

Taking Oneself as Someone at All: Trauma, Recovery, and the Self

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This thesis is dedicated to my undergraduate advisor, Professor Ted Cohen, and to my grandmother, Sakae Mori.

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SUMMARY

In my dissertation, I use certain trauma narratives as a lens to critically examine certain theories in personal identity, recognition theory, and moral philosophy. I argue for a particular kind of self-understanding that I call “taking oneself as someone at all,” which I explain can go missing for someone who has undergone severe abusive trauma. One aspect of taking oneself as someone at all I discuss is the ability to see one’s life events in the past and present as each equally real. I call this ability having “temporal control,” and explain that survivors of abusive trauma with severe flashbacks lack this control, and instead, the traumatic past is privileged. The second aspect of taking oneself as someone at all is to be properly recognized by others; I argue that there is a basic kind of recognition, “therapeutic recognition,” which trauma survivors need in order to be able to develop and maintain trusting relationships with others. This kind of recognition entails listening to survivors’ descriptions of their traumatic experiences without judgment. Finally, I discuss the moral qualities of such trusting relationships and explain that what is present when someone can help a survivor take themselves as someone at all again is the willingness to be open and challenged by what another says.

1. Trauma and the Self

1.1 Introduction

Standard philosophical literature on the self tends to focus on a broad range of issues such as consciousness, knowledge of the self (or the lack thereof), personal identity over time, practical identity, personal autonomy, and authenticity. But accounts of these topics have tended to overlook what I take to be a fundamental phenomenon that I call “taking oneself as someone at all,” the topic of this dissertation. It can be difficult to see the phenomenon of “taking oneself as someone at all” when the condition is satisfied in ideal (or sufficiently-close-to-ideal) circumstances. Instead, “taking oneself as someone at all” is remarkably visible and difficult to ignore when it is absent or when the ability is severely damaged in radical, non-ideal cases — like those of trauma. Although trauma can arise from a wide variety of sources, in this dissertation, I focus on experiences resulting from situations of human-inflicted, interpersonal violence and abuse. I do not deny that the loss of “taking oneself as someone at all” is possible in other forms of trauma, but I think the absence of the phenomenon is easiest to see in experiences of severe abusive trauma. To the extent that standard philosophical accounts of the self have failed to pay sufficient attention to such cases of abusive trauma, I argue throughout this dissertation that they have also failed to account for some basic aspects of selfhood that “taking oneself as someone at all” can help to identify and elucidate. Moreover, the fact that this kind of trauma is not uncommonly experienced indicates that this failure is no minor oversight.

Trauma is centrally characterized by an overwhelming helplessness experienced in the face of a powerful force that renders victims unable to have the sense of “control, connection, and meaning” that they might or would otherwise have (Herman 2015, 34). In the case of severe abusive trauma, the powerful source is another person and the physical and/or psychological

violence they inflict on their victims. My own experience with this kind of trauma is limited to reading first-person descriptions of enduring, surviving, and recovering from interpersonal violence. This dissertation project centers around two trauma narratives that detail severe abusive trauma: poet and author Sapphire's debut novel *Push* and Susan Brison's book *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*. Each work offers a striking picture of the self unlike anything I had ever experienced, observed, or imagined. The protagonist of *Push*, Precious Jones, reflects on a lifetime of sexual abuse among other forms of abuse and neglect; in *Aftermath*, Brison describes a peculiar sense of abandonment she experienced after the sexual assault and attempt on her life that she suffered. Reading specific passages from these narratives, without direct experience of trauma, I was more than troubled to read about the kind of world they inhabited. I was left with the sense that they had described an alien existence and world, and I felt a significant gap between the world they described and the one that I took as a comfortable, familiar, "default" world. At the core of that world they described was the sense that in their worst moments post-trauma, Precious and Brison, though survivors of abusive trauma, lost a sense of their selves in a deep and profound way, such that they did not feel truly alive. In this way, they seemed to me to lose their ability to "take themselves as someone at all," but the loss of this ability did not quite fit the description of losing consciousness, self-knowledge, a practical identity, autonomy, or authenticity (though any of these could also be lost). Insofar as these trauma narratives make this phenomenon apparent, they struck me as demanding philosophical attention, since they reveal a basic aspect of the self that has gone unacknowledged by standard philosophical accounts of the self.

This introductory chapter has three main aims. In the first section, I will explain the source material for this dissertation project — I will summarize both *Push* and *Aftermath* for

unfamiliar readers. In the second section, I will offer a sketch of “taking oneself as someone at all” by first explaining important terminology, and then laying out summaries of the chapters to follow that will further explain the different aspects of “taking oneself as someone at all.” In the third and final section of this chapter, I will situate my view with respect to some neighboring concepts that can be found in psychological and philosophical literature. The contrast between “taking oneself as someone at all” and similar phenomena will help to map the relevant terrain, which will guide readers closer to the vicinity of my view.

1.2 **Trauma Narratives and Senses of Self**

In this section, by offering summaries and commentary on the relevance of two particular trauma narratives I heavily rely on, I will also explore some possible meanings of “self” that are found within these narratives. These meanings of “self” will help set the stage for a sketch of the notion of self I propose to elucidate throughout this dissertation — “taking oneself as someone at all.”

1.2.1 **Push: Precious’s story**

Claireece “Precious” Jones, the protagonist of Sapphire’s *Push*, resides with her mother in Harlem, New York City, in the 1980s. Precious is the victim of various forms of child abuse and neglect: she is sexually abused by her father all her life and has been twice impregnated by him; she is sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by her mother; and she is illiterate, which all of her public school teachers fail to notice. These school teachers and administrators do not know anything about Precious’s home life, and she is expelled from school for her second pregnancy. After this expulsion, she nervously but resolutely joins an alternative education program where she learns to read and write from her teacher, “Blu Rain,” and with classmates who are also victims of extreme abuse and neglect. Although the educational program is an

appropriate and wonderful place for her to finally receive overdue education and to begin healing with peers, all under the supervision of a teacher she trusts, Precious still faces many obstacles that threaten her livelihood. She gives birth to her second child while in school; she escapes her mother's apartment and experiences homelessness with a week-old infant; she is unable to trust her social worker who is charged with her case; and after learning that her father died with AIDS, she learns of her own HIV positive diagnosis. Through the support of Rain and her classmates and her own willingness not merely to survive but to flourish, she is able to develop her reading and writing skills, to care lovingly for her son, to draw boundaries with those she does not trust, and to set her own aspirations for herself in the future. She achieves a great deal throughout this portion of her life, to which readers bear witness.

The novel is compelling for a number of reasons. Though in many ways devastating and difficult to read, it is a relatively quick read, written from the first-person perspective in a compelling vernacular language that commands serious attention to the voice and perspective of a victim of abuse and educational neglect. Events move rapidly in a stream-of-consciousness manner, but the story unfolds in a complex structure of narration and flashback that is interlaced with commentary on various complicated social issues. It is not possible to understand properly the abuse Precious suffers at home without realizing how her personal problems are interwoven with the failure of the educational and welfare system to provide the proper support for a population suffering from poverty and lack of access to education. It is easy to think of her mother and father as monstrous, her public school teachers and social workers as oblivious, naive, and inept, her alternative education program teacher as noble and heroic, and to cheer Precious on as she navigates ruthless and relentless memories and obstacles to a fulfilling life.

But the particular, and deeper, appeal for my purposes here goes beyond the narrative of overcoming seemingly impenetrable barriers to lead a flourishing life. Precious has indeed experienced extreme forms of abuse and neglect, and what this makes apparent is the sense in which she has not lost, but never even managed to establish or develop, some *fundamental sense of self*. This “sense of self” can be difficult to identify and articulate. In an interview from the time the novel was published, author Sapphire describes a “sense of self” that Precious does not have, but acquires, through the alternative education: “...Precious stops being ugly when she comes to Ms. Rain’s class. In that world she gets to be with other women who are older than her, so they are able to embrace her. She’s not competition, but she’s also not the fat joke that she was with the little kids. *She gets some sense of herself*” (Kelvin Christopher James and Sapphire 1996, 40, emphasis mine). Being called ugly or being made into the punchline of a “fat joke” are certainly terrible experiences and will contribute to her lack of self-esteem. That is, those who made fun of her in these ways have robbed her of her ability to think that she is not to be identified with her physical appearances and that her personality is worth getting to know (and that she is indeed precious!).

But there seems to be something deeper at work when she talks about the flashbacks of sexual abuse that intrude on her daily life. When Precious refers to memories of abuse, it is not just that her mother or father rob her of her self-esteem — though they do this as well — but that they rob her of her ability to see herself as someone at all. The disorienting nature of the intrusive memories of a series of terrifying past events damaged her sense of self in that she had no control over these memories. She could not “take herself as someone at all.” Reflecting on exactly what makes Precious’s life and existence so awful, I wish to explore the complex ways in which she never properly developed a fundamental sense of self and how she became able to

develop it over time through the trusting support of her alternative education teacher and classmates.¹

1.2.2 Aftermath: Susan Brison's story

In *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, Brison recounts how she was attacked from behind in broad daylight on a late morning walk in rural France. Her assailant sexually assaulted her, then attempted to strangle her to death, and left her for dead in a ravine. She survived the attempt on her life, received medical care from local hospitals, and gave multiple depositions to local police forces. She later convalesced at home in the United States, taking time off from teaching and research. She details this recovery process in her first chapter, "Surviving Sexual Violence": she deals with responses to the attack from family, friends, and colleagues; she takes feminist self-defense classes; she helps female students at her university receive course credit for their women-only self-defense classes. Brison uses this experience of trauma in conjunction with trauma studies (e.g., Holocaust survivors' testimonies, psychological research on trauma) as a lens to re-examine the nature of the self. One of her primary arguments is the defense of the feminist relational view of the self: "On this view the self is both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed by the help of empathic others" (Brison 2002, 38).

As with *Push*, it is difficult to read *Aftermath* because of the brutal nature of the traumatic experience it recounts. Although there is not much speculation about the assailant's motives besides his official plea of insanity in court, it is still easy to conceive of the assailant as monstrous and to cheer Brison on through the descriptions of her recovery. As such, there is a narrative of overcoming hardship woven into her theoretical analysis. This sense of an

¹ To be clear, I am not stating that Sapphire is wrong, but rather, distinguishing different senses of self, and surely it is possible that Sapphire understands the deeper sense of self that is lost that I am trying to elucidate in this chapter and dissertation as a whole.

underlying narrative arc results from the whole work's powerful structure of relying on, among other sources of research, first-person experiences to support the arguments. Brison devotes an entire chapter, "On the Personal as Philosophical," to a discussion of philosophy's need for references to personal experiences, similarly because it opens up an avenue for traditionally excluded voices to be heard. She argues that first-person narratives can uncover biases historically present in the field and among scholars, as well as offer a novel avenue to imagine experiences different from one's own (Brison 2002, 26). The "personal as philosophical" approach in the book lends itself to a distinct sense of self-awareness, transparency, and honesty, which is as refreshing in philosophy as it is crucial to uncovering and questioning various philosophical assumptions about the self.

But the particular appeal for my purposes lies in Brison's first-person descriptions of surviving trauma and some of the particular points she emphasizes about recovering from traumatic experiences. She persuasively argues that trauma reveals the relational nature of the self: "the self is both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathic others" (Brison 2002, 38). Trauma underscores such a view when these attributes go missing and affect the victim in particular ways that cannot be readily seen without an experience like severe abusive trauma. The most striking passages in *Aftermath* are about what it was like, post-trauma, to be treated by others in ways where she felt that she was not in fact alive despite surviving the attack. To support this view, she discusses the way other people responded to her experiences: she describes the experience of the physical inspection at the hospital as an "autopsy" where the doctors "went over [her] like a piece of meat" and she felt as though she were not alive. She also describes the sense that she led a "spectral existence" in the immediate aftermath of the assault,

feeling as though she had in fact died and no one came to her funeral (Brison 2002, 13). In addition to the relational view of the self, the post-traumatic “spectral existence” shows that in order to be able to relate to others appropriately again, in order not to feel like one is “living posthumously,” in order to be properly recognized by others, one has to be able first to “take oneself as someone at all.” So in addition to a relational sense of self, trauma shows that there is a distinct, more fundamental sense of self that is damaged or undeveloped in severe abusive trauma.

Thus the phenomenon of interest for me is surviving some interpersonal violence and abuse and being physically alive, and yet at the same time not feeling fully or truly alive in another important sense. For Precious, this means feeling something like she is drowning in the overwhelming memories of abuse. For Brison, not feeling fully alive manifests in her interactions with others such that she ends up taking her existential status to be somewhere between survival and death. This post-traumatic state of existence is what I am referring to and trying to draw out in more detail when I say, “unable to take oneself as someone at all,” and what I use to infer what “taking oneself as someone at all” then means.

Aftermath and *Push* both offer first-person perspectives on the experience of severe abusive trauma, but there is an important distinction between the two narratives that should be noted. In *Aftermath*, Brison offers explicit analyses of what happened to her and explanations of the seemingly mysterious consequences of the recovery period, whereas in *Push*, the reader must often make inferences and interpretations to understand Precious’s experience of trauma and recovery. For instance, Precious suffers traumatic flashbacks that disrupt whatever she is doing at the moment; these flashbacks also disrupt the reader’s experience and transports them to what Precious endured in the past. But the novel’s framework is also one where she is recounting

flashbacks, where we are reading “her story.” There is an implied connection between traumatic memories that she cannot control and the creation of her trauma narrative, over which she begins to exercise some control. But Brison makes this connection explicit, for instance in the chapter “Acts of Memory”: “[w]orking through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else’s (the perpetrator’s) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one’s own” (Brison 2002, 68). Support for these ideas and other commentaries can be found and defended in *Push*, but since *Push* is a novel and not a work of theoretical exposition, the ideas and claims themselves are not made as explicitly as they are in *Aftermath*. One important question is then raised about what exactly justifies my unique methodology of using a work of fiction and a work of nonfiction to propose a new way to look at the nature of the self and draw out a particular feature of it, the ability to “take oneself as someone at all.” In the following section, I will briefly explain the use of fictional material as the basis of philosophical analysis.

1.2.3 *Push* as a philosophical source

I take *Push*, a fictional novel, to be a legitimate source of philosophical inquiry for two reasons. The first reason is that although the novel is technically a work of fiction, its sources are rooted in the reality of author Sapphire’s own experiences as an instructor of alternative education programs with students like Precious. She states in an interview: “For seven years, I taught in various alternative education programs in Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn; and I saw a lot, a whole lot, and some of what I saw, not even all, is recorded in the novel” (Marq Wilson and Sapphire 2012). Moreover, the abuse recounted in *Push* had parallels with her own experiences of child sexual abuse at the hands of her parents, described in her previous work, *American Dreams*, a collection of poems and prose. She reveals in the same interview: “I felt I

could write about Precious's mother and father raping her because I talked about my mother and father raping me" (Kelvin Christopher James and Sapphire 1996, 45). Precious's story is, in an important sense, less a work of fiction and more an amalgamation of several different people, characters, and personas, including the author herself.

The second reason to take *Push* to be a legitimate source of philosophical inquiry of the self has to do with the nature of the abuse recounted in the story. To a reader who is not familiar with the nature of child abuse, certain aspects of the story may read like exaggerations for dramatic effect. But in psychiatrist Judith Herman's comprehensive study *Trauma and Recovery*, where she devotes a chapter to child abuse, we see that Precious's experiences are not embellished. Herman describes child abuse as essentially an extreme form of captivity, as she does with other traumatizing events insofar as they immobilize victims and render them powerless. Abused children are overwhelmed, experience unbearable physical and emotional pain, extend great efforts to protect themselves from this pain but at the same time blame themselves for the abuse they endure because of their utterly dependent states on their parents (Herman 2015, 101). In light of these descriptions of child abuse, what Precious describes of her experiences in *Push* are not idiosyncratic. It is not difficult to find examples of the kinds of child abuse Herman describes in Precious's story. For instance, her mother uses force feeding as a way to instate "intrusive control of" her daughter's "bodily functions" (Herman 2015, 108). Her mother also attempts to isolate her from others (e.g., saying she doesn't need to go to the alternative school). Precious depends on her mother despite the abuse: she considers blaming herself rather than her mother who she depends on, and she trusts her untrustworthy mother at times (for instance, she does not tell the police about her experiences of abuse and calls them "pigs" just as her mother does). In recovery, Precious also goes to great lengths to ensure that

her children do not become abused, as many survivors of child abuse do (Herman 2015, 114). In short, Herman's research shows that what we see in *Push* counts as extreme forms of child abuse, but is not exaggerated or so unreal that it seems fictitious. It is tempting to think of the descriptions as extreme and rare. But I think then the question is not whether *Push* is a proper source of doing important philosophical work, but rather, what this discomfort with descriptions of child abuse might tell us (after, if necessary, confirming that the abuse in *Push* are not exaggerations). Facing the distress of reading trauma narratives will be a recurring theme throughout this dissertation.

1.3 **Taking Oneself as Someone at All: A Sketch**

Setting methodology aside, we have so far reviewed two trauma narratives and three senses of self: damaging or developing a sense of self in terms of self-esteem; the relational sense of self Brison argues for; and the sense of taking oneself as someone at all. To clarify the third sense of self I highlight in this dissertation, it will help to clarify what I mean by the terms “self” and “world.”

1.3.1 **Selves, Worlds, and Taking Oneself as Someone at All**

Regarding the former term, there have been a myriad of different approaches to the philosophical treatment of the self. Here I am concerned with the self as a subject of experience, and in particular, a subject who can reflect on their experience in a way that constitutes a sense of “who they are”². I take it that this sense of self, of “who I am,” is what is lost in abusive traumatic experiences, and specifically in the sense that one cannot “take oneself as someone at all.” I understand this inability in terms of a loss of control over one's memories of past events and also in the sense that one can barely begin to relate to others. If I am right about this loss, it

² By contrast, I am not concerned here with something like the metaphysical conditions of personhood; I assume that trauma victims are persons and I am not saying here that if they cannot take themselves to be someone at all, that they do not count as persons or cannot self-constitute.

then seems important for philosophical theories of the self to *not assume* that anyone can take themselves as someone at all.

Many discussions of the self have gone the route of assuming these aspects of taking oneself as someone at all. Some examples from famous and influential theories include Harry Frankfurt's discussion of first-order and second-order desires in the context of freedom and free will and Christine Korsgaard's notion of practical identity, an orienting perspective that guides our values, commitments, and actions. There are certainly ways to consider Precious and Brison's experiences in terms of free will, or practical identities. There is a pressing question of whether she can avoid employment in low-level service or manual labor work force. Precious is a mother; she is a classmate; she is a client of a particular social worker. Some of these practical identities evolve over time, and they importantly shape her experience of the world and others and the establishment of her values, commitments, and actions.

However, these are not the primary concerns that underscore Precious's narratives. Her problems are in some sense more primordial. Managing traumatic flashbacks, piecing together one's story, being able to tell another person one's story, having that narrative properly heard by others, and being able to receive their recognition — I take it that these are more fundamental concerns that help a trauma survivor put together one's sense of "who they are." These activities and reflections may seem unremarkable when they are satisfied such that they may be barely noticeable. But they are alarmingly visible when they are absent — especially when the capacity to engage in these self-reflective activities is explicitly and violently taken away from oneself. In this sense, I take it that many discussions of self and self-reflective capacities begin too late to properly capture the philosophical problems that arise in cases like severe abusive trauma. The literature I have chosen to focus on, then, I think present the most compelling theories of the self

that could help understand the philosophical angles to the problems presented by Precious's and Brison's trauma narratives. But to some extent, even many of these theories, as I will go on to show in both the summaries below and in the chapters to follow, assume taking oneself as someone at all.

