others. The problem Butler's ethics show is two-fold – on the one hand, she does not show which norms could be trusted. She uses norms herself, when she evaluates certain behavior as *forgiving* or *modest*. Yet, she does not clarify these norms in a way that her writing could be understood as the necessary education subjects need to understand how to act. Even if this were the case, the problem would follow why Judith Butler was able to understand the situation even though she is as limited as any other subject. The subject who is constantly aware of her own inability to judge and evaluate can never trust any of her feelings. Without an emotion guiding the way towards a certain standard of ethical behavior (which does not exist in Butler's theory either) rational awareness of anything (which dubiously comes about) could never initiate an action.<sup>1045</sup> It is not only motivation for the ethically correct behavior that evades understanding in Butler's theory but also motivation to come to an insight into fundamental human intersubjectivity.

The fact that motivation seems to be hardly describable in Butler's terms (unless a fundamental ethical interest in justice in terms of non-discrimination as well as a natural ability to rationally grasp insight into the human condition are covertly pre-supposed) is only one problematic aspect regarding motivation. Perhaps more obvious is the fact that tangible situations, in which human beings gather the motivation to change their lives, cannot be explained in Butler's vocabulary. Let us return to two striking examples in the previously discussed novels. When she finds the energy to face life in a communicative community again (instead of continuing to live in her own reality), the nameless protagonist of *Surfacing* actually *refuses* to be a victim.<sup>1046</sup> It is exactly the opposition to her own weakness that enables her to return to a life within the community in which she can actually *do something*. The belief in her own power is vital for her to control her actions. To which ex-

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<sup>1044</sup> Cf. Butler, Kritik 101, ff.

<sup>1045</sup> Cf. John R. Searle, *Rationality in Action* (Cambridge and London, 2001) 139; Davidson, Subjective 127.

<sup>1046</sup> Cf. Atwood, *Surfacing* 185, quoted in chapter III.ii.i.i. on page 134.

tent control can be exerted rests debatable, yet, the belief in oneself as powerful is necessary to exert whatever amount of control is possible. The development of Cal, respectively Callie, also shows this relation. Only after he has found appreciation through other hermaphrodites and eventually through his family is he actually able to start writing about his life in a confident way, assessing his sexual abnormality (as it is interpreted by his society) as a sexual identity.

Moreover, each new plan for the future seems to be guided by the wish to be a certain individual, to be a different person. The success of the plan depends on the ability to become this other person who successfully manages to realize the plan.<sup>1047</sup> Before having realized the new plan, one's personality does, strictly speaking, not include the character traits necessary for the realization. They have to be activated through the process. The individual identity is part of the source of motivation.<sup>1048</sup> The wishes and desires leading to the evaluation of tangible situations and thus to the formation of a plan, are part of the current identity. The motivation to realize such a plan for the future is the belief that one is able to become this other personality that necessarily follows from the realization. Even though absolute self-reflectivity might not be possible, the extent to which a human being can be self-reflective is the important and interesting question with regard to motivation. The existence of motivation reveals that human beings must be self-reflective to a certain extent, or must at least believe that they are. The reason why this realm of possible knowledge is not explored by Butler lies in the historical development of postmodern relativist critique. The focus on negative elements is quasi required to be part of the postmodern critical movement.

Butler insists that some vital part of the self evades us if we understand it solely as a narrative, let alone a narrative that can be controlled autonomously.<sup>1049</sup> Besides the already existing network of communicative options everyone draws on, she thus refers to desires and experiences that can never be fully accounted for as they are not part of the conscious self subjects develop. These unaccountable elements have taken place outside of consciousness. Butler resorts to psychoanalysis to get close to these aspects of human life.

[T]he ego is not an entity or a substance, but an array of relations and processes, implicated in the world of primary caregivers in ways that constitute its very definition.<sup>1050</sup>

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<sup>1047</sup> In this way the autonomy described here is a form of freedom to realize the self (or the different versions of the self). Cf. Taylor, *Freiheit* 120,f.

<sup>1048</sup> Cf. Nanfang Wu, *Auf der Suche nach Identität – Eine psychoanalytische Studie zu Peter Weiss' Leben und Schreiben*, Diss U Freiburg, Poetica – Schriften zur Literaturwissenschaft (Hamburg: Kovac, 1999) 9.

<sup>1049</sup> Cf. Butler, *Account* 59,f; see also Thiem, *Subjects* 149.

<sup>1050</sup> Butler, *Account* 59.



A person's intrinsic motivation is negatively influenced when she is affected in her belief to act self-determinedly. The same effect ensues if she is affected in her belief to be competent and efficient in her actions. Therefore, preconditions for motivation, self-determination (as far as it is possible), and self-regulation are support of a person's effort to be autonomous, to be competent, and to be socially integrated.<sup>1051</sup> Even though absolute autonomy is not to be reached and absolute effectivity cannot be granted, it is psychologically important that an individual understands herself in this way to be motivated and thus to be able to act. As shown in chapters III.ii.i. to III.ii.ii. in the analysis of *Surfacing*, an idea of the self as ineffective will lead to helplessness, frustration, and a static (or paralyzed) personality.

Butler suggests "that the structure of address is not a feature of narrative, one of its many and variable attributes, but an interruption of narrative."<sup>1052</sup> She argues that a story which is addressed to someone gains a rhetorical dimension that cannot be described as a narrative function.

Something is being done with language when the account that I give begins: it is invariably interlocutory, ghosted, laden, persuasive, and tactical. It may well seek to communicate a truth, but it can do this, if it can, only by exercising a relational dimension of language.<sup>1053</sup>

This view of language suggests a strange and in-existent state of language that is not interlocutory, but static and uncommunicative. Butler invokes a static and bodily self-assured person that can neutrally and objectively use language on her own. By using mystical and ambiguous terms such as *ghosted* and *something*, she creates the impression that her view of narration and communication in general is somehow special and therefore inexplicable.<sup>1054</sup> This reminds the reader very much of the mystic origins of psychoanalytic thinking discussed in chapter II.iii.ii. What Butler describes is actually simply the way character narration in the first person singular engages in a given existence with a certain personal perspective. As I have argued in preceding chapters, I understand narration after Adam Zachary Newton as the terms of human existence. With James Phelan, I would describe narrative as rhetorical act. The specific *act of indirection* of first person narrative (as it is described by Phelan) already includes that the narrator is situated in her own narrative and

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<sup>1051</sup> These issues have been well investigated with regard to children. Cf. e.g. Wendy S. Grolnick and Melanie Farkas, "Parenting and the Development of Children's Self-regulation," *Handbook of Parenting – Practical Issues in Parenting*, ed. Marc H. Bornstein (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002) 89-110.

<sup>1052</sup> Butler, Account 63.

<sup>1053</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1054</sup> It could be argued that Butler thereby reintroduces a form of metanarrative which is actually rejected by poststructuralism into the relativist concept. See Pongratz, Untiefen 191,ff for the same idea with regard to system theory and constructivism.

also already implies at least a supposed *narratee*. The action of addressing is always already included within narrative. As I have argued in chapter I.iv.i. I have opted for an abstract reader (or abstract listener) to simplify the understanding of foundational communicative functions. To evoke the *ghost* of a narrative act that can be understood without the situatedness of the narrator, the implied listener or the intersubjective level of communication is simply unrealistic. Moreover, a truth cannot be sought by *exercising* the relational dimension of language but must be sought by trying to understand this relational functionality.

It is of course problematic to understand the unconscious traversing the narration. Still, I doubt that calling such aspects *ghosted* helps to understand them in any way. Butler argues as follows.

To say, as some do, that the self must be narrated, that only the narrated self can be intelligible and survive, is to say that we cannot survive with an unconscious. It is to say, in effect, that the unconscious threatens us with an insupportable unintelligibility, and for that reason we must oppose it. [...] In the language that articulates opposition to a non-narrativizable beginning resides the fear that the absence of narrative will spell a certain threat, a threat to life, and will pose the risk, if not the certainty, of a certain kind of death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence.<sup>1055</sup>

I do think that an unconscious that interrupts narratives is a threat to the individual. It is a threat of helplessness, frustration, and paralysis as has been argued with regard to *Surfacing*. It might even be a threat to life – as an oppressed narration can very well lead to suicide. Yet, the opposition to practices that lead to helplessness and dismay of members of the communicative community should not be understood as an attempt to eliminate the fact that certain aspects of an individual might not be easily or at all narrated. It is correct that the individual cannot account for her own introduction into the communicative narration (her sociohistoric version of communicative reality). Still, she can understand through abstraction how her subjectivation functioned theoretically. She can thus understand through abstraction how she might initially or later have been mistreated through not having been given enough appreciation. The mere fact that Butler (as other theorists) uses the specific narrative of psychoanalysis to describe how such traumas come into being proves beyond doubt that it is possible to thus grasp the functionality of the process which produces unconscious traumas. These traumas are visible through their effect on the narration – precisely because some aspects remain out of reach of the narrativization. Even though some of these aspects may remain out of reach for certain individuals forever, it remains true that their possibilities of action are defined through what they are able to narrate of them-

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<sup>1055</sup> Butler, Account 65.

selves.<sup>1056</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to oppose the traumatic effects of silence between parts of the narration and to try to fill them, even though a full compensation might be impossible. Cal/Callie is a good example for such a strategy. As Callie is confronted with the silent accusations of her community and the monstrous associations with her condition, she cannot do anything but run away. By trying to re-narrate this condition into something socially acceptable (which is only possible because she then experiences some appreciation) Cal relives this trauma, names it, and finds a way to voice it in spite of his unconscious.

This educational process can be described as a process of practicing new behavior. To learn to act differently it is not enough to know what would be the ethically correct course of action. Such actions – if they are unusual for the given communicative community – must be communicated and made accessible for all members. Afterwards, these members have to practice their new or slightly changed roles. A form of social change has been discussed with regard to Atwood's *Handmaid*. The new role allocation for females was linked to already existing moral and social models of religion, piety, and the weakness of the fairer sex. The republic of Gilead could only slowly change the existing rules and even used *education* camps. Besides the slow assignment of their new roles, it was advantageous for the great revolution to disperse some power to members of the oppressed group (i.e. the Aunts). Mental attitudes can only be communicated and provided with role models by recourse to other human beings. Individuals who have already solved problems in a certain way can function as examples. Such communication can only be accomplished through narratives. Either these narratives are presented by already existing role models as their own personal narration or they are generated to metaphorically create images that can display an exemplary function. It is not enough to reveal the limitations of subjects and to preach different behavior to change a communicative community. Alternative options must be revealed as viable modes of reality. Such a revelation cannot be conducted theoretically in advance. It must be realized tangibly – by comprehensible examples and by personal experience.<sup>1057</sup> Additionally, the advantages of ethical behavior must be communicated to generate a motivation to actually move in this direction. Therefore, universal norms must be appealed to and this appeal to ethics as it is inherent in communicative human nature is done rationally and emotionally. Non-narrativizable elements of a personality will not help to change the existing communicative reality in this ethical process.

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<sup>1056</sup> Cf. Davidson, Subjective 7.

<sup>1057</sup> Cf. Reiner Wimmer, "Anthropologie und Ethik – Erkundungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände," Demmerling 215-245; 236,f.

Unconscious traumas might surface through the way some individuals cannot respond to appreciation with an adequate communicative input or the way they cannot give appreciation. Still this traversed or partially incomplete narration is a form of narration. Therefore, opposing Butler, I believe that the narration *is* in effect the self – everything that is traversing the narration is already part of the narration and not something different from it. In this way, our specific self is always already an integral part of the communicative community. The way in which others have influenced or addressed a self-to-be is already part of this self and not an outside *influence*, as it always already exists in a communicative group. The self is indeed no substance or entity that can be segregated from its environment. Therefore, there is no mysterious substance that could have provided an I before her entrance to the community. The initial *assujettissement* cannot be understood as a trauma unless an ideal of how the subject should have existed is referred to, which is impossible in Butler’s own terms.<sup>1058</sup> Therefore, every trauma has been inflicted on the subject after or through her subjectivation and it must therefore at least be possible to heal it.<sup>1059</sup>

[T]here is a kind of plural implied in this “I.” [The] “ought” is compelling precisely insofar as it articulates a kind of universality or aspiration to universality that is not reducible to a contingent individual instantiation. [...] “What ought I to do?” always works in a generalizing manner, because there is a rule or rationale implied according to which one makes a decision.<sup>1060</sup>

Whereas Thiem following Butler tries to rebind the moral *ought* to the social norms on the cultural level of the communicative community, a foundational view insists that this *ought* refers to a more fundamental level of human communicative nature.<sup>1061</sup>

Thiem argues that “we cannot posit a generalized relationality as an ontological reality and then derive from that a criterion for moral conduct, because we can no longer ask how this relationality is produced ....”<sup>1062</sup> The moral modes of behavior and critique argued for in Butler’s work depend on self-referentiality, on becoming “self-critical regarding their own contingent sources” in the end.<sup>1063</sup> Yet, this is a special form of normative positivism which must lead to moral relativism. Ethical evaluation cannot be conducted from within a system. It is necessarily related to an outside standard, decidedly different from

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<sup>1058</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor’s critical discussion of Michel Foucault’s work, esp. Taylor, *Freiheit* 220,f; 232,ff.

<sup>1059</sup> Butler actually argues with respect to underlying desires that exist in the *subject to be* before her subjectivation. Even though subjectivation can be conflicting it is a position given by the communicative community through address. Therefore it can also be altered by the communicative community in cooperation with the subject. In Butler’s own concept of reality the unconscious traumas she refers to regarding the natural desires (which actually could not be *natural* according to her own work but are somehow treated as such) could never be understood in the way she apparently understands them. No human being would be able to gain the knowledge she apparently possesses. Cf. Butler, *Account* 50-65, 85-101.

<sup>1060</sup> Thiem, *Subjects* 192,f.

<sup>1061</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 194-203.

<sup>1062</sup> *Ibid.* 196.

<sup>1063</sup> *Ibid.* 199. Cf. Butler, *Account* 111-136.

the content of specific sociohistorical moral norms. Communicative foundationalist ethics proposes that the functionality of the communicative system (that is to say, the communicative nature of human beings including emotions, reason, and ethics) can function as such an outside standard. In this way the problem sketched above by Thiem loses its edge. If the functionality of human existence (which is communicative existence) already contains emotional, rational, and ethical values and if the functionality is independent of a specific sociohistoric situation it organizes, the mode of relationality can very well serve as an ontological reality delivering the criterion for moral conduct. By truly accepting the communicative reality as the only way reality is conceivable and understandable for human beings, the opposition between ontological and epistemological point of view becomes obsolete.<sup>1064</sup> Theoretically, the relativist tendencies in Butler's theory lead to the problematic of exemptions – when all socially and culturally generated norms are to be critically deconstructed there is no norm left to light the way into an ethically more acceptable life.<sup>1065</sup>

As Butler uses an implicit standard of evaluation and decision making because she judges some sort of behavior as more ethical or more humane than others, she does actually not stay within the relationality of human beings. She argues for more cooperation with and more consideration of others. Yet, she does not use concepts of human nature and ensuing universal standards of ethics, but argues completely according to postmodern relativist understandings of power networks. Interestingly, in religious discourses *paganism* is usually identified with worshiping of power for power's sake, whereas the *divine* carries the meaning of justice, mercy, and compassion for all those who are marginalized and wretched.<sup>1066</sup> This dichotomy is merged in postmodern relativist perspectives such as Butler's. She does not acknowledge that one cannot argue for a certain standard to organize power, which is created by this same power. If all norms and all human beings come into being through the social and cultural power generated by themselves, then none of the norms can be said to be superior to or *better* than any other. The moment these norms are judged a standard (of justice, equality, or survival for example) necessarily enters the argument. Within Butler's work such an external standard cannot be founded, which is typical for relativist theories, and leads to a normative deficit. As Butler's theory is, communica-

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<sup>1064</sup> Cf. also chapter IV.iv.i.

<sup>1065</sup> Cf. Chris Swoyer, "Relativism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/> (25.03.2009).

<sup>1066</sup> Cf. e.g. Donald R. Wehrs, *Islam, Ethics, Revolt – Politics and Piety in Francophone West African and Maghreb Narrative* (New York et al.: Lexington: 2008) 3.

tive foundationalism is a sort of reality relativism.<sup>1067</sup> What sets it apart is the fact that it is a sort of descriptive perceptual relativism – a relativism that believes in the ability of the perceptual community’s members to describe the way in which they perceive (whereas perception is not foundationally differentiated from communication). This leads to the possibility of referring to the functionality of perception or communication as a universal frame of reference. Moreover, communicative foundationalism would propose that even though the subject only gains the status of an individual personality through others, certain parts of the frame of reference must already exist within every human being.

Yet, even though such a framework exists before the individual is subjectivated, communicative foundationalism would never state that an individual can have a relation to herself. When such narrative levels of reality appear (as in *Zen* where the narrator pretends that his old self is not part of himself) they are the effect of some serious disturbance of the individual. She has no extra personality in addition to her personality. She exists intersubjectively. She is ever changing. Yet, she cannot be separated from herself. There is no extra-communicative self that was traumatized by the way individuality was addressed *upon her*. Contrary to Butler and most other poststructuralists, communicative foundationalism would insist that communicative reality is the only reality human beings have at their disposal.<sup>1068</sup> An individual’s role in this reality might be traversed by traumas others have effected when denying her a narrator’s position. Still, she was no individual or even a comprehensive being in the sense of *human being* before she was addressed and subjectivated. Imprinted in her nature were the functionalities of human nature which can be described as emotional, rational, and ethical functions. To be a satisfied, motivated, and to some extent autonomous individual, these functions have to be equally part of her personality.<sup>1069</sup>

Were an individual deprived of the development of one or more of these functionalities, she might be described as traumatized or destabilized. As an equilibrium of human nature does not exist theoretically but only practically, and cannot be realized before entering communicative reality, the communicative community must be potentially able to (re)install it within everybody. Not being completely autonomous nor in full control of all influences affecting one’s personality *is not* a trauma. This is just the natural intersubjec-

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<sup>1067</sup> “Relativism is not always the most effective topic for promoting consistency in those who discuss it, and [...] many relativistic views are unable to give a consistent account of the status of their own claims. With care some local versions of relativism can avoid the exemptions problem, but it is an ever-present danger for more global versions.” Chris Swoyer, “Relativism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/> (25.03.2009). Cf. also Žižek, *Suspension* 182-191.

<sup>1068</sup> Cf. for example the discussion of Foucault in Butler, *Account* 128-131 for this view. The opposition becomes clear regarding *ibid.* 131.

<sup>1069</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor’s similar definition of personal freedom. Taylor, *Freiheit* esp. 144.

tive state of existence human beings find themselves in. Let us reconsider the above quoted statement.

Perhaps most importantly, we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human.<sup>1070</sup>

As both the protagonists of *Zen* and *Surfacing* have shown, it is precisely not the loss of one's self that constitutes the ethical challenge. The nameless female narrator can only feel responsible for her boyfriend after having realized her own power. The philosopher-narrator can only take on responsibility for his son and be a loving and caring father after having accepted his identity. Butler concedes that her ideas are "not to mean that we were only error, or that all we say is errant and wrong;" still, she insists that the "constitutive limit, for which we cannot give a full account, ... is, paradoxically, the basis of our accountability."<sup>1071</sup> As was just argued, this is not an appropriate description of how ethics are communicated in tangible situations. Additionally, the negative justification of accountability and responsibility also brings with it the theoretical dilemmas of exemptions and of the inappropriate (scientific) observer both solved within a communicative foundationalist frame of reference.

To describe the differences more specifically, it will be helpful to generally discuss Butler with respect to the phenomenological tradition, which she works in and which has been subsumed under the heading postmodern relativist theories in this thesis.<sup>1072</sup> She especially draws on the existentialist line of thought.<sup>1073</sup> Therefore, she shares the view that was proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre and is still present in many sociological theories today, that a human being is only conscious of her individuality through contact to other human beings.<sup>1074</sup> Communicative foundationalism proposes a similar concept of the importance of a communicative community. Yet, it sees the dependency of individuals in a different light. Butler (and most existentialists) would say that it is only through the actual onlooking (or address) of an observer that an individual can understand herself as being an individual, a self subjectively observing the world. Instead, communicative foundationalism proposes that the structure with which an individual understands herself as a self must already exist to conceive a thought within that structure. Furthermore, to understand anyone else as a self, the subject must have established herself as a self. Consciousness in this

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<sup>1070</sup> Butler, Account 136.

<sup>1071</sup> Both quotes *ibid.* 111.

<sup>1072</sup> Cf. Žižek, Suspension 17.

<sup>1073</sup> Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/> (02.03.2009).

<sup>1074</sup> This point of view was especially elucidated in chapter III.ii.ii.

characteristic way must already exist to perceive anything as-a-subject-in-the-world. This insight is formulated by Slavoj Žižek following Spinoza as being divested within the network of reality.<sup>1075</sup> Self-assertion thus does not mean putting the self above everybody else but accepting the fact that the self is nothing but the network.<sup>1076</sup>

As I will argue in the following, the conflict between egotism and altruism, which must be addressed by an ethics that insists on intersubjectivity, cannot be completely dissolved in this network. Žižek is certainly correct in diagnosing Butler with a certain proximity to the new age attitude of self-fulfillment, which does not allow this conflict to be solved within her argument.<sup>1077</sup> Most postmodern theorists rarely deconstruct their own perspective and thus hardly ever broach the issue of their position in the network of relationships they criticize. He also insightfully diagnoses an intrinsic connection between what is criticized and the way it is criticized in postmodern theories in general.<sup>1078</sup> “[W]hat if this very mode of defining the problem is part of the problem?”<sup>1079</sup> To make this point more acute, the interpretation of the individual with regard to psychotherapy in chapter II.iii.ii. should be recalled. As the understanding of deviant individuals slowly but surely developed from morally bad persons into mentally ill persons, it is no surprise that the definition of morality within postmodern theories is so difficult. When the very psychoanalytic notions that historically undermined a clear picture of ethics are now used to define ethical behavior, problems necessarily occur. No wonder that individualism (i.e. an inherent notion of resisting the social and cultural norms) and the implied idea of a true (and autonomous) self still spook postmodern relativist theories.<sup>1080</sup>

Žižek also criticizes the uncritical call for diversification made by many postmodern theorists. Flexibility and informational diversity would not necessarily lead to a better

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<sup>1075</sup> The negative movement of postmodern theories is insightfully described in the Introduction to Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London and New York: Verso, 2008) 1-8 (hereafter: Žižek, *Defense*), see also *ibid.* 195,ff. Though Žižek distances himself from such postmodern rejection of causes, he still states that “at the level of positive knowledge, it is, of course, never possible to ... attain ... the truth – one can only endlessly approach it.” *Ibid.* 3. Therefore, he would also appear as a postmodern relativist in the terms of this study. How such a generalizing definition is not unproblematic is discussed in Sandra Heinen, “Postmoderne und Poststrukturalistische (Dekonstruktionen der) Narratologie,” *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie*, WVT-Handbücher zum Literaturwissenschaftlichen Studium 4, eds. Ansgar and Vera Nünning (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002) 243-264; 243.

<sup>1076</sup> Žižek states that the conflict between egotism and altruism is thereby solved. Cf. Žižek, *Suspension* 38. This conflict is also apparent in discussions of negative and positive freedom in political philosophy. Cf. e.g. Taylor, *Freiheit* 118-144.

<sup>1077</sup> Cf. Žižek, *Suspension* 20.

<sup>1078</sup> Cf. Žižek, *Defense* 339,f.

<sup>1079</sup> *Ibid.* 339.

<sup>1080</sup> For the relation between certain forms of individualism and immorality cf. also Taylor, *Unbehagen*, esp. 7-19.



community. They cannot be described as having a potential resistance in themselves.<sup>1081</sup> Moreover, he states that to grasp horrific ethical outrages we need a framework of the ethical, of the good, to even understand them.<sup>1082</sup> Communicative foundationalism would also argue that we need the formulation of new foundations to exist cooperatively. “Anti-foundationalists stress the ineluctability of difference and hence the failings of any notion of totality or unity.”<sup>1083</sup> Postmodern relativistic theories can thus be critically reevaluated with regard to the cultural and social standard of norms they spring from.

In the brave new world of reflexive postmodernists ... everything local is said to dissolve into merged media images, transgressed boundaries, promiscuously mobile multinational industry and workers, and transnational-corporate desires and commodity fetishism. This imagined postmodern, borderless world ... is, in fact, a Camelot of free trade that echoes the marketplace rhetoric of global capitalism, a making of the world and social science safe for “low-intensity democracy” backed by World Bank capital.<sup>1084</sup>

In the prevention of the local by using the general lies another aspect of postmodern theories. Tangible decisions are usually very rarely discussed. Transcendent norms are not accepted as a standard of orientation, wherefore the understanding of a social situation is rendered infinitely complex. Resorting to underlying power structures and retreating from the rational individual who could be in some way responsible can indeed compliment the sometimes inhuman effects of globalization. Thereby, relativist concepts increase at least some of the inequities they intend to fight.<sup>1085</sup> Cultural and social situations appear to be complex with regard to the intersubjective existence of human beings. Yet, in a communicative foundationalist framework there are at least foundational ethical norms and a functional human nature to lead the way. However, the reversibility of the postmodern subject's identity is only true to a small extent. Factually, an absolute restart of personal identity is impossible as human individuals identify with cultural norms and they thus become part of their personality.<sup>1086</sup> Flexibility is a normative demand of postmodern societies, yet, total conformity to this ideal is impossible for human individuals.<sup>1087</sup> Everybody's identity is constantly influenced by the communicative flux of reality. Yet, even if this reality is

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<sup>1081</sup> Cf. Žižek, *Suspension* 140-144; 147-155.

<sup>1082</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 164.

<sup>1083</sup> Mark Bevir, “Post-foundationalism and Social Democracy,” *Deeds Ermarth* 48-65, 48.

<sup>1084</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology,” *Anthropology in Theory – Issues in Epistemology*, eds. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (Malden MA., Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell, 2006) 506-522, 508.

<sup>1085</sup> Cf. e.g. Pongratz, *Untiefen* 21-23, 82, 174-177, 213.

<sup>1086</sup> Cf. Isabell Lorey, *Immer Ärger mit dem Subjekt – Theoretische und politische Konsequenzen eines juristischen Machtmodells: Judith Butler* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1996) 43.

<sup>1087</sup> This is for example analyzed in terms of psychology by Haubl. Cf. Rolf Haubl, “Be cool! Über die postmoderne Angst, persönlich zu versagen,” *Busch, Spuren* 111-133, 115,ff.

overthrown completely, part of it remains unchanged. This is evident in the Handmaid's development, who even in times of revolution partly clings to her old self.

Apart from the fact that Butler and other postmodern intellectuals might thus well be worsening the situation they claim to ameliorate; there are contradictions within their arguments. Butler insists on the fact that room for the other as some unknowable entity must be created so that all possible developments of humanity are allowed for (at least initially – judgment is supposed to be suspended). Human beings are supposed to do this on the grounds of an insight into their own insufficiencies – as it leads to sympathy in the face of other people's insufficiencies. Yet, there are no rational grounds left on which Butler's insufficient subject could understand this implication of her own insufficiencies, let alone these insufficiencies themselves (besides the fact that all standards by which such insufficiency could have been measured have been deconstructed). The implicit standard of an unlimited fulfillment of any self can clearly be seen here. Yet, without a clarification how an individual self really works and how she can still rationally comprehend insufficiencies or ethical demands no real progress can be made at this point. Setting a desire for the other at the core of what is left of personal identity seems not to lead to such rational abilities. A pure desire for the other – or, as Žižek implies, a love for the other – could never be enough to understand the ethical implications of reality.<sup>1088</sup> For such mental processes a personal identity is needed.

This personality cannot be completely dissolved in the network of reality. Drawing consequences from my situation within this network necessarily requires a stable sense of this situation as my situation. In this way, every person is bound to her individual identity. Implicitly, emotions and ethical nature provide an understanding of the relation to everybody else within communicative reality. But the full realization of the ethical implications within this situation can only be reached by rational abstraction. Moreover, an individual can only distance herself from her immediate situation by putting herself at the center of her existence. Distance can only be created by a focus on individuality and personality instead of on involvement. The conflict between egotism and altruism is solved because sincere (and educated) focus on one's own self can only lead to ethical understanding and therefore to the appreciation of others. It is central to this ethical understanding that every human being lives (or functions) identically at her core. Therefore, the other is foundationally understandable whereas her superficial culturally influenced identity might rest mysterious to me. Žižek challenges the notion of an ethical human nature by showing that a sub-

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<sup>1088</sup> Cf. Žižek, *Suspension* 21.

ject is only granted human rights when she is appreciated as a culture-bound individual (i.e. a citizen of some kind).<sup>1089</sup> This relation certainly exists, but it does not prove that there is no relation between human nature and ethics as it only describes a certain political, i.e. cultural, practice. Still, the fact that ethics exist only with regard to human beings who always already have a culturally shaped identity deeply interwoven with their human identity should not be underestimated. They can only access their humanity through this culturally communicated reality.

Deconstructive techniques can help rational evaluation as they often lead to a clarification regarding the foundations of cultural identities that underlie certain perceptions. Yet, the underlying humanity which is condemned by Žižek as well as Butler must be preserved to make such rational techniques effective to an end (to render them meaningful).<sup>1090</sup> We can expose the hidden violence in culturally influenced moral notions such as a specific sociohistorical implication of the word human in human rights. But we can only do so if we believe that there is a truer notion of what is human behind the cultural masks. Therefore, a condemnation of terms such as human or nature leave human beings bereft of a possibility to relate to this nature in which the only possible standard of a humane ethics is hidden. We need a definition of such humanity and it is thus part of ethics that the inhuman can be identified as well. This is not necessarily violent, as Butler suggests. Inhumane or morally wrong actions are violent. Without a condemnation of these (i.e. a possible amelioration of communicative reality) the whole concept of ethics would stop making sense.

Žižek also criticizes Butler for her illogical theoretical refusal to include a positive notion of humanity. He proposes to include other levels of meaning to the notion of being human. In a discussion of Immanuel Kant and Emmanuel Lévinas, he proposes a deeper understanding of what it means to be inhuman.<sup>1091</sup> Even though the literary analyses have highlighted the situation of persons who have lost their personality or even their life by the disrespect of their communicative environment and who have thus become objects or non-persons, I would not call them inhuman. Human in the sense I use is supposed to describe the possibility of experiencing emotions, reason, and ethics. Without this underlying assumption of humanity in every other, the loss of the personal expression of this humanity would become meaningless as well. If someone could really and completely lose her humanity and human (i.e. communicative) potential, then I would also lose all connection to

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<sup>1089</sup> Žižek, *Suspension* 43. He is discussing this in relation to Giorgio Agamben's idea of *homo sacer*.

<sup>1090</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 45,ff.

<sup>1091</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 48-52.

and responsibility for her. The horror of the loss of personal (and thus always culturally influenced) identity only strikes me because I know that under this abject is a possible human being as I am. As I can rationally and emotionally gain an insight into the foundational human nature that we share, I know that it will hurt the other and me if I do not try to ameliorate the situation. There is no outside of communicative reality. Morally wrong behavior that has led to the deformation or destabilization of persons can only make sense if there is a standard of right and wrong as well as a standard of a person that is not deformed or balanced. Such core humanity is actually implied in postmodern theory if ethical evaluations or suggestions for morally right behavior are given, even though it is theoretically condemned in a comprehensive form.

If communicative reality and human nature are accepted, access to this reality and the truths it bears can be assumed in accordance with postmodern critique. It must thus be understood to be certainly true that there is no social practice that cannot in principle be explained by its participators after they have learned it.<sup>1092</sup> Yet, with regard to the understanding of our ethical actions there also is the problem of consequences. Slavoj Žižek evokes the frustration linked to not knowing what our actions lead to by describing the illusion of anonymous agency cast by capitalism.<sup>1093</sup>

The constellation is properly frustrating: although we (individual or collective agents) know that it all depends on us, we cannot ever predict the consequences of our acts – we are not impotent, but, quite the contrary, omnipotent, without being able to determine the scope of our powers. The gap between causes and effects is irreducible, and there is no “big Other” [i.e. a spiritual entity] to guarantee the harmony between the levels, to guarantee that the overall outcome of our interactions will be satisfactory.<sup>1094</sup>

Being impotent or omnipotent – the problem that the effects of their actions are incalculable must discourage individuals who wish to act towards a certain plan and a certain new identity. The gap between causes and effects in the above mentioned vision of capitalism appears mainly due to postmodern relativist tendencies. It is important to relativize i.e. deconstruct such systemic illusions simulating that the individual agent is not responsible for the effects of her actions. It is vital to recapture one’s responsibility for the system to understand and possibly change its workings.<sup>1095</sup>

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<sup>1092</sup> Cf. Michael Dummett, *Wahrheit und Vergangenheit* (transl. Joachim Schulte), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005) 123 (hereafter: Dummett, *Wahrheit*). Of course, we will not be able to do so at virtually any time or in every situation – especially with regard to our initiation into communicative existence there will always be problems.

<sup>1093</sup> For this frustration see also Taylor, *Unbehagen* 16,f; 122-135.

<sup>1094</sup> Žižek, *Defense* 453.

<sup>1095</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 453-458. This problem is also addressed by Thiem following Butler. Cf. Thiem, *Subjects* 215.

Communicative foundationalism understands situations as more immediate – the ethical relation is always the relation that renders the other a personal narrator. This effect is relatively easy to evoke (by appreciation) and it is also relatively easy to control – if the other rests illusive and does not explain herself, the one addressing the other must change her approach. Every speaker i.e. participant in communicative reality is such a narrator and has undergone such a process. She must hence also be able to understand the process and how it can be applied to others. To appreciate the other in such a way that she can enter communication from a personal perspective is the only ethical demand that can be truly understood as universal. Whether a certain course of action (especially in international communication) might lead to a loss of the narrator’s position for certain groups of people might remain unclear to a certain extent. Yet, it is directly visible when the people of a nation, a specific social or cultural group no longer appear in international discourses – it is fairly obvious when someone has no *voice*. All sociohistorical moral norms must be tested to this end – each time anew if they encounter different cultures communicating different cultural norms. This can of course also be the case with regard to sub-cultures. The tangible moral decision how to react to a specific cultural moral situation is always infested by the uncertainty of the broader consequences of human actions. Yet, the outcome can always be evaluated morally. Thereby, nations can learn from experience – although no two cultures are absolutely the same, they all share the underlying human functionalities.

In a globalized world the global communicative community also has a global responsibility.<sup>1096</sup> Motivation might then spring from the realization that one’s own actions need to be ameliorated or have not been good enough. Power is not so much in question as the only power that counts in a communicative foundationalist concept is the power to influence the communicative reality. This power is bestowed on everyone who has a position from which to narrate her story. Such positions can also be the positions of abnormality as has become clear in *Middlesex*. As long as the abnormality is named and positioned within the existing culture and not just a signifier for absence of normality (such as the label *insanity*), it offers a way of narrating and hence acting to the thus signified person. The position ascribed by the community’s address thus includes a certain appreciation of the personal identity of the other. Such appreciation can well be controlled and responsibility can

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<sup>1096</sup> Cf. Thiem, Subjects 225-229. For a brief outlook on how this could be realized in global politics cf. Thomas Mertens, “Reflections on Global Responsibilities and the Nature of Morality,” *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, eds. M.S. Ronald Commers, Wim Vandekerckhove, and An Verlinden (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) 171-215. Mertens remains faithful to the postmodern paradigm of pluralism but sketches several viable political scenarios. For the roots of such all-encompassing responsibility in St Augustine’s ancient idea of charity see Phillips/Taylor 21.

be assigned. In *Suicides* it was, for example, clear that the community shared a responsibility for the girls who killed themselves. Single persons might not easily free themselves from their communities to act in an ethically better way if their community opposes them. Yet, as the three literary analyses in sub-section III.iii. have shown, it is not absolutely impossible to live and act inconsistently with the general cultural and social system and its beliefs. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the power of the communicative community is decisive. Even though communicative foundationalism focuses on the self as a starting point contrary to poststructuralist positions, the self has to be understood as part of the community organizing the life of others in the end. This is why the formulation of ethical demands in a communicative foundationalist concept are in the end rather similar to those Butler develops. It is of course also due to the fact that Butler implicitly refers to an outside reference as there are values implied in her work.<sup>1097</sup>

Communicative foundationalist ethics stays close to the poststructuralist claims because respect for the other and respect for the intersubjective relation between human beings is argued for. Thus, both approaches can be described as being part of what Nancy Fraser has called the *camp fighting for recognition*.<sup>1098</sup> It has to be kept in mind that a fight for recognition in communicative foundationalist terms only regards the recognition of the other's humanity. Yet, to grant them a personal perspective which they can narrate their story from also means getting to know and appreciating their cultural and social differences.<sup>1099</sup> It even means that individuals have to merge their cultural perspectives to actually be able to influence someone else's position within communicative reality. Yet, they do not have to do so because one of those culturally influenced perspectives is superior or because both have the same right to exist. The ethical demand to get to know each other's horizons well enough to support each other communicatively is due to the demand to appreciate each other.

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<sup>1097</sup> This has been criticized by several intellectuals. Cf. Thiem, *Subjects* 208,f. See also Benhabib, *Self* 16, 203-241 for a general argument against such poststructuralist practice.

<sup>1098</sup> Fraser opposes this camp to a group seeking redistribution in the postmodern era. Cf. Nancy Fraser, "Ethical Ambivalence," Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz 95-126, 95,ff.

<sup>1099</sup> At this point it is important to remember that the postmodern relativist critique – especially in its more radical forms such as poststructuralism – has shown that it does not matter how, for example, sexual organs are *really* shaped as human beings only perceive them through their cultural and social norms.

#### IV.ii. The Significance of a Position in Discourse – Problems of Justice in the Light of Seyla Benhabib’s Communicative Ethics

It is now standard practice in moral philosophy to distinguish questions of “justice” from questions of “the good life.” Construing the first as a matter of “the right” and the second as a matter of “the good,” most philosophers align distributive justice with Kantian *Moralität* ... and recognition with Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*.... [...] Norms of justice are thought to be universally binding .... Claims for the recognition of difference, [...] involving qualitative assessments of the relative worth of different goods, ... depend on culturally and historically specific horizons of value.<sup>1100</sup>

As Nancy Fraser suggests, this differentiation between justice and ethics obfuscates the matter of ethics. Whereas philosophers stressing the first element appertain to a rationalistic view of ethics, the latter is mostly focused in approaches taking a culturally incorporated human nature as a starting point for ethical theories. It is inadequate to differentiate between justice and culturally generated values, as a notion of *justice* could never appear devoid of a specific cultural embedding. Justice with regard to a sociohistoric situation created by and among human beings must therefore always mean a cultural intersubjective responsibility with regard to the system that is creating the situation. As I have suggested in the communicative foundationalist vein, what functionally determines any human reality is in the end human nature. If there were no such higher value independent of the cultural content of a given sociohistoric reality, no standard to negotiate between two differing cultures would be available. I propose that a standard of justice can make sense only if it is understood as an intersubjective responsibility with regard to human nature. This question will be discussed with regard to Seyla Benhabib’s concept of ethics and value standards. The main sources of this discussion will be *Situating the Self* and *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*.<sup>1101</sup> Benhabib is discussing matters of rights by traversing traditional ideas of societies as closed communities.<sup>1102</sup> She still argues for a model of positive identity ascription and thus for a politics of identity. Besides her political aspirations, she supports an idea of human rights with regard to ethics and argues for the appreciation of human beings as autonomous individuals who have certain rights.<sup>1103</sup> It will become clear that such claims cannot be supported by the idea of identity.

As communicative foundationalist ethics does, Benhabib also argues for universalism in ethics. Communicative foundationalism can also be said to share her idea of “a dis-

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<sup>1100</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Ethical Ambivalence,” Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz 95-126, 97.

<sup>1101</sup> Benhabib, *Self*; Benhabib, *Critique*.

<sup>1102</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Vielfalt* 13,f, 19.

<sup>1103</sup> Cf. Benhabib’s contribution to the panel discussion in Julian Nida-Rümelin and Wolfgang Thierse, eds., *Philosophie und Politik: Jürgen Habermas und Gerhard Schröder über die “Einbeziehung des Anderen,”* *Kultur in der Diskussion* 5 (Duisburg: Klartext, 1998) 69-75 (hereafter: Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 5). For a discussion of the identity problematic in Benhabib see also Conradi, *Care* 129.

cursive, communicative concept of rationality” to some extent.<sup>1104</sup> Obviously, rationality as a human characteristic must be thought of as intersubjectively respectively interactively generated. Yet, Benhabib understands such an intersubjective rationality no longer as substantialistic or metaphysical. As argued in preceding chapters, a new idea of substantiality and metaphysics can be thought of if external realism is refused. She draws on and also exceeds Jürgen Habermas’ work when she claims to understand communicative ethics as universal, but non-rationalistic.<sup>1105</sup> Referring to Hannah Arendt’s work she formulates her aim as follows.

The nerve of my reformulation of the universalist tradition in ethics is this construction of the “moral point of view” along the model of a moral conversation .... The goal of such conversation is not consensus or unanimity (*Einstimmigkeit* or *Konsens*) but the “anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement” (*Verständigung*). [...] In ethics, the universalizability procedure, if it is understood as a reversing of perspectives and the willingness to reason from the other’s (others’) point of view, does not guarantee consent; it demonstrates the will and the readiness to seek understanding with the other and to reach some reasonable agreement in an open-ended moral conversation.<sup>1106</sup>

It remains unclear from where springs forth a right or a moral claim to be recognized as a partner in such a conversation. How does an individual know that she must finally come to some agreement with others? The mere idea of rationality as communicatively established only leads to the necessity of maintaining a group that is large enough to support one’s own point of view. With this group I must certainly come to some *agreement*, yet, I could opportunistically change to another group or try to modify the existing group. Were I determined by my initial cultural community, I could never decide to work on such an agreement, but would simply be determined to agree with them. In other words: the regulative paradigm invoked at this point seems to have no universal character.<sup>1107</sup> Additionally, it seems unclear how the individual as a being with a personality develops and how she becomes aware of herself. Without having an idea of herself it would be impossible to conceive of the idea to change to someone else’s perspective.

Benhabib reformulates the identity of the moral self and shifts the focus from a generalized other to a concrete other. She thereby argues that every human being is to be seen as a unique person with a certain history and human dispositions and needs. It is certainly

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<sup>1104</sup> Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 5 5. See also Thomas Rentsch’s critique of discourse ethics as too exclusively rationalistic in Rentsch, *Konstitution* 13-29. Still, I would agree with Benhabib that some version of rationality is necessary for a comprehensive ethical concept.

<sup>1105</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 203-241; Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 5 3-11. For the rationalistic character of Habermas’ discourse ethics see e.g. Bachmann-Medick 386,ff; 392. For further critique see e.g. Logi Gunnarsson: “Rationalism achieves neutrality by offering a justification acceptable even to a moral skeptic. ... [T]o demand that moral criticism be justified in this way distorts our view of the reasons we have.” Gunnarsson, *Sense* 216.

<sup>1106</sup> Benhabib, *Self* 9.

<sup>1107</sup> Cf. the discussion of discourse ethics in general in chapter II.ii.ii. and Benhabib, *Self* 23-67, 203-241.



true that I can only engage in an understanding of the other person's needs if I to a certain extent try to engage in her concrete life. Yet, it is still unclear why I should do so. Following her idea of a regulative paradigm, she calls on legalistic and liberal versions of ethics presupposing a "universalistic commitment to the consideration of every human individual as a being worthy of universal moral respect."<sup>1108</sup> This commitment reflects the ideal of justice, and Benhabib supposes that by being socialized into a relational identity (of for example family, nationality, or ethnicity) human beings are already engaged in it. Therefore, the ethical demands can be understood as based on the functionality of social bonds with which humans are socialized. They have to learn from the start to understand themselves as members of a group and to engage in the perspectives of other group members. To make this more than mere social behavior she keeps the universal respect for others (as moral persons) as a rational abstraction in this equation. In this way she understands ethics as something that is learned in social relationships. Contrary to communicative foundationalism it must therefore be supposed that she believes that there is a life without ethics. This becomes already clear in the way she discusses "ethical life" as a special form of life.<sup>1109</sup> Her version of communitarianism is built upon the idea that communities emerge through active participation of their members.<sup>1110</sup> She also shows that social organizations such as the family can include their own inherent injustices by discussing the role of women and their exclusion from public discourse. Thereby, she refutes the above mentioned categorical distinction between justice and the good life. Yet, it becomes increasingly unclear how a standard of justice can spring from socialization if socialization can also lead to severe injustices. In her account it is precisely the excluded women, who have developed a sense of social justice – as they were historically forced to recognize the other in a more particular framework.<sup>1111</sup> The distinction between life and ethical life gets in the way of true universalism because ethics cannot spring from thin air if it is not already inherent in life and thus in human nature.

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<sup>1108</sup> Benhabib, *Self* 10.

<sup>1109</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>1110</sup> Benhabib should not simply be identified as a communitarianist thinker, as she incorporates elements of feminism and postmodernism. She sees herself in the tradition of the critical theory of society. Cf. Benhabib, *Critique* 1.

<sup>1111</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 68-144, 148-202. For a discussion of Benhabib's concept of an embedded and situated self see Conradi, *Care* 83,ff. For the abstract universal respect see Benhabib, *Critique* 303. For the exclusion from public discourse see also Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, "Introduction: Beyond the Politics of Gender," *Feminism as Critique – Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, eds. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity, 1987) 1-15 (hereafter: Benhabib/Cornell) esp. 7-9. On a larger level of the community – the national state – she discusses injustices and social imbalances in Seyla Benhabib, "Das demokratische Projekt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung – Ein Plädoyer für institutionelle Phantasie," Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 3 48-62, 52,f; 57,f. The functionality of strategic, i.e. discriminatory action is explained in Benhabib, *Critique* 139.

If the socially communicated identity does not always lead to just situations – how can it include the value of justice? Even if justice is formulated as interactive respect, it cannot withstand critical scrutiny when cultural communities do not necessarily lead to respectful cohabitation. Even if this were the case, the question of determination would have to be brought up again. Where does the regulative paradigm of universal respect, which forms a continuum with social engagement and experience according to Benhabib, come from if it does not automatically spring from these social practices?<sup>1112</sup> She explicitly argues against an introduction of substantial values into political debates of justification.<sup>1113</sup> But if respect is not understood as a substantial value of human (communicative) existence, there is no foundation except for social and cultural identities, which can obviously differ greatly and exist in relations of injustice (understood as an imbalance of intersubjective respect). Albeit their social character such identities cannot offer a standard of ethical treatment unless ethicality is combined with a foundational understanding of the (social) nature of human beings. It is the lack of substantiality – in a communicative sense – that eliminates the possibility of actual universality in Benhabib’s work. Besides, the concept of identities is criticized strongly by poststructuralist feminism. Nancy Fraser also offers an alternative model to mediate between the two poles of human nature and rationalism in the ethical discussion. Ethics can neither be solely based on rationalistic ideals (depending on an external realism) nor can they be solely grounded in specific teleological or cultural ideas of the good life. She characterizes the usual focus on identity in communitarian or otherwise recognition-related theories as follows.

[W]hat requires recognition is group-specific cultural identity. Misrecognition consists in the depreciation of such identity by the dominant culture and the consequent damage to group members’ sense of self. Redressing this harm means demanding “recognition.” This in turn requires that group members join together to refashion their collective identity by producing a self-affirming culture of their own. Thus, on the identity model of recognition, the politics of recognition means identity politics.<sup>1114</sup>

Fraser stresses this model as deeply problematic due to the strong relation on psychic structure.

Fraser’s above quoted definition of identity politics applies to Benhabib’s understanding of ethics. She sketches a partly positive identity concept, even though she also in-

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<sup>1112</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 10, 23-67, 203-241 and see the discussion of discourse ethics in general in chapter II.ii.ii. In Benhabib, *Critique* 285 she explains the regulative paradigm of the ideal speech situation according to Habermas’ discourse ethics.

<sup>1113</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, “Das demokratische Projekt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung – Ein Plädoyer für institutionelle Phantasie,” Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 3 48-62, 61,f.

<sup>1114</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Ethical Ambivalence,” Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz 95-126, 99.

sists on a functional social ethicality.<sup>1115</sup> The idea that positive knowledge is still possible is also present in communicative foundationalism and has been formulated by other intellectuals such as Satya Mohanty as well.

[T]here is no convincing reason to believe that alterity is so absolute, the radically new future so different, that we can make no sense of it at all. ...[S]uch unyielding skepticism might ironically be based on a form of dogmatism which denies the social organization of human inquiry ....<sup>1116</sup>

At the same time Benhabib insists that an ambivalence of values exists and that the appreciation of one value automatically means the rejection of another value.<sup>1117</sup> This is actually an argument that bears resemblance to communicative foundationalist ethics, as the idea of mutual respect is obviously understood as a higher value. In other words, ethics is distinguished from moral behavior. Yet, it is still unclear where these ethics stem from for her if morality obviously does not automatically lead to such a higher standard, even though such a higher standard seems to be functionally included in cultural moral norms.<sup>1118</sup> The idea of a cultural communal identity does not have to lead to severe problems, though. A communicative foundationalist concept would understand the culturally generated personalities as communicatively substantial with reference to a human nature in which such structures are already inherent.<sup>1119</sup> Benhabib's understanding of identity does of course exclude such notions of substantiality or human nature. She talks about a "strange multiplicity" of groups that are fighting for political recognition in the name of their identities.<sup>1120</sup> She explains how identities cannot be simply constructed out of thin air, but rather have to spin a web of compatible elements – a coherent narrative.<sup>1121</sup>

Yet, it is problematic to explain such an idea of coherence without understanding narrative functions as an inherent part of human nature. Benhabib argues that national systems have to be changed so that social agents can be enabled to realize their own needs. It

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<sup>1115</sup> As was explained in the Introduction, the negative and positive postulates of being have nothing to do with the evaluative realm of human nature. These terms refer to the systematic argument of either (positively) asserting some things as realistically understandable or (negatively) asserting all things as ultimately inscrutable. This means that the negative postulation of being "puts the emphasis on the irreducible alterity that represents both a condition of possibility and a condition of impossibility of every identity." Chantal Mouffe, "Which Ethics for Democracy," Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz 85-94, 89, f. As has been argued already in part II., such negative understanding of reality always includes an inherent contradiction.

<sup>1116</sup> Mohanty, *Theory* 252, f.

<sup>1117</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, "Das demokratische Projekt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung – Ein Plädoyer für institutionelle Phantasie," Nida-Rümelin/Thierse, *Philosophie* 3 48-62, 62.

<sup>1118</sup> Cf. the discussion of moral language in chapter II.ii.iii.

<sup>1119</sup> This idea of substantiality is impossible in the framework of Benhabib as she understands life at least to some extent as externally real. This is implied when she talks about human beings as "embodied creatures" and could be understood as the reason why she holds onto the idea that social values are somehow constructed as an addition to human existence. Benhabib, *Self* 6.

<sup>1120</sup> Benhabib, *Vielfalt* 18.

<sup>1121</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 23-32.

is not understandable how a right to the realization of their own narration could be defended without defining a human nature in which such a need were apparently basic. Moreover, the neglect of such a right in others must be connected to intolerable effects in human nature to render a sound ethical claim. It must also be possible to reject identities that are construed in such a way that other personalities are at a disadvantage. Benhabib herself argues for skepticism regarding group specific legal rights, but she does not explain according to which standard such an evaluation should be carried out. Her explanation rests on recourse to the precarious standards of discourse ethics that have already been criticized in chapter II.ii.ii.<sup>1122</sup> Moreover, the identities she describes are understood as developments including a differentiation “from what one is not” and can therefore not be explained in exactly the same way as communicatively foundationalist personality structures.<sup>1123</sup> Identity (as for groups or individuals) would only be universal or foundational with regard to the functionality of the creation of such an identity (which is narrativity) and the possibility of action that it includes. Benhabib does not conceive such a foundational functionality and does not link the narrative structure of identity inherently to ethics, as she does not use the concept of a human nature. Moreover, she places too much significance on the point of view from which a story can be told. This point of view can only develop into a personal perspective if it is realized through the actual narration of a personal story. Benhabib’s individual standpoint remains too closely linked to the rationalistic and static perspective from which an argument can be formulated in discourse ethics.<sup>1124</sup> In her concept the possibility of narrating one’s own story can thus always be in conflict with others narrating their stories. Even though this is obviously also possible in a communicative foundationalist framework, this is not a situation which has to be a priori regulated by ethics. Such situations arise through the deficient realization of ethics. Everyone can perceive this deficiency, and the identities in such a situation will always be less stable than in a situation that is closer to an ethical(ly *good*) organization.<sup>1125</sup>

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<sup>1122</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Vielfalt* 28,f; 33-78; 109; 111,f; Benhabib, *Self* 23-67, 89-120, 203-241; Benhabib, *Critique* 285.

<sup>1123</sup> Seyla Benhabib, “Introduction: The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference,” *Democracy and Difference – Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1996) 3-17 (hereafter: Benhabib, *Democracy*) 3.

<sup>1124</sup> Cf. Conradi, *Care* 131-134.

<sup>1125</sup> At this point it might be helpful to explain that as ethics is linked to a balanced human nature, *ethical* and *ethically good* can be basically understood to be the same thing. Both notions refer to a situation that adequately adheres to the ethics inherent in human nature.

Benhabib defends a society in which multiple ideals of morality, i.e. different versions of the good life, compete.<sup>1126</sup> The aim of such an approach is the maintenance of plurality through a regulative ideal that best allows for high diversity. Communicative foundationalism on the other hand does not argue for diversity on the level of cultural and social content. Rather, such a diversity is understood as a given. As communicative realities are always produced by human beings socialized in different environments and also by different parts of a given environment, total harmony cannot be judged as a realistic goal. Yet, the aim of communicative foundationalist ethics is to realize the highest possible amount of harmony – which is understood in terms of homogenization. A communicative foundationalist approach states that this tendency towards harmony is inherent in human nature.<sup>1127</sup> There is only one foundational version of the good life and it is a coexistence that enables every member to tell her story from a first-person position – a harmony of narrative perspectives. Third world women have for example challenged the view that there is a universal experience of womanhood.<sup>1128</sup> According to communicative foundationalism it is of course impossible to think of such a generalizable and collectively shared experience that is in some way connected to external (i.e. biological) characteristics of being a woman. Nevertheless, already the lively discourse of feminism shows that there are some elements of communicative reality that all those human beings who define themselves as women share. If women from different cultural and social contexts challenge this assumption, it is obvious that they still share some of the elements of cultural reality (for example the way in which their bodies are rendered meaningful). Otherwise they would not even think of themselves as women. It would make no sense to challenge the discourse, let's say, about white western women if third world women would understand themselves as completely different, that is, *as non-women*.

Such developments are no signs of the failure of universal concepts. On the contrary, this example shows that the respective human beings have an interest in defining themselves as part of a particular group. Their interest in being able to do this is so strong that they engage in adding their own threads of narration to the already existing narration of womanhood. They want to be part of the communicative community and they want to be

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<sup>1126</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," Benhabib, *Democracy* 67-93.

<sup>1127</sup> The question why such a diversity of communicative realities has developed in the first place can obviously not be answered. Communicative foundationalist ethics can never find out about its own generation (nor about its *dehors*). The same conundrum occurs in the analysis of world-wide language development. It is unclear why and how so many different and complex languages have developed, while it seems to be clear that the existing languages have a tendency to become standardized and to merge with each other.

<sup>1128</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, "Introduction: Beyond the Politics of Gender," Benhabib/Cornell 1-15, 13.

able to influence the identities that will influence them – respectively the reality that defines their lives. The identity of a white western woman is not important from a communicative point of view. It does not matter whether this identity prevails or whether the specific identity of black third world woman is added to public discourse. The only ethically relevant fact is that all women (and men) must be allowed to form their narrations from a first-person point of view. In the end it is not the diversity or homogeneity that matters, it is the narrative harmony. Still, true narrative harmony implies certain homogeneity in personality and concepts of reality as the horizons of the participants in communication must be fused. Following Hans-Georg Gadamer Benhabib rightly asserts that “[u]nderstanding always involves understanding from *within* a framework which makes sense for us.”<sup>1129</sup> Mutual understanding, which is the basis of mutual respect and appreciation, will therefore eventually lead to less diverse concepts of reality and identity. Without such a foundationalist basis, Benhabib’s approach must necessarily be reduced to a pure description of the structures of autonomy and rationality, which cannot be used for an evaluation. The mere existence of a structure does not allow for the conclusion that things should be organized according to this structure. Benhabib is actually concluding exactly this when she argues in accordance to discourse theory’s paradigm that one has to accept (and therefore grant) the rules of equal communication the moment one enters a specific process of communicative action.

The experience of becoming an “I” necessarily entails the experience of learning to distinguish one’s perspective from that of others, and this entails learning to see how the world might look through the eyes of the other. It is essential ... that one reaches one’s perspective only as a result of the cognitive and moral process which teaches one also to recognize the presence of other perspectives in the world.<sup>1130</sup>

It is certainly true that knowing oneself and knowing others are connected activities. Nevertheless, the concept of an individual personality has to be established *before* regarding any others. Moreover, a certain engagement with oneself is necessary to establish a point of view from which one can look at anything. This means that the individual personality is clearly constructed by the introduction to communicative reality. Only when this process of construction has been realized to a certain extent can real engagement with others follow. The rational realization of ethics, i.e. the understanding how others *ought* to be treated, is a process of abstraction that can only be accomplished by sufficiently developed personalities. The respective feelings can of course be sensed from the beginning provided that one is socialized according to the human ethical nature – otherwise the feelings

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<sup>1129</sup> Benhabib, Critique x. This assessment is originally meant to refer to transhistorical understanding.