There is a deep connection between the way I understand the self as a subject of experience and the way I understand and use the term "world." Throughout this dissertation, one way I describe the relevant aspects of a self is in terms of the world such aspects contribute to creating. One's world, I argue, is constituted in part by how one understands one's own experiences across time, how one recognizes and is recognized by others, and one's world is infused with meaning by the moral qualities of these relationships with others. What I mean by "world" is inspired by Charles Mills and Maria Lugones, who describe "worlds" in terms of social identities such as race, gender, and immigration. Charles Mills, in "Non-Cartesian *Sums*," describes the "parallel worlds" of whites and non-whites, where fundamental and default assumptions in one world are diametrically opposed to those of the other world (Mills 2015, 3). Such parallel worlds overlap sometimes as a matter of coincidence, but such worlds cannot be genuinely and sincerely *shared* among the worlds' inhabitants until these fundamental assumptions are restructured and reconciled. This undertaking would not just be a matter of adjusting some principles here and there, Mills notes, but would require a complete overhaul and reconsideration of all assumptions about what it means to be a full person (the status whites tend to enjoy) as opposed to a "subperson" (the status that non-whites tend to take up) — namely, someone who "seems human in some respects but not in others" that results in experienced "tensions and internal contradictions" (Mills 2015, 6)³.

³ One example of such tension and contradiction is in the case of slavery, where one is taken to be both a person but also someone else's property (7).

Similarly, in the essay “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception,” Maria Lugones refers to “worlds” in terms of a kind of experience or sense of being (Lugones 1997, 11). “Worlds,” she says, are inhabited by actual people and refer to societies, either “an actual society given its dominant culture’s description and construction of life” or “a society given a non-dominant description” (Lugones 1997, 10). The relationship between the inhabitants and the “world” can be tenuous, since a given “world” may “construct” its inhabitants in ways that the inhabitants do not understand or refuse to accept (Lugones 1997, 10). Finally, she brings attention to the phenomenon in which inhabitants of one “world” can travel to another “world,” and so one can be inhabitants of multiple worlds (Lugones 1997, 11).

Some of Precious’s and Brison’s descriptions of surviving trauma indicate that it is like living in a world that is isolated and estranged from everyone else’s, and I take this description to be helpful in explaining what I have been calling the loss of taking oneself as someone at all. For Brison, it seems that she traveled from one world, where she was able to take herself as someone at all, and was thrown into another one when she was attacked, sexually assaulted, and left for dead in a ravine. By contrast, Precious seems to have always lived in an isolated and terrifying world, where even when she was not being abused she was haunted by traumatic memories of that abuse, and never had room or time — the luxury — to establish her sense that she was someone at all.

Based on Precious’s and Brison’s trauma narratives, their isolated worlds post-trauma had certain prominent characteristics, and each of these features requires its own attention. Part of what makes their worlds so alien has to do with the survivor’s sense of experiences in the past taking on something like a “life of its own,” where the survivor has no control of how she remembers the traumatic event of the past. Another part of what makes this “world” strange is

that she does not receive the right kind of recognition from people who have no direct experience of trauma (I will refer to such people as “non-survivors”), even if they mean well. And finally, what makes this “world” strange is that non-survivors seem to fail to be open to their stories and what they entail. So when the survivor is able to gain sufficient control of her flashbacks of the traumatic event, when the non-survivor can offer “therapeutic recognition,” and when a non-survivor can open up to the challenges elicited by the survivor’s trauma narrative, then it is the non-survivor who is crossing into and coming to “share a world” with the survivor. The survivor is then in a position to and can begin to take herself as someone at all again. This descriptive arc is effectively the outline of my argument in this dissertation, and in the remainder of this section, I will summarize each chapter that describes each relevant aspect of taking oneself as someone at all.

1.3.2 Taking Oneself As Someone At All: Temporal Control

In the second chapter, I explain that one way to understand taking oneself as someone at all is in terms of what I call “temporal control.” This control is over one’s sense that personal experiences occur in chronological order, and that each temporal category of events — past, present, anticipated future events — are all equally real. Although this way of framing the capacity may seem unremarkable in its obviousness, in the case of suffering from intrusive traumatic memories from severe abusive trauma, this temporal control cannot be taken for granted. It can be underdeveloped or damaged, and conversely, it can be built or rebuilt. Temporal control as I describe it is particularly problematic for the trauma survivor with severe intrusive symptoms such as flashbacks: survivors have no or little control over the activity of their traumatic memories, and so past events are in some sense “privileged” over present and hypothetical future events. Temporal control is restored when memories of the traumatic past

events can be conjured up at will, or put away or set aside at will. At this point, it becomes possible to develop a sense of a narrative identity, to be in a position to talk about one's experiences, and it is with this sense of identity that one is in a position to occupy a habitable world post-trauma. Taking oneself as someone at all then has these temporal and thereby narrative components — to be able to control the (over)activity of one's memories so that one can develop the sense that one's life has a rough narrative structure that unfolds across time.

The core of this investigation into temporal control is a passage from *Push* where Precious recounts her earlier years in school — her sense of time is so distorted that she is not only unable to engage in any fundamental educational activities and experiences in school, but she seems barely to have the sense that she exists. Following this description of being unable to focus on any other moment besides past ones, I consider a central capacity highlighted in Thomas Nagel's views on prudential reasoning — being able to see one's life moments as each equally real as another — and show how modifying this idea can help to explain what is missing in an experience like Precious's (Nagel 1978). My point here is that it cannot be assumed that the survivor has control over the sense that her experiences are equally real: her physical composition is likely altered as a result of the traumatic event such that she is on higher alert for the event to reoccur, and without proper therapeutic recovery practices, her traumatic past will be “privileged” over other experiences. In this sense, she does not have “temporal control.” I then show that this is what is required to develop a narrative identity in the sense explained by Marya Shechtman in her first book on personal identity, *The Constitution of Selves*. Although her view has since developed, I hold on to the parts of her original view because of the emphasis on a narrative as a central way to understand identity, and developing the ability to tell one's trauma narrative is crucial for a trauma survivor's recovery process (Herman 2015, 49).

Armed with these theoretical insights, I then explore some more practical aspects of managing traumatic memories, about the survivor's tendency to seize control where it is available through self-blame, by exploring some relevant psychological literature by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman and Jonathan Lear's views on "phantasy" (Lear 1998). I close with the suggestion that a feminist interpretation of self-defense offered by Ann Cahill is a better-suited method of seizing control than self-blame given the aim of gaining temporal control and a sense of a narrative of one's traumatic experiences (Cahill 2001). The idea of using a feminist approach to self-defense helps highlight the idea that occupying a place in a habitable world is not a given for everyone; it is sometimes something for which one must fight or be prepared to fight. The broad idea in this chapter then is that if losing the capacity to thread one's experiences together across time is one way to lose your sense that you are someone at all, then one way to restore this sense of self is through active efforts to see those pieces as each equally real and to weave them together.

1.3.3 Taking Oneself As Someone At All: Therapeutic Recognition

Actively being in a position to occupy a place in the world — indeed, being in a position to fight for it or being prepared to fight for it — requires having that place recognized by others. This is the topic of the third chapter, where I show that trauma survivors struggle to receive this recognition because they do not properly share the same world as non-survivors. Here, I focus on Brison's testimony of what it was like to survive severe trauma, where she describes that she felt like she was "living posthumously" because of the lack of recognition she received from others. I take this kind of description to be another way of describing what it means to lose one's ability to take oneself as someone at all — others seem to feel fully alive, but the survivor takes her existence to be hanging on by a thread despite physically surviving the traumatic event. The

responses vary among family members, friends, colleagues, and strangers, but one problematic common denominator in these responses is a discomfort and unwillingness to listen to her trauma narrative, to as Herman says, “bear witness” to the traumatic experiences. The question I ask in this chapter, then, is what kind of recognition is required for the survivor to feel less like she is leading a “spectral existence,” as Brison puts it, and to feel like she is living “among others, equally real,” a phrase and idea I borrow from Nagel again, this time from his views on altruism, which I then modify for the case of trauma (Nagel 1978). Such recognition would result in the restoration of the sense that one is someone at all by achieving a sense of living in a shared world with others rather than taking shared worlds for granted.

To answer this question, I argue that “therapeutic recognition” is the kind of recognition the survivor needs from others, that this is what it means to “bear witness” to a trauma survivor’s story. First, I begin with Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition in *The Struggle for Recognition*, which shows some important and nuanced ways of being recognized by others. In early loving relationships, a foundational form of trust is developed — trust in control of one’s body, and trust that there are certain relationships that one can always be confident will be sources of unconditional love. Honneth notes that this is what is destroyed in abusive relationships. But his theory assumes shared worlds and so cannot fully show us the recognitive needs of the trauma survivor. It is not just the trust built in loving relationships that is destroyed, but the sense that one is a member of the human community. So I suggest that “therapeutic recognition” is required: the non-survivor must listen to the survivor’s story without interruption and judgment, and the non-survivor must not deflect from the survivor’s story to think (whether out loud or to oneself), “That can’t happen to me.” This refusal to admit that the world is in many ways unsafe, to admit that trauma can happen where the victim isn’t at fault, is a critical juncture at

which non-survivors have the choice of becoming a proper “witness” to the survivor’s story, or of being another victim-blaming interlocutor who cannot bring themselves to put the survivor’s story before their own sense of safety. So when the non-survivor shifts from thinking, “That can’t happen to me” to realizing “That could happen to me,” the non-survivor is moving towards being a witness to the survivor’s trauma story, and coming to share a world with that survivor. The survivor’s sense of herself as someone at all can head towards establishment or restoration as a result of this relationship.

1.3.4 Taking Oneself As Someone At All: Just and Loving Regard

In the final chapter, I continue to examine the relationship between the survivor who is able to share her trauma narrative and the non-survivor who is the audience of that narrative. For someone who has limited experience and knowledge about trauma, it can be difficult to know how to respond to someone who has experienced it and shares their trauma narrative. As Brison notes, some people respond by explicitly victim-blaming; some people resort to explaining the traumatic event through unfounded notions of “luck”; some people mean well but are unable to or incapable of fully expressing their good intentions and thus still prevent the survivor from speaking about their experience in a straightforward manner. In the case where therapeutic recognition is withheld by the non-survivor in these sorts of ways, I explore the question of what moral features are present or absent in such a relationship. Conversely, in the case where therapeutic recognition is offered, I address the morally salient characteristics of that relationship between the survivor and non-survivor who successfully bears witness to the survivor’s story. This chapter is then about the moral ramifications of not being able to take oneself as someone at all and of becoming able once again to do so with the support of others.

Of mainstream moral theories, Tim Scanlon's view of contractualism is promising because of its focus on relationships and the exchanges that take place in them to articulate oneself and one's actions to another person. But this picture of morality takes justification and agreement to be the central, morally relevant features of relationships, and I argue that these features assume a shared world. The ability to share worlds, again, is precisely what is at stake for the trauma survivor who is sharing her narrative with a non-survivor. So part of what I show in this chapter is that a view like contractualism, even with an emphasis on the moral nature of relationships, cannot capture what is morally at stake in the case of post-trauma relations. I then turn to Stanley Cavell, who, in *The Claim of Reason*, does not take articulating oneself — not just in terms of offering justifications to others — for granted, and who does not take what he calls “sharing a moral universe” for granted. I incorporate these directional cues from Cavell and merge them with Iris Murdoch's insights in essays from *The Sovereignty of Good* where it is also clear that she does not assume shared worlds. She suggests that “just and loving regard” is crucial to avoid being selfish and emphasizes the value of humility. I interpret this “just and loving regard” as an openness to being challenged and moved by what another says. The strength of Murdoch's insights is that they can help to explain what is both absent and present in the case where therapeutic recognition is denied and offered, respectively.

To summarize, to take oneself as someone at all, there is an angle of temporality and control to be able to articulate a trauma narrative; therapeutic recognition must be offered to the trauma survivor; and should such recognition be offered to someone who can articulate their trauma narrative, this is so because of a certain kind of openness and vulnerability that a non-survivor can offer to the survivor.

1.3.5 Theory and Practice

In each chapter, my general method is to analyze a theory that explains some important aspect of the self and show how this theory of taking oneself as someone at all, which cannot be assumed on behalf of a trauma survivor. I then use this analytical insight to produce a practical suggestion: in the second chapter, comments on self-blame and self-defense; in the third chapter, comments on how to properly listen to a trauma survivor; in the fourth chapter, further comments on what kind of disposition to take up to properly listen to a trauma survivor.

Although my theoretical insights yield practical advice, my main aim is not to provide a guide to listening to someone's trauma narrative, or how to produce one's own trauma narrative. My overall wish is to convey the problem of a kind of "gap" that commonly manifests between a trauma survivor and a non-survivor, express it in terms of self and world, and how to understand that gap and consider some ways of minimizing it. A more subtle way of thinking about my goal in the dissertation, what I want readers to take away, is the sense of a particular kind of problem that may go unnoticed without examining assumptions: when coming across someone's description of an experience so different, terrifyingly so, from any experience that one has ever known or imagined, many philosophical problems arise that have deep and serious ramifications for how we understand the self and our relationships with others. How does that alien experience affect the person's sense of existence? How does that experience affect how others relate to them? What are the morally salient features of the relationship between that person and others; how can we better understand one another given these kinds of experiences? And my general answer to these questions is that the person who has the alien experience may find it difficult to take herself as someone at all because she is barely able to construct a world, let alone share one. What this may mean is an engagement in a particular kind of mutual exchange: the

non-survivor must realize that the world is not as rosy as they thought it was and that it can be as precarious and terrifying as the survivor describes; but the survivor must also to an extent realize that her world is not as terrifying as it was when experiencing the traumatic event and immediately after, that she can become able to take risks and look for particular people who offer something like therapeutic recognition.

1.4 **Mapping the Terrain of Taking Oneself as Someone at All**

Having more thoroughly introduced the phenomenon of taking oneself as someone at all, the final task of this introductory chapter is to situate this phenomenon with respect to some relevant and nearby phenomena in psychological and philosophical literature. This contextualizing will turn on the senses of the terms “self” and “world” discussed earlier in this chapter. In this section, then, I expect to use these neighboring concepts to further give a sense of what the loss of taking oneself as someone at all is like while also pointing out important distinctions between these other phenomena and the one I am highlighting. Although attention has been paid to the loss of a “sense of self” in these neighboring concepts, there is a particular philosophical angle that has yet to be properly explored and developed.

1.4.1 **Cotard’s Syndrome**

Cotard’s Syndrome (CS), one neighboring phenomenon, is an uncommon and peculiar condition that progresses in three stages: in the first “germination” stage, there is a vague sense of depression and anxiety, often about one’s health, which then “blossoms” into outright delusions that one’s body parts, organs, soul, and so on, do not exist. Finally, the most extreme or “chronic” stage is where patients may exhibit the inability to feel pain, the inability to speak, and self-harming and suicidal behavior (Yamada, Katsuragi, and Fujii 2007). CS is often associated with other acute forms of psychiatric disorders as well as some forms of cerebral trauma and

atrophy (Enoch and Ball 2001). What distinguishes CS from the loss of taking oneself as someone at all are “nihilistic delusions” that characterize CS, the “delusion” that things, including oneself and one’s body parts, are unreal and do not exist (Debruynne 2011). In the loss of taking oneself as someone at all, one important aspect is the sense that one is not “truly alive,” but not in the sense that one’s body is deceased, or that one’s body parts, such as organs, are no longer functioning⁴. But more important for my purposes than this physical characteristic is that in CS, there is an explicit clinical context, whereas in the loss of taking oneself as someone at all, this context is not necessarily present. The person who is suffering from CS insists that they are not alive, that their soul is damned, or that their organs are no longer working and they therefore no longer need to eat, or be awake, or be alive; and someone — a family member or a medical practitioner — says to the person with CS, and believes, that they are not correct. That is, there is an assumed disagreement between what the person suffering with CS says and what the person of support says, and there is a presumption that the person with CS is not correct. There may be a sense in which the person with symptoms of CS lives in an isolated world, but that is not the main issue that needs to be addressed. The main issue is that the person diagnosed with CS be able to function sufficiently so that they can nourish their bodies, so that they stop feeling the need to “finish the job” to make it so that they are dead as they feel, and so on.

But in the loss of taking oneself as someone at all as a result of severe abusive trauma, I am referring to the “inner life” of the survivor who describes her existence as “spectral” (as in the case of Brison) *because of certain failed responses to her narrative*. In the cases I am interested in, there is a genuine question of what an appropriate or inappropriate response is to a

⁴ Self-starvation is cited commonly, but particularly in two cases of Grover, Aneja, Mahajan, and Varma’s “Cotard’s Syndrome: Two cases and a brief review of literature” in *Journal of Neurosciences in Rural Practice*. 2014 Nov; 5 (Suppl 1): S59-S62. The ideation that one’s body is decomposing is also a common symptom cited in Enoch and Ball, *Uncommon Psychiatric Syndromes*, p.168.

trauma survivor who shares her story. The question of whether a world can be shared, whether someone can take herself as someone at all, and whether one is fully alive. In the case of CS in the “blooming” and “chronic” stages, it seems that there is no room for a genuine debate about whether the patient’s sense of her own experiences is correct or not. It seems that the only appropriate response to her reports of how she feels would be to seek medical support (however stressful this process may be) on the behalf of the person with these particular symptoms. Moreover, CS can be treated through pharmacological therapy as well as electroconvulsive therapy (Enoch and Ball 2001, 175–76). Although I discuss the conditions of the restoration of the loss of taking oneself as someone at all, and I offer practical insight into what a trauma survivor might need in recovery, my interest and approach are less about treatment and more about understanding some aspects of the fundamental conditions of trauma and recovery.

1.4.2 Dissociation

Dissociation is another symptom of experiencing severe abusive trauma that is in the vicinity of losing the ability to take yourself as someone at all. A traumatic event renders someone powerless, and they are overwhelmed by the event itself and the emotional response to that event. The body and mind, broadly speaking with the acknowledgment that everyone reacts to different stressful events differently, cannot handle that much activity — external stimulus and emotional response to that stimulus — to process that stress. Herman writes: “When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized” (Herman 2015, 34). One way that this disorganization occurs is in the form of dissociative disorders, which are commonly associated with traumatic experiences. Herman discusses them in the category of “constrictive” or “numbing” symptoms of post-traumatic stress

disorder. These symptoms indicate that the person attempts to escape her situation as a way of managing the survival of unbearable pain and terror.

Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings. Perceptions may be numbed or distorted, with partial anesthesia or the loss of particular sensations. Time sense may be altered, often with a sense of slow motion, and the experience may lose its quality of ordinary reality. The person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing from outside her body, or as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which she will shortly awaken. These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle (Herman 2015, 43).

Herman's description overlaps with the loss of taking oneself as someone at all. I focus on the sense in which time seems to be experienced in a non-chronological way, and how this affects one's sense that one is someone at all. I also explain the loss of taking oneself as someone at all in terms of how survivors can feel that they are not fully alive, living a "spectral existence," as Brison puts it, and this seems to map onto the experience of having a "bad dream from which [one] will shortly awaken."