<sup>1130</sup> Ibid. 141; see also ibid. 333,f.

will amount to misery and an uncertain unconscious premonition that one has been mistreated. However, the effect of subjective consciousness must be created *before* one can abstract from it. It certainly is created by establishing social and cultural content, yet, the realization of one's own personality through these social and cultural roles certainly comes before becoming aware that roles could be changed or altered and thereby realizing that there are other persons behind the available role models. The change of perspective – the possibility of changing one's mind autonomously – can thus be sensibly linked to the idea of alternative social role models.<sup>1131</sup>

Autonomous change would require rational knowledge about oneself as a personality. Therefore, the realization of the other requires the ability to rationally abstract from social and cultural roles and the attached social and cultural feelings and a certain education.<sup>1132</sup> Becoming an “I” only automatically entails the understanding of the other if the respective personality is rationally penetrated. This has become clear through the literary analysis of the narrators in *Surfacing* as well as *Suicides*. Additionally, the Lisbon girls are a good example of individuals who have not been socialized and treated according to human ethics. They cannot really understand their communicative environment's responsibility for their own predicament, as they are not provided with a balanced personality by exactly this environment. The impossibility of narrating their own story due to the fact that they are not appreciated as persons entails the impossibility of understanding themselves and of seeing others as responsible persons. In the end, their aggression or unconscious feeling of being mistreated is not directed against the others who have caused their predicament. It is directed against themselves because they have not yet penetrated their own individuality to get to the understanding of others. Their own horizon (as it is only deficiently connected to the communicative reality they have to share, i.e. not allowing for their influence) is the horizon in which they are trapped. The narrators of their story are unable to understand their own responsibility precisely as they have not fully rationally penetrated their own condition of intersubjective existence. Otherwise they would be able to understand the other, in this case the Lisbon girls. The anonymous female narrator of *Surfacing* reveals a proper ability to interact with other human beings only *after* she has realized that she is not some diffuse part of the natural order. Only when she understands that she is an individual

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<sup>1131</sup> As discussed above within the chapter regarding the postmodern individual, the idea of different social roles was first systematized by Berger. Cf. Manfred Prisching, “Der soziologische Gastgeber,” Prisching, *Gesellschaft* 23-70.

<sup>1132</sup> I hereby focus on an ability to abstract from cultural and social content that is rejected by Benhabib in favor of a complete *dialogization* of rationality. Cf. Benhabib, *Critique* 333.

capable of acting and having an effect on (communicative) reality does she see her boyfriend as a human being as well.

In conclusion it can be stated that the formation of a position in discourse is prior to the actual engagement in communication. Once an individual has been introduced to a specific cultural and social discourse, she will learn to behave and react to the actions of others *normally*. Part of this normality is to take in the statements of others as part of one's concept of reality.<sup>1133</sup> This clarifies that the external information is first integrated into a version of a self. From this established self it might later be used as evidence for the existence of others and their positions in and effects on reality. Only a rationally and emotionally educated individual will be able to engage in communication in such a way as to understand any other (as far as possible) and respect their needs. Besides, forming individuality will have a morally binding factor, as human beings are bound to their ethical nature. They will either be emotionally or rationally impaired if they are not allowed to develop their rational and emotional faculties according to ethics. However, they might not fully understand and thus might not be able to change their situation, once they are such impaired or unbalanced individuals. Therefore, even if socialization does not lead to harmony, one can still conceive of a notion of mutual respect that should be present and thus of a notion of intersubjective *justice*. To apply all the well-thought out rules formulated by Seyla Benhabib in her communicative ethics, the establishment of the communicative situation must be guaranteed. Thus, the problem of a position in that discourse must be tackled in a more metaphysical way. Intersubjective objectivity to such an ideal situation must be related to something deeper than various forms of interactive relations that might or might not appear between human beings in different societies at different times. Justice is obviously relative to a sociohistorical (human) framework. Yet, if the possibility of not being in a sociohistorical framework is absent, there is no need to understand justice in a normatively relativistic sense.<sup>1134</sup>

Absolute autonomy has become impossible, but as Benhabib insists from the idea of an intersubjectively established individual, the idea of socially and culturally established autonomy is still viable. The program of communicative ethics already attempts to justify a non-relative standpoint without falling back to the idea of foundations.<sup>1135</sup> As I have ar-

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<sup>1133</sup> Cf. Dummett, *Wahrheit* 52.

<sup>1134</sup> What is aspired here could be called a version of descriptive relativism. Cf. Chris Swoyer, "Relativism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/> (25.03.2009).

<sup>1135</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Critique* 279-353. See also David Parker's description of Benhabib's ethics as taking up the issue with regard to the Habermas/Gadamer debate: David Parker, "Introduction: the turn to ethics in the 1990s," *Adamson/Freadman/Parker* 1-17, 16.



gued, this is impossible as the idea of (communicative) foundations is indispensable to ethics. The discussion of subjectivity and a position in discourse have already shown the disadvantages of pursuing such a project without foundations. The discussion of autonomy is a further example. We must hold on to an individual as rationally understanding herself.<sup>1136</sup> Especially after the postmodern critique it is most difficult to differentiate between what is happening to a person and her social environment and what is a single individual's doing. Still, it seems to be vital to try to uphold this difference and thereby uphold an idea of autonomy or freedom of action.<sup>1137</sup> Otherwise intersubjective interaction could only be properly described instrumentally. Intellectual coherence (construed with regard to the communicative version of reality) has to be understood as the wish to behave consistently related to the rational abilities of human beings.<sup>1138</sup> Otherwise the act of deliberate insincerity could for example not be described.<sup>1139</sup> It would of course also be impossible to describe it as possibly immoral – as the other human beings would only be instrumentally conceived objects in a subjective game. Yet, it cannot really be rationally reconstructed at all, as an individual could not be distinguished as acting autonomously. To have a meaningful idea of interaction that can be evaluated against a paradigm the ideas of communicative (i.e. socially and culturally generated) autonomy and to a certain extent solitary individuals is indispensable.

I absolutely agree with Benhabib and the tradition of communicative or discourse ethics in this respect. Yet, it remains difficult to argue that the autonomy of others *ought* to be respected without a foundation other than the description of dialogical realities (either rationally or culturally-bounded).

[T]he discourse theory of ethics ... cannot limit the scope of the *moral conversation* ...; it views the moral conversation as potentially including all of *humanity*. [...] I respect the moral worth of the other by recognizing that I must provide ... her with a justification for my actions. We are all potential participants in such conversations of justification.<sup>1140</sup>

The autonomy of the other as an individual and as a human being is still disrespected, if one merely gives her justifications for one's actions. It is important to realize the other as a concrete other and to understand her needs as well as her social and cultural position, as Benhabib argues. Thereby, it might be indispensable to be theoretically able to justify

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<sup>1136</sup> Cf. Benhabib, Critique 243,f.

<sup>1137</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 20. For a general discussion of this philosophical problem with regard to Kant see Nagel, Fragen 83-109.

<sup>1138</sup> Cf. Tugendhat, Vorlesungen 22.

<sup>1139</sup> For a discussion of insincerity see for example Mitchell Green, "Speech Acts," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/speech-acts/> (2.4.2009).

<sup>1140</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (intr. and ed. Robert Post) (Oxford, NY.: Oxford UP, 2004) 18 (hereafter: Benhabib, *Cosmopolitanism*).

one's actions to the other, as it is an action that takes into account what would count as justification for her. Yet, to allow for her as a narrator from a first-person position it is not absolutely necessary to do so. If I actually engage with others and try to penetrate their cultural and social content of individuality this layer of content is only relevant for a better communication. My justification in terms of my own individuality might not make any sense at all to the other.

If I were fundamentally religious and tried to argue on the basis of God's will why I wanted my partner in conversation to dress differently, this would open up a dialog. Yet, this dialog could not be resolved. Benhabib argues that such a dialog should have transformatory character. How could this character be established? As the analysis of *Handmaid* has shown, even though Offred was given a new position as an individual (object) in the Republic of Gilead, her whole personality was not appreciated. The actions of the new regime were even justified with regard to religion as well as to natural and social needs. Benhabib describes the process of moral justification as open-ended and highlights the dilemma of the exclusion of outsiders from a nation, if the formation of a nation is to be justified. She talks about the tensions resulting between duties to the community and duties to humanity.<sup>1141</sup> Yet, Offred is not a foreigner, but she does not want the identity of woman that is offered to her in Gilead. The allegiance to her community as a woman is a responsibility that confines her, as the allegiance to her new family and nation does. Still, her new identity must be defined as an immoral confinement. How can this character of a moral agent and fully autonomous subject be justified?

It is apparent that even though the regime mistreats her, the members of the government have created a bounded group that supplies them with enough appreciation for immediate survival. They even want to appreciate their female citizens, yet they have their own idea of how womanhood should be appreciated. To show that this contradicts the ideal conditions of a conversational situation (and that thereby the individuals are contradicting themselves) the ideal standard has to exist already. It is thus implied as a universal human condition – a human nature, which is denied as a foundation by Benhabib and other discourse ethicists. Communicative foundationalist ethics is – at least to a functional extent – the engagement in a new metanarrative about humanity. A situation of inequality can only be judged as unjust if a standard of justice exists in human nature. In communicative foundationalist ethics it can be argued in favor of a justice of equal respect of each other as first-person narrators. Other standards, for example, of the redistribution of goods can only

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<sup>1141</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Cosmopolitanism* 19.

be inferred. Yet, even for such a minimal notion of ethics a foundation of evaluation has to exist within the description of communicative reality. A justification that could rationally transform someone else's perspective would have to be a justification relating to such a universal human nature. Such a means is still partially open to Offred, because she has once enjoyed communicative reinforcement of her personality. She can therefore still formulate rational demands although she is not sure about her feelings any longer. Obviously, the decision to narrate her story is neither a purely rational decision, nor does she communicate to the reader in an exclusively rational manner. The same could be said for her communication with others in her story. Yet, the injustice of the regime and the society it has created is addressed on several levels, even though Offred is not emotionally decided enough to openly rebel.

The appeal to such a standard of justice has nothing to do with the cultural and social substance of her personality. Only the structure that was installed by socialization is crucial. At the same time, a predisposition to rational and emotional abilities has to be assumed, since the true understanding of ethics would otherwise rely on coincidence.<sup>1142</sup> Benhabib states that the "evolution of cosmopolitan norms ... have [sic] caught most liberal democracies within a network of obligations to recognize certain rights claims."<sup>1143</sup> Yet, this evolution of a body of rights that transcends actual communicative situations and that is supposed to be valid in every situation of humanity can only rely on a foundational notion of humaneness. Following Ernst Tugendhat I would argue that discursive versions of ethics wrongfully use such a notion of universality even though Benhabib for example explicitly states the loss of a last certainty.<sup>1144</sup> Yet, as has been argued she could not come to the universalist conclusions without such a supposition. Still, as communicative foundationalist ethics also uses such a notion – which is properly justified – the similarities in general moral arguments must necessarily be greater than the differences. Especially Seyla Benhabib's notion of communicative ethics and her arguments for human rights are similar to how a communicative foundationalist ethics would eventually evolve abstractions that could be applied to politics respectively political philosophy. The idea of creating an ethical situation that does not necessarily lead to actual consensus is also a notion that suits communicative foundationalism well. It is unclear whether a perfect state of harmony can be reached even temporarily at any given point in history. Though, to grant each individual

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<sup>1142</sup> As rational argument and a practice of justification have become part of social and cultural realities of all times, this cannot be the case.

<sup>1143</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Cosmopolitanism* 36.

<sup>1144</sup> Cf. chapter II.ii.ii.; Benhabib, *Self* 68-87.

her personality from which she can narrate her story can be described as an ethical situation. Communicative foundationalism does assume a greater tendency to homogeneity and would suppose an eventual evolution in this direction. In order to install ethics it is nevertheless initially enough to rearrange the speakers' positions. The most striking differences are probably communicative foundationalism's neutrality facing cultural and social identities and the significance of communicative reality as the only relevant reality for human beings.

These differences mark the poststructuralist legacy in communicative foundationalist ethics. Even though one could abstract from the universal ethical functionality in the same way that Benhabib argues for political purposes, the situation of the communicative foundationalist individual in relation to her group is decidedly more complex than in communicative ethics. My description of intersubjective reality rather resembles Butler's concept of ethics, even though I employ Benhabib's focus on narrativity. Still, I do not focus on actual dialogs in which individuals argue for solutions of moral problems, but focus rather on the narrativity of existence. For communicative foundationalist ethics it is important to give each human being the chance to build a personality in order to tell her own story. This is understood as a tool of survival rather than a means of ethical negotiation. Therefore, a narrative structure of reality is assessed that does not exist in Benhabib's version of discourse ethics. Moreover, communication is not confined to actual linguistic exchange, but is supposed to encompass all communicative gestures of human beings. Communicative foundationalist ethics is discussing a mode of life, a communicative human nature, whereas Benhabib is arguing for a discursive understanding of ethical negotiations. These ethical negotiations encompass questions of justice (rational questions of action) and questions of the good life (i.e. intersubjective justice), but do not encompass all of human existence. Moreover, they are not understood as narrative existence, but as argumentative exchange. Participating in the narrative construction of reality does not mean participating in one or more public discourses but first and foremost having a voice or having a position that allows for a perspective.<sup>1145</sup> Giving each other such a voice is not motivated by the cultural or social values that might be at stake in any discourse, but by the inherent feeling of ethics that can be rationally penetrated to lead to ethical understanding. As the construction, perception, and realization of the individual's own perspective come first in the process of communication, it is indispensable that she can understand ethics from this perspective before mistreating or treating others well. The concept to understand ethics must exist

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<sup>1145</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 68-87. Communicative devices – other than linguistic – must also be interpreted as complimentary to a narrative. See *ibid.* 89-119 for her idea of public discourse.

to be able to interpret interaction in such a way, whereas the true realization can only be established when such actual interaction takes place.

Rational abstraction thus does not include the deliberation of the universal law that could be valid for all rational creatures. Rather it is an immersion into one's own human nature that already holds the answer. It is recognition instead of creation, even though the recognition creates knowledge in each individual anew as she experiences this process of abstraction. The conscious ethical knowledge pertains to all situations in which human beings interact. There are no special ethical situations or ethical parts of life. I am responsible for everybody else, as these others are responsible for me – whenever we are in contact. As human beings live in intersubjective realities, they are never alone and therefore always responsible for some partners of communicative interaction. The question of ethics is always the first and deepest question of every situation. The negotiation of cultural and social norms can only be evaluated ethically through abstraction with regard to the content of these norms. Benhabib actually criticizes contractualist and other theories for presupposing an understanding of the human being as it is. The presupposed existence is strongly modeled on male characteristics and excludes a notion of education in her view. She argues for the inclusion of more female characteristics such as narrativity and relatedness and suggests the notion of the concrete other.<sup>1146</sup> Communicative foundationalist ethics rather insists on the utility of the notion of a generalized or abstract human being, yet, formulates it modeled after the relatedness and narrativity that cannot be denied after the postmodern relativist critique. The literary analyses have shown that such an abstract notion of the individual applies to the description of human reality. Additionally, the combination of feelings and reason as well as an inherent ethics is accepted to be part even in an abstract sense of human existence. Even though ethics obligates us to engage in the concrete individuality of the other, the functionality of individual personality can be understood in abstract terms as narrative perspective and position. This is humaneness – it only exists in individual terms. Although I do not owe others appreciation because we always exist in concrete situations in which our cultural and social histories play an important role, I do however owe them appreciation because of the ethical claim that is linked to my (abstract) humaneness.

It must be conceded that communicative foundationalist ethics only delivers such abstract explanations on the rational level of existence. Ethics are nevertheless also valid, when the agents have not understood a situation on this level. They will know that something is wrong on the emotional level, as ethics is inherent to their existence. The narrators

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<sup>1146</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 148-176.

of Suicides are again a good example for such emotional ethical realization. The fact that they were in concrete situations with the Lisbon girls is not decisive for their ethical responsibility. To realize this responsibility they would have had to engage in the girls' concrete histories to be able to appreciate them. Yet, the reason for their responsibility lies on the level of general human feelings and rationality. They can only reach a harmonious balance if the inherent ethics is heeded. Therefore, the generalized perspective on human beings (first on the self, then on the other) is necessary to describe and understand ethics and human existence. The cultural and social content of specific identities is only relevant on the level of the realization of the ethical claim, not on the level of understanding or justifying it. I obviously agree with Benhabib in stating that to actually appreciate the other as an individual I have to act from my specific individual perspective considering her specific individual perspective. It is impossible to try to adopt her perspective by abstracting from the concrete situation, as her perspective only exists within this concrete situation. Moreover, I, as the individual that acts towards her, only exist in this concrete situation in which I meet her as well. Cal's educative course of action in *Middlesex* exemplifies this. To fight for his perspective in life, he first has to identify with this perspective and accept it completely. Afterwards, the mediation between himself and others can be approached by narrating a story that firmly installs him in the existing lifeworld. When his family, and later, his lover accept him, the ethical claim is realized within these concrete situations. The realization is thus not a question of arguing but a question of adapting the narrations of reality so that they can fit.

At the same time, Cal and his communicative environment have to feel secure about their identities. If Cal had not assumed his identity to be determined – this determination has to be understood in intersubjective terms – he would never have been shocked or depressed about his environment's disrespect. Even though communicative identities are not unchangeable, they are real and secure for the persons adopting them at a given moment. This need is also important for motivation and is aptly expressed in the following quote.

As if one tiny choice by someone unimportant could make that much difference! History had to be a bit tougher than that. It all sprang back eventually, didn't it? He was sure he'd read something, somewhere. If it wasn't like that, no one would ever dare do *anything*.<sup>1147</sup>

A positive identity is therefore indispensable for any understanding of intersubjectively autonomous acts. Yet, Nancy Fraser describes problems in such a concept.

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<sup>1147</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Going Postal* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2005) 77.

Construing misrecognition in terms of damaged identity, [this model] stresses psychic structure over social institutions and social interaction. [...]t puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to group culture.<sup>1148</sup>

Fraser points out that such a model runs the risk of seeing identity as essentialist and too simple, of ignoring the transcultural interfaces, and of supporting power imbalances within social and cultural groups. Indeed, Benhabib's concept of communicative ethics displays a problematic employment of the term *identity*. She understands individuals always as concrete individuals, preferably having a comprehensive view of their own history and thus being able to act autonomously and rationally. It certainly is true that everybody has some position in discourse and therefore some sort of identity respectively personality from the moment on in which he is addressed. Yet, it is equally true, that this identity can include ethical injustices. If a philosophical concept only views people in terms of identities, and negotiates their rights from this perspective, possible different personalities can be oppressed from the start. Communicative foundationalist ethics have the advantage that they argue for individual personalities only in functional terms. Benhabib assumes such abstraction through the universal paradigm of ethics she cannot defend on the grounds on which she bases her theory. Another level of contradiction is thus revealed. Despite certain ambiguities in Fraser's approach, she correctly highlights the fact that social esteem cannot justly be claimed by everyone. Ethics can only ensure functional emotional and rational existence through narration. Ensuingly, an individual personality is built; yet, the social and cultural content and the way certain elements are esteemed in a certain society are no ethical matters.<sup>1149</sup>

As we have seen, equality can be derived as a fundamental characteristic of social communication. Once the importance of equality is set, this basically ethical consideration can be used for a (re)shaping of political discourse.<sup>1150</sup> From a theoretical point of view, this setting of the base of any moral argument is most important, because starting from postmodern critique without it, any argument can then be reduced deconstructively with regard to the system it promotes and the question of the system's legitimacy. Such a deconstruction can be adequate to oppose conservative political reasoning that tries to hide the

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<sup>1148</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Ethical Ambivalence," Garber/Hanssen/Walkowitz 95-126, 100.

<sup>1149</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 105. Although I also treat recognition (in Fraser's terms) respectively appreciation (in my terms) as a matter of (intersubjective) justice, I have argued for a substantial foundation for such an ethical claim. In Fraser's status model, deontology is claimed without a secure foundation. Cf. *ibid.* 104, 112-118. With regard to esteem and deducing from ethics one could argue that the same actions and achievements should be equally esteemed, no matter who achieved them. Yet, this would be a moral argument in relation to the feelings and appreciation of the respective personality and not an argument related to social esteem as a just ethical or even moral claim.

<sup>1150</sup> As the idea of democracy is based on an assumption of equal rights for all, it must obviously be acknowledged that this principle has already been used in political discourse.

nature of its underlying system. Its intention is to protect and conserve the existing power structures, the existing governance circumstances, and the existing distribution of property.<sup>1151</sup> Yet, when such reasoning is used to dissolve morality itself, it becomes a counter-productive tendency. Total relativity also challenges the operator and her means of critique. Whereas it is necessary in a postmodern environment to put these two elements in question to a certain extent, their absolute negation leaves nothing to change the existing circumstances (be they political or otherwise characterized).

Indem sie den Abschied von kritischer Vernunft, strukturierender Analyse, veränderndem Handeln und politischer Perspektive betrieb und das bestehende mittels Dekors in seiner Fragwürdigkeit zu verschleiern, in seiner Faktizität aber zu befestigen wusste, leistete die Postmoderne einen nützlichen Herrschaftsdienst.<sup>1152</sup>

If the democratic basis of equality can be put on firm ethical grounds, arguments transporting the democratic ideal can be used in a revolutionary gesture to truly oppose the inequality promoted by conservative tendencies.<sup>1153</sup> Benhabib is one of the theorists who challenge the idea of radical relativity. She tries to maintain a view of reality, the individual, and identity that is to some extent positively defined. Yet, as has been clarified, such positive assertions are only justifiable through the idea of a secure foundation. Additionally, communicative foundationalist's functional concept of individual personalities allows for a less problematic explanation of ethics.

#### **IV.iii. Inherent Judgment vs. Ethical Consideration: Different Levels of Normative Evaluation**

Already the first discourse ethicists have thought of different levels of evaluation for values that are conveyed through cultural and social traditions and values that pertain to the universal realm of transhistorical and transcultural ethics. As Karl-Otto Apel has shown,

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<sup>1151</sup> For an overview of conservative politics and its characteristics see Klaus Fritzsche, "Konservatismus: Entwürfe zur Sicherung sozialer Herrschaft," *Handbuch: Politische Theorien und Ideologien* Band I, ed. Franz Neumann (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998) 267-318. Fritzsche summarizes the core of conservative theories as follows: "Alle diese Ansätze eignen sich dazu, die Ungleichheit in der Gesellschaft und den allgemeinen Vorzug der Ordnung vor der Freiheit als notwendig zu erklären." Ibid. 305.

<sup>1152</sup> Ibid. 301.

<sup>1153</sup> For a well informed political and juridical application of the democratic ideal on the economic market system with the formulation of democratic economic rights see Christian Barrère, "Defining Economic Democracy: A Challenge. An Institutional Framework," *Democracy, Freedom and Coercion*, eds. Alain Marciano and Jean-Michel Josselin (Cheltenham and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2006) 69-102.



such a concept is not necessarily inconsistent.<sup>1154</sup> Yet, communicative foundationalism would insist that there must be a *compelling* reason to act ethically, once rational (and *emotional*) insight into ethics has been achieved. It cannot be supposed that rational understanding alone would make a person act ethically, even though this would mean that she understood that she was behaving contrary to reasonable standards of argumentation. Contradiction alone cannot be used as an argument for ethics as it is done by rationalist discourse ethicists. Besides, the problems of refusing discourse and deliberate irrational acts are not really conceivable in communicative foundationalist ethics.<sup>1155</sup> Existence is thought of as truly intersubjective in communicative foundationalism and not as the communicative cohabitation of rational beings. Moreover, the differentiation in communicative foundationalist ethics also differs from the traditional levels of morality and ethics in antiquity.<sup>1156</sup> After the postmodern relativist critique it is impossible to differentiate social and individual levels of morality, as the individual is always already socially subjectivated. Still, in the beginning of this thesis I have declared to follow Ernst Tugendhat in understanding ethics as the philosophical thought and discipline (moral philosophy) about what ought to be done, whereas morality is supposed to describe the practical everyday level of action.<sup>1157</sup> It has become clear by now that these levels cannot be described by assuming a neutral and objective access to the reality of everyday life. It is through an intrinsic abstraction from cultural intersubjective existence – in which cultural and social judgments take place – that individuals can reach their inner nature and access the inherent ethical functionalities of their existence.

Whereas judgment on the sociohistoric level is always culturally mediated and thereby inherent in the individual personalities caused by this very culture, the functionalities of human nature are a secure framework. In this way, they can serve as an *external* standard for the cultural content of human existence. Obviously, this standard is not actually external but rather the condition of the content, yet, still rationally separable from it. Morality is thus *encultured* (concrete) ethical nature.

[D]ie Moralphilosophie [sucht] einen Maßstab für Maßstäbe, also einen moralischen Maßstab zweiter Stufe. Um ihn zu gewinnen, klärt sie zunächst einmal die entscheidenden Begriffe und die logische Struktur einer Moralbegründung, was eine dritte Diskursstufe ausmacht und ‘Metaethik’ ge-

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<sup>1154</sup> Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, “Praktische Philosophie als Diskurs- und Verantwortungsethik,” Apel/Hösle/Simon-Schäfer 49-74; 63,ff. The differentiation between levels of evaluation is typical for discourse or communicative ethics. Cf. Conradi, Care 205.

<sup>1155</sup> Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, “Praktische Philosophie als Diskurs- und Verantwortungsethik,” Apel/Hösle/Simon-Schäfer 49-74; 63,ff. 69.

<sup>1156</sup> Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 18-20.

<sup>1157</sup> Otfried Höffe also suggests such a differentiation. Cf. *ibid.* 21.

nannt wird. Dieser Ausdruck ist ... missverständlich, da der Metadiskurs zur philosophischen Ethik unverzichtbar hinzugehört.<sup>1158</sup>

Ethical discourse always already consists of these different levels of meaning, and it has been argued in part I. that all philosophical and moral argumentation also refers to such a meta-level. Without a meta-level a moral norm cannot execute the implied claim for universal validity. Without this claim a norm loses the specific moral character with regard to what is morally *good* and what *ought* to be done in a world of plural cultural and social norms. The ethical level cannot be understood as a cultural product among others.<sup>1159</sup> Ethics are the functional system realized in morality as it is generated by human individuals.

As individuals intersubjectively interact through personalities, that is to say personal narratives, their perspectives can be judged to be stable in concrete sociohistorical situations, even though they are changeable through social, cultural, and temporal developments. Persons do have confidence in their identity and autonomy, even though this confidence depends on their communicative environment.

Confidence in the depth and substantiality, the “reality,” of one’s world, and one’s way of living in it, and thus of one’s self, is ... not a natural given, but a social, cultural, and psychological achievement, recurrently threatened, occasionally destroyed.<sup>1160</sup>

Clifford Geertz argues that, in understanding the world human beings create and are created through rituals, which are “modes of being-in-the-world, forms of life” and can thus be understood as the communicative reality so far described in this study.<sup>1161</sup> Underlying functional quasi natural laws form cultural and social identificatory rituals realized by communicative actions. These communicative laws (as communicative reality is the only decisive reality for human beings it can as well be called *natural*) are inherent in the communicative nature of human beings.

It is true that there always is a choice in the end.<sup>1162</sup> It is also true that there might be human beings, who decide against ethical behavior, even though they have rationally and emotionally gained insight into the inherent ethics of their nature. The emotional insight in these cases must have been negative, and these individuals will certainly be destabilized. They must have undergone serious destabilizing experiences in their communica-

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<sup>1158</sup> Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 21.

<sup>1159</sup> Moral consciousness is often interpreted as a cultural achievement. Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 39.

<sup>1160</sup> Clifford Geertz, “‘To Exist Is to Have Confidence in One’s Way of Being’: Rituals as Model Systems,” Creager/Lunbeck/Wise 212-224, 220.

<sup>1161</sup> *Ibid.* 221.

<sup>1162</sup> Alain Badiou has described the philosophical situation as a situation in which we make a choice about our mode of existence and our mode of thinking. Cf. Alain Badiou, “Das Ereignis denken,” *Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek: Philosophie und Aktualität – ein Streitgespräch*, ed. Peter Engelmann (Wien: Passagen, 2005) 15-49; 18.

tive community to decide against enabling themselves to develop self-respect and self-love and thereby confidence in a personal identity. Self-respect undoubtedly depends on the respect of others. First, others must have communicated the notion, and then must have enabled the personal perspective of an individual so that she could have narrated her position in such a way as to develop self-respect. Moreover, even though one might develop self-respect it is vital that this notion and the related version of reality are appreciated by the community. An individual might find a partial community to back up a certain version. Yet, if she has fully understood human nature, she also knows that her version might be challenged and destroyed by others. Therefore, these others will always be a potential destabilizing threat to her. In addition, she will know when she has wrongly denied someone else ethical treatment and reinforcement of the respective version of reality and narrator's position. This knowledge will always haunt and destabilize her, unless the respective person's version of reality precluded ethical behavior in general.<sup>1163</sup>

Acting against their nature will not lead to a stable and satisfied existence in the long run. Sooner or later the presence of those denied an active narrator's role in the communicative community will close in on those who have wrongly excluded them. It is important to keep in mind that in a globalized world the communicative community potentially comprehends all human beings. Hence, all human beings potentially possess the power to change the global situation. None of them exists outside of the communicatively established network of power and none of the culturally and socially established power systems are extraneous to communicative power. Acting against those communicative laws that enable the development of a stable identity deprives an individual of her power to influence the communicative reality, respectively the part of communicative reality she is involved in. Acting in self-denial can only be a sign of disharmony.<sup>1164</sup> Without a secure identity no control over feelings or actions can be gained. One will sooner or later be a negative influence to others and will be unconsciously aware of it and will thus be further destabilized. The anonymous female narrator in *Surfacing* is an example of such a development. For some time she tries to act in self-denial, as she assumes to have an identity that is dissolved in nature.<sup>1165</sup> She nevertheless hurts her boyfriend in this state of self-denial and

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<sup>1163</sup> A corresponding notion of violent consciousness as the internalized cultural norms is developed and criticized in postmodern relativist theories, especially poststructuralism. It is correct to oppose such internalized bonds to specific cultural norms that might in the end exclude others from ethical treatment.