Although there may be some overlap between dissociative experiences post-trauma and what I call the loss of taking oneself as someone at all, the main distinction is that dissociation is considered a diagnosable *disorder*, which can be found in the most recent version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V). To demonstrate what I take to be important about the diagnosability of dissociative disorders, I will focus briefly on one of the dissociative disorders, "depersonalization disorder." The "Depersonalization Severity Scale (DSS)" was developed by psychiatrists to be used by clinicians in order to help develop the research on dissociative symptoms in PTSD studies (Simeon, Guralnik, and Schmeidler 2001). Questions in the DSS ask about observing oneself "as if in a movie," as if body or body parts were detached and did not belong to oneself, as if someone else controlled one's voice and

behavior, about feeling unreal or like a stranger to oneself or disconnected from one's own reflection in a mirror (Simeon, Guralnik, and Schmeidler 2001, 347).

There are assumptions in a clinician who asks these questions to someone who is suffering from dissociation: that it is not normal to feel like you are watching yourself in a movie, as if your body or its parts are detached, as if you are unreal or a stranger to yourself, and so on. These assumptions are made because the context is one of diagnosis and treatment, and in this context, there is the "world" of the patient where she has these disconnecting experiences, and there is the "world" of the clinician whose job it is to reduce or minimize the disconnected nature of the patient's experiences. This is where the diagnosis of the severity of the depersonalization would be helpful.

The main idea here is that in the clinical context, there is more likely an "unshared," asymmetrical structuring of the relationship between the patient and the medical/psychological, whereas in becoming able to take oneself as someone at all, what is critical is the developing sense of a shared world. As explained in the CS case, it must be not only a live and relevant question, but *the* primary question, whether worlds are shared. In the case of dissociation, the question of shared worlds is not as relevant as it is in the post-trauma case I am interested in where a survivor shares her story with a non-survivor.

The above review of psychological symptoms in the vicinity of what I call the loss of taking oneself as someone at all is underscored by a common point: medical and clinical research on trauma helps us understand the issues that arise from experiencing trauma through diagnoses and treatment. But I am trying to get the sense of "what it's like" to experience abusive trauma to use as a critical tool for better understanding philosophical theories of the self rather than only to diagnose and treat. Specifically, I am trying to characterize taking oneself as someone at all

and show that many theories of the self take it for granted. I take it that first-person accounts of trauma provide a rich and novel way to understand this characterization.

One exception is that I do rely heavily on Judith Herman's comprehensive work on trauma more than other psychiatrists and psychologists, because in *Trauma and Recovery*, she manages to successfully acknowledge the works of clinicians and researchers, all while also respecting the testimony of survivors of trauma. On top of gracefully executing this balance, she also makes readers aware of the social, political, and historical context of trauma studies — for instance, she explains the tendency in psychiatric research on trauma to victim-blame trauma survivors and the outdated and offensive usage of “borderline” and “multiple personality” disorder diagnoses; she attempts to bridge the gender gap between typically male veterans of war who have PTSD and typically female victims of sexual violence; and she explains how trauma studies expands and contracts according to surrounding political movements and contexts. Her descriptions of trauma phenomenology are evocative, and some of her comments have shaped specific directions in my dissertation (see chapter three on “therapeutic recognition” in particular).

1.4.3. “Bottom up” methodology

So far I have explained that the loss of taking oneself as someone at all is relevantly unlike certain symptoms and disorders that can be found in psychiatric and psychological literature. A slightly messier, but rich and interesting, contextualization of taking oneself as someone at all in the relevant literature is to look at authors who have had similar approaches to uncovering important assumptions about the self by paying careful, joint attention to theory and testimony. Whereas in the previous section, I showed the distinctions between nearby psychological symptoms and taking oneself as someone at all, here I want to situate my

methodology to uncover taking oneself as someone at all with similar methods of other authors in philosophical literature.

Jill Stauffer's concept of "ethical loneliness" comes closest to the phenomenon of taking oneself as someone at all. In *Ethical Loneliness*, Stauffer describes ethical loneliness as a particular kind of isolation felt when someone undergoes a dehumanizing experience only to be confronted by the problem of not having their testimonies properly heard and taken seriously by others. Faced with such loneliness, one survives a traumatic event but has no social network or support in the aftermath on which to rely in healing and recovery.

Stauffer's "ethical loneliness" and my "loss of taking oneself as someone at all" map similar phenomenological terrain⁵. But the scope of her project is much broader than mine, insofar as she is attempting to take on not just failed individual responses to trauma testimonies, but failed responses from institutions that were meant to and designed to listen to victims and survivors of larger-scale atrocities. One way to think about our ideas, then, is to see ethical loneliness as the broader category under which the phenomenon of losing one's ability to take oneself as someone at all falls, and it is this specific phenomenon that I use as a tool to analyze and critique theories that offer important observations, descriptions about the nature of the self.

However, our methodologies align nicely. At one point in the chapter "Ethical Loneliness," Stauffer raises the idea of the sovereign self in liberal political theory:

⁵ The description of ethical loneliness closely maps on to my discussion of the lack of what I call "therapeutic recognition," the particular kind of recognition I argue is necessary for survivors to take themselves as someone at all. In Stauffer's discussion of "repair" — aiming to make amends to some injustice — where it is assumed that repair is possible, she explores what it means to listen to survivors of grave harm: "[t]he self with a will to repair needs to be open to being interrupted, to hearing something other than what she expected" (70). She puts forth these ideas by discussing irony, failed communication, and Levinasian concepts. Using different authors and ideas, I also discuss the need for openness from non-survivors who are tasked with genuinely listening to trauma survivors' stories. She also describes how one's past experiences affect one's present, and how this is affected in particular ways for those who suffer from ethical loneliness, and similarly, discuss the temporal nature of not being able to take oneself as someone at all in the aftermath of a traumatic experience, but from a different conceptual angle.

One might call...the goal of liberal political theory...to provide or defend conditions where confidence in the intelligibility of the world may thrive. Those are not bad goals! We should note, however, that sites where such confidence remains secure are unequally portioned out across space, time and other ways of dividing up worlds. What Levinas and Améry describe complicates the assumed inevitability of that security. If we pay heed, their descriptions may make it more difficult to take an easy autonomy for granted. We may see that the sovereign feeling sometimes possessed by human beings is not an essence but a product of human interaction (Stauffer 2015, 20).

Just as Stauffer uses Levinas (philosophy) and Améry (survivor's testimony) to reexamine and "complicate" the story of autonomy, Brison uses trauma studies and her own experiences to argue for a relational view of the self. Likewise, I take myself to be following in their footsteps, using Brison (philosophy and first-person descriptions of surviving a traumatic event) and *Push* (first-person description of surviving an extreme case of a lifelong series of abusive traumas) to uncover the aspect of the self I call taking oneself as someone at all.

This methodology has roots in the beginnings of trauma studies, in Sigmund Freud's work on patients who were thought to suffer from what was then called hysteria⁶. Relying almost exclusively on testimonies of "hysterical" women, he reached the conclusion that these women were not afflicted with a disease that manifested exclusively in women, but that the women whose testimonies he took seriously were all simply severely abused and traumatized⁷. Freud reexamined assumptions, in his case of certain middle-class Austrian women, and revealed not that they were sick because they were women, but that they were sick because people had done terrible things to them.

⁶ Hysteria was considered a disease afflicting the uterus and was the diagnosis given to any woman who had what Herman describes as "incoherent and incomprehensible symptoms" (10). Herman also notes that "three particularly troublesome diagnoses [with negative connotations that] have often been applied to survivors of childhood abuse are somatization disorder, borderline personality disorder, and multiple personality disorder" all three of which "were once subsumed under the now obsolete name *hysteria*" (123).

⁷ In Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, see the section "The Heroic Age of Hysteria" in Chapter 1. She writes of Freud and Janet, who each sought to uncover the cause of hysteria: "In pursuit of their goal, these investigators found that it was not sufficient to observe and classify hysterics. It was necessary to talk with them. For a brief decade men of science listened to women with a devotion and a respect unparalleled before or since. Daily meetings with hysterical patients, often lasting for hours, were not uncommon. The case studies of this period read almost like collaborations between doctor and patient" (page 11-12).

The results of using trauma testimony in Freud, Brison, Stauffer, and my own work reveal what has been overlooked: the traumatic experiences of women, the relational nature of the self, a profound isolation that results from multiple levels of abandonment, the loss of taking oneself as someone at all. Reaching these conclusions is not possible without taking seriously the claims and words of trauma survivors. From this point, I want to make a culminating comment on this methodology of using testimonies of trauma survivors to reexamine and uncover overlooked theses on the self in philosophy. This approach is related to the “bottom up” approach of feminist thinking noted prominently and vividly in Kimberlé Crenshaw’s essay explaining the idea of “intersectional feminism”. She describes an analogy, where inside of a basement are all people who have some disadvantage on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, and/or physical ability. She notes that these people are arranged so that those facing multiple factors of disadvantage are at the very bottom of the basement (e.g., women of color; disabled woman of color; etc.), and those with fewer disadvantages stand on their shoulders. Those who are only affected by one factor stand right below the ceiling of the basement. In order to remedy this situation, “those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that ‘but for’ the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room” (Crenshaw, 1989, 151). If a hatch is created through which those “from the basement” can crawl, it will only be available to those who are closest to the basement ceiling. But those who are farther away from the ceiling, who are “multiply burdened,” such as women of color, will be left in the basement “unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch” (Crenshaw 1989., 152). Crenshaw argues that antidiscrimination doctrine was traditionally written with those who are singularly disadvantaged in mind, but not multiply, such as women of color, and so those who fall into the latter category are not afforded legal protection

(Crenshaw 1989, 152). In the final comments of her article, Crenshaw suggests it is backwards to help the singularly disadvantaged first with the hope of improving conditions for those who are multiply disadvantaged. Instead, the priority should be “addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restricting and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit” (Crenshaw, 1989, 167).

One reverberation of Crenshaw’s basement analogy is Brison’s aforementioned comments about including first-person experiences in philosophical literature. Philosophy tends towards abstraction and thinking of a general “self” or “person,” or at least begins with ideal conditions and treats as anomalous the non-ideal circumstances. But, setting aside whether non-ideal conditions ought not be the case, there are in fact those in the “basement,” those who live with varying non-ideal conditions. I find trauma survivors (not unlike those living with certain forms of disability) to provide particularly interesting insight because trauma is not visible from the outside. In this sense it can be easier to make unwarranted assumptions about trauma survivors, and it can be easier for trauma survivors to unveil those unwarranted assumptions in their testimonies and trauma narratives. Moreover, having experienced and survived trauma can be compounded by experiencing other forms of oppression or undue burden as in the case of Precious, but it can also be something that someone who experiences relatively less oppression can experience. One point I stress in later chapters is that there is no reason to think that anyone is immune to trauma, even of the extreme, interpersonal, and abusive kind. So following the logic of Crenshaw’s analogy, when we think about trauma survivors and what assumptions they have imposed on them and which ones they uncover, we can learn not only about trauma survivors, but about anyone, regardless of whether they have encountered trauma or not. The

result of this bottom-up approach here is due attention to the phenomenon and important but fragile ability of taking oneself as someone at all.

In this spirit, I do not assume ideal circumstances reflecting on the nature of the self, and I take myself to be centering trauma and not treating it as a fringe experience and phenomenon. This work is on the ground, so to speak, focusing on lived experiences of people, to inform philosophical thinking. The extreme conditions of trauma will reveal the importance of taking oneself as someone at all, the various and intricate details of which will be explicated in the next three chapters.

2. Taking Oneself as Someone at All: Temporal Control

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, I introduced the idea of a fundamental sense of self that I called “taking oneself as someone at all” that can be lost in trauma, which can be described as not feeling fully alive. Here I will explain more positively what I mean by “not feeling fully alive.” This sense of self can be captured by referring to the narrative view of the self, the self understood as a series of unfolding events, experiences, characteristics and commitments developed over time. This narrative self-conception can be damaged or lost in trauma because of how trauma disrupts memory and thus one’s sense of self as temporally extended. After explaining the connection and relation between memory, self, and narrative, I will show that taking oneself as someone at all can be understood as having “temporal control,” the ability to see one’s life events as each equally real as one another. This basic ability is necessary for managing and interpreting the narrative that will be critical to one’s identity. Since narrative views of the self overlook the importance of temporal control, I will show that having a narrative with which to construct the self and identity is more tenuous than might be thought. In the second half of the chapter, I ask how temporal control can be restored. I suggest that self-blame can distract from restoring temporal control because self-blaming claims seem to express a desire to return to a predictable and knowable world. Instead, feminist self-defense practices may be a more appropriate response to a capricious and at times dangerous world, and can help to genuinely restore the ability to take oneself as a self at all.

2.1 Memory, Narrative Identity, and Temporal Control

The first half of this chapter begins with a discussion of memory to specify the aspect of the self I take to be relevant in bringing out what I mean by taking oneself as someone at all.

Memory is important for developing the sense of oneself as temporally extended, and if memory is disrupted, then the sense that one is a temporal being is also disrupted. This disruption can be seen in the way trauma affects one's ability to speak about the traumatic event and to understand it properly as part of a whole life story. Given the intrusive and intense nature of traumatic memories, commonly known as flashbacks, I suggest that *the traumatic event is not over* for the survivor until she can manage these memories. This sense of the traumatic event as “unintegrated” into a larger framework can be understood by examining Marya Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view, which places understands the self as a life story that unfolds according to a diachronic and holistic structure. But I will go on to point out that in order to have this background sensibility that a sense of the whole story gives meaning to the individual events that constitute the story, “temporal control” is needed: the ability to see key life events of one's life as each equally real. I take this loss of temporal control to be the core problem for the trauma survivor with flashbacks. Trauma reveals that insofar as narrative self-conception is critical to identity constitution, having a narrative, or narrativity, is a fragile capacity that itself cannot be taken for granted.

2.2.1 Memory and the Temporally Extended Self

In order to understand one important way trauma damages the self, it will be helpful to compare traumatic memories to functional memories. In *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-Historical Selves*, John Christman, in explaining the relationship between memory and the agential self, summarizes recent literature on the psychology of memory with a focus on autobiographical memory. Although the target of my view is not the self as an agent, this review of how autobiographical memory functions and how it is related to the constitution and maintenance of the self will be helpful to better understand memory and the damage that

trauma does to this faculty. My interest here is not so much saying something definitive about memory and trauma from a clinical or psychological perspective, but rather, uncovering what trauma's effects on memory can reveal about the nature of the self.

First, Christman notes that memory requires active engagement with encoded material, which in turn presupposes some sense of self. He highlights the great extent to which memory recall is an active process, and this is now acknowledged by researchers on memory. Recalling an experience is not merely a matter of pulling up some data and passively “watching” it. Rather, memory requires interpretation and is infused with judgment and meaning, which is shown by how we edit our memories when we recall them — we do not remember every detail, and we sometimes add to details retrospectively, often for pragmatic reasons. Memory recall is also responsive to requests or expectations, and the standard of a memory's coherence is commonly socially determined. What we recall and how memories are reconstituted depend on why we remember something, and why we remember can be prompted by a complex web of practical concerns of memory capacity, the interactions we have with others, and our emotional responses to certain memories. All of this activity is guided by a responder and an interpreter — that is, someone with “a working self-schema” (Christman 2011, 127).

One important feature of this “working self-schema” is temporal extension. Christman goes on to note that the connection between memory and the self can be seen explicitly in the case of amnesiacs who retain various cognitive capacities but have lost short-term memory. Amnesiacs have some sense of “who they are, what they want, and what they need to get what they want,” but what is importantly missing is their sense of their temporal extension, and this disrupts their understanding of who they are (Christman 2011, 131). In particular, he notes that a functional memory is crucial to being able to see oneself in a narrative sense — to

see one's characteristics and experiences in a diachronic framework, to be able to interpret and re-interpret these characteristics and experiences (Christman 2011, 134). I will return to the narrative view of the self in the next section. Here I want to emphasize that functional memory implies that when recall occurs, this activity is structured by a self-schema as temporally extended.

Christman's summary of memory and the self suggests in the case of abusive trauma that if one's memory becomes defective, then the "self-schema" that guides all of the active work of memory is also damaged, and so one's sense as a temporally extended self can be disrupted. These disruptions can affect agency, decision-making, responsibility and obligations, but there is a more basic consequence. Trauma upends the overarching framework needed to understand one's traumatic experiences. This framework is damaged, or goes missing, and this is the beginning of the story of what it means to lose the ability to take oneself as someone at all.

In the case of abusive trauma, memory often becomes dysfunctional. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman describes traumatic memories as "not encoded like the ordinary memories of adults in a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story" (Herman 2015, 98). She quotes psychoanalyst Pierre Janet, who, in 1919, noted that traumatic memories are not genuine memories because recalling a genuine memory would involve being able to speak about the recalled events both to oneself and others and to place this recital of events as "one of the chapters in our personal history." Instead, Janet suggests that traumatic memories are more accurately described as a "fixed idea of a happening" (Herman 2015, 37).

These "fixed ideas of a happening," or flashbacks, have peculiar qualities: they break into consciousness spontaneously and repeatedly, and they are experienced as "reliving" the event "as though it were continually recurring in the present" (Ehlers and Hackmann 2004). They are

described as wordless, taking the form of vivid sensations and images, and are considered unintegrated from within a larger system of other memories. Because of their unpredictable, sensory, and fragmented nature, it is thus difficult to make sense and meaning of these traumatic memories. In the discussion of intrusive symptoms, Herman explains:

The psychiatrist Mardi Horowitz postulates a “completion principle” which “summarizes the human mind’s intrinsic ability to process new information in order to bring up to date the inner schemata of the self and the world.” Trauma, by definition, shatters these “inner schemata.” Horowitz suggests that unassimilated traumatic experiences are stored in a special kind of “active memory,” which has an “intrinsic tendency to repeat the representation of contents.” The trauma is resolved only when the survivor develops a new mental “schema” for understanding what has happened (Herman 2015, 37).

The victim’s flashbacks are an attempt to understand an event that cannot be properly understood; put another way, the flashbacks are failed attempts to understand the traumatic event. Horowitz’s theory about the “completion principle” suggests that this must be so because the framework — the terms and assumptions used to make sense of the event — is outdated, or in cases of extreme trauma, severely underdeveloped. This idea can be found in Susan Brison’s reflections on recovery: “Recovery no longer seems to consist of picking up the pieces of a shattered self (or a fractured narrative). It’s facing the fact that there never was a coherent self (or story) there to begin with” (Brison 2002, 116). In the case of Precious from *Push*, she may not have had a sense of being a whole self that was “shattered” by abuse, but rather, she had a complete absence of a positive subjective experience, an “inner schemata of self and world” that helps her process and make sense of new information, for much of her life (positive here describing both quality, i.e., “good” as well as to describe the quantity of self-affirming experiences she had, i.e., none, or nearly none). Without this kind of framework to understand the events, either established for the first time or re-configured, to understand the event, the flashbacks return, and in this sense the traumatic event is not really over. The traumatic experience is relived, experienced almost, if not equally, as real, the original event, and there is a

violent quality to the memory insofar as flashbacks can be disruptive. The idea of a missing or defective framework will lead us to a specific view of narrative identity in a moment, but first I want to explain how Herman describes the importance of recovering the ability to remember the traumatic event *in an empowered way* as part of the recovery process for trauma victims.

According to Herman, in the “remembrance” stage of recovery, the goal is to be able to put words to the mental images and other sensations of the traumatic memories and articulate one’s trauma narrative, the story of what happened in the original traumatic event. “Telling one’s story” has at least two conditions: she tells the story of the trauma, which requires being able to hold the memory in one’s mind long enough to speak about it and then dismiss it, but she also integrates it into her life narrative with proper temporal and historical context (Herman 2015, 176–77). Both of these conditions are underscored by control: “The choice to confront the horrors of the past rests with the survivor” (Herman 2015, 176). The survivor must try to recount in great detail: first, her life history, including “important relationships, her ideals and dreams, her struggles and conflicts prior to the traumatic event” (Herman 2015, 177); then, what transpired in the traumatic event, as though she were giving a report of the incident; and finally, what emotions the survivor felt in that traumatic event¹. For those with complex traumas comprising multiple traumatic events, the ones that stand out as representative of the others are highlighted for discussion with the therapist (Herman 2015, 187). The survivor must trust the therapist enough that the sessions are seen as “safe spaces” in which to test articulating her story. The ultimate goal of the “remembrance” part of recovery is to tell the story of the trauma

¹ Peter Goldie has argued that after a transformative event (“tragic or traumatic”), one may have memory of the event but not be able to properly recollect the event. He suggests that what is missing in these cases is “emotional closure”: “the desire to be able to look back in the right way on one’s past life from one’s present external perspective: not just seeing causal connections, and making sense of why one then thought, felt and acted as one then did, but also seeing one’s own external emotional response as an appropriate one.” See Goldie, P. “One’s Remembered Past: Narrative Thinking, Emotion, and External Perspective” *Philosophical Papers* 32:3, 301-319.

as part of one's life history, but in a way where she has control over the construction, integration, and pacing of this expressive work.

Contrasting the trauma victim's memory problems with those of the amnesiac's can help to clarify the salient difference that I highlight here as the predicament of not being able to take oneself as someone at all. Whereas the amnesiac lacks certain memories and then weaving and so cannot weave together a narrative, the victim of severe abusive trauma finds certain memories so overwhelming that they block the sense of having a narrative at all. The amnesiac misses particular memories; the trauma victim possesses certain overpowering memories. An amnesiac can preserve some minimal sense of feeling sufficiently alive, though the quality of that living is severely confused and thereby significantly diminished. But a trauma victim with severe flashbacks is in an important sense less alive than this. She is so overwhelmed by the traumatic memories that during a flashback, all she can see is the traumatic past. This is not necessarily a constant state of being, but the problem with intrusive memories is their unpredictable nature. When they strike, she seems to take herself in the following way: she *is* the traumatic past. And this is not a problem because this is somehow wrong (although the identification may in fact be wrong, as she is more than her traumatic experiences) but the identification is a problem because when she reflects, she doesn't see a person, but rather, re-encounters a particular past experience or set of past experiences filled with vivid images and sensations that feel more real than what is happening in the present from where she revisits these memories.

The problem of identifying so strongly with an overpowering set of memories is that there is no sense of an overarching narrative — that is, no narrative structure, no framework within which to understand the traumatic memories. The amnesiac, meanwhile, is trying to figure out what's missing and how the presence of the missing memories would contribute to her

sense of who she is. But there is still a sense of a general structure and form, the narrative; the problem is that its pieces throw the narrative into question. In other words, the disturbing feeling of “all of this doesn’t make sense” is *possible* for the amnesiac because they have some sense of a framework, a narrative structure, from which they can try to make sense of their experiences. For someone like Precious, though, the *overall form* of a narrative is missing, because some of the pieces are just so overbearing that the bigger picture disappears from view. If either the amnesiac or the trauma victim somehow hypothetically had all of the memories to weave together into a narrative identity, comparatively, the amnesiac would have the tools — the sense of having a narrative structure — with which to *control* the narrative constitution of the self, but the trauma victim would not have such a tool nor the control to exercise that tool. In this sense, she cannot take herself as someone at all. In the next section I will look at Marya Schechtman’s narrative view of the self that can explain the importance of this overarching sense of one’s life. But I will eventually show that even this view, which can explain trauma’s damage to the self, is in some sense “too far ahead” to get at the heart of the trauma victim’s existential crisis — the utter loss of control over her memories and how she understands herself.

2.2.2 Narrative Selves

So far, we have established that trauma disrupts the ability to “integrate” the traumatic event into one’s life story: because trauma victims with these intrusive memories lack an overall narrative framework to make sense of the traumatic experience. At the core of Marya Schechtman’s narrative self-constitution view is the idea that our lives have a narrative structure that guides our ability to interpret and understand individual life moments. Although the primary interest here is not to see the extent to which a trauma victim counts as a person or self according

to Schechtman's view, her view will help us see more clearly the different parts of taking oneself as someone at all².

In *The Constitution of Selves*, Schechtman distinguishes two different ways of interpreting the question, "Who am I?" The reidentification version of this question is a metaphysical one, asking for instance whether my "time slice" at time t_2 is the same "time slice" I was at some earlier time, t_1 . The characterization question, on the other hand, is about which characteristics can be attributed to me, and might be asked by the confused adolescent who has behaved or thought or reconsidered values and commitments in a way that does not seem to quite make sense or "fit" with those characteristics of their past self. The narrative self-constitution view is meant to address this second version of the "Who am I?" question. The view asserts that "individuals constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of themselves as persisting subjects who have had experience in the past and will continue to experience in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs" (Schechtman 1996, 94). The confused adolescent is not worried about whether she is physically the same biological entity as she was in the past when she sees earlier photos or hears stories about her former self. She is concerned instead about the extent to which there is a way to understand the traits of her former self in terms of her current self (e.g., she was a social butterfly in the past but now is racked with social anxiety, or vice versa).

According to Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view, one understands oneself in terms of

² In some sense we might be sympathetic to Hilde Lindemann Nelson's views presented in *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (2001) about damaged identities and the repair with a counterstory to combat the inaccurate narrative that is imposed on certain individuals and groups of people prone to exploitation, oppression, etc. Precious is constructing a narrative about her experiences, in some sense to counter the abuse she experienced that never permitted her to develop important fundamental capacities to be a self, a reflective subject of experience. But it is not her agency that is at stake, but something more basic: her ability to see her experience as organized in a temporal fashion, her ability to reduce the intrusive and overwhelming experience of flashbacks and pull herself back into the present when she is reminded of the various experiences of trauma she had accrued as a young child. The question is not whether she has the right narrative but whether she has any sense of a narrative at all. Eventually, she will get to this question and respond with what in many ways probably does constitute as a "counterstory" — in the sense that it counters the narrative the social worker has in mind for understanding Precious and her future, but also in the sense that it counters a narrative that she is something like merely a victim of rape; she is a survivor.

a life story, where identity-constituting episodes and characteristics are those that belong in that story, and the ones that do not are not identity-constituting.

Schechtman describes the form of the narrative self-conception as linear and intelligible, whose overall structure gives individual parts meaning³. She further explains that having this narrative self-conception need not be an explicit autobiography that is ongoingly written, edited and revised, literally or in one's mind. Rather, and this is the feature of Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view that I take to be most salient to the case of the victim of abusive trauma, the narrative self-conception is more like a sensibility that informs the way we experience various moments and happenings.

The sense of one's life as unfolding according to the logic of a narrative is not just an *idea* we have, it is an organizing principle of our lives. It is the lens through which we filter our experience and plan for actions, not a way we think about ourselves in reflective hours. ... To have an autobiographical narrative in the relevant sense is thus to have an implicit understanding of one's history as unfolding according to the logic of the story of a person's life" (Schechtman 1996, 113–14).

Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view gives a way to understand the "missing overarching narrative structure" that prevents the integration of the traumatic event and its memory (what makes the event a "fixed idea" as opposed to an unfixed idea of what happened, something that can be integrated with the control of the self). This holistic background against which we make sense of individual events is important, and it is what goes missing in the case of trauma. To see the urgency of what the trauma victim lacks, another way of putting this point is that she cannot quite *say* or *think* to herself or anyone that this traumatizing event happened to her or describe it. To be able to say "This traumatic event *happened* to me," she must understand herself minimally as an entity to which things happen. This basic understanding involves a sense

³ Schechtman justifies this form to explain that this is not as conservative and value-laden as it may initially seem (see pages 99-105).

of a narrative unfolding, into which individual episodes are integrated and against which these singular episodes are given meaning.

But the description of trauma is incomplete without a proper understanding of how the traumatized self is unable to see one's key life events properly. A holistic, narrative sense of an unfolding life presupposes the ability to see one's life events as each equally real. In this sense, we might understand the trauma victim as *not even being able to ask the characterization question of herself*, at least initially when she is experiencing severe flashbacks. When these memories occur, *she is still in the past event*, and so she cannot ask whether or to what extent it is attributable to her, how this fits in her life story, and how and to what extent this event constitutes her identity.

2.2.3 Taking Oneself as Someone at All: Temporal Control

Recall that Schechtman says that the unfolding, ongoing, broader narrative that provides the context of individual episodes must have a linear format. One's life narrative has a beginning, middle, and presumed end. A minimal requirement of having a life narrative, then, is that one must be able to organize one's life events in chronological order. Having the sense that events are ordered chronologically involves an understanding that the past events are in the past, the present ones are happening now, and the future ones have yet to come but can be anticipated. Put this way, one's understanding of an event's location across the spectrum of time seems barely worth pointing out, as it seems an obvious ability that any person has. Having a narrative self-conception also minimally requires having access to memories, not in the sense of missing or having them, but being able to "pull them up," to revisit them as needed. In order to organize Events 1, 2, and 3 in chronological order, each one needs to be accessible *in a manageable way*, and this is what the trauma victim with flashbacks struggles to do. The memories of the past

traumatic event are not under the victim's control — they intrude unpredictably and their intensity and duration are not up to the victim.

I take this problem of the past being unpredictably and overwhelmingly ever-present to be an instance of “privileging” a particular moment, the kind of problem that Thomas Nagel discusses in *The Possibility of Altruism*. In his discussion of prudential reasoning and behavior, he argues that to be a persistent being is to see all your life moments as equally real, where no one “time slice” is more privileged than the other. In the case of failing to be prudent, he takes the problem to be that someone fails to hold a temporally neutral perspective towards their commitments to the future and instead privileges reasons given in the present moment. For instance, say I commit to training to run a marathon, and plan to train every other day. I ran on Monday, but Wednesday when it is time to run, I am feeling uninspired in a number of ways. If I decide not run, and end up not running because of these present sensations and temptations, then I have failed to be prudent: I have privileged the present moment rather than seeing it as equally real as the moment I committed to running and to my training plan.

The relevant issue, Nagel thinks, is “an extremely abstract feature” of temporal persistence: “the condition that a person be equally real at all stages of his life; specifically, the fact that a particular stage is present cannot be regarded as conferring on it any special status” (Nagel 1978, 60). Being a temporally persistent being entails possessing a perspective that does not take the temporal position as a relevant characteristic of something; so for instance, when we appeal to a reason to justify an action, *when* that reason is given is not relevant. Nagel explains this temporally neutral perspective as follows:

We can of course also regard [the events of our lives] from a tensed standpoint, and we usually do. But the possibility of viewing them tenselessly must always be available. To regard oneself as a being who persists through time, one must regard the facts of one's past, present, and future life as tenselessly specifiable truths about different times in the history of a being with the

appropriate kind of temporal continuity. And one must be able to regard the present as merely one of those times (Nagel 1978, 61–62).

On one end of the spectrum of Nagel's view, there is the person who takes up the tenseless standpoint toward their life events, and so can fulfill long-term commitments. Such a person likely makes an effort to view their "time slices" as equally real so that the present moment is not privileged — a prudential marathon trainer may feel groggy some mornings and not want to run, but does so because she is able to balance her sense of different "time slices," and the present one that loosens her commitment to running is no more special than the past one that rigidly commits to running. It may seem like the person who lacks prudence, say the failed marathon trainer who privileges the present, is on the other end of the spectrum from the prudential person.

But we can also see how privileging *any* moment, not just the present, can be problematic, which takes us beyond questions of prudential action or decision-making. In the case of privileging the past, an extreme case is Precious's, who, at the time of being regularly severely abused by her parents, has great difficulty with flashbacks. She describes, in retrospect, what it was like to be abused so badly at such a young age, and what that existential state was like:

I see me, first grade, pink dress dirty sperm stuffs on it. No one comb my hair. *Second grade, third grade, fourth grade, seem like one dark night. Carl is the night and I disappear into it.* And the daytimes make no sense. Don't make sense talking, bouncing balls, filling in between dotted lines. Shape? Color? Who care whether purple shit a square or a circle, whether it purple or blue? What difference it make whether gingerbread house on top or bottom of the page. *I disappears from the day, I jus' put it all down—book, doll, jump rope, my head, myself* (Sapphire 1996, 18).

In these early years of her life, Precious endures so much abuse that she has a peculiar experience of time: she cannot distinguish the first grade from the fourth grade, and she cannot distinguish day time activities from night time activities. She is so overwhelmed by the

regularity and intensity of the sexual abuse and their memories that she is unable to even think about herself — she “disappears into the” night, “from the day,” and wishes to “put down” her head and self. She is so abused that during the day, safely away from her abusers at home, she still cannot escape the abuse. The trauma is ongoing and incomplete: Precious’s traumatic experience does not occur in a discrete incident (or set of incidents) with a beginning and an end, because even when she is not abused, the abuse’s effect is so powerful that there is a sense in which it is not genuinely over. It is this existential state that I think best describes being unable to “take oneself as someone at all” because she has no temporal control — she cannot distinguish the past from the present, she cannot foresee a future, and her traumatic past is always present and in this sense “privileged.” As a result, her day time activities, where she is not abused, are not merely “colored” by her traumatic past; she simply cannot see the school activities as part of the present moment, separate from the past. This is why she cannot participate in them. Recall that Schechtman describes the past as giving us not just memories of episodes we’ve experienced, but also a “sense of self, an idea of who we are and what kind of story we are living.” For Precious, during these early grade school years, her traumatic memories make it utterly impossible to have this sense of self, an idea of who she is or what kind of story she is living. She has some sense that things are happening to her, but during these early grade school years, she does not yet seem to be able to say to herself or anyone else, “This abuse happened to me,” because she doesn’t see herself as the kind of thing that things happen to. Moreover, in some sense, they are still happening to her and if there is not a violent quality to the experience of flashbacks, they are at least weakening and devastating insofar as she is held back so many

years in school. She is not in a position to reflect on the happenings, to try to manage them and make sense of them on her own terms⁴.

Schechtman writes that “the person who is raised to view himself as a loser...will have quite a different experience” than the “well-nurtured child who grows up to view herself as a person who will have a good life, and this affects how she acts, what she expects, and how she experiences the world” (Schechtman 1996, 111–12). Nagel says that prudence requires the sense that one is a persistent being: “one must regard the facts of one’s past, present, and future life as tenselessly specifiable truths about different times in the history of a being with the appropriate kind of temporal continuity” (Nagel 1978, 61–62). It is not even possible for Precious to view herself as a “loser,” “abused,” or to otherwise categorize the kind of life she lives, and prudential reasoning and acting are not priorities. At this point in her life, it might be a luxury to consider herself a “loser,” to consider whether her actions and reasoning are prudential or not. To this degree, then, even these views that could help to explain Precious’s condition ultimately begin too late.

2.3 **Restoring Temporal Control: Self-Blame and Self-Defense**

The discussion above of past memories being “privileged” and losing “temporal control” may suggest that the trauma victim is somehow responsible for this activity. In the rest of this chapter, I want to relieve this concern by arguing against the view that self-blame is productive by showing that such a disposition for the survivor does not help to restore temporal control and thus taking oneself as someone at all. Instead, I will close with the suggestion that feminist practices of self-defense would be more helpful to restore temporal control to see past events as equally real as others and thus to take oneself as someone at all.

⁴ My comments here are primarily about Precious between the first and fourth grade; in the quote, she is obviously reflecting on these years from the point of view of her later self, or “time slice,” when she is sixteen years, no longer illiterate and isolated.

2.3.1 Self-Blaming Responses to Trauma

When trying to make sense of a traumatic experience, it is not uncommon for survivors to frame their narrative in terms of self-blame. Brison explains self-blame in terms of alleviating a certain kind of anguish:

Those who haven't been sexually violated may have difficulty understanding why women who survive assault often blame themselves, and may wrongly attribute it to a sex-linked trait of masochism or lack of self-esteem. They don't know that it can be less painful to believe that you did something blameworthy than it is to think that you live in a world where you can be attacked at any time, in any place, simply because you are a woman (Brison 2002, 13).

For the trauma victim, there is an inability to construct a sensible narrative independent of their point of view of having experienced the event first-hand. This first-person perspective, of which the victim is intensely reminded through flashbacks, is in some sense all she has, the one certainty about the traumatic event. This perspective is limited because she has little access to any other perspectives; it is distorted insofar as flashbacks are vivid and intense, so much so that she feels she is reliving the experience. It is then not unreasonable to begin thinking that the event happened because of her various actions or inactions. So framing the way she understands the event in terms of self-blame allows the victim to have a sense of being able to understand the traumatic event. Moreover, as Brison notes it is simply more terrifying to face the fact that one lives in a world where such traumatic events can happen without a proper explanation.

In *Shattered Assumptions*, psychologist Ronnie Janoff-Bulman presents research that explores the response of self-blaming in trauma survivors. They face the dilemma of wanting to hold on to assumptions about the world and self built and developed prior to the traumatic experience, while also knowing very well from the traumatic experience that the world is in fact not this way. She highlights trauma victims' efforts to "hold on to beliefs about control and a nonrandom world" (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 132). She argues that "survivors' self-blaming strategies...reflect adaptive motivations by survivors for they actually entail perceptions of the

traumatic event that strive to minimize the threat to the survivor's conceptual system [i.e., assumptions about the world and self]" (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 132). It should be made clear from the outset that Janoff-Bulman does not think that victims are in fact to blame for the traumatic events they experience, and she notes caution in encouraging it in clinical practice (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 129). Her point in suggesting that it is adaptive is to essentially give credit to trauma victims for their efforts to restore their assumptions about the world as benevolent and meaningful⁵. She also notes that "behavioral self-blame is not essential for coping with victimization. Clearly, many survivors do fine without it. I would certainly not recommend that survivors who do not engage in behavioral self-blame be taught to do so" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, 130). But in the event that a victim does self-blame, Janoff-Bulman sees the strategy as adaptive insofar as the victim is trying to reassemble her world and interpret the traumatic event on her own terms⁶.

Post-trauma, the survivor's efforts are largely aimed at rebuilding a viable assumptive world, and it is from this perspective, I believe, that self-blame can best be understood. Self-blame reflects the struggle of survivors to make sense of their victimization, to understand "Why me?" and minimize the possibility of randomness in the world (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 125).

Janoff-Bulman takes trauma victims to "hold onto beliefs about control and a nonrandom world" by distinguishing between two kinds of self-blame: "behavioral" self-blame focuses on

⁵ This attempt at acknowledging trauma victims' efforts must be understood in a particular context. She explains how she came to her conclusion that behavioral self-blame is an adaptive response to trauma: she noticed in her research on victims of various forms of trauma that they would commonly blame themselves for the outcome of the event. At the time, one common interpretation in the case of rape victims "involved some form of female masochism; masochism was presented as a female trait, albeit one that is socialized by our culture, and, for many, seemed to provide a complete explanation for rape victim's self-blame." Opposing this interpretation of self-blame among rape victims, Janoff-Bulman sought to reframe self-blame in a more positive light by trying to acknowledge victims' efforts to cope with and recover from their traumatic experiences.