<sup>1164</sup> Self-denial in this sense does not include actions that deny only certain parts of group identities, as that would be an affirmative act toward an alternative identity.

<sup>1165</sup> This is not even an act of absolute self-denial as identity is not completely cast off. Communicative foundationalism assumes that it is not possible to entirely cast off identity, as the mere presence in reality entails some place in the ongoing narrations. Yet, autism might have to be interpreted as a borderline case; a coma

that leads to regret even though she does not feel consciously responsible for her acts during this period.

Through such laws an idea of social or intersubjective objectivity is established. It is important to understand that relativity can be interpreted as the reverse side of the project of a strict and universally valid philosophical justification of ethics.<sup>1166</sup> When relativity is relativized, respectively put into (social) perspective, it cannot challenge universality any longer – at least not if this objectivity is understood in an intersubjective natural way.

[W]e can retrieve neither a pure ethical desire to extend ourselves and respond well to others nor a pure ethical demand others make. Nonetheless, even if desires as well as demands are always socially mediated and conditioned, neither the responsiveness nor the demands, insofar as they carry ethical valence, are reducible to their social conditions. In other words, ... responsibility and the ethical claims of responding well to others are not simply reducible to internalized and moralized social demands in relation to which one becomes accountable and has to justify one's actions but that there is an ethical dimension that we can rethink at an angle to social normalization by approaching responsibility as a question of responding to others and of being in relations with others.<sup>1167</sup>

As has been argued, the idea of an ethical dimension has to be founded or (communicatively) naturalized to be maintained. Without such a foundation social critique would be ultimately unthinkable.<sup>1168</sup> Yet, social critique, evaluation, and even a specifically ethical discourse (as well on the general level discussed in chapter II.i.vi. as on a philosophical respectively theoretical level) do exist and thus must be conceivable. Therefore, the concept of such a foundation must exist. Where would it spring from if not from the way in which human beings communicate? To accept this concept fully, a few additional ideas have to be considered. The level of meaning and the level of truth of statements cannot be clearly distinguished.<sup>1169</sup> Moreover, the evaluative or meaningful part of human existence cannot be distinguished from any pure or rationally objective perception.<sup>1170</sup> Therefore, the universal standard of evaluation has to exist within communicative nature but cannot be involved in the actual moral content.

Communicative foundationalist ethics thus focuses on ethical principles and conceives of a foundation or justification. The abstraction to a ground on which moral practice can be privilegedly compared with other social practices is needed to account for and to justify the social criticism that is rendered in western societies.<sup>1171</sup> It is also needed to de-

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certainly presents such a case. Such cases will be briefly discussed in the following chapters, yet, they must count as exceptions.

<sup>1166</sup> Cf. Wolf/Schaber 20.

<sup>1167</sup> Thiem, Subjects 6.

<sup>1168</sup> Cf. Baynes, Grounds 8.

<sup>1169</sup> Cf. Dummett, Wahrheit 11-40.

<sup>1170</sup> Cf. Reiner Wimmer, "Anthropologie und Ethik – Erkundungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände," Demmerling 215-245, 217,f; 231.

<sup>1171</sup> Cf. May, Theory 7-10.

scribe the very real disregard of the ethical foundations of human nature that is displayed in the world. Moreover, political critique would be inconceivable, as a sensible field of human agency, without normative grounds on which to rely. To know is not necessarily the same thing as to understand. Here, the version of communicative intersubjective rationality represented by Seyla Benhabib and discussed in the previous chapter comes into play. By assuming that rational and emotional faculties of an individual have to be developed before they can become part of a personal identity, a notion of education is introduced to communicative foundationalist reality. First, the human being has to learn how to communicate and differentiate the significance of meaning, which will enable her to influence the concepts of knowledge in her society. Michael Dummett explains that statements always have a sense of direct implication and the asserted meaning they are used to convey. These two levels become distinct, for example, when we learn what something means in a foreign language. Language is always tied to the way it is used. Humans can learn that something is true by learning the social acts that are necessary for the general acceptance of truth (e.g. techniques of justification). Analogously, the levels of morality can be understood.<sup>1172</sup> As the functionalities of such communicative structures are already interwoven with ethics, the ethical claim is manifested through actual techniques of interaction. The better an individual is able to control these techniques through her personal perspective, the easier it will be for her to abstract from them to realize their hidden structure and its implications for herself and her treatment of others.

Ethics can never be learned without their communicative moral or social manifestations.<sup>1173</sup> Ethics can also never exist apart from these manifestations in human existence. It is nevertheless possible to distinguish between cultural moral norms and ethics. The moral norms appertaining to a given social and cultural identity will necessarily lead to an inherent judgment of reality and the others within. This judgment is as automatic as the use of language to convey certain learned meanings. When I want an apple I will automatically use the words *I want an apple* until I have learned not only to express my needs but to subordinate them (and my identity) to a social and cultural situation. After I have developed a personal perspective – i.e. a place within a community – I will take into account other factors than my own needs. I will, for example, wait until I am asked and use a more polite form of stating my wish. As an additional social identity skill, I might learn how to state my wish in alternative languages. Yet, the abstraction of not using the words automatically

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<sup>1172</sup> Cf. Dummett, *Wahrheit* 11, 129-131.

<sup>1173</sup> I use the terms *moral* and *social* here as ethics are universally present in every human exchange and not only in situations that would socially be identified as moral.

can only be mastered after having fully developed an intersubjective identity. Then I might start to grasp the concept of grammar and how such utterances might have developed. I might also understand why rituals of demanding are different in other cultures – which cultural and social concepts of demand and of human relations motivate them. I might (to use an alternative example) become able to mediate between individuals that stem from a culture in which there are many different words for *snow*, but not one general expression to describe it and westerners who use this term. I might therefore also learn how to abstract from the evaluations of my culture and society as I compare them to other sociohistorical evaluations. Hence, I will be able to abstract from my concrete personal identity and penetrate its functional systematic.

From a point of view of communicative foundationalism it is easy to argue that the more alternative versions of reality an individual is confronted with, the easier it can be for her to learn how to abstract. If she is deeply rooted in her community and the respective social and cultural realities, she will perhaps stick to her inherent judgment, as she never meets any serious or conscious complications. Being confronted with many alternative cultures will easily let the inherent judgment of a certain culture and society collide with ethics if other cultures or versions of identity are mistreated. Inherent judgments will usually be aligned with the realist impulse mentioned in in chapter II.iii.ii. and discussed with regard to *Zen* in chapter III.ii.ii.ii. Therefore, it is no wonder why the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed such an upsurge of relativism and ethics. The destabilization of the contact between many different cultural systems had to lead to an upsurge in relativist tendencies as the realist certainty was necessarily challenged. This loss of certainty led to a heightened interest in ethics as the underlying communicative foundationalist ethics in every human being creates the (sometimes unconscious or only felt) knowledge that relativism is not true. Therefore, a lively debate between realist and relativist ideas began, leading to certain merged versions, such as Seyla Benhabib's version of communicative ethics. In the globalized reality in which multiple cultures, societies, and identities come in contact, it is easy to finally abstract from given communicative realities and to gain insight into the underlying structure. Ethical consideration has emerged in many variations, yet, I believe that it has not been as structured and systematically merged into a system of ethics as in the idea of communicative foundationalist ethics.

In conclusion, it should be conceded that to confront someone – especially a young human being still developing an individual personality – with as many different versions of reality as possible is not a good way of educating them to be capable of ethical considera-

tions. First, an individual has to have a secure (i.e. intersubjectively appreciated) identity to be able to incorporate changes. Changes can only be incorporated when the individual is already capable of abstraction to the extent she can understand the other's perspective. With the idea of a tendency to resurge to concepts of external realism in mind, one can see that the usual reaction to different concepts of reality is an alienation from the other to protect one's identity.<sup>1174</sup> This structural alienation can appear as religious, scientific, social, cultural, or individual concepts.<sup>1175</sup> Such reality beliefs are often thought of as unchangeable. When one attempts to change them, one has to change the communicative consciousness – as was exemplified by Cal's course of action to become accepted in *Middlesex*. If someone believes that the world is flat, then I might be able to change this belief by presenting her with other speech acts or even with documents that sprang from communicative practices such as physics or geography. In any case, the verification never happens with regard to a *real* reality, but always only with regard to the communicative representation of it.<sup>1176</sup> Such changes always entail changes in the self-consciousness of the members of the respective communicative reality. They will react protective as their identity is all they have within communicative reality to insert an influence. Therefore, globalization can also lead to severe mistreatments if individuals feel threatened in their communicative existence. It is not possible to rationalize the concepts behind our everyday behavior at all times.<sup>1177</sup> Yet, this does not mean that there are no such concepts. The inherent ethics structuring human nature functionally exist on a foundational level. The practice of moral argumentation exists on the cultural and social level of the content of communicative reality as it is created through human narrations. By invoking a universal validity, concrete moral arguments reflect the functional level of the underlying universal ethics. Accordingly, the common practices to invoke external realism and to understand identity as essential also reflect such an idea of underlying universality.

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<sup>1174</sup> This reaction is similar to the cultural and social immune system that was discussed with regard to *Lila*.

<sup>1175</sup> Cf. Thomas Rentsch, "Grenzen und Einheit der Vernunft neu denken," Rentsch, *Einheit* 25-45, 28.

<sup>1176</sup> In this way I take on a strictly postmodern and anti-realist position. Even though I try to found a new realistic concept of ethics on the functionality of human representations, I reject the traditional realistic idea of external realism, i.e. a real world around us, as for example defended by John Searle. Cf. Searle, *Geist*. Thus, many of the references given in this book have to be understood as structural and systematic comparisons and can of course not be seen as remarks on complete accordance.

<sup>1177</sup> Cf. e.g. Thomas Rentsch, "Grenzen und Einheit der Vernunft neu denken," Rentsch, *Einheit* 25-45, 26.

#### IV.iv. Existing Combinations of Natural Sciences and Philosophy and the Ensuing Biological Ethics

Before finally composing a comprehensive description of communicative foundationalist ethics, current alternative ideas of a connection between the natural sciences with their environmental realism and the humanities with today's pluralistic tendencies shall be discussed.<sup>1178</sup> This forms an excursus, as it revisits the line of argumentation in an alternative light. It is included to address a certain type of postmodern approach to ethics that has not been sufficiently appreciated yet: (neuro-)biological ethics. In the following, several approaches that are part of natural scientific realism will be introduced and confronted with counter-arguments reflecting various philosophical and cultural concepts.<sup>1179</sup> Thereby, the most striking objections against communicative foundationalist ethics regarding current natural sciences shall be answered. As the ethics in question are supposed to build an interconnection between several postmodern concepts, arguments from various sources will be organized loosely around questions concerning neutral observation, bodily existence, the relation between body and consciousness, and environmental influences on the mind. Apart from the fact that the perspective of the observer has gained increasing interest since Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, recent natural sciences have produced explanations that seem to fit communicative foundationalist ideas.<sup>1180</sup> The tendency to connect relativism and realism has existed for quite some time and the tendency to combine natural sciences and philosophy can be thus understood.<sup>1181</sup>

Current realist approaches to philosophy, especially those cooperating with the natural sciences (as the philosophy of mind) often exclude ethics in a universally evaluative

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<sup>1178</sup> Basic similarities of communicative foundationalism and structural realism should be mentioned. Yet, structural realism is a philosophy of science and tries to explain the enormous success of the natural sciences. *Communicatively founded structuralism* (to coin an alternative term) would argue that science is successful because it functions in ways that are consistent with basic structures of human consciousness on which all knowledge is built. Communicative foundationalist structuralism supposes that all cognition must be explained from a phenomenological starting point. Camber Warren has actually published a dissertation about what he terms *communicative structuralism* discussing the structures apparent in all sorts of public communication. Yet, he is not concerned with ethics or a foundationalism as it is intended here. Cf. Camber Warren, "Communicative Structure and the Emergence of Armed Conflict," *Camber Warren Homepage* (2008) <http://camberwarren.net/dissertation.html> (12.01.2010).

<sup>1179</sup> Communicative foundationalism would redefine it as a system of helpful pragmatic strategies to ease survival – thereby using *pragmatic* in quite a Rortian sense.

<sup>1180</sup> Even though Searle does not believe in the legitimacy of constructivist relativism, he discusses the importance of Einstein, Thomas Kuhn, and others for postmodern thought. Cf. Searle, *Geist* 9-52.

<sup>1181</sup> It exists since relativist tendencies have had a structural influence on theories in the twentieth century. "Searle's theory of intentionality reads like a modernized version of Husserl's." David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/> (04.05.2009).



sense and degrade normativity to just one more social function.<sup>1182</sup> Ethics can to my knowledge not be argued in a normative sense from a biological and evolutionist point of view unless a value realism like Pirsig's is pursued. Still, a lot of current neurobiological projects show results that seem to complement a communicative foundationalist point of view.<sup>1183</sup> Scientists, for example, found that brains can be altered by severe stress as experienced through acts of war.<sup>1184</sup> They have also found that children's hormonal balances can be influenced by stress and that the environment has an effect on the chromosomes of twins, which are virtually identical at early stages of life and grow apart with age.<sup>1185</sup> The basic phenomenological idea that humans as beings are always already situated-in-the-world fits to such findings of interdependency of human beings and their environment.<sup>1186</sup> In current philosophy of mind, the idea of *the embodied mind* even seems to connect the realistic implications of natural scientific research and phenomenological concepts of consciousness.<sup>1187</sup>

Even though progress has been made over the past decade, Chalmers' statement from the end of the past millennium remains true: "Consciousness ... is as perplexing as it

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<sup>1182</sup> Cf. Searle, Geist 145,ff. For the general broad interfaces between physiology, biological psychology, and philosophy today see Thorsten Jantschek, "Raus aus dieser Bar – Versuch über Sofia Coppola und die Kultur des Gefühls," Rentsch, Einheit 157-177, 162.

<sup>1183</sup> Within the combinations of neuroscience and philosophy two currents can be identified. On the one hand, ideas of consciousness are discussed from a more philosophical point of view, whereas on the other hand, natural scientific foundations are first and foremost assumed. These two currents can be understood as opposing each other. Cf. Bernard Lauth, "Das Dilemma der Geisteswissenschaften," Lubkoll/Wischmeyer 19-33.

<sup>1184</sup> Cf. Heidi Ledford, "Some Gulf War veterans have different brains – Study adds to evidence of a physical basis for 'Gulf War syndrome'," *Nature – International Weekly Journal of Science* 1 May 2007 <http://www.nature.com/news/2007/070430/full/070430-3.html> (02.05.2007).

<sup>1185</sup> Cf. Roxanne Khamsi, "Twins grow apart as they age – Genetic tests reveal how the environment changes our DNA," *Nature – International Weekly Journal of Science* 4 July 2005 <http://www.nature.com/news/2005/050704/full/050704-3.html> (04.07.2005); Roxanne Khamsi, "Crammed orphanages have lasting effects – Neglected babies show depressed hormones for years," *Nature – International Weekly Journal of Science* 21 November 2005 <http://www.nature.com/news/2005/051121/full/051121-2.html> (21.11.2005).

<sup>1186</sup> Cf. David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/> (2.3.2009). Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi observe that the phenomenological approaches to self-consciousness resemble the latest trend in cognitive science, the enactive paradigm. Cf. Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, "Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness," 2006, Note 4, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological/index.html> (18.04. 2010). For an overview of enactive approaches see e.g. Tom Froese, "From Cybernetics to Second-Order Cybernetics: A Comparative Analysis of Their Central Ideas," *Constructivist Foundations*, Volume 5, Issue 2 2010, 75-85, <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/journal/5/2/075.froese> (18.04.2010); or Nigel J.T. Thomas, "Mental Imagery," 2010, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-imagery/> (18.04. 2010).

<sup>1187</sup> Cf. e.g. Damasio, Entschlüsselung. The idea of an embodied mind has existed since the beginnings of biologically oriented constructionist thinking. The tendency to thus consolidate the arts (as bearers of meaning) and science (as a window upon the reality human beings can become aware of) has been implied from the start. For a concise description of this tendency cf. e.g. Klaus Peter Müller, "Re-Constructions of Reality in Margaret Atwood's Literature: A Constructionist Approach," Nischik 229-257; 229,f. For a brief summary of the idea of embodiment with regard to the field of neuroscience and a review of Shaun Gallagher's *How the Body Shapes the Mind* see Andrea Pitasi "Descartes, Embodiment and the Post-human Horizon of Neurosciences," *Constructivist Foundations*, Volume 5, Issue 2 2010, 100,f. <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/journal/5/2/100.pitasi> (18.4.2010).

ever was. It still seems utterly mysterious that the causation of behavior should be accompanied by a subjective inner life.”<sup>1188</sup> Facts of a natural order may underlie consciousness, yet, the reality in which human beings live is the reality established through consciousness. Therefore, such facts like an obvious need for nutrition can only be seen as permitting the reality of values, emotions, and rationality experienced through intersubjectivity. They must be considered as sub-foundations for human life, yet, they can only exert influence as to the *connecting* and *disconnecting* of individuals to reality. Additionally, they only gain the specific meaning they have in a given culture through their communicative realization within narratively established reality. The connecting relation is comprehensively described by the following quotation from Atwood’s *Handmaid*.

It can’t last forever. Others have thought such things, in bad times before this, and they were always right, they did get out one way or another, and it didn’t last forever. Although for many of them it may have lasted all the forever they had.<sup>1189</sup>

The many facets of communicative reality cannot be further influenced by any natural order, and intersubjective reality cannot reach out to clarify what it really is. The sort of realism implying that such a clarification is possible is unrealistic. “[W]e are surer of the existence of conscious experience than we are of anything else in the world.”<sup>1190</sup>

There is no natural order that is not communicative – at least it is not and will never be accessible for human beings. Yet, as well as values clearly exist in communicative reality, rationality and the possibility to distance oneself from one’s cultural environment exist as well. Therefore, a communicative version of an ultimate justification in ethics must be possible. A communicative version of a natural scientific positivist description can be conducted even though reality is not realistic in a natural scientific (external) way.<sup>1191</sup> If consciousness (which basically is intersubjectively experienced and created communicative reality) is all that is primarily accessible to human beings, then all elements of reality (including the sciences) must eventually be explained by this notion. This does not mean that the outside world is inexistent or irrelevant; it simply means that truth can only possibly be found in questions regarding consciousness. The above mentioned similarities or seeming

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<sup>1188</sup> David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind – In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) xi (hereafter: Chalmers, *Mind*). The impossibility to understand this mystery in terms of natural sciences is discussed from a pragmatic physical and logical point of view by Alfred Grierer in *ibid.* “Bewusstseinsnahe Hirnforschung und das Gehirn-Geist-Problem,” *Neurowissenschaften und Menschenbild*, eds. Eve-Marie Engels and Elisabeth Hildt (Paderborn: Mentis, 2005) 139-149 (hereafter: Engels/Hildt).

<sup>1189</sup> Atwood, *Handmaid* 144.

<sup>1190</sup> Chalmers, *Mind* xii.

<sup>1191</sup> Chalmers argues that although everything else is part of such an external reality, consciousness forms an exception. Cf. *ibid.* 93-122. See also John Law, *After Method – Mess in Social Science Research*, International Library of Sociology (New York: Routledge, 2004) 12,f.

analogies must be explained through the existing cultural concepts enabling such scientific theories to be thought and formulated.

Lawrence Shapiro formulates a recent version of an embodied mind theory. He states that “minds profoundly reflect the bodies in which they are contained.”<sup>1192</sup> This seems to be proven by the different patients with brain malfunctions described by Antonio Damasio. David, for example, is a case who shows the ability to act according to certain social conventions but cannot consciously rationalize them – he lacks the ability to formulate an overall idea of social conventions.<sup>1193</sup> It would be pointless to deny such cases. It would also be pointless to deny that these patients do not have the same possibilities to act within the socio-communicative reality as others. But it must be stated that their feeling of self will be as little directly influenced by their bodies as anybody else’s feeling of self. There is nothing it *feels* or it *is* like to be a body.<sup>1194</sup> The reference to bodily needs only makes sense to regulate sub-foundations of life. However limited an individual’s connection to the intersubjectively created communicative reality is, it is not a bodily connection. The body only restricts the connection. Likewise, the way a handicapped person is treated by her community does entirely rely on the respective cultural reality. As history shows in most diverse ways, disabilities have been understood, evaluated and dealt with completely differently and even contradictorily in different sociohistorical frameworks. Reductive theories cannot explain the conscious intersubjective reality human beings experience and produce.<sup>1195</sup> When this reality is understood correctly, it does not lead to dualism as the sub-foundations are not part of a different kind of reality that would matter to human beings.

The same striking discrepancy between biology and ethics opens up when neurobiology and ethics are combined. In today’s media this often happens when the supposed refutation of free will is discussed with regard to its moral consequences. This is done in biased ways, stressing the point that all traditional philosophical assumptions have been wrong and humans are determined by their neurons. A striking example is a discussion published in 2002, in which the director of the Max Planck institute for brain research, Wolf Singer, and philosopher Thomas Metzinger both argue as though free will was al-

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<sup>1192</sup> Lawrence A. Shapiro, *The Mind Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 167.

<sup>1193</sup> Cf. Damasio, *Entschlüsselung* 144-149.

<sup>1194</sup> Cf. Chalmers, *Mind* 95.

<sup>1195</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 121; Simon Blackburn, *Being Good – A Short Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 37-43.

ready history.<sup>1196</sup> This debate did not even include the question how it could be possible to still talk about ethics without a notion of autonomy, or how the understanding of ethics would have to be modified. What could it mean to be moral if human existence was regulated solely by the survival instinct? Neurology has still not reached a point where all questions can satisfyingly be answered. The main problems arising in such frameworks are still biologically non-profitable personal experience and individual consciousness.<sup>1197</sup>

The questions of responsibility and of the significance of influences on human autonomy have been discussed throughout the twentieth century. From a culture poetical point of view it can thus be stated that biology is obviously just another field of discourse in which these questions have recently appeared. They are the core questions of the relativism that sprang from phenomenology at the beginning of the past century. If the human being is always situated-in-the-world, it can never be as free as traditional realists would have it. This new debate is just confronting the autonomous with the culturally-influenced individual again – with the difference that the influencing factor is now biology. The cultural terrain has long been prepared for the natural sciences as a currently very powerful discourse of knowledge production to join this debate. These destabilizing and disorienting tendencies challenging ethics as such are the cause of western society's readiness to think along these lines and of its deep trouble and need for reorientation. As relativist theories must lead to a moral impasse, there has been a surge of religious issues and a (re)turn to ethics.<sup>1198</sup>

The issue at this point is not to discredit natural sciences as they exist within the western cultural framework. On the contrary, they are as much part of the reality human beings live in (at least in the western world) as any other cultural paradigm. Therefore, they offer standards of rationality that can be used to live one's life more effectively in some respects. But this is not all that human life consists of. It is just one part of cultural

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<sup>1196</sup> Cf. Carsten Könneker, "Brennpunkt Neuroethik: 'Ein Frontalangriff auf unser Selbstverständnis und unsere Menschenwürde' – In der Hirnforschung bahnt sich die größte wissenschaftliche Herausforderung des 21. Jahrhunderts für unsere Gesellschaft an. Was kommt auf uns zu?" *Gehirn & Geist* 4 (2002) 32-35.

<sup>1197</sup> For the problematic reliability of neurological scans cf. e.g. Ludger Tebartz van Elst, "Alles so schön bunt hier – Gehirn-Scans sagen viel weniger aus, als in sie hineininterpretiert wird," *DIE ZEIT* 16 August 2007, 30. For problems regarding the manner in which the results of technical procedures in neurology are displayed and discussed see also Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 246-261.

<sup>1198</sup> For the readiness to engage in such discourse cf. e.g. Thomas Assheuer, "Ich war es nicht! Hirnforscher legen uns nahe, dass es weder persönliche Schuld noch Freiheit gibt. Wie kommt es, dass sich die Gesellschaft an dieser Nachricht jubelnd berauscht?" *DIE ZEIT* 11 October 2007, 57. For the surge of spiritual interest cf. e.g. Thomas Rentsch, "Grenzen und Einheit der Vernunft neu denken," Rentsch, *Einheit* 25-45, 42; Terry Eagleton, "Die Gottesfrage – Religiöser Fundamentalismus fällt nicht vom Himmel. Er ist eine Reaktion auf die kalte Zweckrationalität der liberalen Gesellschaft" (transl. Michael Adrian) *DIE ZEIT* 08 May 2008, 45.f.

production. What exists is not defined by the field of natural sciences.<sup>1199</sup> More importantly: what exists cannot be morally evaluated by natural scientific standards. Moreover, whether biological *facts* are interpreted as relevant for life or not, does not depend on biology, but again on the culturally produced interpretation of communicative intersubjective reality.<sup>1200</sup> This is obvious in the treatment and perception of illnesses and the perception of *facts* as normal or abnormal throughout the centuries. Especially striking is the development with regard to psychological deficiencies.<sup>1201</sup> The reciprocity between environmental (i.e. cultural and social) and bodily factors is underlined when brain researchers state that the manner in which an individual thinks, feels, and acts determines the branching of her neurons.<sup>1202</sup> Yet, even though biologically descriptive approaches partly include the relational discourse hitherto located chiefly in the humanities and social sciences, they rest attached to the problems already discussed regarding descriptivism in II.ii.<sup>1203</sup>

However, within philosophy of mind more phenomenological approaches have also been created. They are organized around the traditional cognitive science program: “higher organisms act out of the content of their mental states.”<sup>1204</sup> These theories are usually structured according to the assumption of “an ontology of mental dispositions rather than an ontology of mental particulars.”<sup>1205</sup> Many of the more recent theories within philosophy of mind work with the idea that concepts are basically capacities of human beings. This is an interesting point with regard to postmodern critique. Whereas the radical critique that there is no empirically external reality has not been commonly popular throughout the rel-

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<sup>1199</sup> Cf. Wendel, *Grenzen* 35-39.

<sup>1200</sup> For a general discussion of the influence of rational standards on the possibility of perception in philosophy see for example Wendel, *Grenzen* 31-35.

<sup>1201</sup> In this respect the developments concerning the diagnosis of developmental disorders in children are interesting. Today far more disorders are diagnosed than in past decades, and they are diagnosed with respect to behavior that used to be judged as normal. One could say that developmental disorders are one of *the* illnesses of our times. Cf. Tanja Stelzer, “Ich will doch nur spielen: Eltern fördern ihre Kinder heutzutage wie nie zuvor – und helfen oft mit Medikamenten nach. Aber welchen Preis bezahlen die Kinder für den Erfolg?” *ZEITMAGAZIN* 32/2009: 10-14 (hereafter: Stelzer, Eltern).

<sup>1202</sup> Cf. Gerald Hüther, *Die Macht der inneren Bilder – Wie Visionen das Gehirn, den Menschen und die Welt verändern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 9.

<sup>1203</sup> Cf. also Pongratz, *Untiefen* 51. Furthermore, they contain versions of reductionism, especially in naive naturalism. “Überlegungen über das Zustandekommen unserer Erkenntnis, etwa Erklärungen physiologischer Art, [vermitteln] durchaus Erkenntnis über das Erkennen. Dennoch ist die Ansicht, darin liege schon die ganze Lösung der Erkenntnisproblematik, naiv. [...] Die Erkenntnistheorie hat es nicht nur mit der kausalen Erklärung von Erkenntnisvorgängen zu tun, sondern hat auch nichtkausale Bedingungen der Möglichkeit von Erkenntnis zu klären. Naiv naturalistischen Lehren entgeht ..., dass sie von nur dogmatisch vorausgesetzten metaphysischen Annahmen abhängen, die erst die Relevanz wissenschaftlicher Theorien begründen .... Psychologische oder neurophysiologische Theorien sind ... überhaupt erst dann als erkenntnistheoretisch relevant zu veranschlagen, wenn wir vor aller wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung zumindest implizit schon ... voraussetzen, dass Erfahrung, wie sie in den Wissenschaften zum Zuge kommt, die grundlegende Erkenntnisquelle bzw. Prüfinstanz für unsere Erkenntnis überhaupt ist.“ Wendel, *Grenzen* 41.

<sup>1204</sup> Jerry A. Fodor, *Concepts – Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) vii (hereafter: Fodor, *Concepts*).

<sup>1205</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

ativistic and relational approaches, the idea that the world and the reality human beings live in is entirely characterized through the mental concepts we produce has been.<sup>1206</sup> Even though most cognitivist concepts remain deeply engaged in a foundationally natural scientific understanding of reality, Jerry Fodor has, for example, developed an idea of inferential learning. Within this concept, the learning of objects and the attached concepts depends on the use human beings put to them, i.e. the mental constitution they are approached with. Thus, he allows for the cultural shaping of reality through human perception. He also proposes that the human mind is *naturally* structured to rationally understand and build concepts such as language.<sup>1207</sup> Postmodern theories cannot uncritically relate to the implied realistic notion of nature and scientific research. Still, the assumption that human beings must be predisposed in a way to be able to enter and take part in the communicative process of creating reality is a useful concept. Thus, universally valid conclusions about this process and the ethics involved can be made.

This concept is useful even though such conclusions can only be supported by giving examples and appealing to the inherent communicative predisposition (which includes rational, ethical, and emotional elements). For Fodor, some properties “are mind-dependent.”<sup>1208</sup> Therefore, the laws about such things must always be mind-related laws. Furthermore, he argues that minds are real which is why being mind-related cannot contradict realism.<sup>1209</sup> Yet, postmodern theories must argue that all that matters within communicative reality are the mediated (and thus mind-related) qualities. It cannot be denied that natural sciences are useful for survival; yet, it cannot be denied that minds are useful for survival either. As far as natural sciences are understood as springing from the mind, there is no problem. Yet, when natural sciences try to objectively and neutrally describe the whole mind, i.e. also the more complex ethical parts, problems of justification occur.

Even though (post)modern medicine and other natural sciences form an important part of today’s everyday life, it cannot be denied that postmodern theories have brought to light that the objective observer needed for a natural scientific perspective of explanation does not exist. It is debatable whether this fact justifies the rejection of the natural sciences as a model of explanation. Yet, the statements made about that world are always self-referential to the phenomenological ideas already formed within the human mind. Currently, this fact has been shown by gender and queer studies especially with regard to sex and gen-

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<sup>1206</sup> Cf. Fodor, Concepts 4 and Wendel, Grenzen 93-103.

<sup>1207</sup> Cf. Fodor, Concepts 132-139.

<sup>1208</sup> Ibid. 147.

<sup>1209</sup> Cf. ibid. 148,ff.

der.<sup>1210</sup> It is not possible to study or discuss sex or gender biologically without referring to culturally generated concepts. Yet, this simply means that there is no way to formulate universal truths on the basis of natural sciences. It does not mean that the natural sciences cannot serve as models of understanding practically adapted to today's everyday life and understanding. As discussed in chapters III.ii.ii.ii. and IV.iii., the basically realistic understanding of the world seems to be a characteristic of human consciousness. Realist intellectuals such as Searle have argued that the manner of believing in the basic realism of the world – and the fact that the beliefs are usually not disappointed – is a proof that this basic realism is true.<sup>1211</sup> They take examples such as airplanes that would obviously not fly just because humans *believed* them able to do so. It can be objected that communicative constructs are not a question of belief, but a question of established practices. Additionally, postmodern theories do not deny the existence of a real world. They simply claim that this real world cannot exist as such within human consciousness, but is always already translated into understandable patterns.

Just because humans have produced certain technical devices that enable them to predict if something will fly for some stretches of time does not mean that they have established a relation to the world around them that is in a traditional way realistic. Already the concepts of flying, of space, and of time used to describe such an event are culture-related. Additionally, the horizon of meaning always present in such descriptions (What sort of airplanes do we need; what can they achieve for our society etc.?) cannot be described through external references. The possibilities for technical inventions existing today are produced by communicative reality and can only be understood within the parameters of the respective cultural codes. Even though it seems as if humans found ever better ways to understand their *natural* environment, there is no way to universally prove that any statement based on the idea of a scientifically objective observer is actually true in exactly the way we understand it. Even though the (post)modern natural sciences are highly practical and absolutely appropriate to today's world, the truths gained by them cannot function as universal standards for understanding the human condition, because they must always be *biased*. This bias, or self-referentiality with respect to the communicative human condition means that it will never be possible to access the *natural* environment in an unmediated way.

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<sup>1210</sup> Cf. e.g. Norbert Finzsch, "Geschichte der Sexualität in den USA und in Deutschland: Stand der Forschung, Probleme und Methoden zwischen Foucaultscher Diskursanalyse und *Oral History*," Nünning/Sommer 197-214; Judith Butler, *Das Unbehagen der Geschlechter* (transl. Kathrina Menke) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991).

<sup>1211</sup> Cf. Searle, Geist 9, ff; 45, ff.

There is another argument to be made against direct scientific knowledge with regard to morality. It would also seem logically impossible to link a universal concept of ethics to a biological or alternative natural scientific standard. How could a concept linked to human thinking and judging etc. be possibly justified by an unconscious process? It is an empirical fact that ethics exists within the communicative world and has existed for centuries. Furthermore, it cannot be explained by purely social behavior in a biological way. It has a normative level that is only understandable within normative standards. Normative standards cannot spring from the pure description of *nature*. Evaluation is a property obviously not ruled by biological processes. At least neurobiology has not yet found a way to make such an explanation feasible. And even if processes are detected, which seem to have strong effects on the emotional capacities (and thereby also on the evaluation) of individuals – it is the emotional lack that has the effect in the end.<sup>1212</sup> This means that such effects could obviously also be described from a purely mind- and emotion-related point of view. Lacking an objective observer in a naturally scientific way, the findings will always be interpreted within cultural codes. If the lack of emotions truly is a decisive factor for an ethical human being and if this belief is increasingly accepted in today's sociohistorical community, it must still be assessed that the mere possibility to come to such a conclusion by scientific methods was created by communicative means and not by scientific reality. The facts gathered by natural sciences are never meaningful in themselves.

However, neurobiology is a very powerful discourse creating knowledge in western industrialized societies. Neurobiologists assert that genes and neurons are strongly affected by the environment and especially by social interaction.<sup>1213</sup> They even make a case that emotional relationships are very important for young people to grow healthily, to be able to learn, and to create motivation. Joachim Bauer, for example, states that children can only develop a personality and an individual self when they are treated respectfully and are appreciated as human beings with a certain potential by their attachment figures.<sup>1214</sup> This corresponds to the argument of intersubjective relations made by postmodern theories. Yet, it is again only a descriptive explanation of human behavior. When arguing for the correct comportment of a teacher, Bauer states the following.

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<sup>1212</sup> For such neurological case studies cf. e.g. Damasio, *Entschlüsselung*.

<sup>1213</sup> Cf. Bauer, *Menschlichkeit*.

<sup>1214</sup> Cf. Joachim Bauer, *Lob der Schule – Sieben Perspektiven für Schüler, Lehrer und Eltern* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2007) 26-29 (hereafter: Bauer, *Schule*). It should be mentioned that theories linking cooperative and kind behavior to neurological functions have already existed for some time. Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor discuss this with regard to Auguste Comte. Cf. Phillips/Taylor 45.



Ausstrahlung entwickeln und eine Vorbildfunktion erfüllen kann als Erwachsener aber nur, wer als Person vital auftritt, das Leben liebt, wer weiß, wie man Probleme löst, sich für Ziele begeistern kann und für Lebensstile und Werte eintritt, die er oder sie für richtig hält. Dabei muss sie oder er zugleich menschlich bleiben, darf also keine Gewalt ausüben, andere nicht demütigen und eigene Schwächen nicht verleugnen.<sup>1215</sup>

Some interchangeable values the teacher is supposed to advocate are simply pronounced at this point. Additionally, humanity is defined with the same ease as something like mutual respect. Why this behavior is adequate is not challenged at all. This is because the natural sciences, especially biology, are not construed for such a challenge.<sup>1216</sup> As already argued, it would be illogical to try to describe and understand a phenomenon (in this case ethics) by using concepts that do not include this phenomenon (such as scientific objectivity). The argument that children do not grow up to be healthy human beings capable of maintaining relationships and leading their lives only gives an instrumental reason to behave humanely in the end. It cannot be explained why it is *good* not to treat human beings with inhumane cruelty. An account of psychological and physical integrity is given – whereas it remains unclear why such integrity *ought to* be granted to everybody. I do not wish to argue that the conclusions drawn from more specific research are always wrong. On the contrary, the guidelines presented by neurobiologists such as Bauer very strongly resemble those that can be concluded from communicative foundationalism. Yet, I would venture to argue that the reason why the findings of any such research are correct does not consist in the appropriateness of its conduction. When it comes to what ought to be done, the right answers will only be found because of human communicative nature – in which vocabulary and with what means this nature is described or perceived does not matter.

Neuroscientific studies show that human beings experience physical and psychological pain in exactly the same way.<sup>1217</sup> Thus, the actually relevant communicative aspects are centered. There is no doubt that in moments of, for example, strong (physical) pain the consciousness of any person can be strongly affected if not even clouded. Nonetheless, the mind cannot be thought of without its communicative framework – even if its communica-

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<sup>1215</sup> Bauer, Schule 27,f.

<sup>1216</sup> Developmental psychologists interested in anthropology like Michael Tomasello similarly describe pro-social tendencies in human behavior. “[H]uman communicative motives are so fundamentally cooperative that not only do we inform others of things helpfully, but one of the major ways we request things from others is simply to make our desire known in the expectation that they will volunteer help.” Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, Jean Nicod Lectures (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008) 5,f; see also 72-98 (hereafter: Tomasello, *Origins*). Even though Tomasello argues that the cooperative intention led to an adaptive advantage, the ultimate justification why we should collaborate and not disrespect the other cannot be explained thus (cf. *ibid.* 8). Giving the adaptive advantage as a reason would, firstly, presuppose a rational agent able to perceive, understand, and process this information. Secondly, an evolutionary advantage can never justify the dignity or the moral rights of an individual (cf. e.g. Hösle, *Krise* 145,f). The first intellectual to have systematically argued for the significance of cooperation with regard to human social interaction was Paul Grice. Cf. e.g. *ibid.*, *Bedeutend, Meinen, Intendieren* (transl. G. Dürselen) (Trier: L.A.U.T., 1977).

<sup>1217</sup> Cf. Bauer, Schule 31.

tive nature can be eclipsed for a short time.<sup>1218</sup> It is the communicative frame which relates any experience to personal identity – even if this is only done in retrospect. Although physical experience might in some cases replace or fill the mind completely for a period of time, they can come to nothing in the world of human experience and meaning if they are not afterwards introduced to and included in the communicative framework.<sup>1219</sup> By such emphasis on the communicative nature of human life, demands of the social sciences to acknowledge psychological violence in the same way as physical violence are echoed in neurological findings.<sup>1220</sup> Postmodern neurology evokes the image of man as a living creature in constant communication and interaction with his environment and therefore with other humans and contrasts him to a development automaton. Nonetheless, it remains dubious when it comes to actual individual experience. The *sense* that must be added to the equation if human life is supposed to be described realistically only enters the stage through a backdoor.<sup>1221</sup> If this sense were just another neurobiological or chemical effect that automatically sprang from the right experiences young human beings lived through, it would not be a sense of life in the way that human beings use and describe it.<sup>1222</sup>

The conclusions drawn in biological contexts (as correct as they might be) are not consistent with their own foundations when they venture to give ethical information or advice. A similar and still effective argument against a biological understanding of ethics has been formulated by Thomas Nagel. From a point of view that holds on to the evaluative aspect of moral behavior, biology must lead to a defective understanding of reality. As ethical action is described like any other socially observable behavior, ethics must be tied to a

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<sup>1218</sup> Yet, the notion of *eclipse* or *loss* of consciousness only makes sense if we understand ourselves as being firmly set in a communicative framework of consciousness.

<sup>1219</sup> It must therefore be assumed that for example comatose patients can only be included in the communicative foundationalist world concept (and therefore its ethics) by referring either to a possible resurfacing or to the other communicating humans, whose communicative world these patients play a role in. This is a difficult point and the medical debate whether and how far comatose patients can actually engage in communication or can at least receive communicative signals is far from settled.

<sup>1220</sup> Cf. e.g. Butler, *Speech*. Notwithstanding the according discourses in disciplines such as psychology and law, this account is one of numerous examples of how the humanities have prepared the ground for today's neurobiology. With regard to acts of terrorism and gun rampages, the connection between humiliation and general anger against the world is discussed in psychological discourses. Cf. Josephina Maier, "Groll gegen die Welt – Verbittert sind die meisten Menschen nur vorübergehend. Bleibt das Gefühl, kann es für Junge und Alte gefährlich werden," *DIE ZEIT* 20 August 2009, 24. In the same way the importance of non-verbal parts of communication long discussed in the humanities is highlighted by neuroscientific findings today. Cf. Bauer, *Schule* 56. The whole current concept of the *mirror neuron system* is very similar to the concepts of interdependency and human interrelatedness already existing in the humanities and social sciences. These neurons reflect not only the other person's action in an individual's brain but also the other's image of oneself and thereby open a corridor of possible development. Cf. *ibid.* 39, 128-134.

<sup>1221</sup> For the curious use of the notion of a *sense* of life in neuroscientific literature see e.g. *ibid.* 139,f.

<sup>1222</sup> If it were conceived as being extraneous – somehow on top of neurobiology – it would actually contradict natural science as such. For a well informed summary of the underlying foundational dispute between natural sciences and the humanities regarding the law of the conservation of energy see Bernard Lauth, "Das Dilemma der Geisteswissenschaften," *Lubkoll/Wischmeyer* 19-33; 24,ff.

biological sense. If this were the case, there could be no way to tell in which way any action was morally good or bad (or was even simply moral). It could only be explained whether the actions conformed to the biological sense or not. The evaluative level would be irretrievably destroyed. Human action would have to be understood as a method of decision, rather than a critical conscious process. The actual *being* part of the human world (acting, thinking, arguing etc.) is no longer part of the biological sense that might underlie human existence.<sup>1223</sup> From another argument Nagel made against the reductionist tendencies in psychological explanations of consciousness one could deduce the following statement: All biological approaches to ethics are compatible with a total lack of the ethical level of meaning in human behavior.<sup>1224</sup> With regard to them, the special sort of evaluation, which differentiates the judgment on bad piano playing from the judgment on a bad moral action, does not exist. As has been shown, it nevertheless *exists* in human reality and communication.<sup>1225</sup>

The humane treatment of others rests on criteria other than biological ones.<sup>1226</sup> Therefore, a theory trying to describe the way ethics functions must distance itself from natural scientific explanations.<sup>1227</sup> Fritz Wallner's constructivist definition of natural science elucidates this.

[D]ie Naturwissenschaften [stellen] zumindest den Anspruch ..., den Menschen wegdenken zu können, die Welt in einer sozusagen unversehrten Weise zu haben. Das ist eine negative Konsequenz aus der Voraussetzung der menschlichen Freiheit. [...D]ie individuelle Freiheit, hat zur Folge, dass sich prinzipiell jeder von uns eine gewisse Eigenwelt schaffen kann. Wenn man nun alle Eigenwelten subtrahiert, so gelangt man nach dieser Ideologie zu einer besonders sicheren Erkenntnis der Welt. Der Anspruch der Gewissheit ersetzt den der Wahrheit. [...] Wahrheit ist immer etwas, was in Relation steht. Gewissheit ist etwas, das ohne Relation auskommt. Beides ist im Extremfall unmöglich. [...] Wenn ich den Beobachter-Standpunkt entferne und durch eine technische Vorrichtung ersetze, die selbst die Natur ersetzt, so habe ich in einem bestimmten Sinn Gewissheit erreicht. Gewissheit in diesem extremen Sinn bedeutet nicht zu beschreiben, sondern zu ersetzen. Gewissheit ist ein Prädikat einer technischen, keiner wissenschaftlichen Haltung.<sup>1228</sup>

The world does not exist without mediation by human beings – that is, the world which is actually inhabited by human beings as sense-giving individuals.

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<sup>1223</sup> Cf. Nagel, *Fragen* 201-206.

<sup>1224</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 230,f. Even though he argues from a rather realistic position, Philosopher Manfred Frank succinctly puts it as follows in an interview: “Alles Wesentliche, das wir mit dem Gedanken der Menschheit verbinden, verknüpfen wir doch mit dem Gedanken der Subjektivität und nicht mit unserer Vorstellung vom Gehirn.” Ulrich Schnabel and Thomas Assheuer, “Der Mensch bleibt sich ein Rätsel – Ein Gespräch mit dem Tübinger Philosophen Manfred Frank über die Illusionen der Hirnforschung und ihre zweifelhaften Folgen,” *DIE ZEIT* 27 August 2009, 52,f, 53.

<sup>1225</sup> Cf. e.g. James Page, *Peace Education – Exploring Ethical and Philosophical Foundations* (Charlotte NC: Information Age, 2008) 12. The *Golden Rule* (today usually associated with the Gospel according to Matthew) as one of the oldest moral rules (in the systematized form of a rule), for example, has a history that according to Rentsch dates back approximately five thousand years. Cf. Rentsch 259.

<sup>1226</sup> Cf. also *ibid.* 255.

<sup>1227</sup> Cf. also the discussion of descriptivist ethics in II.ii.

<sup>1228</sup> Wallner, *Verwandlung* 238.

#### IV.v. A Comprehensive Communicative Foundationalist Ethics

When the literary analysis is evaluated in the context of postmodern relativist theories, the postmodern paradigm of plurality is challenged. Whereas ethics is usually included in the game of perspectives in constructivist approaches, which strive to open new possibilities, communicative reality points to another conclusion.<sup>1229</sup> In the following, I will outline the characteristics of the communicative reality and the notion of an individual which are necessary to explain communicative foundationalist ethics along with the detailed explanation of the ethical concept. It has become apparent that ethics is by its communicative nature always inextricably linked to a vision of a better future. All communicative actions aimed at an amelioration of society, such as learning, teaching, and political actions, are therefore steeped in morality. They always already include an idea of moral truth, a standard of what is supposed to be better, of what is supposed to be *good*. When postmodern approaches engage in an enhancement of perspectives (of action and creation) and ignore questions of (moral) truth, they obviously miss an important part of communicative reality.<sup>1230</sup> On a deeper level, the above analysis has shown that human beings do not live in a reality to which they can apply ethics whenever they engage in moral actions to change the relations creating their world. Ethics underlies the reality and renders communication meaningful.

Individual persons cannot be completely reduced to their intersubjective relatedness. Moreover, they can only understand the intersubjectivity that forms part of their nature by developing a strong personal point of view which allows them to abstract from tangible cultural situations. Therefore, it is as important to defend one's own position of first-person narrator as it is to enable others to form or keep such a position themselves. In the end, an assimilation of the cultural modes that might keep individuals from accepting each other's position will be necessary.<sup>1231</sup> Communicative foundationalist ethics include the faculty to *transcend* the sociohistorical content of human existence.

We can subject the positive norms of any given society to a critical evaluation only in reference to normative standards that transcend all particular societies. To look at positive norms from the perspective of transcendent norms is to take a transcendent perspective.<sup>1232</sup>

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<sup>1229</sup> For the idea of ethics as a game of perspectives in postmodern theories cf. e.g. Kaiser-Probst, Wandel 10.

<sup>1230</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 7,f; 59. See also Cornell, Images 144.

<sup>1231</sup> Yet, as not all members of the global communicative community are in contact with each other at the same time, this development cannot and will not lead to absolute cultural impoverishment. Still, traditions absolutely forbidding personal points of view for some members of a society cannot be kept if we are to increase ethical cohabitation on a global scale.

<sup>1232</sup> Seung, Intuition 215.

The functional structure of communicative human existence transcends the particular instances of cultural and social individuality. It sets the frame of a harmonious balance between emotions and reason with regard to their realization through individual narrations. The ensuing ethical obligation is directed at everyone's appreciation as an individual person.<sup>1233</sup> This obligation to let others enter discourse as an appreciated person implies that everyone has to be accepted as a coherent and unified self. Even though this is not possible in an absolute way, it is necessary to appreciate the other and be appreciated oneself to be able to unfold the intersubjective possibilities of action. The ethical obligation is the basic requirement of a social practice which includes all possible members. It is an obligation to communicatively create the illusion of a social community that consists of truly autonomous individuals. This means that individuals have to believe in their individual autonomy and independence of intersubjective relations. This enables them to realize the limited freedom of action that is granted to them as narrators of the communicative reality. If a member refuses to appreciate others she must be confronted with ethical understanding. If she still refuses to accept others, she could be condemned by her community in the end as a result of ethics. Even though this process needs to be further explained in the following, it is vital to understand that there is a level of social punishment. It is a two-fold punishment: on the one hand, it certainly installs the functionality of human beings as this functionality has been identified within their ethical nature. On the other hand, it can only be applied by appreciating the other as an individual person and not simply as a functional part of the cultural system in which this functionality is to be increased.<sup>1234</sup>

To structure the following discussion, first, the notion of a communicative nature will be focused upon. After this, the notion of foundations will be considered. Then, the specific possibilities of action in tangible moral (i.e. culturally and socially situated) situations will be scrutinized. At the end, narrativity as the most important functional characteristic of human communicative existence will be reconsidered. It is obviously impossible to discuss the first points without recourse to narrativity. Yet, due to its significance, the aspects not directly related to human nature, foundations, and action will be discussed separately.

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<sup>1233</sup> Care theorists, such as Elisabeth Conradi, also propose a combination of emotion, reason, morality and duty, which is located in either the intersubjective individual or the interrelated interactions between individuals. Cf. Conradi, *Care* 107,f.

<sup>1234</sup> In this way the poststructuralist critique of humanism as a means of the discourse of power to install subjects as a self-controlling biological mass for certain social purposes can be countered. Cf. e.g. Taylor, *Freiheit* 198,f; 230,f. This could certainly be described as a version of philosophical psychology and is reminiscent of Paul Grice's work. Cf. e.g. Grice, *Conception*.

#### IV.v.i. Ethics as Part of Communicative *Nature*

Ethics has been defined as the structure of human nature as it is realized through emotions and reason in or even as communicative reality. If it is natural for human beings to communicate, their nature can be well claimed to be realized as communicative reality. Even though this is a study on ethics, it has been necessary to define human nature as ethics has turned out to be its functional element. Language and the human ability to communicate and to mediate ideas into each other's minds characterize man above all.<sup>1235</sup> Learning a language is considered to be in a first approach merely imitation, whereas the ability to infer complex concepts from what is learned must develop successively. To be able to enter such a process of inference, the functional concept must be considered as inherent.<sup>1236</sup> The first educational process of linguistic subjectivation concerns the understanding of the concepts of sentences. Comprehending the grammatical complexity implied and the ability to combine sentences must be understood as ensuing from this basis.<sup>1237</sup> To state that thought is completely determined by language might be an impossible argument. Yet, the determination of a human mind by a whole culture of communication as has been argued by poststructuralists and other postmodern thinkers seems much more authentic. Even though communicative foundationalism does maintain universal functional elements, it would state that most of the structures in which humans think are produced by their communicative environment. Intersubjectivity provides the possibility that this relation is reciprocal. However, the communicative environment that also provides rational standards of behavior and emotional response is needed to learn to communicate – linguistically and beyond.<sup>1238</sup>

The influence of culture and a certain predisposition obviously contain a risk that perception is biased and people only hear what they expect to hear. Communication always also means inserting previously learned knowledge into the communicative *gaps*. It could also lead to the exclusion of members of the communicative group because no ready-made standard of approach is available as described in the analysis of *Suicides*. People entering into communication in unusual ways (for example with a stutter or a dialect) might also ef-

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<sup>1235</sup> Cf. Pinker, *Language* 16. See also Schütz/Luckmann 336-342.

<sup>1236</sup> Cf. chapter IV.v.iii.

<sup>1237</sup> In this respect I disagree with many existent concepts of language acquisition but agree for example with Fodor's approach of concept acquisition. Cf. Fodor, *Concepts*.

<sup>1238</sup> Cf. Pinker, *Language* 57, ff; 278.

fect a certain incertitude or prejudice in their communicative partners.<sup>1239</sup> Besides these risks of discord between different individuals, societies, and cultures, the concept of communication as a way of life offers an integrative ideal. Communication as such can only be established if a certain consensus is already achieved as to what communicative partners are talking about. Consensus is thus always already inherent in the functional nature of communication. Therefore, the belief that harmony between human beings is possible and that humans are by their communicative nature predisposed to live cooperatively can be maintained, which is necessary to adhere a normative view of the world and not to succumb to moral nihilism.<sup>1240</sup> The fact that the idea of ethics has been sustained for several millennia and that it has recently become increasingly popular seems to further prove that a foundationally ethical human nature exists.

The first level of learning mentioned above must be understood to already combine ethics, emotions, and rationality as the general subjectivation includes the functionalities of an individual personality.<sup>1241</sup> Reason will help learners to organize the information according to standards. Cultural and social (moral) behavior must be organized according to cultural concepts of morality, i.e. cooperation and consensus, too. Learning these concepts involves emotions to a great extent, as their acceptance means initiation into the cultural community. Learning therefore means emotionally engaging with other people and involves imitation. First, the engagement is only concentrated on the self. When a concept of the self is generated, a position from which the others are immediately included in one's realm of reality is realized. Induction and rational abstraction become feasible later, when the concepts that culturally organize a specific community have already been firmly incor-

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<sup>1239</sup> Cf. Pinker, *Language* 158,ff; 179,f; 183,f; 227,f. The interactive model of a communicative reality inextricably linked to identity is reminiscent of the lifeworld concept in Alfred Schütz's phenomenological sociology. Cf. Schütz/Luckmann 29-47. It also resembles the human nature usually proposed in postmodern cognitive science, especially Norman N. Holland's psychological explanation, which includes a theory on literature's role in human reality. Cf. Holland, I 48-57. Yet, such cognitive approaches, founded on biological frameworks, leave the role of the observer unclear. Cf. chapter IV.iv. The effect of prejudices and the question of determination will be further discussed in IV.v.ii.

<sup>1240</sup> Cf. Hursthouse, *Virtue* 262-265. In this perspective communicative foundationalist ethics is again quite close to Charles Taylor's idea of ethics.

<sup>1241</sup> The three levels of the rational, emotional, and ethical are as interrelated as human beings are intersubjective. Without ethics no rational evaluation can be possible. Without emotions no moral motivation can be possible. Without rationality no distance from an emotional (and irrational) existence can be possible. Without emotions no participation in intersubjectivity, that is to say reality would be possible. Brain researchers such as Gerald Hüther even judge the fact that words are emotionally charged as essential for the infantile process of learning how to speak. This is for example discussed in Stelzer, *Eltern* 14. Without rationality no insight into the ethics underlying personhood would be possible. Without ethics human emotional response would simply be overwhelming. Priorities must be set and standards of orientation must be accessible for identifying distinct feelings.

porated in one's personality through imitation.<sup>1242</sup> The automatic impulse to protect their culture and society along with themselves is inherent in every individual's communicative being. Yet, this should not be understood as a limitation – without the cultural and social content they would simply not exist. It is an enabling identity they achieve by embracing their communicative community and therefore the only way to survive – that is, to live as a human being.<sup>1243</sup> There are alternative identities in different cultures and societies, yet, whether an identity complies with ethics can only be evaluated through abstract consideration once an individual perspective has been soundly achieved.

Communicative foundationalist ethics would thus state that what is ethical is in principle consistent with what secures the existence of the human race.<sup>1244</sup> Human beings who act contrary to their ethical nature have been forced to ignore respectively have been deprived of the chance to really understand their feelings as well as their rational abilities. To clarify the picture of human nature, it is now necessary to define these abilities more distinctly. As discussed in chapter IV.iii., emotions tie us to social moral norms as well as to the underlying ethics. It depends on our reason whether we find out which of these feelings are adequate. Ethics build the standard of measurement for this abstraction. In the same way, the feelings that relate to ethical obligations originate in ethics. Ethics build the fundamental condition of relatedness and the inherent knowledge that we must appreciate each other to be balanced human beings. This equilibrium is an emotional balance (we could never be truly content knowing that we have cast out or even killed others as was discussed regarding *Suicides*) as well as a rational balance.<sup>1245</sup> Once we have gained insight into our nature and our ethics through rational abstraction, we know that we will never be satisfied if we do not work towards communicative justice. We would rationally know that we were acting against our nature were we to ignore the basic ethical call to obligation. Additionally, the emotional engagement in intersubjective relations allows us to feel what is ethically wrong. On the level of cultural and social norms the combination of

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<sup>1242</sup> For the problems of a concept of learning as induction (albeit with regard to a supposed natural realistic reality) see Fodor, *Concepts* 123-128. Even though postmodern theories must challenge the whole idea of sensory concepts, they could very well build on the idea of inferential concepts proposed by Fodor. See *ibid.* 134-139.

<sup>1243</sup> As Michel Foucault has argued for example in Foucault, *Sexualität* the strategy of identification by contrast is also a way of being influenced and subjectivated by the very standards one opposes.