⁶ Another way of sympathetically understanding Janoff-Bulman's interpretation of self-blame as adaptive is to think about what it means for the victim when she says, "I blame myself," but is told, "You shouldn't blame yourself" by her interlocutor. The interlocutor's response can seem invalidating to the victim, who is likely seeking validating responses in light of her traumatic experience that likely made her invalidated in the first place. Instead, to understand Janoff-Bulman's interpretation sympathetically, one might take her to mean, *qua* interlocutor to a self-blaming trauma victim, "You seem to be working hard to reestablish your shattered assumptions about the world as meaningful and not arbitrary."

one's behavior, "the acts or omissions a person causally contributed to an outcome" and "characterological" self-blame focuses on an "individual's character or enduring qualities" (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 125-126). An example of behavioral self-blame is: "I should not have gone back to his apartment," while an example of characterological self-blame is: "I am a very bad judge of character" (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 126). This distinction is made in order to resolve the apparent contradiction in a self-blaming trauma victim who tries to preserve her belief in the world as benevolent and meaningful at the expense of her belief in her self-worth. That is, if the trauma victim engages in behavioral self-blame, then she interprets the attribution of the trauma in terms of the control she did or did not have at the time of the traumatic event. But she does not take the behavior to stand for her character, so she does not interpret herself in some global sense as the cause of the event — just this particular behavior, or lack thereof. So she can preserve the belief of self-worth, while also, through behavioral self-blame, trying to preserve the sense that events in the world have some meaning, and are not random and arbitrary. In these ways, survivors can go to great lengths to try to understand their victimization in light of their worldview. The survivor is striving to find benevolence, meaning, and self-worth, while having been forced to confront malevolence, meaninglessness, and helplessness. By interpreting an event so as to maximize control, meaninglessness and helplessness are minimized. Equally important is that the possibility of cognitive-emotional integration of the event is maximized — trauma victims can alleviate emotional confusion and anxiety they had when they were not able to understand the event.

2.3.2 Criticisms of Self-blame Strategies as Adaptive

It is important, however, to remember that behavioral self-blame can lead to an understanding of the responsibility of trauma resting in an individual's actions, rather than

properly attributing it to the particular perpetrator or to broader systemic characteristics of particular societies that facilitate such traumatic events as sexual violence or child abuse. In other words, it seems as if self-blaming responses ought not be encouraged because the victim is simply not to blame for the traumatic event, and not because of the extent to which it is adaptive or productive for the victim. But there are other concerns in understanding self-blame as adaptive for the trauma victim⁷. B.L. Katz and M.R. Burt, in addition to providing methodological criticisms of Janoff-Bulman's research, note that it is possible to affirm control without resorting to self-blame (Katz & Burt 1988). An interlocutor can offer a sense of control to a survivor without blaming her for her actions: "You did a good job taking care of yourself, making choices in the situation that kept you safe (alive). If you had responded differently, you might have been hurt more severely...you evaluated the situation as well as you could, and you acted, trusting your own intuition and thinking" (Katz & Burt 1988, 165). In *Aftermath*, Brison also notes a similar problem with behavioral self-blaming: "it also leads to self-berating for her past 'mistakes' and to unfair, and ultimately futile, self-imposed restrictions on her behavior" (Brison 2002, 75-76).

I share these concerns about self-blaming strategies, so I am pre-disposed to take a position against the idea that self-blaming could be an adaptive coping strategy. But my criticism of understanding behavioral self-blaming to be an adaptive coping strategy focuses instead on the relationship between self-blame and control. Behavioral self-blame may indicate a great effort to actively understand the traumatic past, but it is not clear that this kind of understanding results in genuine control.

⁷ For a summary of criticisms, see Victoria L. Pitts and Martin D. Schwartz, "Promoting Self-Blame in Hidden Rape Gases," *Humanity & Society* 17, no. 4 (November 1993): 383-98.

On the surface, it may seem that a self-blaming trauma victim has increased certain forms of control. A behaviorally self-blaming trauma survivor seems to have a narrative self-conception: she can organize the events, take up a more temporally neutral perspective than when she was struggling with severe flashbacks, and she can even make the judgment about the narrative that its outcome would have been significantly different if she had acted differently. Thus she must also have sufficient temporal control so that she is no longer “stuck” in visions and sensations of the traumatic past, and, rather, she can step back and view the events from a narrator’s perspective. To this extent, perhaps she has come a long way. Moreover, since she sees the event differently now, she likely feels better just to be able to understand the event at all, and so she can perhaps feel she is in control of her emotional reactions to her traumatic past.

But I suggest that it is wishful thinking to take one’s behavior in a violent traumatic event to be the central issue in such a situation. In Janoff-Bulman’s view, it looks as if the victim is seeking control over her actions and behavior, and by extension, she is seeking some kind of control over how the world operates. But this is an expression of what Jonathan Lear calls “phantasy” that features in his work *Open Minded: Working out the Logic of the Soul*.

In the chapter “Restlessness, Phantasy, and the Concept of Mind,” Lear explores the idea that the mind, often depicted as rational by default, is actually far more restless and embodied than often thought and described. The mind is restless because it actively seeks connections and associations, and embodied insofar as it is limited in its control and environment. Lear explains how the expression of “phantasy” is an example of mind’s restlessness and embodied characteristics.

Lear depicts Freud’s “Rat Man” (a case study of a neurotic patient obsessed with rats) as engaging in a “phantasy” where he fears Freud and thinks Freud will attack him, in much the

same way as when his father attacked him in the past. In analysis sessions with Freud, the Rat Man experiences a “reflexive breakdown” where he cannot articulate what he is doing. He hurls abuses at Freud, he paces around the room, and finally, he cringes before Freud. For each of these actions, the Rat Man attempts to explain what he is doing: he more or less apologizes for the verbal abuse; he says he cannot lie down in comfort when verbally assaulting Freud; and finally, he says that he fears Freud, that Freud will attack him, and he recalls his father being similarly violent.

One interpretation of this behavior is that he actually fears Freud, and *because* of this fear of Freud, he cringes. But Lear suggests that the Rat Man does not actually fear Freud, and so the Rat Man is not actually cringing for a *reason*. Rather, Lear suggests that the Rat Man engages in non-rational mental activity called “phantasy,” which includes *internalizing* Rat Dad and his prohibitive voice and *projecting* Rat Dad onto Freud. Internalizing Rat Dad and projecting Rat Dad onto Freud are not fully articulated claims with propositional content, but rather are infused with affectations and emotions. For this reason, Lear considers internalizations and projections as non-rational mental activity. The Rat Man’s behaviors and actions are outbursts, expressions of phantasy, the product of a restless and embodied mind.

I suggest that the trauma victim’s mind is also restless and embodied in the way Lear describes, and that in self-blaming responses to trauma, survivors engage in “phantasy” as well. Recall that the trauma victim experiences traumatic memories, which replay not only as vivid images but can also be re-experienced as a present phenomenon. She is overwhelmed by visceral traumatic memories that affect her physical person; she is anxiously looking for ways to understand this event and fit it into the broader context of her life story; and she is also trying to understand the world at large in light of the traumatic experience. Just as the Rat Man feels

anxiety about the unknown, the trauma victim may not be able to make sense of these memories except that they feel as if they are repeatedly happening in the present. It may be that victims who struggle with this anxiety of a seemingly uninterpretable event blame themselves for the traumatic event, which can take the form of a claim of self-blame. This view is compatible with the original intent behind Janoff-Bulman's interpretation of self-blaming claims as adaptive: the point is to show that she is not masochistic or exhibiting behavior linked to women, but that the trauma victim who seeks to understand her confusing experiences is significantly engaged in mental activity, working hard to make sense of a challenging experience.

The phantasy she expresses has to do with the assumption about the world that Janoff-Bulman thinks the behavioral self-blaming trauma victim is trying to restore: that the world is both predictable and meaningful. This is to say that events in the world do not take place randomly and arbitrarily, and so they can be explained and understood. But there is a piece of this assumption that is overlooked: to the extent that the world is assumed to be "meaningful," it is also assumed to be a reliably safe place for its inhabitants. The phantasy that the self-blaming trauma victim engages in, or expresses, is that through control over her behavior, she can control how events unfold in the world to restore her sense of the world as predictable. It may be true that she can reduce the likelihood of re-experiencing the same kind of traumatic event if she alters her behavior, but it must be admitted that it is wishful thinking to take one's individual behavior as having so much influence over how external events unfold and how other people behave that one can know *ahead of time* whether some event will happen or not. In fact, it is just this characteristic of the world that the original traumatic events show to be illusory: part of what makes an experience traumatic in the first place is the unexpected and unpredictable nature of the event, including its occurrence, impact, and aftereffects. Moreover, traumatic memories, insofar

as their triggering is also unpredictable, continue to serve as reminders that one cannot exercise a significant amount of control so that the world is predictable. The absence of a predictable world that permits one to control the way events unfold in it is precisely what characterizes the “trauma survivor’s world” — the world is not as benevolent and meaningful, nor is it as predictable and knowable, as it had seemed to be before her traumatic experiences.

The trauma victim who chooses the self-blaming trauma narrative with some explanation, rather than no explanation at all, is not only “holding on” to a world where events are predictable and can be explained, but she is even trying to “return” to such a world. But to seek out such a world is to seek a world where the traumatic event didn’t happen, a practically nonexistent, ideal world. The idea of self-blaming as phantasy comes alive in the sense that there is in fact no such world to return to. Rather, this is one of the important losses she must come to mourn: the victim loses her sense of the world as the one she was familiar with before her traumatic experiences⁸. To a certain degree, while she is still searching for a path towards recovery, the trauma victim is without a world to inhabit; in self-blaming, she is remembering what her “old world” felt like, and seeking it out. Self-blaming gives her an illusory world in which to inhabit insofar as she feels that she can predict the outcome of events in the world through her behavior, molded by her future-oriented self-blaming claims — “If I do X (or avoid doing Y), I can avoid the trauma in the future.”

There are two outcomes of the Lear-inspired view that self-blaming is an expression of phantasy over Janoff-Bulman’s view that behavioral self-blaming is adaptive, and both have to do with compatibility. First, recall that Janoff-Bulman presented the “irrationality” of self-blame in terms of two of the three assumptions that are “shattered” in trauma: why would the victim try

⁸ Herman uses the metaphor of immigration to describe this point. The world post-trauma is not the same one pre-trauma, but a different one with new rules and principles that the survivor must learn to navigate, just as an immigrant must learn a new language and cultural norms in a foreign country. See chapter 10, “Reconnection.”

to reestablish the assumption that the world is meaningful at the expense of the assumption that the self is worthy? She used the distinction between behavioral and characterological self-blame to say that in behavioral self-blame the victim can maintain both the assumption that the world is meaningful and the self worthy, but cannot in characterological self-blame. So, she concludes, behavioral self-blame is adaptive. But this interpretation does not take into consideration the ramifications of a trauma victim taking herself to be in control of how events unfold in the world according to her actions, except insofar as they affect how victims feel comforted by this belief. To take ourselves to be in this kind of control may be immediately comforting, but this view is not compatible with the idea that the world is just not predictable in the way the self-blaming trauma victim takes it to be. Lear offers a way to understand self-blaming as wishful thinking, a view that is compatible with the idea that a traumatic event shows us precisely the unpredictability of the world and that our control over how events unfold is finite and limited.

Second, and to refine the problem of self-blaming, let us return to the idea that traumatic memories indicate the loss of various forms of control, including, as I highlighted earlier, the loss of temporal control. Here I am highlighting the kind of control over our sense of how the world works, and my difficulty with Janoff-Bulman's view is that it looks like in behavioral self-blaming there is an attempt to wield more control than is possible. Equally important to the "remembrance" process of recovery from severe abusive trauma is "mourning": according to Herman, mourning involves feeling sadness, despair, frustration, and anger about the trauma. The subject of these emotional reactions is specifically about losses suffered, real and hypothetical:

Trauma inevitably brings loss. Even those who are lucky enough to escape physically unscathed still lose the internal psychological structures of a self securely attached to others. Those who are physically harmed lose in addition their sense of bodily integrity. And those who lose important people in their lives face a new void in their relationships with friends, family, or community (Herman 2015, 188).

In telling one's trauma narrative, and in being able to integrate that story into the context of one's life history, one begins to realize what the story means. Take Precious's case: in telling her story, she not only can describe the abuse she endured, but she eventually takes up a position in which she pauses intermittently to realize that she will never have a set of trustworthy parents as other children. After experiencing a flashback, which at this point later in the story are less intense than at the beginning because she has greater command over her response to them, she notes: "I exhausted, I mean wipe out! What kinda chile gotta think about a daddy like I do?" (Sapphire 1996, 113). Her case is an interesting and telling one, because she does not face a true loss because she never had a set of trustworthy parents or guardians. So mourning need not be over an actual loss, but it can also be a sobering realization that the world is a particular way. As Precious realizes that other children grow up in non-abusive and non-horrific circumstances, she mourns the fact that some children are born into safety and trusting relationships with their parents or guardians, and others are not, and that she fell into the latter category. Trauma victims generally may come to the double realization that the world can be unsafe, unreliable, and unpredictable, but also that the world was never really that way to begin with.

Self-blaming, in this light, cannot be seen as adaptive in the long run because, as the above points show, it does not contribute to the recovery processes of "remembrance" or "mourning" as Herman describes them. The supposedly future-oriented thinking that self-blaming produces is in fact anchored in and dictated by the traumatic past. Working to avoid recurrences of the traumatic past does not generate temporal and narrative control to become able to remember genuinely the traumatic past, where one conjures up and leaves the memories at will — one does not learn to remember properly in self-blaming. Working to avoid recurrences of the traumatic past entails a view of the world as more or less predictable, but this sense of the

world as having such a feature is precisely what is destroyed in the traumatic event and in the memories of that event — one is not able to properly mourn in self-blaming. If this view is right, then it is not possible to “return” to the world as the victim knew it before her traumatic experiences. She must accept a new world, a much scarier and horrific world, and with this, it must be accepted that the past cannot be altered, the future cannot be known, and certainty is painfully out of reach. Nevertheless, she can, in ways that empower her ability to understand herself and navigate this world, try to find a “safe” space within it.

The main point then is that self-blaming does not contribute to the acknowledgment of the limits of our behavioral control and the control we have over the world. But this is not to say that we must relinquish *all* control over our bodies and how our behavior and actions affect events in the world. One interesting question that results from the view of self-blame as an attempt to hold on to control over the world as a result of violent trauma is whether taking up self-defense training falls into the same category of self-blame. In the following section, I discuss feminist practices of self-defense as a way of further highlighting the importance of temporal and narrative control in surviving trauma, and I continue the discussion of the importance of sufficiently mourning the loss of one's sense of the world as one's “home,” a safe and reliable place to reside⁹.

2.3.3 Feminist Self-Defense Practices

In *Aftermath*, Brison acknowledges the possible hazards of advocating for self-defense training in the wake of sexual violence: some immediate concerns are that it is “not a panacea,” and it may “contribute to the common misperception of some types of trauma — rape, in particular — as individual rather than collective traumas” (Brison 2002, 76). But in her personal

⁹ Although there are different interpretations of feminist self-defense, the general idea is that women can be empowered to navigate a sexist society infused with rape culture. One key underlying assumption is that sexual violence is presented as an injustice rather than assumed to be a natural outcome of human society.

account of taking self-defense courses in the aftermath of sexual assault, she remarks that her self-defense training “not only enabled me to walk down the street again,” but “it gave me back my life”(Brison 2002, 15). In self-defense training, she was able not only to regain control of and confidence in her body, but she was also able to restructure the emotional struggle in the aftermath of her trauma. She remarks that she was initially terrified of her assailant, which she thought prevented her from being angry at him (Brison 2002, 13). In self-defense classes, she was able to diminish her fear of her attacker, which then made it possible to direct her anger toward him. For Brison, self-defense classes helped her see her individual, particular traumatic past in a new way (i.e., become angry with her assailant), but she was simultaneously able to see a new way to move about in the world for women more generally. It is often said that women are taught to restrict their bodies in space, minimize their strength, and avoid resistance, and Brison saw that self-defense courses offered women the opportunity to unlearn these habits¹⁰.

In short, feminist self-defense training, for Brison at least, contributed to the redevelopment of bodily and emotional control in recovery. What might feminist self-defense practices do for temporal and narrative control? She offers an interesting perspective on how self-defense training can help a victim manage traumatic memories:

It may be that, in some cases, a kind of physical remastering of the trauma is necessary. In learning self-defense maneuvers and then imaginatively reenacting the traumatic event, in space as well as in the imagination, with the ability to change the ending, a survivor can gain even more control over traumatic memories. In recovering from trauma, a survivor may be helped not only by telling the story, but also by being able to rewrite the plot and then enact it (Brison 2002, 76).

In self-blaming, it is primarily fear of a recurrence of the trauma that drives the victim to alter and constrain her behavior. In self-defense training, however, it is not fear, but know-how, imagination, and a tolerance for a different or open-ended ending that ultimately drive the physical movements. Knowing what to do in an attack (either offensively or to de-escalate

¹⁰ Brison references Iris Young’s essay, “Throwing Like A Girl” that argue for these claims.

unwanted situations) can diminish one's fear of another attack. Knowing what to do in an attack also implies practicing and becoming able to imagine both what happened in a prior traumatic event, and what could happen in another attack. A physical version of this imaginative exercise can help a victim see the traumatic past as the past, and can help a victim tolerate the past but imagine or envision different, even unknown, endings to hypothetical scenarios of another attack. Unlike self-blame, self-defense provides a host of opportunities to contribute to the "remembrance" process of recovery and it seems to be a compelling way to regain both temporal and narrative control.

Like Brison, Ann Cahill does not measure self-defense training's efficacy in terms of prevention of attacks. In her book *Rethinking Rape*, Cahill offers a view of rape as a specifically embodied experience, and as such, suggests in the conclusion that one promising way to resist rape is in an embodied response — namely, in feminist self-defense courses (Cahill 2001). She explains what she means by this kind of training in the article "In Defense of Self-Defense":

...the self-defense courses I am endorsing here are distinctly feminist. That is, I am interested in those self-defense courses that are grounded in a political understanding of sexual violence and its relationship to other social and political phenomena (such as family structure, hegemonic gender roles, and compulsory heterosexuality). ... Feminist self-defense approaches (regardless of whether the term 'feminist' is explicitly used) reject the givenness of both sexual violence and the feminine body; the former is considered to be vulnerable to opposition, and the latter is constructed as capable of more and different kinds of actions than hegemonic gender norms allow. It is in these sorts of self-defense courses that my hope for resistance resides (Cahill 2009, 367).

In such courses, she argues, women's bodies are seen as an empowered locus of resistance; nothing and no one else (in particular, men) is needed (Cahill 2001, 203). Self-defense also offers a solution to the problem that "the repeated speaking of the violence imposed on women can serve to reify masculine dominance": self-defense does not merely "re-present" that violence without offering an alternative outcome for it. "It doesn't allow sexual violence to have the last word; instead, it writes an entirely new chapter" (Cahill 2001, 204). This view of

self-defense echoes Brison's, where self-defense is seen as an opportunity to think about and re-imagine the traumatic event, which I take as unique opportunities for temporal and narrative control.

To what extent does feminist self-defense training contribute to the progression of the “mourning” process of recovery for trauma survivors? It becomes difficult to tell whether Cahill's interpretation of self-defense contributes to temporal and narrative control, while conceding adequately loss of control over the world and the sense that the world is predictable, because she suggests that self-defense courses would give men a reason to fear women, and as a result, rape would occur less frequently (Cahill 2001, 204–5). Although this may appear to be an argument for the view that incidents of rape in the future can be prevented by self-defense, and thus a kind of wielding of wishful “control over the world,” I think that it would be a mistake to read her view this way. Her suggestion is that women's bodies have a particular meaning in a patriarchal society — specifically, they are often associated with victimhood. Self-defense classes can change this perception about women's bodies because it can change the way women's bodies are constructed, move, and thus what they are associated with and what they mean. Should this change in perception occur not so much on an individual level, but on a larger scale affecting women in general, then it is not events in the world that change so much as the nature of the world that changes: specifically, male dominance diminishes. It is not that self-defense classes will lead to the belief and reality that this particular man will not rape me as a result of my taking self-defense classes, but that in general, I no longer have to worry about walking alone at night, inviting a male friend over for coffee, or however else feminine bodies are taught to be restricted. As she writes in “In Defense of Self-Defense”, when she responds to critics of self-defense:

A person who has undergone feminist self-defense training has been given the opportunity to move in and through the world in a new way, both more aware of her physical ability and more critical of the threats she's expected to manage. Regardless of whether she is ever the object of sexual assault, these insights and bodily practices serve to broaden her participation in social and political life, and thus to erode the pernicious effects of a rape culture (379).

In this sense, I do not read Cahill's views on self-defense as wishful thinking that one person can control the outcome of events in her world, but rather, as offering a broader vision of a world where male dominance and patriarchal attitudes and behaviors are nearly eradicated — at least not a pervasive cultural norm — and sexual assault occurs less frequently. She is not envisioning a world we “return” to, a time when or place where women were not attacked. There was no such time or place. The world was never truly reliable or predictable in the first place. Rather, she is envisioning the creation of a new world that is without misogynistic thinking and behavior, which she acknowledges happens all too often in the current world.

Feminist self-defense training creates a safe space for women, not just on the training grounds, but one that they can carry with them to help them navigate a difficult and at times traumatizing world. But “safe” does not mean “preventing or avoiding sexual assault.” Rather, what makes a safe space is that first, within it, one can move with awareness and control, but of the temporal and narrative kind, where a trauma survivor can access and speak about memories of her traumatic past as needed. Second, the space is safe in the sense that one is not given a false sense of security that the world is safe and predictable, and that any individual can more or less control what happens in it and the extent to which other people (mis)behave in it. Having a realistic sense of the world as unpredictable and at times inexplicable, and preparing for such a world, can help decrease the likelihood of being re-victimized in it. In this sense, self-defense contributes to the “mourning” process of recovery. To the extent that trauma victims struggle with “taking themselves as someone at all” in their traumatic memories, where they have distorted experiences of time and cannot access or speak about their traumatic past, I take it that

feminist self-defense training, rather than self-blame, restores one's temporal and narrative control while also properly mourning the loss of one's sense of being "at home," safe, in the world.

2.4 **A Memory as Equally Real as Others**

Remembrance — regaining temporal control and narrative control — and mourning — relinquishing, to a significant degree, control over the world — yield a particular picture of the trauma victim surviving her experiences, repeatedly exercising the ability to talk about them, and beginning to move on with her life. Herman illustrates an overall picture of the trajectory of this stage of recovery:

The second stage of recovery has a timeless quality that is frightening. The reconstruction of the trauma requires immersion in a past experience of frozen time; the descent into mourning feels like a surrender to tears that are endless. ...

After many repetitions, the moment comes when the telling of the trauma story no longer arouses quite such intense feeling. It has become a part of the survivor's experience, but only one part of it. The story is a memory like other memories, and it begins to fade as other memories do. It occurs to the survivor that perhaps the trauma is not the most important, or even the most interesting, part of her life story.

At first these thoughts may seem almost heretical. The survivor may wonder how she can possibly give due respect to the horror she has endured if she no longer devotes her life to remembrance and mourning. And yet she finds her attention wandering back to ordinary life. She need not worry. She will never forget. She will think of the trauma every day as long as she lives. But the time comes when the trauma no longer commands the central place in her life. ...

...The major work of the second stage is accomplished...when the patient reclaims her own history and feels renewed hope and energy for engagement with life. Time starts to move again. When the "action of telling a story" has come to its conclusion, the traumatic experience truly belongs to the past (Herman 2015, 195).

When the trauma victim can take up a temporally neutral perspective towards the traumatic event, she can tell the trauma story in the context of her life history, which will involve her admission and acknowledgment that the world is unpredictable, the self vulnerable. The status of "victim" shifts squarely to "survivor." Although the trauma happened, and she can control her body and emotions to a certain degree in light of it, she must acknowledge that this control will not give her a way to predict the presence or absence of trauma in her future.

Another critical aspect of this recovery process — recovering memory, temporal control, a narrative self-conception, constructing a trauma narrative — is the element of social support. This will help the survivor with the sense of living in different “worlds,” that although she may feel isolated in her own world, she can come to meaningfully share one with others who she can trust. As Brison notes, an audience “able and willing to hear us and understand our words as we intend them” is required to properly heal from trauma (Brison 2002, 51). The trusting relationship between the survivor and the “witness,” the kind of recognition and support needed to recover her sense that she is someone at all, and the notion of shared worlds, are the main subjects of the next chapter.

3. Taking Oneself As Someone At All: Therapeutic Recognition and Shared Worlds

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described taking oneself as someone at all in terms of one's control over how one can see one's experiences as each equally real. In this chapter, I describe a second aspect of taking oneself as someone at all: coming to share a world with others by being able to receive their therapeutic recognition. Like "temporal control," this feature of taking oneself as someone at all is difficult to see without survivors' first-person descriptions of surviving severe abusive trauma. And as in the prior chapter, I will continue to appeal to Susan Brison's work and the novel *Push* to make my points about shared worlds, therapeutic recognition and taking oneself as someone at all.

I will begin sketching one of the central concepts in this chapter, "shared worlds," citing the influences for this phrase. Taking recognition to be an important characteristic of shared worlds, I will then examine the extent to which the most relevant part of Axel Honneth's recognition theory can properly account for the sense in which a world is shared. I will argue that his notion of self-confidence presupposes what I call *therapeutic recognition*. It is not sufficient for the survivor to be recognized through loving relations with family and close friends. Descriptions of surviving trauma indicate that survivors must furthermore know that to provide proper support and recognition, people in their lives must be willing and able to listen to their stories without judgment, which are the key characteristics of therapeutic recognition. Survivors need this kind of basic recognition in order to elevate their sense of feeling fully alive, to take themselves as someone at all. In this way, trauma reveals that even this basic level of recognition that characterizes shared worlds is a significant achievement, a joint accomplishment between oneself and one's supportive community.

3.2 A Sketch of Shared Worlds

In this section, I will introduce the idea of “shared worlds” by presenting a sketch below, composed by inspirations from different authors and certain concepts they delineate in their work. This sketch will develop more thoroughly throughout the chapter and will help to show the particular problem of recognition for the trauma survivor and will help to reveal the particular kind of recognition she needs.

3.2.1 Herman: Sharing Guilty Knowledge

Trauma survivors’ descriptions of their experiences can reveal the importance of shared worlds and in turn uncover how we — those of us who have not or only minimally encountered trauma — might take shared worlds for granted. We can begin to see what it is to “share a world” in the context of trauma by looking at what Judith Herman writes about survivors and the disconnect they can feel post-trauma:

The survivor’s shame and guilt may be exacerbated by the harsh judgment of others, but it is not fully assuaged by simple pronouncements absolving her from responsibility, because simple pronouncements, even favorable ones, represent a refusal to engage with the survivor in the lacerating moral complexities of the extreme situation. *From those who bear witness, the survivor seeks not absolution but fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity* (Herman 2015, 69; emphasis mine).

The quotation points to at least three different kinds of responses people can have towards victims of trauma. In one kind of clearly cruel response, people are critical of the victim and essentially blame her for her traumatic experiences. A second, more reasonable, response is for someone to completely relieve the victim of any blame for her experiences in the trauma. This second response, although not inappropriate, is not substantive enough to help the victim come to terms with what has happened to her. Herman then describes a third response to the trauma victim, in which *the victim and the responder* “share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity.” There must be a certain kind of correspondence between what

the victim sees of her surrounding world and its inhabitants and what the responder sees of her own surrounding world and its inhabitants — hence the term “witness.” In the first two kinds of responses, what characterizes them both is that the responder, either harsh and critical or merely absolving, does not and cannot see what the victim sees. Bringing together a similarity of vision and understanding of what the victim experienced and how she now experiences the world is a critical aspect to the victim feeling connected with others again. Insofar as she seeks someone with whom to share in the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity, she seeks to share a world with others.

3.2.2 Mills: Parallel Worlds

The trauma survivor who seeks to share a world with others post-trauma may then be described as living in a “parallel world.” Exploring “parallel worlds” can help us to understand what a shared world looks like. This idea is featured in Charles Mills’ “Non-Cartesian *Sums*,” where he explains the “whiteness of philosophy” and why black students tend not to study philosophy at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Mills 2015, 1–19). More generally, he describes the nature of a “white universe” where non-whites live knowing that the purported universal rules do not apply to them. He writes:

An enlightening metaphor might be the notion of a parallel universe that partially overlaps with the familiar (to whites) one but then, because of crucial variations in the initial parameters, goes radically askew. For the inhabitants of this universe, the standard geometries are of limited cartographic use, conceptual apparatuses predicated on assumptions that do not hold true. It is not a question of minor deviations, which, with a bit of bending and twisting here and there, can be accommodated within the framework. Rather, so to speak, some of the Euclidean axioms have to be rejected; a reconceptualization is necessary because the structuring logic is different (Mills 2015, 3–4).

Someone like Brison, a trauma victim, may be released from the hospital after severe injuries, convalesce at home, and returns to work and a social life. As she recovers, such a victim’s world may overlap significantly with non-survivors who are also working and

socializing with colleagues, friends, and family. But because of “crucial variations in the initial parameters” — in this case, a severely abusive traumatic experience — things go “radically askew.” Trauma victims may feel that their world actually spins away from everyone else’s because baseline assumptions are not shared. For instance, non-survivors may take their physical safety to be more or less a given, or that strangers and acquaintances alike can be more or less trusted, but a trauma survivor may not be able to make these assumptions any longer (or never was able to). And this is not a “minor deviation” in the framework of how she understands the world because it may affect her so powerfully — for example, in how she physically moves in public spaces, or whether, when, and for how long she is in certain public spaces — that “a reconceptualization” of her world is necessary to the point that she is seemingly in her own world. So sharing assumptions is one way of understanding how a world can be shared, and parallel worlds form when there is a break in sharing fundamental assumptions and premises that shape how one experiences and understands their world.

Later in this chapter, I will return to further connections between the trauma case and the parallel universe point that Mills makes here. But for now, I will lay out some other preliminary characteristics of a shared world by turning to other authors who have ways of helping us understand the nature of shared worlds, the target goal of trauma survivors who feel isolated and disconnected from others.

3.2.3 Laden: Living Together

Another source of inspiration for the concept of shared worlds comes from Tony Laden’s work on a social picture of reasoning in *Reasoning: A Social Picture*. Laden introduces the idea that reasoning is a social and ongoing activity insofar as it is done with others, and which has no definite, conclusive point before it begins. He appeals to the idea that the activity of giving

reasons must remain open to both agreement and discussion, as well as vetoes. Through the idea of an invitation, Laden then introduces the idea of a “shared space of reasons”: “...what that invitation amounts to is an invitation to regard this corner of the space of reason as the speaker has laid it out. Acceptance of a reason, then, involves an acknowledgment that we share some, perhaps small, space of reasons” (Laden 2012, 15). There are three main characteristics of this idea of a space of reasons — the space says something about reasons being relational as opposed to “discrete points”; it is a space that people take up and inhabit; and finally, the space is neither assumed nor the product of individual people or individual thought (Laden 2012, 17). One of the most important outcomes of these three characteristics is the following claim:

...sharing a space of reasons does not require that we stand at exactly the same point. Whether we share a space of reasons is not only a matter of where each of us stands, but how we relate to one another, through the mediation of the space in question, and how we understand our joint responsibility for its upkeep and renovation (Laden 2012, 17).

That is, agreement is not a necessary condition to share a space of reasons. This is an important point for trauma survivors and the extent to which they feel disconnected from others. It is not the case that for trauma victims, a world is shared among only victims of trauma. Instead, and to a great extent, the concern is about the relationship between the trauma survivor and the person who has not experienced trauma. Trauma survivors may feel that they are living in a world parallel particularly to non-survivors since each party’s assumptions may be diametrically opposed to one another. The important point is not that two people have had the same experience and thus can come to share a world (which might be true), but that shared experience is not a requirement for sharing a world.

What is required for a shared space of reasons, instead, according to Laden, is “mutual intelligibility”:

...not merely in the sense that I know what all the words you say mean, but I can understand what you mean when you say them, which requires also that I can see your point in saying them, here

and now, to me. Sharing such a space already includes sharing normative standards, in particular about the intelligibility and thus the appropriateness of saying things in certain contexts... (Laden 2012, 18).

Mutual intelligibility is an important characteristic of a shared space of reasons because it means that it is possible for two parties or more not to necessarily agree or disagree about something, but as Laden stresses, to speak to, with, and even for one another. The contrasting picture would be one where the parties speak past one another, or lecture at one another, resulting in a world Laden calls “living side-by-side” rather than “living together.” “Living side-by-side” is governed by self-interest and interactions with others only insofar as one “merely [reacts] to and [predicts] what others do,” whereas “living together” is governed by the “shared set of norms or rules that mediates and constructs our actions in part by making them intelligible to each of us as moves within this shared framework” (Laden 2012, 20–21). Without an audience to acknowledge what one says about her traumatic experiences, the survivor lives merely side-by-side with others. Her interlocutors who fail to bear witness to her experiences are directed by self-interest to the extent that they are protecting themselves from the “guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity” — for instance, from the knowledge that physical safety cannot be assumed, and neither can trust in others, and that discarding these assumptions would mean that their lives and worldview are dramatically altered. Conversations, including “simple pronouncements absolving [the victim] of responsibility” can be superficial in such cases, whereas “living together,” or sharing a world, entails conversations where there is a genuine attempt to understand what the other party is saying, even if this attempt undermines one’s self-interests.

3.2.4 Nagel: Among Others, Equally Real

We can also see what it means to share a world by considering a central idea in Thomas Nagel’s work in *The Possibility of Altruism* and *The View From Nowhere*. Central to these

works is the following idea: “the conception of oneself as merely a person among others equally real,” a conception he says “we cannot escape” (Nagel 1978, 14). He sees a parallel between this way of thinking about our own and others’ minds, and physical objects in space:

When we conceive of the minds of others, we cannot abandon the essential factor of a point of view: instead we must generalize it and think of ourselves as one point of view among others. The first stage of objectification of the mental is for each of us to be able to grasp the idea of all human perspectives, including his own, without depriving them of their character as perspectives. It is the analogue for minds of a centerless conception of space for physical objects, in which no point has a privileged position (Nagel 1986, 20).

This self-conception is deployed in altruism as well, where Nagel’s concern is figuring out a way to explain how it is possible to be willing “to act in consideration of the interests of other persons, without the need of ulterior motives” (Nagel 1978, 79). Even when he proposes the “Golden Rule” as a guiding principle — “How would you like it if someone did that to you?” — he remarks that it is not clear how it is possible that one’s “conduct be influenced by the hypothetical ambition that if someone were [doing that to you], you would not like it” (Nagel 1978, 82). So he explains his interpretation of this rule:

Recognition of the other person’s reality, and the possibility of putting yourself in his place, is essential. You see the present situation as a specimen of a more general scheme, in which the characters can be exchanged. The crucial factor injected into this scheme is an attitude which you have towards your own case, or rather an aspect of the view which you take of your own needs, actions, and desires. You attribute to them, in fact, a certain objective interest, and the recognition of others as persons like yourself permits extension of this objective interest to the needs and desires of persons in general, or to those of any particular individual whose situation is being considered (Nagel 1978, 83).

Nagel understands the possibility of altruism as beginning first with the assumption of one’s own reality, and then moves on to the question of how to conceive of others as real. The problem, but also key, is my “recognition of the other person’s reality.” Nagel’s starting point is one world that we all automatically inhabit, and one critical assumption in that one world, whether within the question of other minds or for how prudence or altruism are possible, is that one is real to oneself in that one world. The central issue, then, according to Nagle, is the need to

know how others are just as real in that same world. One must be able to abstract one's own perspective and realize it is one instance of perspectives generally, and that everyone else's perspectives are also instances, equally real as anyone else's, even if their reality cannot be felt and understood as directly or intensely as one's own. In this one world, the conclusion should be that all of our perspectives are equally real (especially other people's perspectives) and like physical objects in space, none of them are privileged (especially not mine).

I want to show an alternative way of looking at the world and our occupancies in it by looking at Nagel's idea of this particular self-conception from a different angle. To do so, all we need to do is shift the emphasis of the phrase, which will point towards not a world we all automatically inhabit, but a shared world that we must strive to inhabit. Rather than framing the issue of minds and ethical relations in terms of conceiving myself as "oneself as among *others equally real*," it might be that I have issue conceiving myself as "oneself *among* others equally real." It may be that I see others living among each other and together, confirming each other's reality, and that it is I who feel less real because I am so disconnected from all of those other people as they go about navigating the world. That is, it may be that I do not share a world — either I no longer share one, or I never did in the first place — with others and have trouble communicating and relating in any meaningful way with others. This way of looking at Nagel's self-conception would imply that we are not automatically inhabitants of a shared world, but that living in a shared world with others is an achievement. I suggest that this is the problem that the victim of trauma faces, and I will explain this problem in more detail in a later section. For now, the important point is to lay out a sketch of the concept of "shared worlds."

3.3 **Honneth: Mutual Recognition**

So far we have reviewed what a “shared world” could mean: sharing in the “guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity”; living together with the aim of being mutually intelligible to one another; being among others, equally real. All of these interpretations are ways that can help us understand what it is that trauma survivors often struggle to achieve — a shared understanding of her experiences and the relational, disconnecting consequences of being traumatized. Underlying all of these features is the requirement of mutual recognition. Sharing in the guilty knowledge of what happens in traumatic, life-threatening circumstances requires recognition from the non-survivor of what happened and how this affects the trauma survivor post-trauma. Mutual intelligibility and living together require mutual recognition of what each is saying and doing. Being among others requires that others see you as among them and that you take yourself to be as equally real as others. In short, sharing a world requires recognition. Because Axel Honneth focuses on the mutuality of recognition and on concrete and specific relationships, I will examine his account presented in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (1995).