<sup>1244</sup> The difference to other theories stating this fact lies in the supposed communicative nature of the human species. Cf. Philippa Foot, *Die Natur des Guten* (transl. Michael Reuter) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004) 54,f (hereafter: Foot, *Natur*). When Foot discusses the similarities between the way in which plants and animals can be evaluated and the way in which humans can be evaluated, she completely ignores the question from which perspective evaluations can be conducted. Such a neutral position from which evaluations can be described does not exist. Cf. *ibid.* 59,ff.

<sup>1245</sup> For the importance of emotions and reason see also Christoph Demmerling, "Vernunft, Gefühl und moralische Praxis – Überlegungen zur Kultur der praktischen Vernunft," Demmerling, *Vernunft* 246-270.



these two faculties allows us to engage in someone else's situation – her personal perspective on her concept of reality.<sup>1246</sup> Aggression and contest are only the negative side of cooperative behavior. When people are excluded from appreciation they might feel aggressive if not depressed and uncertain.<sup>1247</sup> Lack of appreciation can also lead to psychological (or actual) death.<sup>1248</sup>

Besides such communicative murder, the question whether sub-foundations for life should be influenced if possible remains a valid moral question. Communicative moral nature only exists when human beings are alive and live communicatively. Thus, every step to permit communication (also medically) should be taken.<sup>1249</sup> The question of sub-foundations of communication can only include rudimentary measures such as artificial respiration and nutrition if they are requested. It is vital that such measurements are offered in ways that do not interfere with the personal narrations of the individuals involved. In non-scientific contexts this is often described as respect for someone's dignity. Thereby, it becomes necessary not only to consider a person's hunger or other needs but to engage in serious communication. Only such communication makes it possible to find out how her individuality including her version of emotions and rationality is narrated and how someone who wants to help can appreciatively enter this narration.<sup>1250</sup>

It is of course impossible to create an absolutely perfect mutual appreciation of speakers' positions as humans are confronted with many choices at a time. Some individuals might be affronted by the alien concepts of a society supporting someone's personality

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<sup>1246</sup> Cf. Demmerling, *Vernunft* 270. For the roots of this concept of human nature in pagan thought see Phillips/Taylor 17; 19, ff.

<sup>1247</sup> Cf. Bauer, *Menschlichkeit* 76, f.

<sup>1248</sup> The fundamental importance of appreciation between human beings as it has been discussed with regard to philosophical anthropology, discourse/communicative ethics, and poststructuralism can be traced back to dialogical philosophy, to phenomenology, and more abstractly to the Aristotelian conception of man as a social creature. Cf. Israel, *Dialogphilosophie* 139-143.

<sup>1249</sup> Difficult exceptional cases like those of locked-in-patients cannot be discussed here as such analyses would go beyond the scope of the present study. Yet, it can be assessed that most patients suffering from loss of brain functions can still communicate to a limited extent. It is thus rarely absolutely impossible for living human beings to take part in communicative reality. Besides, scientific data or even instruments to measure psychological states are sparse in cases of locked-in-syndrome or total paralysis. Therefore, an informed discussion of how communication might work with persons not able to communicate fully is very difficult as such. Cf. Niels Birbaumer, "Nur das Denken bleibt: Neuroethik des Eingeschlossen-Seins," Engels/Hildt 77-94. We can always assume a responsibility to appreciate other human beings even if the conditions of appreciation are limited. The existing empirical data unambiguously demonstrates that the slightest possibility to communicate with other human beings ameliorates the quality of life even in the most severe cases. Cf. *ibid.* 92. Additionally, the question of addiction comes to mind when such statements are made. For the difficult relation between addiction and illness and the ensuing moral problems see Julia Wolf, "Anthropologie und Ethik der Sucht," Engels/Hildt 105-120.

<sup>1250</sup> Obviously, such fundamental arguments cannot solve practical problems. I am not even sure whether they significantly improve the process of finding solutions to problems of practical ethics (as dignity is often inherent in pragmatic or other philosophical and political arguments without a consideration of its communicative foundation). Yet, fundamental arguments provide solid guidelines for the communication between different moral systems.

who would not be accepted in their own culture. Their feelings related to the level of cultural norms will let them shrink from appreciating such alien speakers completely at first. Moreover, mutual appreciation can only happen if the respective positions have been adapted to each other. Cal's educational efforts in *Middlesex* are a good example of how difficult it is to accustom other's to a different concept of a cultural idea (such as sexuality). The unnamed narrator of *Surfacing* has shown how difficult it is to change one's own concept of reality if it has been disturbed by non-appreciation (of her as woman and mother by her former lover). Hereby, it also became clear that appreciation means to accept the social roles as well as the role as narrator. A social role assigned to a person has to include this person's freedom to influence reality by telling a story. It is not always easy to realize if a role is adequate for this purpose or not.<sup>1251</sup> Offred in *Handmaid*, for example, struggles to maintain her old personality but also struggles to accept the new social role of resource, robbing her of all social influence. Rationally being able to discern the underlying ethical claim does not mean that the ethically correct course of action immediately becomes visible or accessible. It is blurred as social situations are complex and the consequences of our actions are unclear. Yet, as our actions are defined by reason as well as emotion, it is always possible to console our regret if we realize that our actions have excluded someone else from participating in communicative reality. If we know that we have acted to the best of our knowledge and try to atone for the mistakes afterwards, we can control the harm to ourselves to a certain extent.

It is not important to forgive one another for excluding and thus mistreating each other. If we have rationally comprehended the human condition, we know that it is not possible to consider everybody immediately and always. We can only try to approximate an existence complying with our ethical nature.<sup>1252</sup> If someone has willfully disregarded this relational nature, she has acted ethically incorrectly and her influence in communicative reality must be restricted until she truly understands human nature.<sup>1253</sup> It is obviously important to honestly try to find out whether her course of action was due to an emotional imbalance (i.e. the culprit knew but has been mistreated too severely to feel what is ethical) or to a rational imbalance (the culprit did not know how to act better but felt that her action was

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<sup>1251</sup> Besides the ethical obligation that has to be fulfilled, no social role can be judged as *better* than another.

<sup>1252</sup> This sounds like the proverb *The journey is the reward*, which is not absolutely adequate. It certainly matters to keep journeying, yet, without the ethical aim of the journey, the journey would not be worthwhile.

<sup>1253</sup> It is still possible to describe someone else as immoral. Yet, the notion of *evil* as an independent category is necessarily dissolved. Disturbances are created through intersubjective mistreating. Without such a positive understanding of human nature, instances of ethical (or kind) behavior could not be explained. Cf. Phillips/ Taylor esp. 7; 97,f; 109,f; 115. For an example of how postmodern competitive individualism breeds unkindness in this way see *ibid.* 104-107.

wrong). It could also be that a culprit was simply uneducated and therefore unable to know how to act ethically.<sup>1254</sup> In all three cases the punishment should not simply have the character of an exclusion from influence but the character of therapy – of further emotional, rational, and ethical education. It is also important to find out how the imbalance could develop and try to change the social and cultural system in a way as to enable a better *education* for everyone involved in it.<sup>1255</sup> Pure forgiveness, as it is argued for by Butler, does not make sense as it is apparent that the perfect ethical reality is illusory. It is not important to refrain from punishment, but to enable better communication in the future. Before even thinking about punishing someone else, it is obviously necessary to try with all one's might to enter into communication with her. It is vital to really make the effort to adapt the social and cultural layer of one's personality to the ethical claim of mutual appreciation. It will always be necessary to change oneself to a certain extent to allow for someone's position as a narrator if she has been socialized in a different culture. One must remember that the natural ethical level is structurally important for a balanced life, whereas such happiness or contentment can be realized in many cultural and social shapes. Such a course of action has nothing to do with forgiveness and everything to do with a universal ethical foundation of human life.<sup>1256</sup>

Following Philippa Foot, a communicative foundationalist ethicist would argue that it is indeed enough for human beings to gain insight into the ethical foundations of their nature to simultaneously produce enough motivation to try to act ethically.<sup>1257</sup> Insight would mean that they really understood their intersubjective relatedness and the consequences of unethical behavior for themselves. Understanding, then, must include an idea of acceptance as it is possible to read the words on this page and dismiss the information of our intersubjective relatedness.<sup>1258</sup> It is surely impossible to dismiss the true realization forever, yet, I would not suggest that learning and understanding necessarily mean the same

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<sup>1254</sup> The test to prove this could be imagined as a test of coherence. Cf. Davidson, *Subjective* 137,f.

<sup>1255</sup> The idea that individuals can be in asymmetrical situations of power and must be helped is also very prominent in ethics of care. This naturally also refers to the education of children and differently abled persons. Cf. Conradi, *Care* 133.

<sup>1256</sup> Such openness to the other, even if she has acted wrongly, is reminiscent of Alfred Schütz intuition to truly consider the other's perspective in any given situation. Cf. Michael D. Barber, *The Participating Citizen – A Biography of Alfred Schutz* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2004), 181-184, 193,ff. Without the human community creating a communicative reality, communicative foundationalist ethics are inexistent. Therefore, the ethical standards thus identified can only apply to situations between humans. At best, their validity could be expanded to other creatures entering communicative relations with human beings. Cf. Tomasello, *Origins*. But this could only be valid for the treatment of such animals – they could not be asked to commit themselves to human ethics.

<sup>1257</sup> Cf. Foot, *Natur* 41,ff. Yet, Foot argues with regard to natural scientific external realism. Cf. e.g. *ibid.* 48-51. Whereas Foot creates the idea of natural defects in human beings, I would interpret such behavior as the result of communicative assaults on the internal equilibrium of a person. Cf. *ibid.* 99,f.

<sup>1258</sup> Foot makes a similar observation following David Hume and David Wiggins. Cf. *ibid.* 130.

thing. In the end, everybody sooner or later experiences the fundamental dependency of individual personality on the respective communicative environment – be it only through observation.<sup>1259</sup> The realization of what ought to be done according to the ethics innate in human nature is not only binding because of practical reasons. It is a rational as well as an emotional realization – an insight into the fundamental functionalities of human existence. Therefore, the decision to do what ought to be done is not in any traditional philosophical sense a solely rational decision.<sup>1260</sup> As it is also an emotional decision bound to the very core of every human being, I would even state that this decision is more often made on purely emotional rather than rational grounds. The narrators in Eugenides, *Suicides* for example know that they have not acted as they ought to have done. They very acutely feel remorse, yet, they do not understand completely how they have mistreated the Lisbon girls.

Thus, the notion of the subconscious is reduced to experiences disrupting the abilities to reason, feel, and to thus intersubjectively autonomously enter communicative reality. This definition of the unconscious as merely bad experiences of mistreatment and non-appreciation is similar to that of Charles Taylor. Persons can be insensitive to the feelings of others, which might very well be connected to their former experiences.<sup>1261</sup> It is important to understand that communicative foundationalism does not expect desires of any other kind than desires to communicate, to appreciate, and to be appreciated as innate (at least as predispositions) in human nature. Therefore, the arguments of psychoanalysis that desires of a sexual kind are suppressed through subjectivation must be discarded. Communicative foundationalism must insist that there is no way to access what lies before the introduction of an individual into a communicative community. Predispositions of the above mentioned kind must be supposed by inference from the human nature that is realized in and through communicative reality. Sexuality is only one of many (modern and postmodern) personality factors to be appreciated.<sup>1262</sup> The only *mystery* that can be added to the things that an individual cannot know about herself in general is her own subjectivation. As was argued in

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<sup>1259</sup> A very common ground for this experience in western cultures is the time we have spent at school or in teenage cliques. Especially teenagers are sensitive to the powers of the group undermining or supporting their individual personality. Often they have not yet experienced enough communicative reinforcement to rationally distance themselves from their communicative communities.

<sup>1260</sup> Cf. e.g. Foot, *Natur* 83,f.

<sup>1261</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Freiheit* 42,f.

<sup>1262</sup> The existence of instinctive sexuality cannot be denied completely in communicative foundationalism. Following Butler's work on sexuality (arguably more closely than she does herself when she engages in psychoanalysis), it can be stated that every aspect of human reality becomes visible to human beings already communicated through and permeated with cultural meaning. It is therefore impossible to try to understand anything apart from its sociohistorical meaning. This does not mean that desires do not exist in an external realistic sense, yet, humans never see them without the cultural glasses of their respective sociohistorical context.

chapter VI.i., the ensuing gap in the narration can at least be functionally reconstructed. Before this subjectivation, she *did not exist* as an individual person.

Usually, practical reason is defined as a reason which can decide against emotional and socio-cultural constraints in philosophy.<sup>1263</sup> In this way, practical reason is a way in which human beings can free themselves of these constraints and act solely with regard to what is *good*. Yet, there is no human being left if one leaves emotions and socio-cultural subjectivation out of the equation.<sup>1264</sup> The individual *is* the effects of her subjectivation as much as she is her emotional and rational faculties. As personal freedom is inextricably linked to intersubjectivity, the problem of determination necessarily arises. Yet, it is possible to argue that even though inner conditions are caused by social situations and interactions, the inner decisions are not determined as long as they are not forced.<sup>1265</sup> Each personality is caused by intersubjective actions. Yet, as long as a narrator's position is appreciated for a person, she has the means to decide for herself and influence the intersubjective situation to some extent.

As human beings are not made to exist on their own, freedom can simply not mean that an individual can do whatever she likes regardless of her communicative environment and thus her intersubjective situation. The freedom and autonomy argued for in this study and many other philosophically prudent works do not describe any perfect faculties.<sup>1266</sup> Freedom does only exist as long as it is granted. Even though individuals who have experienced a large amount of communicative reinforcement might be able to sustain their personality or at least parts of it for some time without being appreciated, this is not possible on a permanent level. Although human beings will never be able to perfectly control or understand their reality, they are not determined beings. The understanding and shaping of communicative reality depends on every member. Hence, an idea of perfect (as arbitrary) personal control is in itself illogical. Individuals experience subjectively, but the reality they experience and the ways in which they experience are intersubjectively developed. Still, every level of control or freedom that is possible depends on the subjective understanding of oneself as a person. The functionalities underlying personal reasoning and feeling must be innate to be able to explain the way in which reality exists.<sup>1267</sup>

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<sup>1263</sup> Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 219.

<sup>1264</sup> There might be some life form left when individual personhood is disregarded, yet even this life form could not be described in human terms. Human beings perceive and understand everything through the filter of their personality, which is to a great extent socio-culturally influenced.

<sup>1265</sup> Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 228, f.

<sup>1266</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 251.

<sup>1267</sup> Cf. esp. the discussion of Pirsig, *Zen*. See also the way in which Donald Davidson was discussed in chapter II.iii.ii. The strategy of trial and error described functionally at this point resembles Davidson's concept of

#### IV.v.ii. Communicative Ethical Foundations

Appropriating Hegel and Kant, Jon Mills and Janusz A. Polanowski highlight the way in which prejudice is inherent in subjectivity and accordingly in human nature.

[P]rejudice itself is not a negative attribute of human nature or development; instead it is a universal *a priori* condition necessary for the evolution and maturation of the self and civilization. The *a priori* foundation of this claim lies in the multiple structures and parallel processes that constitute the nature of subjectivity, conscious and unconscious organizations, and the psychodynamics of the self.<sup>1268</sup>

A communicative foundationalist point of view also proposes such a neutral reevaluation of prejudice. I would probably not go as far as to call prejudice the *greatest achievement of the human soul*.<sup>1269</sup> Yet, the idea that every human being always immediately passes judgment on others is definitely supported by communicative foundationalism. The common sense definition of prejudice states that it means judging others not because of their individual merits but because of their membership in a group. When others are approached communicatively their ability to respond is assumed because of their membership in the human species. When individuals try to share their concepts of reality, very similar prejudices enable their communicative actions. Without faith in the (at least possible) success of communicative actions no one would undertake them. As has been made very clear in the literary analyses, human beings exist through the images of reality they design and through the images others design for them. Images containing (parts of) reality must necessarily include other human beings as well. Thereby, the perception of another person is always influenced by the image of other humans contained in images of reality. In these terms postmodern relativist theories can be described as trying to eliminate such pre-formed images to protect members of the society who do not conform to the norms. Besides prejudices related to human nature, prejudices related to the given cultural framework are at work within the formation of images. To understand reality, humans nevertheless need these images that supply them with the features concerning human nature and the specific sociohistorical situation.

Postmodern relativist theories actually claim a decomposition of individuality in the name of ethics. In this way the many assertions of the death of the subject can be interpreted in a new light. They are not a description of the supposed new pluralistic reality. They

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how we interpret other person's utterances with regard to which language they speak. Cf. Davidson, *Subjective* 110, ff.

<sup>1268</sup> Jon Mills and Janusz A. Polanowski, *The Ontology of Prejudice*, Value Inquiry (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1997) 15.

<sup>1269</sup> Cf. *ibid.* ix.

are moral claims, aimed at a better world. However, they are not leading to a better world. On the contrary, they are impeding the actual description of communicative reality and are thus undermining the sense of self every human being needs to communicatively interact, i.e. to live with the greatest possible amount of freedom. No one can know who she is without a communicative initiation – without the initiation into the cosmos of images and narrations (containing sociohistorical as well as transcending elements of human nature). Furthermore, it is no use to generally demand a cautious handling of these images, holding back the judgments already implied in every part of communicative reality. The only demand that can be made consists of a functional ethical obligation. Images should be handled in a way that the positions of others in these images do not (permanently) reduce them to objects.<sup>1270</sup> Human beings can meet this obligation by adapting the way in which they narrate their stories. Ethics thus comes down to a claim for a certain narrational style. What can be formulated as truly ethical claims regarding narrational style does actually not differ greatly from what is formulated by postmodern relativists such as Judith Butler. Yet, contrary to postmodern relativism, communicative foundationalist ethics offers a foundation and thus founded moral claims. As was discussed at length, plurality is not a firm ground for ethics. Additionally, the literary analyses have shown that the affirmation of plurality as the main characteristic of postmodern reality is simply wrong.

In contrast to empiricism in relation to a true or real nature around us, I have argued for an empiricism based on communication.<sup>1271</sup> The study of language is naturally related to the study of communication. It has come to many descriptions throughout the last decades; yet, none of them are especially concerned with ethics. “A commonly accepted result [in recent linguistics] is that discourse has an internal structure, however it is recognized and marked.”<sup>1272</sup> As discussed in II.ii., analytical theory is the most ethically concerned branch of philosophy related to linguistics. Similarly, it is commonly supposed in communicative studies that basic communicative actions (such as gestures) are transcultural and transhistorical.<sup>1273</sup> Therefore, they support the idea of communicative foundationalism. Still, linguistic theories must be ranged into the greater framework of

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<sup>1270</sup> It is certainly true that we necessarily appear as grammatical objects in someone else’s story. Yet, it makes a huge difference, whether the other addresses us as a potential speaker, who can engage in her story, or as an object, a means to an end of her story without human qualities.

<sup>1271</sup> Still, the exact relationship between scientific research and communicative foundationalist reality has not been described yet. This study is not the place to analyze it in detail. So far it can only be said that research accomplished within a specific sociohistoric and the greater socio-communicative framework could provide valid information in some respects.

<sup>1272</sup> Giacomo Ferrari, “State of the art in Computational Linguistics,” *Linguistics Today – Facing a Greater Challenge*, ed. Piet van Sterkenburg (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004) 163-186 (hereafter: van Sterkenburg, *Linguistics*) 178.

<sup>1273</sup> Cf. Tomasello, *Origins* 111.

postmodern thought and will not be discussed in any more detail.<sup>1274</sup> If the human capacities to communicate and to mediate ideas were exclusively learned, i.e. completely dependent on the learner's circumstances, an argument could be made that different cultural learning provided different structures for communication. It is vital for a communicative foundation that communication has (at least) a transhistorical and transcultural structure. If universal foundations are to be advocated from which binding norms of moral behavior can be deduced, some predispositions must be included in what it means to be human. As academic research on mind and communication has provided some strong lines of argument for a predisposition to develop language, it is relatively unproblematic to establish this case. Children recreate language when they are learning it, as has for example been shown in the development of Creole languages out of pidgin communication. Out of all languages available speakers of different languages create a pidgin that usually shows no grammatical complexity. Children exposed to the pidgin as language learning environment will invariably develop it into a bona fide language, displaying the usual grammatical complexity.<sup>1275</sup> Besides such evidence, the usual learning process of a mother tongue points to the same conclusions. There must be some predisposition to communicate and to speak a language. As this research presents results gained from the study of language and communicative behavior, it must be considered valid within a socio-communicative framework.

For humans the communicative context is not simply everything in the immediate environment, from the temperature of the room to the sounds of birds in the background, but rather the communicative context is what is 'relevant' to the social interaction, that is, what a participant sees as relevant as well – and knows that the other knows this as well, and so on, potentially ad infinitum.<sup>1276</sup>

Once their own perspective is established securely, the experience of such a frame of reference forces all human beings to imagine someone else's perspective. Otherwise an individual would never be able to understand what someone else was trying to communicate. Human beings are able to construct various frames of reference cooperatively and can even be said to have a *cooperative spirit*. If an individual does not reply in adequate, cooperative ways, she will be socially punished – for example by not having friends or by being

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<sup>1274</sup> Further problems would arise in such a discussion because postmodern linguistics as the empirical study of language is usually ranged among realist scientific theories. Obviously, they are postmodern approaches as well, and linguistics has played a very important role in the distribution of postmodern ideas. For an informative overview of recent linguistics especially in the area of normative questions see Robert M. Harnish, "Pragmatics – State of the Art," van Sterkenburg, *Linguistics* 207-215 and Harry van der Hulst, "Phonological dialectics – A short history of generative phonology," van Sterkenburg, *Linguistics* 217-242. For a theoretical discussion of linguistic concepts of an absolute core of language see Petr Sgall, "Types of languages and the simple pattern of the core of language," van Sterkenburg, *Linguistics* 243-265.

<sup>1275</sup> Cf. Pinker, *Language* 32-39.

<sup>1276</sup> Tomasello, *Origins* 74.



considered insane. For Michael Tomasello such cooperative reasoning also includes the supposition of a joint interest in social cooperation and, therefore, the supposition that someone trying to communicate will always want to be helpful to the addressed.<sup>1277</sup>

[T]he motivational structure of human communication is ... recursive in that we both know together that we both are helpful – so that you are expecting me to expect you (and so on with further embeddings as needed) to be helpful.<sup>1278</sup>

The present approach does thus not only suppose a structural ethical priority, which subordinates all further epistemological and ontological concerns, but also links the structural composition of human consciousness to an ethical a priori. Yet, this is not an a priori in the Kantian sense, still referring to a world that exists externally. It is a totally mind-structuring a priori in an absolute mind-dependent reality as proposed by phenomenology. In this way, consciousness is understood as morally binding. Communicative foundationalism seeks – like the natural sciences – objectivity towards all relative cultural factors. A justification of ethics proposed in these terms will be most useful to communicate cross-culturally.<sup>1279</sup>

At this point it is necessary to return to the question of determination in terms of the cultural part of individuals' personalities. Determination by an underlying intersubjective human nature and even by cultural personality traits does not contradict self-determination. Following Harry Frankfurt, Michael Pauen has argued convincingly that determination and free will do not categorically contradict each other. A person cannot exclusively be called free (i.e. self-determined) if she is able to act differently under the exact same circumstances. She is rooted in her culture, her biography, and her narration. Even though she is not absolutely determined, she will nevertheless act according to her personality. As one of the expressions of her self-determination, this personality will determine her to certain courses of action, unless the circumstances and hence the personality change drastically.<sup>1280</sup> She is free as long as there is the communicative room to narrate her life from a personal perspective. This freedom (or free will) springs from the fact that she is influenced by her communicative environment but is also able to influence this environment and thereby herself. As

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<sup>1277</sup> Cf. Tomasello, *Origins* 76; 81; 83; 93,f. The question of perspective is especially relevant for non-linguistic types of communication. For the general importance of a kind and cooperative relationship to lead a happy life and the evidence that people *do* care about others without consideration of their own benefits see also Phillips/Taylor esp. 16,f; 102; 115.

<sup>1278</sup> Tomasello, *Origins* 95. Moreover, children often seem to communicatively demand that their attitude is shared by adult communicative partners. Cf. *ibid.* 121.

<sup>1279</sup> For the idea of language as developing with such an underlying structure but without reference to an in-born language capacity see Schütz/Luckmann 668,ff.

<sup>1280</sup> Cf. Michael Pauen, "Keine Freiheit in einer determinierten Welt? Neurowissenschaftliche Erkenntnis und das menschliche Selbstverständnis," *Engels/Hildt* 171-193; 180, 183-186.

long as she is one of the subjects and not an object of communicative reality, she can intervene in communicative developments. Thereby, an individual is never identical to communicative reality but never completely free from communicative reality either. The stability implied in this definition leaves room to address an individual as someone with a stable intersubjective personality.<sup>1281</sup> Free will or self-determination thus means the possibility of shaping a narration that is culturally and socially influenced. If the position of narrator is offered and appreciated by others, an individual person can develop. If this perspective is not offered or insufficiently appreciated by the communicative environment, the according member will not be able to be an individual person. Therefore, she will not be free or self-determined (to the extent that free will is possible in a communicative reality). Self-determination in this sense is a window of possible participation in a communal reality shaped by individual voices.<sup>1282</sup>

#### **IV.v.iii. Actual Moral Behavior**

The notions necessary for ethical action are freedom, autonomy, and moral responsibility.<sup>1283</sup> To describe and analyze the socio-communicative world properly and to scrutinize the ethical choice each human being has to make when she wants to truly realize her ethical potential, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of a certain freedom. Besides the possibility of unethical choices, it is important to realize that the development of self-consciousness is a dynamic process. Moreover, a certain level of personality has to exist before the realization of one's ethical potential can be attempted. In the case of Eugenides' *Suicides*, the narrators could not enter an ethical relation to the Lisbon girls because they had not yet reached the state of mind to distance themselves from the intersubjective relationships with the rest of their community. The fragile bodies of their self-consciousnesses have been lastingly unbalanced in the wake of their actions. They are caught in a vicious circle of reliving their experiences, even though they ineffectively try to break it by re-narrating their story. To help them, a certain kind of intersubjective intervention would be needed. Yet, the aim of this intersubjective help would consist of gaining a certain distance from their community so that they could learn to think and act independently. The exact

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<sup>1281</sup> Although he conceives of the individual as much less intersubjective, Paul Grice makes a similar argument to describe the stability of persons in spite of their changes. Cf. Grice, *Conception* 61, f.

<sup>1282</sup> The antithesis in neurobiology's claim of the absence of free will is exposed in realistic philosophical terms by Michael Heidelberger in *ibid.*, "Freiheit und Wissenschaft! Metaphysische Zumutungen von Verächtern der Willensfreiheit," Engels/Hildt 195-219, esp. 197, 209-212.

<sup>1283</sup> Cf. Žižek, *Defense* 436.

balance between the realization of intersubjectivity and the utilization of the amount of freedom that leads to happiness, satisfaction, rational action, self-consciousness, and ethical existence is the crux of ethics.

The sense that someone else behaves wrongly is not always conscious. When referring to cultural behavior such as the *right* distance between two partners in dialog, only a diffuse sense of emotional disturbance might be evoked.<sup>1284</sup> Any judgment of the other person can also be fueled by such unconscious perceptions. Therefore, it should be rationally checked before any action that could inflict harm on the other is taken. Such side-judgment cannot really be called ethical. Nevertheless, the strength of these sorts of perceptions with regard to the emotional consideration of others should not be underestimated. It is also obvious that the force of a surrounding group can influence the decisions of a member.<sup>1285</sup> Yet, communicative foundationalism maintains that this is an effect of emotional intersubjectivity. Education should lead to the ability to reason because otherwise ethics cannot be understood. As feminist theory has insisted, it is important to understand the development of human beings. They are children until their communicative environment helps them to develop into adults with complex individual personalities.<sup>1286</sup> It is therefore most important to appreciate human beings who are not sufficiently developed as individuals to give them a frame of reference from which to act.<sup>1287</sup> This frame of reference should be mediated as a secure reality for children to enable them to understand the functionality and content of a concept of reality. Only when they know their own system well can they engage in other concepts of reality to appreciate other persons as individuals. An adult or intersubjectively autonomous individual can be described as a person with a sense of coherence for her self and her story. A harmonious balance between feelings and reason could also be described as a balanced point of view engaging in one's own perspective, yet not disrespecting others' perspectives.<sup>1288</sup> As the balance of one's own personal identity is linked to the personal identity of all others, a reciprocity is installed that can be used to fight against injustice on a political level. In the same way it could be stated that the source of the injustice that is used as an argument in so many political struggles has been detected.

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<sup>1284</sup> Cf. e.g. Paul Watzlawick, *Wenn du mich wirklich liebtest, würdest du gern Knoblauch essen – über das Glück und die Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit* (ed. Heidi Bohnet und Klaus Stadler), (Munich and Zurich: Piper, 2006) 121,f.

<sup>1285</sup> Cf. e.g. Paul Watzlawick, *Wie wirklich ist die Wirklichkeit? Wahn – Täuschung – Verstehen* (Munich: Piper, 1978) 91-99.

<sup>1286</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *Self* 178-202.

<sup>1287</sup> Communicative foundationalist ethics would thus contradict a constructivist pedagogy arguing that teachers are supposed to offer their education as only one amongst many possibilities. Cf. e.g. Pongratz, *Untiefen*.

<sup>1288</sup> Benhabib, *Self* 201,f.

At the same time one has to be careful when arguing from a communicative foundationalist point of view. I can, for example, realize that racism or homophobia create situations that are ethically wrong as they mistreat certain groups of people. It is nevertheless required to communicate with the respective racist or homophobic person in a way that does not undermine her individual personality. Ethics thus require that we abandon part of our own cultural and social identity to be able to communicate with and educate others on a level on which they can actually be met.<sup>1289</sup> Simply denying their communicative realities would unbalance them and at the same time would unbalance those who attempt to educate or change them. Losing one's communicative reality means, quite literally, that one's world falls apart. Not every change in the communicative concept of reality must lead to this complete collapse; yet, education has to be rendered carefully and openly. Changes will come about slowly. The collapse of someone's world will easily lead to violent reactions due to the absolute uncertainty that is thereby caused. Moreover, by destroying someone else's communicative reality, her individuality and thereby her sole means of understanding ethics is deeply unsettled as well. Hence, it makes no sense at all to confront someone with a totally different concept of culture and society violently or abruptly. Above all, education must lead to either the development of a stable personality or the maintenance of a stable personality, before changes in reality or an obligation to abstract from a given situation can be expected. Following this claim, education can be understood as enabling communicative participants to train their reason and emotions sufficiently in order to understand ethics and to be able to do what is best for them.

However, individuals are usually integrated in social and cultural systems. Art Kleiner formulates an important question with regard to these systems as follows.

What sorts of features must we instill in a collective—a team, an organization, a nation, a culture, or a society—to make it easier for people to make the [ethical] decision ...?<sup>1290</sup>

It might be necessary to change a social or cultural system so that an individual can act rightly. If the system's integrity is insecure at a certain moment in history, it is necessary to allow for a discourse that also heeds critical voices. It is possible to imagine a historical situation in which two cultural and social systems collide that have socialized two very different sets of identities. If these sets of identities are very different in vital points, it could be a good solution to temporarily separate the respective groups. Different religions within a nation could also serve as an example. The eventual goal of human existence must be to

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<sup>1289</sup> Cf. Cornell, Images 144.

<sup>1290</sup> Art Kleiner, "Doing the Right Thing: How Organizations Can Help us Make Ethical Decisions," *Carnegie Ethics Online* 4 February 2009 [http://www.cceia.org/resources/ethics\\_online/0030.html](http://www.cceia.org/resources/ethics_online/0030.html) (4.1.2010).

narrate identities and personalities that are compatible and thus create narrations which offer a place for every member of the global community. Yet, as the process of adjusting to each other is very difficult, it can be sensible to slow this process down. The tendencies of local resistance against global politics – of local identity politics – can be interpreted as an example that the process of adjustment is happening too fast at the moment.<sup>1291</sup> The general aim of such systematic action would not be to represent the differences more appropriately, but to pave the way for a future rapprochement.<sup>1292</sup>

The action that can be claimed from politicians must thus be aimed at a better world. Yet, the vision of morally good cooperative cohabitation is inherent in us all. We need not really cling to a special form of utopia which links it to the given sociohistorical circumstances and thus makes it culturally accessible. To campaign for a specific utopia might even make it easier for politicians to ignore the actual demands and find excuses.<sup>1293</sup> It seems far more vital to engage in the discussion of present problems hampering ethically correct cohabitation. Measures can unfortunately only be evaluated regarding their whole impact after they have been taken. Therefore, the measures proposed can only function as a projection of a person's aims. If pressing problems are openly discussed, anyone can be evaluated according to his agreement with ethics. If open discussion of overall issues and proposals for solutions are avoided, such evaluation cannot take place (politicians could then, for example, only be evaluated according to their abilities in solving or handling minor problems). Deciding whether some person or party should be destined as a leader is only truly possible when a greater perspective (including ethical questions) is offered. Thus, a public dialogue of the crucial issues is an opening for possible ameliorations of communicative reality.

A cultural or social system might lead to ethically unacceptable situations, but this might also happen on a micro-level of intersubjective action. Ethical aspects cannot be swapped or traded. Some situations are simply immoral – this means that no moral choice can be made. Yet, an analysis of these situations can reveal how they came about and which factors must be changed to enable the persons who had to bear them to realize a moral life. What is ethically wrong will stay ethically wrong, and people will be hurt if they have to choose between two wrongs. Moral dilemmas usually illustrate such situations, even though they are mostly formulated by theorists to show the impossibility of universal

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<sup>1291</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, "Introduction: The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference," Benhabib, *Democracy* 3-17, 5.

<sup>1292</sup> It is therefore different from current communitarian concepts. Cf. *ibid.* 11, f.

<sup>1293</sup> This phenomenon is aptly discussed in Žižek, *Defense* 350.

value or unambiguous guidance. A well-argued overview of this aspect of ethics is given by Thomas Nagel.<sup>1294</sup> When an absolute ethical standard forbids the killing of other human beings, there are no options left to an agent who has to decide whether to destroy the airplane with its innocent passengers or let the airplane crash into the inhabited houses.<sup>1295</sup> If an individual finds herself in a situation in which any of her actions must lead to ethically wrong consequences, the situation must be understood as immoral in itself. The only moral consequence springing from a dilemma in this sense is the responsibility to find out how the situation came about and how it can be avoided in the future. The individual who had to act wrongly will nevertheless emerge from such an immoral situation deeply troubled and perhaps forever scarred.<sup>1296</sup>

Strong arguments for human partiality have been made by more culturally-oriented philosophers in postmodern times. “We put the interest of our fellow citizens far above those of citizens of other nations ....”<sup>1297</sup> Richard Rorty even states that justice should be understood in terms of globalized loyalty.<sup>1298</sup> It cannot be reasonably denied that human beings’ emotional affiliations are strongest for those they love most. These can possibly only be those they know best. As emotions supply ethics with motivation, the motivation to help those closest to us will necessarily be greater than to help those living far away.<sup>1299</sup> Thereby, this behavior can very well be explained within the framework of communicative foundationalism, too. It is still not morally right. The claim of ethics has to be answered individually, communally, regionally, and globally. Despite the fact that evidence towards a tendency of armed conflict and even genocide presents itself throughout human history, there is also an abundance of evidence pointing out the cooperative nature of human beings.<sup>1300</sup> It is more logical to explain the uncooperative actions as disruptions of a cooperative nature than vice versa.

Apart from the theoretical issue that is settled by communicative foundationalism, it remains difficult to decide what the correct moral behavior in a given complex socio-cul-

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<sup>1294</sup> Cf. Nagel, *Fragen* 83-109.

<sup>1295</sup> Nagel moves towards a solution by differentiating between an action and the consequences of an action. He argues that not everything happening to others is what is *done* to them by an individual, even if what is happening to them can be interpreted as a consequence of that individual’s actions. Cf. *ibid.* 92,f.

<sup>1296</sup> This obviously increases already existing challenges to the notion of a just war.

<sup>1297</sup> Singer, *World* 152.

<sup>1298</sup> Cf. Rorty, *Philosophie* 85.

<sup>1299</sup> This behavior is for example evidenced by the massive amount of money donated by Americans in the wake of the terrorist attacks in September 2001. While New Yorkers (in need or not) received an average of \$ 5,300 per family, private US-donations for foreign aid amounted to about \$ 20 per family in 2000. Cf. Singer, *World* 150-153. As Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor argue, a special relationship between feelings of kindness (which would be associated with ethics in communicative foundationalism) and familial bonds was traditionally conceived in ancient thought. Cf. Phillips/Taylor 18.

<sup>1300</sup> Cf. also Singer, *World* 111.

tural situation is. Daniel A. Bell, for example, raises a few of the questions that present themselves to international organizations campaigning for human rights.

How do people who want to do good behave when they meet obstacles? Is it justifiable to sacrifice some good in the short term for more good in the long term? And which human rights concerns should have priority?<sup>1301</sup>

Moral decisions are almost always mingled with utilitarian considerations. Ethics as a communicative foundation can only reveal the direction for solutions. Problems must be solved through shared communication as every part of humanity is connected in the same way as all human beings involved. Therefore, all disciplines or institutions involved in the problems must work on the solutions together.<sup>1302</sup> Critics such as Slavoj Žižek offer much differentiated analyses of culture-related political issues. The ethical core of any communicative relation and the ensuing problems will always appear entangled in cultural issues on the communicative stage. Therefore, it remains important to deconstruct arguments and approaches; it remains dramatically important to challenge the underlying foundations of the ways in which people perceive and treat certain situations. Many philosophers have pointed to the immense difficulties of distinguishing between the manageable actions of a person and the things that merely happen to her. As she exists in a complex interplay of environmental influences and personal actions shaping the environment, it is indeed difficult to pinpoint the sphere of individual responsibility. Following an after-Kantian understanding, communicative foundationalism assumes that personal intention must be crucial in deciding this matter.<sup>1303</sup> After having achieved the ability to consider ethically on the highest level, the human individual decides whether to try to behave ethically or not. At this point judgment can and must be rendered universally. In terms of communication this means that a person either tries to communicate and reach a consensus or she does not do so. If she does not try, she must be condemned.

Our culturally learned norms and beliefs will guide us, as they directly affect our emotions. We automatically judge acts and people. Yet, once reason enters this behavior and the fundamental ethics is discovered, a balance between ethnocentric allegiances and allegiances to the whole of the communicative community can be established. This is a process, a functional guideline forever edging us on to relate to even more others. Selfishness on a more subjective level is very easy to describe in terms of communicative founda-

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<sup>1301</sup> Daniel A. Bell, "Introduction: Reflections on Dialogues between Practitioners and Theorists of Human Rights," *Ethics in Action – The Ethical Challenges of International Human Rights Nongovernmental Organizations*, eds. Daniel A. Bell and Jean-Marc Coicaud (Cambridge et. al.: Cambridge UP, 2007) 1-22, 2.

<sup>1302</sup> Cf. Thomas Rentsch, "Grenzen und Einheit der Vernunft neu denken," Rentsch, *Einheit* 25-45, 31.

<sup>1303</sup> Cf. Nagel, *Fragen* 45-63.

tionalism. Whenever a person seeks to reach a substantial – that is to say material – aim as a static picture, she is acting wrongly. Someone might for instance imagine herself to be a lawyer with a certain number of children and material comforts such as a house and a big car. If she pursues this as an unchangeable vision, it will necessarily lead to the instrumentalizing of others. If a situation is not fully appreciated as a communicative situation in which one is *never* alone and in which one *always* has to consider one's fellow narrators, no one will act ethically. When any substantial dream is allowed to become pivotal, the functionally ethical behavior towards others must be afflicted. As important as dreams and ideals are for the emotional part of a person and therefore for her motivation, they are also dangerous when allowed to form set frames. The framework of communication must stay flexible.<sup>1304</sup>

Sometimes the level of existence communicated within cultural and social meanings will be contradicted by ethics. People will not be able to let go of the meaning of their world. Yet as long as they keep in mind that the others – especially referring to others from alternative cultural regions – are unable to let go of their world either, they can be careful to render their narrations suitable for each other. Once human beings have really understood that new meaning environments actually threaten to crumble people's worlds, they can design processes of narration gently enough to give others an opening. As the meaning of existence is challenged alongside the level of evaluation, alternative evaluative processes can threaten others to the very core of their existence. In this way, traumas are not only caused on the deeper ethical level by ignoring someone's humanity, but also on the cultural and social level by disrupting someone's cultural and social identity. It is only after having made every effort to understand the other and to redesign communicative reality as to enable her to join a narration, that comprehensive ethical judgment should be rendered. When she refuses to engage in communication and to change her narration in a way that gives people with other moral norms access to her behavior, she must be judged as unethical. How people that are not acting ethically should be treated is a very serious and difficult question. Mutilating narrations or other people's ability to engage in a narration should be considered as a serious crime. Depriving someone of the ability to engage in re-

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<sup>1304</sup> It should be highlighted that this demand is different from poststructuralism's demand for a flexible individual. Instead of softening the framework of a rational individual as such, communicative foundationalism demands that an individual position of narration is sought and maintained. Yet, the manner of narrating ought to remain flexible. Obviously, this will lead to effects on communicative reality and thereby also on the individual's perception of herself. But this change of herself is not to be sought as a general flexibility of the self – it is merely an effect of ethical behavior and renders the world not ever more flexible, but ever more ethical.



ality means killing her in the communicative sense. Yet, such questions cannot be debated in the scale of this study as it is designed to identify the ethical foundations.

There is no abstractly formulated practical solution that is right for everybody involved or that could be accepted by everybody involved *per se*. The ethical implications of human nature are an obligation to communicate about problematic issues. Thereby, the issue as well as everybody involved must necessarily change. A solution is not ethical because it adheres to a special set of norms. Its moral value depends entirely on adherence to the ethical functionality described as a narratively structured access to reason, emotions and thereby foundational ethics forming human nature. The communicative agreement involved is very similar to existing formulations of discourse ethics.

Unter den Kommunikationsvoraussetzungen eines inklusiven und zwanglosen Diskurses ... fordert der Grundsatz der Universalisierung, dass sich jeder der Beteiligten in die Perspektive aller anderen hineinversetzt; gleichzeitig behält jeder Betroffene die Möglichkeit zu prüfen, ob er ... aus jeweils seiner Sicht eine strittige Norm als allgemeines Gesetz wollen kann.

[D]iese ideale Rollenübernahme, also die Entschränkung und Reversibilität aller Deutungsperspektiven, [wird] durch die allgemeinen Kommunikationsvoraussetzungen der Argumentationspraxis zugleich möglich und nötig gemacht ....<sup>1305</sup>

There is really only one ethical norm that underlies all communication. As it entails the appreciation of each other as first-person narrators, the resulting (cultural) understandings (or norms) must remain provisional. It is exactly this interim nature of intersubjective communicative agreements that appreciates the communicative ethical foundations of human nature. Therefore, the only norms that can be justly called norms are those which guarantee the status of every human being as a first-person narrator. In this way the communicative foundationalist understanding of ethics is only decisively different from existing approaches to postmodern ethics as it refers to a foundational justification of human nature, conceives of the observer as narrator, and subsequently focuses on narrativity.

#### **IV.v.iv. Narrativity Reconsidered**

[F]or almost all of us living and telling are inextricably connected: we make sense of our experiences through the stories we tell about them, even as those stories influence our future experiences.<sup>1306</sup>

A few words on the nature of narrativity have to be said to conclude the account of communicative foundationalist ethics.<sup>1307</sup> How others can be unsettled in their ability to

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<sup>1305</sup> Habermas, *Erläuterungen* 157.

<sup>1306</sup> Phelan, *Rhetoric* ix.

<sup>1307</sup> The question of individuals who are not yet or not any more able to communicate cannot be addressed here, as this would go beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, the individuals who are not yet able to communicate in the sense of future generations not yet procreated are not included in this discussion. Issues of ecology could for example be subsumed under the issue of sub-foundations of communication addressed

narrate must be characterized in some more detail. Especially the questions of how such unbalanced humans can be helped and how far unethical reactions because of unethical assaults must be tolerated. More theoretically, the question how the boundaries of the communicative community can be defined will be addressed first. It is possible to temporarily exclude other human beings categorically from the narration by means of declaring them as not being human. This behavior could also bypass the effect described in *Suicides*, as the sense of wrongdoing experienced by the narrators here sprang from their theoretical acceptance of the Lisbon sisters as equal members of their community. What happens if a special part of the population, let us say a certain religious group, is declared not to be human and can therefore be treated differently?<sup>1308</sup> Communicative foundationalism must insist that it would eventually turn out as impossible to consider other beings capable of narration as such a different kind. This was shown in the analysis of *Handmaid* and can historically be supported by the numerous cases in which at least some members of an oppressing force have eventually helped at least some of the oppressed. Moreover, the analysis of the anonymous narrator in *Surfacing* has revealed that the violent exclusion of others, i.e. their denomination as *objects* (in this case as *Americans*) does not lead to a stable personality. On the contrary, the violent reduction of others leads to the serious disturbance of an individual. The psychological explanation of the Stockholm syndrome also seems to point out that it is impossible for human beings in close contact not to engage in mutual narration sooner or later. Thus, they will eventually relate to the other as a human being in some way, even if they have decided to treat each other immorally.

Therefore, a communicative foundationalist would suppose that in the end the mechanisms analyzed in *Suicides* will always prevail. It will nevertheless remain very difficult to reason with, let alone educate someone who firmly believes that some members of the community are not as valuable as others. It will thus always remain highly problematic and will need a refined narrator to meaningfully combine two narrations about completely different topics. This is an important point in communicative ethical foundationalism: it is not so much about the punishment of ethically wrong behavior but about preventing it.<sup>1309</sup>

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above. Comatose individuals or unborn babies must be understood as exceptions. They could both be addressed in terms of the communicating individuals, whose lives they already or still play a role in. They could also be addressed in terms of their future (re)entry into discourse.

<sup>1308</sup> For the discussion of such examples see e.g. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Exactly and Responsibly – A Defense of Ethical Criticism," Davis/Womack 59-79, 69.

<sup>1309</sup> With this reminder I hope to diminish the danger that communicative foundationalism could be regarded in the light Michel Foucault shed on regimes of power. They create their own order of things which has to be re-established through punishment. Cf. Foucault, *Ordnung*; Taylor, *Freiheit* 190, f. I believe that the ethical order is part of human beings and is in this way an innate power we all exercise for our own good. Therefore, the inevitable form of humanism intertwined with communicative foundationalism should not be understood

At the same time rationality has to be addressed again at this point. If it is indicated ethically necessary to reason with someone else, the notion of a common rational faculty is addressed. Rationality can be described as intersubjective coherence or narrational equilibrium or harmony. Consistency and social objectivity (i.e. the quality of connectivity for all others) are the most important features of an account of rationality – without the communicative aspect; it would not exist according to communicative foundationalism.<sup>1310</sup> Such a notion of a rationally installed equilibrium that satisfies emotionally and is ordered according to ethics is reminiscent of other philosophical versions of a reflective equilibrium, probably most prominently argued for by John Rawls. Allan Gibbard, who combines utilitarianism as well as influences from contract theories in his philosophy, develops a similar notion of rational consistency, but does not formulate it in terms of narration. Besides, the rational faculties are usually given priority over emotional faculties in such arguments. Communicative foundationalism would always argue for the narrational characteristic of human communication, whereas a narrational equilibrium must encompass the highest adequacy to describe the pursuit of ethics.<sup>1311</sup>

Communicative foundationalist ethics describes the first and last value of humanity as mutual respect for each other's narrating position in addition to the care of one's own first-person narrative.<sup>1312</sup> This is only a minimal foundation and merely a theoretical answer to the philosophical question: why should I behave ethically? Which cultural moral norms might contradict these foundational ethics must be analyzed by deconstructive and critical means. Even though an individual should do what she can faced with the immediate exclusion of someone else from communicative reality, a political organization system-

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as an external force to control but as a modus to realize one's self. Yet, as there is no external frame of reference to prove such an idea, I have only this metanarrative to try to make communicative foundationalist ethics plausible (i.e. the justification consists in the fact that I hope to deliver a metanarrative that is more plausible than the existing realistic or relativistic narratives).

<sup>1310</sup> Except for the stress on narrativity this is not an unusual concept of rationality. It complies with the version of contemporary non-cognitivism that is often called quasi-realism. The term indicates a certain proximity to this study as it is communicating between the theoretical positions of realism and relativism. Cf. Gibbard, Choices 315; Mark van Roojen, "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-cognitivism/> (4.1.2010). Obviously, such positions are distinguished from communicative foundationalism, as they deny the communicative realism that allows for elements of communicative reality to be claimed to be substantially good.

<sup>1311</sup> Cf. Norman Daniels, "Reflective Equilibrium," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reflective-equilibrium/> (4.1.2010); Gibbard, Choices 153-250.

<sup>1312</sup> It is equally possible to speak of ethics more traditionally as first philosophy. In this respect communicative foundationalism is close to the postmodern project to establish ethical responsibility as something that precedes every other aspect of human existence. For a discussion with respect to Emmanuel Levinas see for example Michael Eskin, *Ethics and Dialogue – in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam, and Celan* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 28,f (hereafter: Eskin, Ethics). The main differences become visible in the way the individual is conceptualized and in the way responsibility is justified and explained. I would for example argue against Levinas in the same way as I have argued against Butler (who is indeed indebted to him). Cf. chapters II.ii.iii. and IV.i.; see also Eskin, Ethics 32.

atically leading to the exclusion of a part of the population must be addressed as a systemic problem.<sup>1313</sup> In this way, communicative foundationalist ethics only adds a standard of legitimization to the existing critical projects of postmodern relativist and critical theory.

What makes human beings ethically responsible for each other is not a failure to understand themselves and others adequately. As has been discussed especially in chapter IV.i., this situation would only lead to ignorance and violence. On the contrary, it is because humans *can* understand their nature that they realize the innate ethical duty. The ability to engage in narration is an important part of this duty as individuals engage in reality through narration. If many postmodern relativists state that it is not the narration that constitutes reality, I most fervently disagree.

[N]or would [the critical sociologists] take it for granted that what humans do is nothing but what they think they are doing or how they narrate what they have done.<sup>1314</sup>

There is no ontological difference between what human beings do and what happens on the communicative level. These two levels are always already intertwined. Moreover, there is always a listener, a partner in communication, and the interaction within the community generates how situations are perceived and understood. What happens is always related to the way in which the narrations – those that are possible and those that are oppressed – form reality.

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<sup>1313</sup> I hereby adhere to Theodor Adorno's famous statement that no good life is possible within a bad life. Cf. e.g. Florian Roth, "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen," *Florian Roth* 2002, [http://www.florian-roth.com/texte/pdfs/Es\\_gibt\\_kein\\_richtiges\\_Leben\\_im\\_Falschen.pdf](http://www.florian-roth.com/texte/pdfs/Es_gibt_kein_richtiges_Leben_im_Falschen.pdf) (22.12.2009).

<sup>1314</sup> Bauman, *Ethics* 3.

## V. Conclusion

[T]here are some things we shouldn't forget and mostly they add up to where we came from and how we got here and the stories we told ourselves on the way. But folklore isn't only about the past. It grows, flowers and seeds every day, because of our innate desire to control our world by means of satisfying narratives.<sup>1315</sup>

Concluding, it can be said that the postmodern moral impasse is foremost a theoretical impasse and not a practical one. Judgments are still passed and moral narrations of identity are still told. Following Kästner's slogan that ethics is always inextricably linked to moral behavior, I have tried to *trace* the ethical theory developed in this work in the *story* of sociohistorical moral discourse. By supposing communicative realities to be the only realities accessible for human beings, a communicative realism, that is to say foundationalism, has effectively been molded for ethical theory. One could argue at this point that there is no need to properly describe moral actions if people still manage to act morally. Yet, the emerging problems of justification are crucial problems in a global discourse between different cultures. If they are to cooperate closely in the future and to cooperate with as little conflict as possible, a means of sensible communication between their different moral concepts must be found. Intuitive emotional access to ethics does not suffice in case the identities in question differ greatly. Therefore, a proper ethical theory that also addresses the rational abilities is indispensable. Justification – convincing justification – is one of the crucial elements to set the course of mankind's future. Moreover, inspired by Robert M. Pirsig's ideas, I have argued that we do not live in a reality for which we have to design moral standards. On the contrary, the moral standards shape the reality and render it visible and experienceable for human beings.<sup>1316</sup> Therefore, human nature can be more adequately understood through the ethics that underlie and mold reality.

Dummett states that it is not the philosopher's duty to reduce or to glorify truth; she should neither justify nor neglect it. Yet, it is her duty to explain why this term is needed and what it means to dispose of it.<sup>1317</sup> In the same vein, I meant to explain why ethics is needed and what it means to render moral judgments in human societies. With the foundation of experimental psychology ethics was understood as a normative overview at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was thus not supposed to shed light on what is right and what is wrong in a religious vein, but to explain existing norms.<sup>1318</sup> As I have shown, it is

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<sup>1315</sup> Introduction to *The Folklore of Discworld* by Terry Pratchett, quoted after a preview in Pratchett, Money 475, f; 476.

<sup>1316</sup> Obviously, Pirsig's MOQ could only serve as an inspiration as it starts from a realistic background, whereas communicative foundationalist ethics is set in a relativist framework.

<sup>1317</sup> Cf. Dummett, *Wahrheit* 133.

<sup>1318</sup> Cf. Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 39.

not possible to talk about a normative topic and save its normative level without a normative mode of explanation. Thus, I have rejected purely descriptive approaches and have combined the normatively compatible parts of realism with a postmodern perspective, drawing on various approaches attempting to combine realistic and relativistic elements. Thereby, I have outlined a body of theory, which I term communicative foundationalism, and have developed a communicatively founded ethics. Obviously, the elements of such a concept are not entirely new. Postulating that a communicative concept of reality can best explain what happens in the communicative world of human beings means that all theories that used to prevail in the past and are popular in the present must be in some way compatible with it.

Additionally, I do not understand this theoretical body as a new postmodern approach. It is meant to be a foundation for postmodern perspectives, enhancing and enriching the study of postmodernity.<sup>1319</sup> It might seem absurd to introduce a positive relationship of reason and emotions into philosophical theory – especially from the point of view of postmodern relative theory.<sup>1320</sup> The fact that theological ethics have a tradition of theories developing such a positive relationship does only strengthen the effect that this is an at least awkward move.<sup>1321</sup> Following Wittgenstein, Philippa Foot insists that it is important to develop and defend even the most ridiculous philosophical thought.<sup>1322</sup> I have tried to heed her advice with this study. Even though it seems slightly inappropriate to introduce the essentialist idea of human nature into postmodern relative critique, I have argued that postmodern relative theories cannot appropriately describe ethics, because they display a blind spot when it comes to the justification of deconstruction or the justification of establishing ideal communicative circumstances. It was necessary to introduce a transcendent element to maintain the postmodern relativist framework. I have chosen to name this element human nature, because poststructuralism shows that communicative realities are the only realities that will ever structure human minds and perceptions.<sup>1323</sup>

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<sup>1319</sup> I believe that it is for the most part compatible with current postmodern theories. Obviously, they would have to be adapted to the concept of a foundation respectively to a normative content, which would change some of their arguments. Yet, this adaption would lead to the ability to finally find an answer to the question of justification.

<sup>1320</sup> However, it has certainly become less absurd since the 1980s. In 1986 Seyla Benhabib wrote: “Any philosophical program which still seeks to formulate minimal criteria of valid knowledge and action, which still develops concepts of normative legitimacy transcending specific language games, is accused of continuing the failed program of Enlightenment (McIntyre), of privileging epistemology (Rorty), or of perpetrating the fictitious metanarratives of the nineteenth century (J.-F. Lyotard).” Benhabib, *Critique* 14.

<sup>1321</sup> For the tradition in theological ethics cf. Black 288-314. Poststructuralists are often anti-religious. Yet, many of their sources actually discuss religion with regard to ethics. Cf. e.g. Eskin, *Ethics* 38.

<sup>1322</sup> Cf. Foot, *Natur* 15.

<sup>1323</sup> Besides the already discussed approaches of philosophical anthropology and discourse ethics this basic insight in fundamental human intersubjectivity (and in the constructive nature of reality) has also been for-

Many intellectuals have tried to positively (re)evaluate the underlying circularity of arguments in postmodern relativist theories. Yet, most of them have fallen back on the paradigm of plurality, which cancels out the normativity that is so obviously part of human communicative reality, or have simply been immersed in self-referential incoherence. This procedure can be explained by applying a historical perspective to the development of postmodern theories. They thrived because of their recognition of the risk of getting ensnared by one's own sociohistorical context, thereby automatically condemning alternative cultures. The values those theorists fought for to counteract such exclusions are mainly tolerance, freedom, love, and relational responsibility.<sup>1324</sup> Yet, these values cannot be proposed in frameworks contradicting normative settings. Without a true understanding of the normative nature of human reality, these specific normative relations can never be adequately analyzed. Communicative foundationalist ethics points out that human beings live in an ethical world, which they could understand more profoundly if they realized its ethical nature. As this world is a dynamic and socio-communicative reality at the same time inhabited and created by human beings, understanding ethics also means understanding oneself. Yet, postmodern theories have a history of condemning normativity and foundationalism. Even though theorists such as Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib implicitly (re)introduce such values in their work, they do not provide the metanarrative needed to set their importance in perspective. Butler is clearly an example of postmodern critique, whereas Benhabib is already involved in a reinterpretation of relativistic phenomenological assumptions. Due to their historic development, postmodern relativist theories categorically oppose more traditionally realist concepts of reality. Thereby, they often overlook important discussions of ethical problems that could inform their own argumentation.<sup>1325</sup>

The communicative ethics proposed in this study has to be ranged in the line of phenomenological thought. As a phenomenology it explores the constitution of meaning in the human mind. Contrary to current postmodern relativist theories, communicative foundationalism accomplishes this not only by openly assuming a foundation, but also by understanding itself explicitly as a metanarrative. Metanarratives were pronounced dead long ago in the history of postmodern thinking, which is why it seems impossible to fall back on such structures from a postmodern starting point. Still, communicative foundationalist eth-

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culated within dialogical philosophy, such as the work of Martin Buber. Cf. Israel, *Dialogphilosophie* esp. 102-108. No nature apart from communicative nature is describable beyond doubt in the end. Hence, I see no problem to term the functional structure of this nature *natural*. Following Foot, I believe that it is mandatory not to reduce moral evaluation to some special feature of language or communication. Cf. Foot, *Natur* 19-43.