3.3.1 **Background**

Against the Machiavellian and Hobbesian view of the atomistic view of the self, Honneth traces the self as a social being in the Hegelian strand of social and political philosophy. Hegel was wary of the individualistic way of understanding the self as needing to preserve one’s self-interests. Against the presupposition of “the existence of subjects who are isolated from each other” and thought that this view only leads to a seeing “a ‘community of human beings’” that could only be “conceptualized on the abstract model of a ‘unified many,’ that is, as a cluster of single subjects, and thus not on the model of an ethical unity” (Honneth 1995, 12). To borrow

terminology from Laden's social picture of reasoning again, we might think of Hegel wanting to know how to "live together" rather than merely "side-by-side." Instead of asking, "How are individual subjects formed given that we are born into a society of relationships and in various ways, aim to — indeed, struggle to — sustain them throughout our lives?" Hegel begins his thinking with the notion that people are not inherently isolated subjects, but rather, inherently social creatures. He "wants to say that every philosophical theory of society must proceed not from the acts of isolated subjects but rather from the framework of ethical bonds, within which the subjects always already move" (Honneth 1995, 14).

Honneth aims to build a theory of recognition in this Hegelian tradition that takes "intersubjective relationships as empirical events within the social world," which he finds in the work of social psychologist George Herbert Mead (Honneth 1995, 68). Both Hegel and Mead "[aim] to make the struggle for recognition the point of reference for a theoretical construction in terms of which the moral development of society is to be explained" (Honneth 1995, 71). That is, Mead, drawing from pragmatist thinking, assumes that individual subjects make "cognitive gains" from "situations in which actions are problematized during their performance": being confronted by and working through challenges in one's interactions with others is required for learning more about oneself and becoming an individuated person (Honneth 1995, 72). Honneth thus takes from Mead the following crucial idea: "...the ability to call up in oneself the meaning that one's action has for others also opens up the possibility for one to view oneself as a social object of the actions of one's partner to interaction. In perceiving my own vocal gesture and reacting to myself as my counterpart does, I take on a decentered perspective, from which I can form an image of myself and thereby come to consciousness of my identity..." (Honneth 1995, 74). The basic idea is not unlike the mental and moral processes recommended by the Golden

Rule, “Do unto others as they would do unto to you”: we are called upon to ask, “Would you like it if someone did to you what you did to them?” or to “place yourself in their shoes.” But to be able to partake in exercising the Golden Rule to oneself, it is inherently part of the process to see oneself in the process of hypothetically taking up of another’s perspective¹. Again, we might think of Nagel’s phrase “one among others equally real,” where Mead’s concern is not how real other people are in relation to one’s feeling of one’s experiences as somehow especially real, but rather, he stresses how one is already aware of oneself “amongst others.” Honneth highlights this starting point for recognition: I cannot help but think of myself when I think about how my behavior affects other people’s experiences, so that *through* social interactions, I have already achieved a basic level of self-awareness. What I suggest is that trauma narratives can reveal that this basic self-awareness built in to relationships and social interactions cannot be assumed or taken for granted.

Here I want to bring a closer focus to the role that self-understanding plays in recognition that is so crucial to becoming an independent subject of society. I will examine the general form of recognition and the particular form of recognition Honneth calls “self-confidence” to bring forth a clearer picture of just what kind of self-understanding is required to engage in mutually recognitive relationships.

3.3.2 Recognition’s General Form

In the article “Analyzing Recognition,” Heikki Ikaheimo and Arto Laitinen define Honneth’s use of “recognition” as a reciprocated interaction between two people: “taking someone as a person, the content of which is understood and accepted by the other person”

¹ Whereas Nagel takes the Golden Rule exercise to be one of “exchanging characters” (see page 75) by schematizing the present situation, Honneth’s understanding is more in line with Ted Cohen’s interpretation of the Golden Rule as an imaginative exercise — one must imagine oneself as another person. See: Ted Cohen, *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

(Ikaheimo and Laitinen 2010, 42). This definition of mutual recognition gives us a picture of two conditions that need to be satisfied: (1) A must take B as a person, and (2) B must understand and accept A's recognition of B as a person. The ethical questions at stake for Honneth then are whether and to what extent this mutual recognition takes place in a relationship: Has A taken B as a person? Has B understood and accepted A's recognition of themselves as a person?

To focus on the role that self-understanding plays in recognition, I am interested in the second criterion of the conditions for a mutually recognitive relationship to develop: the claim that B, who is being recognized by A, must understand and accept A's recognition of themselves as a person. One way to interpret this condition is as Laden does in "Reasonable Deliberation, Constructive Power, and the Struggle for Recognition": B must understand that A is someone who is capable of offering recognition (Laden 2010). And while that is an essential component to this second criterion of what the person receiving recognition must do, it is also the case that in order for A's recognition of B to be of any benefit, B must to some extent regard *themselves* as someone who can be the appropriate object of A's recognition. So for the second criterion to hold, (2a) as Laden points out, B must regard A as "capable of conferring recognition" but also, (2b) as I point out, to some extent, B must regard themselves as a person. That is, minimally, B must take themselves to be *someone at all*. Honneth's view of recognition is that one cannot fully develop and maintain their "identity," or become an autonomous and independent subject of society, without the help and support of recognitive relationships. I am underscoring here that to be recognized by another as Ikaheimo and Laitinen define recognition, there is a minimal requirement of being able to see oneself as someone at all. To see in what "minimal" sense of

seeing oneself as someone at all I am referring to, we will have to turn to the details of Honneth's theory.

Honneth's response to this question — in what minimal sense must I see myself as someone at all? — can be found in the discussion of how self-confidence develops through relations of love and care. For Honneth, self-confidence is the fundamental self-attitude that develops in mutually recognitive relationships, from which the other two self-attitudes of self-respect and self-esteem develop. Self-respect forms through relationships of respect, and self-esteem through relationships of solidarity. Though these phrases “self-confidence,” “self-respect” and “self-esteem” usually indicate a focus on the individual — e.g., I am confident in myself; I respect myself; I esteem myself. For Honneth, the attitudes are about oneself, but are only possible because of the relationships one has with others. So self-confidence is knowing one is loved and cared for by others; self-respect is knowing one is respected as an equal by others; and self-esteem is knowing one is recognized for one's particular qualities and contributions towards a shared project or goal. Because I am interested in the extent to which one must minimally see oneself as someone at all, I will focus on the development of self-confidence. Eventually, however, through the lens of trauma, I will show that this is not the most fundamental self-attitude one needs to accept and benefit from another's recognition of oneself.

3.3.3 Recognition: Self-confidence

The story of how self-confidence develops within the context of loving relations begins with the assumption, following Hegel and pediatrician and psychoanalyst David Winnicott, of how socially embedded we are from birth. Both Hegel and Winnicott believe that “a philosophical theory of society” and “psychoanalytic research on infants,” respectively, must

begin with the understanding that subjects are inherently entangled in “ethical frameworks,” or relationships with significant others, and cannot be understood as “isolated subjects” or as “an independent object of inquiry” (Honneth 1995, 14–15, 1995, 98). With this relational account of the self in the background, Honneth explains the nature of relationships marked by love and how self-confidence develops in three progressive stages: absolute dependency, relative dependency, and the struggle for recognition. Assuming the struggle for recognition is successful, self-confidence — knowing that you are loved unconditionally by another — is the resulting self-attitude.

In the stages of absolute and relative dependency, infants and primary caregivers learn to differentiate themselves from one another. In the former stage, the needs and desires of caregivers and infants overlap to a great extent. The child needs X to be satisfied; the caregiver’s need is also X insofar as their child’s needs are satisfied. Increasingly, however, both parties become more and more independent — initially by not spending all their time with one another. The physical separation helps the infant ontologically discern itself from the caregiver, as it is learning the first and basic stages of independence. Likewise, the primary caregivers learn to discern themselves from their children and re-learn what it is to be on their own again. The infant realizes that the caregiver is part of the environment external to itself, and in realizing its dependence on the caregiver and others, the infant begins to realize what it can control and what it cannot (Honneth 1995, 100). The caregiver makes a parallel realization that the child is independent and the child’s conditions are outside of her complete control (e.g., realizing that the child has certain idiosyncratic tendencies, not being able to control the child’s health despite taking excellent care, and so on).

When the infant begins to make these distinctions, Honneth notes that the infant often expresses this experience. The common story told in child psychology is that the infant goes through a period of “rebellion” when they physically attack the caregiver by biting, kicking, punching, and so on. Honneth interprets this stage as a struggle for recognition. Winnicott argues that “the infant unconsciously tests out whether the affectively charged object does, in fact, belong to a reality that is beyond influence and is in that sense, ‘objective’” (Honneth 1995, 101). If the mother “survives” these tests without “retaliating,” meaning she does not withhold her care and affection for the child and does not deny fulfilling their needs and desires as a result of these tests, the child then begins to understand that their trust in the caregiver is not betrayed and that they will continue to be provided for. In this process, Honneth argues, the child realizes more deeply that they and caregiver are physically and ontologically separate: that even though the caregiver is absent from time to time or even though the infant “tests” the caregiver, the infant knows that the caregiver will continue to provide unconditional love and care.

The original question that took us into the explication of Honneth’s view of self-confidence developed through recognitive relations of love was asked what kind of basic form of self-regard one needs in order to satisfy the second condition of recognition — “B must regard themselves as someone.” Honneth’s answer, I take it, would be that this kind of self-confidence is needed to engage in any mutually recognitive relationships. In knowing one’s physical distinctness from others, one also knows that one will be loved and cared for, safe from physical harm. Moreover, self-confidence is crucial because once it is established, then one becomes prepared for the development and maintenance of other social relations, leading to the possibility of self-respect and self-esteem². In other words, once one can regard oneself as physically and

² This is based in Hegel’s belief that social relationships develop first within the family and further develop beyond one’s immediate community: “...in Hegel, these three patterns of reciprocity [the three forms of recognition] are

ontologically distinct from another, but still intimately connected to others, then one can see when recognition comes one's way and can accept it from the other person.

But I will suggest that this is not the most fundamental way of regarding oneself as someone in order to engage in mutually recognitive relationships. My answer to the question, then, would be that B must regard themselves as someone *at all*, prior to being loved, respected or esteemed, and not as an object of love, respect or solidarity. Once again, this view becomes most visible in cases of trauma. Honneth identifies what goes wrong in cases of trauma, connecting it to the development of self-confidence, but I will argue that this explanation is insufficient. When we see what does go wrong, relationally, in trauma, then we will see that there is a relational way of understanding the phenomenon of taking oneself as someone at all.

3.4 **Living Posthumously and Spectral Existences: Parallel Worlds in Trauma**

For Honneth, the development of self-confidence is crucial because through the process of receiving love from the caregiver and overcoming struggles to know that the caregiver will always continue to give that unconditional love, one learns to differentiate oneself physically from others but also to develop a fundamental trust in others. Trusting one's basic physical and psychological safety with initial and primary caregivers prepares one for learning to trust others to help protect one's basic safety. In the chapter "Personal Identity and Disrespect: The Violation of the Body, the Denial of Rights, and the Denigrations of Ways of Life" in *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth explains what happens to the self in non-ideal circumstances when the three forms of recognition are absent. In cases of extreme physical disrespect, particularly when control of one's body is denied, as in torture and rape, he says that what is either absent or destroyed is the trust one builds in mutually recognitive relations of love that

mapped onto particular concepts of the person in the sense that the subjective autonomy of the individual increases with each stage of mutual regard" (Honneth, 96).

develop one's self-confidence. These cases are problematic not because of the physical pain one must endure, but rather, he says, "the combination of this pain with the feeling of being defenselessly at the mercy of another subject, to the point of feeling that one has been *deprived of reality*" (Honneth 1995, 132). He goes on to explain what constitutes this deprivation of reality:

Physical abuse represents a type of disrespect that does lasting damage to one's basic confidence (learned through love) that one can autonomously coordinate one's own body. Hence the further consequence, *coupled with a type of social shame, is the loss of trust in oneself and the world*, and this affects all practical dealings with other subjects, even at a physical level. Thus, the kind of recognition that this type of disrespect deprives one of is the taken-for-granted respect for the autonomous control over one's own body, which itself could only be acquired at all through experiencing emotional support as part of the socialization process. *The successful integration of physical and emotional qualities of behavior is, as it were, subsequently broken up from the outside, thus lastingly destroying the most fundamental form of practical relation-to-self, namely, one's underlying trust in oneself* (Honneth 1995, 132-133).

According to this picture, trauma victims lose their capacity to navigate the world and others because they no longer know how to direct and manage their physical person in that world and with other people. Judith Herman supports Honneth's views about developing trust in oneself and the world early in life through relations of love: "The sense of safety in the world, or basic trust, is acquired in earliest life in the relationship with the first caretaker. Originating with life itself, this sense of trust sustains a person through the lifecycle" (Herman 2015, 51). She goes on to explain what happens in traumatic situations:

In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. *When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living* (Herman 2015, 52, emphasis mine).

Susan Brison describes the immediate aftermath of her trauma in a similar way. First, she describes the experience of a forensic examination:

For about an hour the two [male doctors I had never seen before] went over me like a piece of meat, calling out measurements of bruises and other assessments of damage, *as if they were performing an autopsy*. This was just the first of many incidents in which I felt as if *I was experiencing things posthumously*. When the inconceivable happens, one starts to doubt even the most mundane, realistic perceptions. Perhaps I'm not really here, I thought, *perhaps I did die in that ravine. The line between life and death, once so clear and sustaining, now seemed carelessly drawn and easily erased* (Brison 2002, 8–9, emphasis mine).

She goes on to explain that this sense of living “posthumously” persisted as she continued in recovery:

For the first several months after my attack, *I led a spectral existence, not quite sure whether I had died and the world went on without me, or whether I was alive but in a totally alien world*. Tom and I returned to the States, and I continued to convalesce, but *I felt as though I'd somehow outlived myself* (Sapphire 1996, 30–31, emphasis mine)

And when family members failed to reach out to Brison in the aftermath because they did not know how to respond to her trauma, Brison reacted in the following way:

Didn't they realize I thought about the attack every minute of every day and that their inability to respond *made me feel as though I had, in fact, died and no one had bothered to come to the funeral?* (Brison 2002, 13, emphasis mine).

The deprivation of reality is not a point about metaphysics (nor one about feeling like one is dying as in Cotard's Syndrome) but about one's relationships with one another. Again, we see how Nagel's idea of conceiving “oneself among others equally real” works in cases of trauma if we emphasize the problem as being “among others,” noting their apparent reality, feeling outside of that reality, and thus disconnected from them. Other people and their experiences seem real, but the victim does not, and so her experiences seem surreal to her — hence the references to a gray space between life and death: “living posthumously,” “spectral existence,” “perhaps I did die,” “outliving myself,” “as though I had, in fact, died and no one had bothered to come to my funeral.” In *Push*, there is a particular scene where Precious experiences a dream-like, “spectral” state of both vividly and consciously seeing herself in the past while supposedly being asleep (Sapphire 1996, 58–59). Likewise, she reflects on how standardized tests regard her as “more than dumb” but “invisible,” and she asks: “Why can't I see myself, *feel* where I end and begin?”

(Sapphire 1996, 30–31) She finally makes a reference to living and dying: “What it take for my muver to see me? Sometimes I wish I was not alive. But I don’t know how to die. Ain’ no plug to pull out. ’N no matter how bad I feel my heart don’t stop beating and my eyes open in the morning” (Sapphire 1996, 32). Like Brison, Precious is prevented from joining any community because she is not sufficiently or properly recognized by anyone, including by her own mother. According to Herman, some trauma survivors relate more to the dead, but Precious cannot even imagine that death would relieve her of her extreme sense of alienation.

This inability to identify with the living returns us to the notion of shared worlds. The trauma victim’s feeling of identifying with the dead more than with the living is precisely a symptom indicating that she does not share a world with the living because they are all “someones,” while she does not experience life as a someone, not even at all, hence the references to death. In recognizing another’s reality and wondering about her own, one might say that she still has to be aware of herself in order to be able to “wonder about her own reality.” But this awareness is not sufficient to give her the sense that she is alive, or that she is someone at all. The problem is not a conceptual one, but rather a relational one of being unable to have any external confirmation that she is alive and real, and so she constantly and erratically shifts between identifying first with the dead and then with the living. This is an extreme form of isolation: she does not share a world with *anyone* when she goes back and forth between identifying with the dead and then wondering if she is alive, for sharing a world with the dead is not properly sharing if the dead cannot participate in the sharing, but neither can she share a world with the living when they fail to reach out to her and seem more alive than she does. For someone like Brison, after experiencing trauma, her sense of community and safety were thrown into serious doubt. For someone like Precious, she felt that she never belonged to any

community — she was, as she notes, too lost in her traumatic memories to even chronologically organize her past experiences to be able to participate in school activities and to make friends or any connections in school.

Thus first-person descriptions of trauma support Honneth's idea that our sense of trust in ourselves and others to respect for the boundaries of one's body develops in loving relations, and that this is what is destroyed in abusive trauma. But these descriptions of experiencing trauma also reveal that it is not just respect for the boundaries of my body that is developed in recognitive relations of love; it is furthermore my inclusion in the human community that is developed through recognitive relations of love in infancy and early childhood, since that is when one is inducted into that community (and sometimes even before birth). Victims are traumatized by perpetrators, they have undone and destroyed *both* that trust in oneself and others to respect the boundaries of my body, as well as one's basic inclusion in the human community at all. The conjunction is critical, because in the parallel worlds between the traumatized and the untraumatized, one of them assumes that you can trust others and as a result you will not only be safe but have basic membership in society, while the other one denies that any of this is as automatic as it seems. So the shared world, if it ever existed in the first place, diverges at the point of trauma and two worlds run parallel to each other: that of the victim, and that of those who are not victims of trauma or do not have any ties to traumatic experiences.

This picture of parallel worlds given to us by the experience of trauma reveals the precarious nature of our capacity to take oneself as someone at all. There is one world in which "most of us," that is, those who do not encounter any form of trauma, live, where there is an underlying set of beliefs grounded in the assumption of one's physical safety from human-induced, severe abusive trauma. We believe, or behave as though we believe, that the statistics

are in our favor not to encounter trauma from these sources. Furthermore, despite however much we might acknowledge our identity as ever-changing in light of our experiences, we believe that our experiences won't be marked by trauma, and so we not only believe that "who we are," our sense of being someone, will always be more or less intact, but we always believe that we will take ourselves to be someone at all.

Stories like *Precious's* and *Brison's* do give us a glimpse into the nature of human-induced trauma, and in so doing specifically confirm to us the possibility that the first world is composed of the illusion that our physical safety from such trauma can be more or less assumed. Readers are given the opportunity to determine whether the world they inhabit is one that runs parallel to the one they think they know and inhabit, one that they can turn away from at their convenience, or whether it is the actual world in which we live. If we didn't know trauma, particularly from sexual violence, then what we learn from these stories is that the world is such that it is entirely possible for the extreme child abuse and neglect that *Precious* experienced, that it is possible to be attacked from behind in broad daylight like *Brison* was. What makes these narratives so difficult to read is not just that the details are unpleasant, but that at least while reading, we have to share in the knowledge that we live in a world where these events are not only theoretically possible but entirely plausible and sometimes more likely for certain groups of people. So there is in fact a second world in which not "most of us" — those actual few who do not encounter trauma of any kind — but most of us — those who do actually encounter human-induced trauma of various kinds — live, where the underlying set of beliefs is not grounded in one's physical safety, but rather, a deep understanding of how one's physical safety can be robbed in an instant by another in the form of abuse and violence. Moreover, one's sense of

being someone at all is understood as much more precariously developed and maintained in this second world.