<sup>1324</sup> Cf. Kaiser-Probst, *Wandel* 51; 65,ff.

<sup>1325</sup> This holds true especially for poststructuralist approaches and less so for those theories which already try to combine realism and relativism to a certain extent.

ics formulate a functional and founded normativity, which is able to combine realism and relativism. As was implied above, I believe that postmodern theories had to face a crisis eventually, because of their neglect of normative ethics. The recent revival of ethical topics only serves to show that the current sociohistorical discourse misses an important foundational element. This has been shown to be true even though postmodern relativist critique has effectively challenged traditional, realistic, and metaphysical grounds.<sup>1326</sup>

The dismissal of universality in postmodern ethics has been traced to the implicit acceptance of external realism. This readiness to accept the idea of an outside world not related with ourselves can be explained by the tendency to objectify perception. However, philosophers such as Thomas Rentsch have argued that the philosophical vocabulary is in itself derived from early religious concepts of reality.<sup>1327</sup> Communicative foundationalism would even suggest that the tendency to build a *real* (external) reality is human.<sup>1328</sup> It might be insightful for the developments of a discipline such as critical theory or philosophy in general to scrutinize the origins of their terms and concepts. Yet, as these will invariably follow a universal human pattern, it is much more interesting to discuss this pattern for an inter-cultural idea of ethics. As has been shown, the patterns can be detected and analyzed in every narration. The narrational form is another universal element of humanness. This is not to say that every cultural aspect must be considered to solve a given problem within a sociohistorical context. Cultural contexts naturally include religion as a prevalent cultural phenomenon. Obviously, the character of any given cultural phenomenon reflects the pattern of humanity as it is necessarily modeled upon its characteristics. Yet, even though religious narrations might have been the first well-regulated narrations concerned with ethics, it is not necessary to consult this sort of narration for the solution to a moral problem.

From the point of view taken in this thesis, a purely objective and neutral analysis of the texts and thinkers without relation to already existent ethical theories cannot be claimed. Still, it has been very productive to approach ethics through contemplating the cultural (including the theoretical) productions concerning this matter. Ultimately, I have scrutinized contemporary cultural practices of ethical narration, which I assume to be able to understand as a coeval. In doing so, transcultural and transhistorical elements have been identified. The main advantages of a communicative foundationalist ethics consist in the combination of communicative ideas of the empirical, the functionally normal, the founda-

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<sup>1326</sup> Cf. esp. the chapters subsumed under II.i. See also Thiem, Subjects 203.

<sup>1327</sup> Cf. Thomas Rentsch, "Grenzen und Einheit der Vernunft neu denken," Rentsch, Einheit 25-45, 43.

<sup>1328</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapters III.ii.ii.ii. and IV.iii.



tional, and the normative. The initially proposed separation of morality and ethics has turned out to reflect the two levels of moral evaluation discussed in chapter IV.iii. Ethics has turned out to be the functional meta-level of moral behavior that can be described as a phenomenon rather than as a metaphysical theorem. It manifests itself implicitly in every human communicative act. The narrative construction of intersubjective reality as a manifestation of human nature already includes the duty to take care of one's own individual perspective and successively, of the other's individual perspective of narration. Including emotional and rational engagement, this means that one has to be prepared to change one's identity to allow all other identities that conform to ethics. Contrary to the postmodern moral claim to reveal the construed character of all identity, as for example formulated by Judith Butler, this readiness to change oneself means a willingness to replace identities with other, more ethically suitable identities.

Politics is one of the main areas in which practical ethics are discussed today. On the whole, relativistic theories are the new and current *thing* in the field of political theory as well.<sup>1329</sup> The viability of constructivist approaches to tangible political problems has been proven by many studies in this field.<sup>1330</sup> Tangible and theoretical problems – belonging to subjective cognition and practical cooperation with other human beings – cannot be acutely separated. “[I]t is only in intersubjective interaction that actors are able to forge a sense of being and identity at any given time.”<sup>1331</sup> As I was able to identify a universal ethical standard ruling this communicative interaction on a phenomenological level, it is not so much the practical application of existing constructivist theories that is challenged, but the evaluation of their results. In this way the evaluative elements of the theories as a whole will have to be adapted to the existence of said universal ethical standard. The special postmodern relation between an individual and an *other*, the significance of pluralism and human fallibility as well as the meaning of objectivity have to be adapted as well. The development of the present narrative ethics rests to a great extent on poststructuralist assumptions as formulated by Judith Butler and on communicative concepts of ethics as represented in Seyla Benhabib's work. Therefore, these two concepts have been comprised as examples, highlighting how they would have to be altered. Deontological ethics are the most important concept from the philosophical school of thought called ethics. Deontology

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<sup>1329</sup> Cf. Bachmann-Medick, Turns. Still, a realist edge mostly prevails, which is not really due to a new focus on its importance, but rather to the long-standing realist political tradition.

<sup>1330</sup> For a general overview of constructivism in the political sciences cf. Dahler, Nina von and Andreas Holtz, *Kultur Macht Politik: Konstruktivismus und die politische Beziehung von Kultur und Macht* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2010). A specific case study is e.g. Browning, Constructivism.

<sup>1331</sup> Browning, Constructivism 11.

has been introduced and embraced by the example of Ernst Tugendhat's work, which is part of analytical theory. An important part of my argumentation rests on this tradition. Through the discussion of the historical development of ethics I also expounded the most important traditional problems of ethical philosophy.

Postmodern relativist theories were introduced to show how my approach to ethics engages in this tradition. Obviously, I have generalized a lot of aspects in a way that is at least debatable in this discussion. Still, I would argue that the reduction of differences to main similarities is adequate to understand how communicative foundationalist ethics can be combined with various theoretical concepts. As relativism was identified as the core element, it has been discussed in its own right with regard to philosophical tradition. Relativism has proven an appropriate interface as I was able to explain many of the sociohistorical developments with this focus. This led to an excursus about external realism in the natural sciences. It was discussed in general as it forms the counterpart to the focused relativistic tendencies. Moreover, this opposition corresponds fruitfully to the developments in literature and literary theory. Additionally, relativist or constructivist approaches are still seen as a blatant contradiction to the external realism springing from natural sciences also very much *en vogue* during the sociohistorical period discussed. Hence, it seemed necessary to contrast and distance the present ethical concept from those theories. As I have argued in detail, a realistic ethics cannot be formulated through such (supposedly) *value-less* realism. Human reality is obviously formed through the application of values, which is why a theory *sans* values (that operates on an interpretative level) can never be able to comprehensively describe it.

The self-perception of cultural and social studies is wrong insofar as they believe themselves to have overcome the traditional paradigm-discussion.<sup>1332</sup> In the broader perspective of the twentieth-century intellectual and theoretical developments they clearly work on the relativistic side. This side cannot typify ethics as it is used in communicative contexts. It does not distinguish between moral norms and all other social and cultural norms in a differentiated way, and it does not describe identity and individuality as they are established. Understanding ethics as a universalist field of investigation, I have connected the tendencies that can be found in the *narrative* turn, the *social* turn, the *cognitive* turn, and the *emotional/biographical* turn.<sup>1333</sup> By posing a realist foundation and by refusing to accept the inherent dissimilarity between these different perspectives of research, the aim

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<sup>1332</sup> Cf. e.g. Bachmann-Medick, Turns 16,ff. For an overview of the fragmented, highly specialized, and seemingly independent field of culture studies see as well Mulhern, Culture.

<sup>1333</sup> Cf. Bachmann-Medick, Turns 381,ff.

has been to find a meta-theory applying to all cultural and social studies. This project is not entirely new.

[Es könnte] auf einer ... höheren Stufe dennoch von einer Art Paradigmenwechsel die Rede sein ..., gewissermaßen von einer „Wende“ der Kulturwissenschaften selbst. Diesen „Paradigmenwechsel“ mag man in der wechselseitigen Anreicherung und „Pluralisierung der Dimensionen“ ... auf dem Weg zur Idee einer „histoire totale“ verorten .... Vorsichtiger und pragmatischer formuliert wäre er in einer Verdichtung spezifischer Gemeinsamkeiten der kulturwissenschaftlichen Neuorientierungen zu sehen, wie sie erst in der Zusammenschau deutlich vor Augen treten.<sup>1334</sup>

The already existing tendencies in cultural studies display a focus on process as well as a focus on the function of symbolic items and functionalized systems. Nevertheless, a universalist foundation is needed to reinsert a viable ethics in this theoretical complex.

To be able to formulate such a foundational ethics I have resorted to the focus on language (and communicative relations) springing from the initial *linguistic* turn. This focus has been increasingly blurred by the many new turns in cultural studies.<sup>1335</sup> Thus, I have refocused on a *traditional* element of cultural studies, while trying to give an epistemological foundation for virtually all perspectives. In this way, the (at heart phenomenological) work done in the different areas is not deconstructed, but reconstructed by this meta-theory.<sup>1336</sup> This study has thus attempted to provide the long missing ground-work of postmodern relativist theories with regard to normative issues.<sup>1337</sup> Such a foundation is at least implicitly included in most postmodern relativist theories of ethics. Yet, as argued above, the implicit recourse to realist assumptions within relativistic frameworks is logically impossible. Thus, the problem clarified in this work was to some extent an implicit problem, and the results can therefore not lead to decisively new theories. Yet, the ever recurring accusation of postmodernity's moral nihilism could be silenced once and for all by referring to communicative foundations.

It has been this study's aim to show that no choice can be made between relativist and realist positions, relationalist and substantialist, or monism and pluralism. Neither is there a clear choice for any single discipline to research ethics. The truth lies in between all these choices, in a genuine fusion of all these approaches. Not only the inner conflicts of any separate concept of thought, but also the mere fact of their existence must lead to this conclusion. As they have been developed by mankind, they must all comprehend some

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<sup>1334</sup> Bachmann-Medick, Turns 383.

<sup>1335</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 384.

<sup>1336</sup> It can neither be called metaphysics nor phenomenology without evoking conflicts with regard to the traditional meaning of these applications. Again, I have opted for the middle ground in between existing positions. The notion *postmetaphysics* could probably best describe what I aim for. Cf. Thiem, Subjects 205.

<sup>1337</sup> In a way, Husserl could be said to have delivered this foundation from the very start of phenomenology, but it has not yet been included in an ethics, especially not in a culturally informed ethics. Cf. Drummond, Intentionality.

truth about human nature. Of course the theory of fallibility, that states the insecurity to prove the validity of a statement, must be considered.<sup>1338</sup> Yet, this does not render the statements on the ethical foundations of communication invalid. As theories in the natural sciences, any scientific theory has to be evaluated for its applicability to communicative reality. I propose that communicative foundationalist ethics are best suited to describe the intersubjective, narratively structured reality as it is. Conceding to the feminist critique of universal moral theories as substitutionalist, I have argued that this study is supposed to be representative.<sup>1339</sup> The narrators that have been analyzed are equally male and female.<sup>1340</sup> Most of the secondary texts are admittedly written by men, but the two examples discussed in detail were Butler and Benhabib.

Realism as a positive assertion of understanding one's environment has the danger of being biased or dogmatic, especially when conducted in the traditional positivist stance. Relativism depends on the individual and holds the danger of solipsistic (circular) reasoning. Whereas theories based on the subject can lead to such solipsism, intersubjectivity as a proposition for explanatory statements harbors the possibility of formulating a new kind of intersubjective objectivity.<sup>1341</sup> Even though there are many attempts to combine relativist critique with partly positive assumptions with regard to intersubjectivity and communication, usually the concept of a secure foundation is excluded. Yet, without a foundation, ethics cannot be explained in the universal way in which it is functionally used. A secure foundation is the only possibility to challenge the relativistic, postmodern nihilism in ethics.<sup>1342</sup> The existential level of ethics that has become apparent through the literary analyses could not be adequately described without a foundation either. This binding universality can only be explained when it is linked to *humaneness*. Contrary to traditional essentialist positions, communicative foundationalist ethics understands transcendence as a mediation of the predisposed structure to the cultural and social content. Thereby, the advantages of a well-founded justification are preserved without running the risk of dogmatism and bias.<sup>1343</sup>

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<sup>1338</sup> Cf. Wendel, Grenzen 125,f.

<sup>1339</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory," Benhabib/Cornell 77-95, esp. 81. Obviously, in this study, a part of the western cultural realm has served as an example for my research. In order to substantiate this narrative of justification a trans-cultural and/or transhistorical literary study could be added.

<sup>1340</sup> Two female narrators vs. two books featuring a male philosopher-narrator, whereas Eugenides' books should be considered as merging feminine and masculine perspectives. Two male authors are challenged only by Margaret Atwood, but I am a female author as well.

<sup>1341</sup> Cf. Israel, Dialogphilosophie 111.

<sup>1342</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter II.ii. See also Hösle, Krise 130, 147,f.

<sup>1343</sup> It could only be objected that human nature does not entail a willingness to engage in communication and that communication can also be achieved by disregarding others. The second objection is illogical, and the

As communicative foundationalist ethics supposes that there is no *outside* of communication (that is relevant to the human reality of meaning), there is no evidence independent of communication that I could cite to justify this ethical theory in a traditionally realistic way. In the style of postmodern relativist, especially poststructuralist, theories, I have offered a metanarrative, which explains the way in which ethical judgments are rendered in a more adequate way than already existing theories. Obviously, poststructuralists would strongly object to this description, yet, they have no realistic justifications and simply deliver narratives as theories. However, the explanatory coherence of communicative foundationalist ethics is its only evidence. Besides the aspect of universality, communicative foundationalism can address reason and emotions as well as action, responsibility and motivation in adequate ways. As it includes the possibilities of unethical behavior and punishment, it still fits the character of a social norm in the way that it includes the *if-then character* highlighted by Tugendhat and discussed in II.ii. Part of the negative consequences are linked to human nature and therefore internalized, though.

Additionally, a concept of intersubjective justice can be embraced, which makes it possible to infer guiding principles for political action.<sup>1344</sup> Due to the inclusive paradigm of communication, it has been easy to expand the idea of responsibility to the global community.<sup>1345</sup> The dogmatism of traditional realism has been turned into the obligation to make an effort to understand other cultures and societies to the extent that one's own individuality is changed. It is vital to respect the fact that the intrusion of an alternative reality concept puts us fundamentally in question, because we have come into existence in specific relationships with exactly this reality. It can therefore never be a question of a simple imposition of human rights that will change the world. As we live in a communicative reality, which fully encompasses us and all our views, there is simply no way to change this world only partly. Every change in this reality is also a change in ourselves.<sup>1346</sup> The idea that the

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first objection would contradict the nature of moral arguments as discussed in II.ii. as well as the results of the literary analyses. Such an objection would have to prove how these contradictions could be explained by the assumption that human nature does not entail a willingness to engage in communication and the related ethics. I believe that this is impossible.

<sup>1344</sup> Cf. chapter IV.ii.

<sup>1345</sup> Cf. chapter IV.i. It could be asked if an intensification of communication, which is our foundational basis of existence, will not also change our mode of existence. New tendencies in social theory discuss such problems. Cf. e.g. John Tomlinson, "'Your Life – To Go': Der kulturelle Einfluss der neuen Medientechnologien," *Konnektivität, Netzwerk und Fluss: Konzepte gegenwärtiger Medien-, Kommunikations- und Kulturtheorie*, eds. Andreas Hepp et al. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006) 69-78.

<sup>1346</sup> This dynamic does not entail that all human beings will eventually have the same cultural existence. The diversity of different communities that are not all in direct and immediate communicative contact with each other renders this very unlikely. Cf. IV.v. Nevertheless, the current re-focusing of community concepts and the emphasis on sociality in theory as well as the emergence of the swarm motif in literature suggest that a significant move towards further understanding of the intersubjective nature of human beings has been taken.

ethical is part of human nature is evidently not new. It dates back to Greek philosophy and is very prominent in theological discussions of ethics.<sup>1347</sup> Communicative foundationalist ethics also assumes an element of naturalism as natural predispositions to communicate must be supposed to create the necessary inclusiveness. In this way I agree with Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor. As discussed in part II., Rorty argues that philosophical metaphysics still follows the metaphors of depth or height traditionally passed on by religious discourses. Charles Taylor argues similarly and also states that such justifications are always relative at heart in a way that theistic justifications are not.<sup>1348</sup> Communicative foundationalism understands communicative actions in the poststructuralist sense as constitutive of reality. The source of the good (ethical standards) is understood as already innate in the structure of this reality.

The apparent connections between communicative foundationalist ethics and current philosophy of mind are partly due to their theoretical relations. From a more historical point of view these interfaces can also be explained through the sociohistorical developments toward a peak of relativistic tendencies at the end of the twentieth century. Whether an actual surplus with regard to content can be gained from such interfaces for communicative foundationalist ethics must be left to debate. It remains problematic to assimilate a basically realistic approach into a basically relativistic approach when the primary access

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The mere existence of communicative ethics as well as the focus on ethics (as a study of equal and just coexistence) proves the point. This study can be seen as another attempt in this vein. The swarm motif has been very popular in novels and movies such as Dean Devlin, Roland Emmerich, and Stephen Molstad, *Independence Day: Der Roman zum Film* (transl. Gunter Blank) (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1996); *The Matrix*, Dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski, Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Ann Moss et al., Groucho II Film Partnership, 1999; *Darkness*, Dir. Jaume Balagueró, Perf. Anna Paquin, Lena Olin, Iain Glen et al., Dimension Films/Fantastic Factory/Via Digital, 2002; Atwood, Oryx; Frank Schätzing, *The Swarm – A Novel of the Deep* (transl. Sally-Ann Spencer), (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006); Stephen King, *Cell* (Scribner: New York, 2006). Interestingly, the swarm motif is usually used for collective entities confronting mankind. Instead of seeing the beauty of the completely man-made perception of reality and honoring the immense creativity, the elements challenging individuality are stressed. At the moment it seems as though the allegations of moral nihilism put forward against postmodern theory outweigh the growing awareness of mankind as a reality-creating community also contained therein. Without further empirical research conducted on the according media such observations must, of course, remain speculative. Such research would have to investigate how the socio-communicative community actually deals with the growing understanding of its own nature.

<sup>1347</sup> Even though theological discourse has also stressed the importance of narrativity in ethics as is done by communicative ethics, there are decisive differences. On the one hand communicative foundationalism sees no need to analyze the specific religious aspects of life. On the other hand, there is, of course, a difference with regard to the question of justification. Cf. e.g. Hursthouse, *Virtue* 192,ff; Wimmer, esp. 280,f; Thomas Rentsch, "Grenzen und Einheit der Vernunft neu denken," Rentsch, *Einheit* 25-45.

<sup>1348</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Sources* 211-304. Taylor argues that a life lived authentically is the only ethical life. Similar to communicative foundationalism he defines individual personality as created through dialogue. Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2000). For problems concerning Taylor's external realism see Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Taylor's (Anti-) Epistemology," *Abbey, Taylor* 52-83.

through language does not really fit the realistic approach.<sup>1349</sup> The only way to do so from a realistic starting point seems to be the Metaphysics of Quality discussed with regard to *Lila* in III.iii.ii. As has been argued, the aim of such an ethics must stay aligned with non-human values, whereas communicative foundationalist ethics clearly focuses on human life and human actions.<sup>1350</sup> Communicative foundationalist ethics could be ranged among approaches to social construction conceiving of personal agents or as the case may be, among approaches of subject naturalism.<sup>1351</sup> Even though communicative foundationalism argues that there are cultural and social groups displaying some homogeneity as to their strategies of socialization, these cultures and societies are realized through the actions of their members. Personal autonomy as conceived of in Enlightenment philosophy has been substituted by intersubjective autonomy. Individual personalities are thus created and are still considered as decisive for perception, understanding, and action, but are at the same time firmly set in an intersubjective reality of human relations.

Even though a more or less automatic cultural moral practice is inherent in every given individuality, it is possible to abstract from the immediate perception and knowledge of a reality and grasp the underlying structure of human nature. Thus, the culture-dependent evaluation that is always learned together with the cultural facts of a concept of reality can be separated.<sup>1352</sup> The concept of reality can then be modified according to the transcultural and transhistorical standard of ethics. Hence, communicative foundationalism could be understood as a version of human methodological naturalism with a focus on communication and with a focus on universalism.<sup>1353</sup> Another significant interface is thereby construed between empirical and metaphysical understanding. Importantly, the natural sciences are ranged as one concept of knowledge production among others without any distinction with regard to truth. Truth also has an intersubjective character. Human beings

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<sup>1349</sup> The effects on human consciousness caused by biological stimuli seem significant, but at the same time they can hardly be addressed in their quality of being *biological* in a metaphysical approach such as this study represents.

<sup>1350</sup> The different levels discussed with regard to *Zen* show a striking similarity to Searle's discussion of the function of symbolization contained in language. Cf. Searle, Geist 183,f. He argues that institutionalized categories can be created by adding the characteristic of symbolic meaning to certain existing elements.

<sup>1351</sup> Cf. e.g. Ron Mallon, "Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-construction-naturalistic/> (5.5.2009) and Rorty, *Philosophie* 265.

<sup>1352</sup> Even though all facts are only what they are because of their specific cultural and social embedding, the entailed evaluation can be changed. Thereby, the communicative nature of a fact will necessarily be changed too (at least partly), yet the idea that *facts are facts* belongs to most concepts of reality. It springs from the discussed tendency to think of reality as external reality.

<sup>1353</sup> Cf. Ron Mallon, "Naturalistic Approaches to Social Construction," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-construction-naturalistic/> (5.5.2009). The term naturalism would have to be changed in order to comprehend nature as communicative nature.

have thus been set in a reality of meaning that cannot exist independently of communicative significance.

The specific characteristics and the included level of education of communicative foundationalist ethics have been discussed in detail in IV.v. As for example Thomas Osborne has criticized “[t]here is little or no educational element – educationality – in post-modern discourse.”<sup>1354</sup> This is a further level on which communicative foundations can complement relativist theories. Moreover, the deficit of the postmodern cultural “rather narcissistic, focus on the self” can be addressed as well.<sup>1355</sup> It does not only exist in the theories (which do not promote a knowable and teachable other) but also in the culture. Western cultures have experienced problems of disorientation through a heightened individualism as well as through the heightened relativism in theory.<sup>1356</sup> The (re)turn to ethics resulted from the realization of this relativism. These problems can now be adequately described by the concept of human nature composed of ethics, rationality, and emotions. To produce a balanced individual personality these components have to be poised.<sup>1357</sup> The foundationalist character additionally offers an ideal as it is used for educational practices (as well as for politics and motivation) and holds on to a version of intersubjective reason that allows and calls for emotional engagement.

As the cultural part of individual persons can lead to irrational behavior and aggression regarding members of other cultures, neutral and rational behavior has been formulated as the scientific and also morally just alternative. Yet, it excludes the ethical as well as the emotional side of humanity and can therefore only inadequately describe what a moral existence really is. Neutral appreciation of humanity is a contradiction in itself. Descriptive and relativist positions cannot describe the actual normative level within reality. Rationalist or realist positions cannot theoretically describe the meaning of emotions or personal individuality for human action. Psychoanalytic, literary, or religious positions often ignore the importance of rational thinking (or refer to a supra-natural instance in the end).<sup>1358</sup> Consequently, communicative foundationalist ethics seems more adequate than already existing theories, as it seems to be without self-referential incoherence and without lack of relation to what actually exists within (communicative) reality. The combination of realistic and relativistic tendencies seems indeed to be the only way to adequately describe ethics. Liter-

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<sup>1354</sup> Osborne, *Structure* 151. The general deficit of philosophical theory in this respect is also discussed by Otfried Höffe and Rosalind Hursthouse. Cf. Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 347,f; Hursthouse, *Virtue* 15.

<sup>1355</sup> Osborne, *Structure* 154.

<sup>1356</sup> This problematic intellectual climate is for example described by Vittorio Hösle. Cf. Hösle, *Krise* 26,ff.

<sup>1357</sup> In this way a communicative foundationalist ethics remains true to the original idea of a virtue ethics directed towards a good life.

<sup>1358</sup> These positions have not all been discussed in detail in the present study.



ature has proven to be a rich source of ethical research as it displays the inherent human nature and highlights the importance of narratives. The organization in realistic narratives is the only way in which ethics can exist.

Communicative foundationalist ethics thus offer a middle course in many ways. Last but not least, they combine the question of a *good* aim and a *good* origin for moral action. They include an ultimate goal of respecting everyone in a communicative community, although it will undoubtedly be easier to effectively change the communicative situation for those in one's immediate environment. Moreover, communicative foundationalist ethics offer a focus on intentions – when you know that you have tried to do your best, even if it might not have worked out as you planned, there is a lesser disturbance of your own equilibrium than without such good intentions.<sup>1359</sup> Even though the term *freedom* loses part of the meaning it had acquired during modernity, personal freedom generated through intersubjective subjectivation can still be described.<sup>1360</sup> It is not a freedom exempt of all cultural and intersubjective bonds – yet, there is no existence exempt from these bonds, which is why such a characterization of freedom would be simply unrealistic. Ethics derived from human nature could be expressed in the maxim to enable each other to engage in first-personal narration. Therefore, it is advantageous also in a formal sense. Maxims are open for manifold contents that can be culturally and socially developed throughout history.<sup>1361</sup> Thereby, communicative foundationalist ethics offer a standard with which to measure all sociohistorical norms and virtues. The aim is to preserve subjectivity (within intersubjectivity) in order to enable subjectivity. The person able to (per)form this subjectivity is not only rational but also emotional. Thereby, the often created philosophical gap between objective (and neutral) rationality and subjective emotion is bridged.<sup>1362</sup> Similarly, the difference between moral duty and personal penchant can be solved. An individual's feeling can – under conditions of true ethical understanding – never contradict the maxim of ethics. In the end, she would only disturb herself by immorally treating others.

It might be argued that such ethics are *only* a human order, relating to no higher standard, and therefore not able to mediate an authoritative code of conduct. I would object by stating that it is as humans that we want to reach harmony. The human world is all we have.

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<sup>1359</sup> For the significance of these positions in moral philosophy see Höffe, *Lebenskunst* 190-193.

<sup>1360</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 196, ff.

<sup>1361</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 217.

<sup>1362</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 313.

I think of myself, standing on a street corner, ringing a bell, swathed in floating garments. Selfless and removed, free from sin. Sin is this world, says Krishna. This world is all we have, says Joseph. It's all you have to work with. It is not too much for you. You will not be rescued.<sup>1363</sup>

The realization that any human being has to remain within her communicative reality, and that she can – if she can free herself at all – change to another cultural community at most, should be enough to make the right moral choice binding. When the effects of one's behavior are penetrated and the intersubjective mode of existence is recognized, the ethical choice can be the only rationally and emotionally acceptable choice. As human beings consist of ethics, reason, and emotions, it could even be stated that what is morally right is eventually the only human choice.

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<sup>1363</sup> Margaret Atwood, "The Sin Eater," Atwood, Egg 215,f.

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## VII. Appendix: Interview with Margaret Atwood

This is the transcript of a personal interview conducted after an event organized by NDR Kultur at the Magazin cinema in Hamburg on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2009.

**Nina von Dahlern:** You are well known for creating manifold perspectives in your novels. Do you thereby want to show that the ethically correct choice does not exist or do you think various perspectives can reveal what is ethically good?

**Margaret Atwood:** Neither. I don't think it has anything to do with what's ethically good. I rather evaluate this aspect with regard to the nature of truth. Moral understanding is subjective. You should read chapter 4 of my book *Negotiating with the Dead* published by Virago. I discuss the question of morality there.

**N.v.D.:** You often write about the importance of the narrative act in your novels. Would you say that the possibility to tell one's story is indeed necessary for survival?

**M.A.:** Yes, I think that narrative skills are necessary for survival. I understand them as evolutionary skills. You can read what Dennis Dutton has written on the subject. That's my point of view.

**N.v.D.:** You have often chosen dystopia as a genre. Would you say that this genre is particularly suited to treat problematic issues? Do you even want to create a greater awareness of contemporary problems with your books?

**M.A.:** The term dystopia is too loosely applied nowadays. [...] As I said, literature reflects rather than causes anything. And you can't really write about the future. The novel is a reflection of life as it is. That is what literature does. The solutions imagined are only understandable in relation to the present situation. Take "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathan Swift as an example. [...] The whole idea only makes sense with regard to the actual situation in Ireland at the time. We are talking about imagination. This is the same for moral issues. Actually, the author never intends to write a morale into his book. But this does not mean that the reader does not always read one into it. It's all about imagination. Barbie and Ken didn't go to the ball. You made it all up.