But will the cognitive relation of love help a victim of trauma rebuild their sense of security and trust that others will respect the boundaries of their body — their self-confidence — so that they will include her in the human community at all? It is not that the trauma victim needs to be loved or cared for. In fact, this is what Precious is missing in her life to begin with, so if one does not have such relations with anyone and is traumatized, who will they get this unconditional love and care from? And Brison reveals in her experience that while her parents expressed their grief over her traumatizing experiences (to the point where they tried not to express it to concern Brison), they, too, had difficulty offering the right kind of response to the sexual violence that Brison experienced. That is: her husband, parents or other family members could not help her *return* to the world of security and trust that others would not harm her. That world is precisely the world that Brison lost in the attack.

So an important question is raised: is the victim to be reintegrated back into the community so that they feel “alive” again, no longer isolated or alienated, “someone at all among others equally real”? That seems to be one obvious way to help a victim heal from trauma. However, the world that the victim inhabits is not one out of which she can be pulled, to be reintegrated back into the world of assumed safety and trust. Although she experiences the world as “detached from reality,” as in some sense illusory because she experiences it as “living posthumously,” there is a special kind of reality imbued in it that those who do not experience trauma are unaware of. So when Brison is “reassured” by friends that, for instance, “my having had such extraordinary bad luck meant that the odds of my being attacked were now quite slim,” or when her family “thought it would be most comforting to act as if nothing had happened,” she

is in a sense being called back to the world of trust in others that they will not harm her, a world that assures safety (Brison 2002, 10). But that is asking her to return to a world she knows to be illusory *while pretending that it is in fact not illusory*.³ What she wants is not to return to that illusory world, but to restore or establish her sense that she is someone at all, living among others, where she feels equally real as others. That cannot be done by pretending to live an enriched, authentic and autonomous life in a deceptive world.

To restore a victim's sense of being someone at all among others equally real, then, will require a form of recognition that is not built with assumptions that the world is a safe place where we can easily and automatically develop trust in others. The required form of recognition will come from a world where no such assumption is made. I suggest that this form of recognition is none of what Honneth offers in his theory, for those forms of recognition presuppose a shared world, explaining successful mutually recognitive relationships and their corresponding self-attitudes. What is needed first is a form of recognition that acknowledges the possibility of shared worlds as well as parallel worlds. This form of recognition then provides an opportunity to bridge the parallel worlds, not so that inhabitants can cross between the two worlds at their convenience (although that may become a critical tool for survival when encountering people who refuse to accept the victim's world), but so that the victim can inhabit one world with others, whether those others have encountered trauma or not. Providing this form of recognition is a tall order for those who "bear witness" to trauma and "share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity," the details of which I will now lay out.

³ Charles Mills makes the same kind of point regarding race in "Non-Cartesian *Sums*": "[Black people] know that what is in the books is largely mythical as a *general* statement of principles, that is was never intended to be applicable to them in the first place, but that within the structure of power relations, as part of the routine, one has to pretend that it does" (4).

3.5 **Bridging Parallel Worlds: Therapeutic Recognition**

Therapeutic recognition can bridge parallel worlds, and what it establishes or restores is the ability to take oneself as someone at all because it reconnects a victim to others who help confirm their experiences and existence. People who are in the world where they understand firsthand that trauma is actually a common experience and that the world is such that trauma occurs not infrequently, need not only to be recognized by their peers (although that is crucial as well), but they must further be recognized by others who are in the first world where the underlying belief is that trauma is a rare occurrence we are unlikely to experience. And the recognition is not marked by something like pity — it is not that the inhabitants of the illusory world need to recognize trauma victims as deserving of special treatment, who have different rules that apply to them (e.g., excuse them from a period of time at work or school, although that may be true and necessary as well). Rather, the recognition is marked by an acknowledgment that the world we live in is a shared one that understands that severe abusive trauma is a real and common experience. How is this shared understanding expressed? Here I will explain two main features of therapeutic recognition that distinguish it from other forms of recognition.

What exactly is therapeutic recognition, or what does it look like? We will have to examine the characteristics of an ideal therapeutic recognizer who would behave in a way towards a victim of trauma that permits them to attempt healing from their trauma. I will call the person in the therapeutically recognizing position the “witness,” and the person who encounters trauma the “survivor.”

There are two main features of therapeutic recognition, each underscored by the general theme of the need for the witness to prioritize the experience, concerns, and beliefs of the survivor before those of the witness. The first main feature is the need for the witness to *listen* to

the survivor's narrative as it is told, particularly without the witness's judgments or opinions.

Brison explains that it is not sufficient for a trauma survivor to survive her experiences by merely creating a narrative in her mind of her traumatizing experiences. The survivor needs an audience who is willing to bear witness to her story:

In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling to listen to what they endured (Brison 2002, 51).

Brison notes that many people don't know how to empathize with a victim of a crime — they don't know what to say, or how to respond, to the victim (Brison 2002, 10). Given the magnitude of traumatizing experiences, and how many people may not come across them with regularity, it makes some sense that people struggle to respond properly. While her own friends and family struggled to respond to her experiences, Brison notes: "But I learned that everyone needs to try to and make sense, in however adequate a way, of such senseless violence" (Brison 2002, 11). Moreover, she continues, it is sexual violence in particular that causes a particular kind of awkwardness in a potential witness's response to sexual trauma:

In the case of rape, the intersection of multiple taboos — against openly talking about trauma, about violence, about sex — causes conversational gridlock, paralyzing the would-be supporter. We lack the vocabulary for expressing appropriate concern, and we have no social conventions to ease the awkwardness... We do not learn — early or later in life — how to react to a rape. What typically results from this ignorance is bewilderment on the part of victims and silence on the part of others, often the result of misguided caution (Brison 2002, 12).

Based on Brison's experiences and comments, we see that what is actually helpful to a survivor of trauma is that she is given a safe space to explicitly talk about her experiences, concerns, and beliefs regarding the traumatic event, rather than avoiding its discussion. It is the "conversational gridlock" and "paralysis" that is to be avoided, not talking about the event itself. Brison expressed anger at certain close relatives for never having contacted her after the attack; her parents assured her that "[t]hey all expressed their concern to [them], but they didn't want to

remind [her] of what happened” (Brison 2002, 12). She already thinks about the attack all the time, so for someone else to bring it up would not upset her, but rather give her an opportunity confirm that her experiences were in fact real, that she has survived it, and that she is in fact alive: “*Didn’t they realize I thought about the attack every minute of every day* and that their inability to respond made me feel as though I had, in fact, died and no one had bothered to come to my funeral?” (Brison 2002, 13). It is not so much that the survivor wants to be reminded by others of her traumatizing experiences, but that the survivor wants someone to “share in the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity,” as Herman notes. The witness is called to face the event with the survivor, to not avoid it, and the survivor is helped to do so herself when others bear witness with her to the same event so that she does not feel isolated and outside of the human community. The witness does not have to say something in particular, but should allow the survivor to speak about her experiences and tell her story without the witness interrupting with doubts, judgments, and opinions; in this sense, the witness has to be a willing audience.

Listening without interruption is not only beneficial to the survivor who has an opportunity to have someone bear witness to her experiences. The witness gets a clear and vivid picture of what trauma looks like from a primary source without having to directly experience trauma themselves. This is an important point because on the one hand, it looks like fellow survivors would be most capable of supporting and helping a victim of trauma recover, and would have the most shared understanding of what a victim endures throughout the various stages of post-trauma. But the difficult work of helping trauma victims recover cannot be placed only on other survivors. For if there are shared and parallel worlds and we want to avoid the latter, then dividing the population among survivors and non-survivors will only contribute to the

existence of the latter. It is also just not necessary for survivors to exclusively help each other, because non-survivors can listen. This point brings us back to Laden's work on social reasoning — recall that agreement is not a goal nor requirement for reasoning: "...sharing a space of reasons does not require we stand at exactly the same point." Likewise, listening without interruption, or as I will show next, judgment, relieves the witness of having to experience trauma themselves to provide therapeutic recognition.

There is a temptation to say that the witness "just" has to be the willing audience for the trauma survivor, that "all" they have to do is listen. But in fact, there is much more involved to "just listening" to someone's story about surviving sexual violence or other forms of trauma. This leads to the second main feature of providing therapeutic recognition for a trauma survivor: the need for witnesses to withhold not just judgment about the survivor's story, but also to withhold the emotional need and tendency to deny that "this could happen to me" and deny that they live in a world where these kind of traumatic experiences occur, with regularity, about which one can do very little as an individual. We can find examples of this point in Brison's experiences in the aftermath of her attack, even among her family members:

My sense of unreality was fed by the massive denial of those around me — a reaction I learned is an almost universal response to rape. Where the facts would appear to be incontrovertible, denial takes the shape of attempts to explain the assault in ways that leave the observer's world unscathed. Even those who are able to acknowledge the existence of violence try to protect themselves from the realization that the world in which it occurs is their world and so they find it hard to identify with the victim. They cannot allow themselves to imagine the victim's shattered life, or else their illusions about their own safety and control over their own lives might begin to crumble. The most well-meaning individuals, caught up in the myth of their own immunity, can inadvertently add to the victim's suffering by suggesting that the attack was avoidable or somehow her fault (Brison 2002, 9).

She refers to her own experiences where a friend, "succumbing to the gambler's fallacy, pointed out that my having had such extraordinary bad luck meant that the odds of my being attacked again were now quite slim"; her parents sent cards but never mentioned the attack,

perhaps thinking “it would be most comforting to act as if nothing had happened”; other relatives attributed Brison’s survival to God (Brison 2002, 10–11). Embedded in these responses is an attempt to protect and preserve the interlocutor’s sense of a safe world in which something so random could not happen without *some* explanation, whether one that involves (a misunderstanding of) probability and statistics, a higher being, or even blaming the survivor. Often, in searching for some reason and order in seemingly inexplicable human experiences, we will go so far as to find a reason that blames the victim (even if we do not mean to do so) to protect our sense of the world as safe from senseless violence and trauma⁴. And even when someone says, “It’s not your fault,” this response is not sufficient by itself, especially if they go on to contradictorily think that *they* themselves could avoid such a traumatic experience and that the world is still a generally safe space for anyone.

A relatedly important part of being willing to listen in a way where the witness withholds her tendency to protect her world as safe from the harms of human-induced trauma is *paying attention to the details of the survivor’s story*. Reading a story like *Push* or *Aftermath* is not easy and requires a significant amount of psychological effort, and this difficulty cannot merely be attributed to the fact that the details are graphic and unpleasant. More specifically, the central difficulty is having to both imagine what is happening to the narrator, but also having to identify in some way with the narrator such that one ends up imagining oneself, or a close acquaintance, enduring the same traumatizing experience. To use a metaphor of reaching out a hand to someone who has fallen, the act of extending a hand is deceptively simple. When someone has

⁴ Children who experience abuse from primary caregivers often resort to this kind of thinking as well. Seeking control over a chaotic situation in which they have none, they will stretch explanations and go so far as to blame themselves in order to preserve their notion of their primary caregivers as primary caregivers, for they have no others to rely on. “To preserve her faith in her parents, she must reject the first and most obvious conclusion that something is wrong with them. She will go to any lengths to construct an explanation for her fate that absolves her parents of all blame and responsibility” (Herman 2015, 101). “Inevitably the child concludes that her innate badness is the cause [of the abuse]. The child seizes upon this explanation early and clings to it tenaciously, for it enables her to preserve a sense of meaning, hope, and power” (Herman 2015, 103).

fallen and I reach out my hand to help them up, I am not “just” reaching out a hand, but rather, I am realizing that falling in some way can happen to anyone, including myself, and I would want to have a hand reached out to me if that were the case, and this person probably has the same wish for help from another. This metaphor brings us back to Nagel, who says that we must generalize the situation we find ourselves in, realize that its “characters can be exchanged,” and we can imagine ourselves being resentful if someone didn’t help us in a trying situation (Nagel 1978, 15).

Nagel is interested in the attempt to see the world objectively, and so here he is primarily interested in how everyone’s perspectives are “equally real” because that is how we are motivated to act altruistically. Again, my emphasis is different: I am interested in the humility involved in acting altruistically, in reaching out a hand, in the attitude required of oneself to help another person work towards being able to see themselves as someone at all again. Moreover, I think it is too easy to say that “characters can be exchanged” in schematizing a present situation. This is exactly what is difficult and requires work in the exercise of listening to a trauma survivor’s story without interruption, judgment, or arrogantly determining in advance, “This can’t happen to me.” In other words, Nagel’s claim, “You see the present situation as a specimen of a more general scheme, in which the characters can be exchanged” is recommended as “essential,” but without considering extreme but common cases like trauma, I do not think his theory sufficiently recognizes the extent to which it is a social and relational *achievement* to be able to shift from “It can’t happen to me” to “This can happen to me” in listening to a trauma survivor’s story. The shift is not just a cognitive shift, but in a sense, a paradigm shift. Recall that Mills writes of bridging the parallel universes between white and non-white worlds: “It is not a question of minor deviations, which, with a bit of bending and twisting here and there, can

be accommodated within the framework. Rather, so to speak, some of the Euclidean axioms have to be rejected; a reconceptualization is necessary because the structuring logic is different.” Characters are not merely exchanged in realizing that “This could be me.” Rather, an understanding of the whole world as safe from human-induced trauma, and an understanding of oneself, has completely changed.

Let me say more about this shift, now with respect to being and taking oneself as someone at all. When the witness can listen to the survivor’s story, sitting through it all and never turning a blind eye to the graphic details of the experiences, and finally, when the witness stops saying to herself “This could *never* happen to me” and even realizes “This *could* happen to me” — which is most likely to occur in facing (by reading, listening to) the details of the narratives, when people are faced with the decision of having to imagine themselves enduring the same details — then a shift occurs in the position of the witness and the survivor. The survivor lives in a world where she either knows that her safety was never guaranteed in the first place even though it seemed that way all her life given her background conditions like Brison, or where trauma is all she knows, like Precious. When the witness who has not encountered trauma moves from thinking, “This could never happen to me” to “This could happen to me,” she has now entered the survivor’s world, leaving behind the world of illusory thoughts like “This could never happen to me,” and more broadly, “The world is generally safe from traumatizing experiences.”

Thus it is backwards to think that “those who bear witness to trauma” “welcome” survivors *back* into the “real” world of assumed safety, pulling them out of the world of alienation, “spectral existence,” and “living posthumously.” What happens when a non-survivor does not or cannot provide therapeutic recognition and tries to protect their illusory world of

safety is that in seeking control over that world that seems threatened by a victim's narrative of trauma, they try to confirm that they are someone at all, someone who does not or will not just succumb to apparent random chaos and violence, someone connected to others in ways that protect them from traumatizing violence. But this denies to the victim her inclusion into that world, subsequently isolating her, and contributing to her sense that she is in fact *not* someone at all. She is told that in this world, she cannot have the full status of being someone at all; instead, she is stuck in the purgatorial space of "spectral existence." Yet given her experiences, clearly the victim is the one who needs the confirmation that she is someone at all more than the person who seeks to protect their illusory world of safety. The victim is actually disconnected, alienated, and "living posthumously," unable to trust in herself that she is safe and alive, and needs the confirmation from others that she is someone at all. The person who tries to protect themselves still has that trust in themselves, so it is incumbent upon them to offer that confirmation not for themselves but for the victim. What the witness does provide in therapeutic recognition is thus her sense that she is someone at all, by "witnessing" her experiences, confirming their — and her — reality. The successful witness does not turn the focus of the victim's story *away* from the victim and completely towards themselves. Rather, the victim's story and the victim herself are the pivoting points around which the witness realizes, "This can happen to anyone, including me or someone I know." When the witness does this, they provide the victim with the sense that she is someone at all: that her experiences were real, that she is alive and not dead, that her story is a part of "who she is," rather than taking all of this to be a random blip in the grand scheme of events that we can "set aside" and think of as anomalous. So she is someone at all *because* she is connected to another person who recognizes her through

sharing in her experiences, accepting them and their ramifications about the nature of their shared world.

In in the ways described above, therapeutic recognition brings survivors and non-survivors into one world and restores the survivor's ability to take herself as someone at all, among others, equally real. Just as temporal control was demonstrated to be an achievement in being and taking oneself to be someone at all, the social integration brought about by therapeutic recognition is also an achievement, a joint effort accomplished by both by the witness and the survivor.

Returning to Honneth's recognition theory, therapeutic recognition precedes love, respect, and solidarity, which can preliminarily be seen by noting their corresponding self-attitudes: being and taking oneself as someone at all, self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. More specifically, self-confidence, from which the other two self-attitudes develop, is built with an assumption of a shared world in the sense that trauma is considered an anomaly. But my project is situated by thinking that trauma is not an anomaly. Thus trauma is accounted for only after building the theory from ideal cases. Trauma is certainly an anomaly to the extent that it should not happen and when it does, as it is described, it is an "event that is outside the range of usual human experience" (Brison 2002, 15). But empirically, it is not an anomaly, and so my project assumes trauma's frequency and pervasiveness in modern life.

But this is not to say that therapeutic recognition replaces self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Honneth's three forms of recognition are crucial for a survivor's recovery, just as *Push* and *Aftermath* show. For instance, after receiving therapeutic recognition from her alternative education program teacher and classmates, Precious is able to consider properly receiving the Honnethian forms of recognition. In addition to providing unconditional love and

care for her son, and presumably receiving his unconditional love, she also considers what it would be like having a significant other in her life, expressing her desire to know how to be loved and cared for by others unconditionally (Sapphire 1996, 109). And although she initially refuses to speak to the police about her traumas, after receiving therapeutic recognition from her alternative education teacher and classmates, she is able to entertain the possibility of turning to the police for help — that is, for legal recognition of her trauma⁵. Finally, she is recognized in class for her poetry and presentation skills, and begins to imagine herself fulfilling different roles in the future, indicating her ability to see herself in the future (Sapphire 1996, 113, 1996, 109). Self-confidence developed by relations of trust are also important for Brison, as she needs to receive her family's love and care, and as she starts her own family, just like Precious. She fights to gain formal recognition from her employer, a university, to provide protection for women on campus⁶. She is also recognized for her work on trauma in her professional life, as the book itself shows, and so she is recognized for her particular experiences and the unique contributions she is able to make in light of them to the field of philosophy.

Given the emphasis on the importance of relationships to the ability to take oneself as someone at all, one question that arises is what the moral characteristics of these relationships are. I have placed more urgency on relations between the survivor of severe abusive trauma and those who have not encountered such experiences. As I have suggested above, listening without judgment can in fact be a difficult task because of the psychological tendencies to preserve one's sense of the world as safe, of other people as generally trustworthy. In the not uncommon case that trauma survivors are not afforded therapeutic recognition by non-survivors, in what sense is

⁵ She considers this possibility by asking: "Why no one put Carl in jail after I have baby by him when I am twelve? Is it my fault because I didn't talk to polices" (Sapphire 1996, 125).

⁶ In two examples, she gets the university to increase the lighting during the night for a school-owned parking lot and fights the university for getting physical education credit for a female-only self-defense class (Sapphire 1996, 17).

this failure a moral failure? If a non-survivor can offer the survivor therapeutic recognition, in what sense is this a moral achievement? In the next and final chapter, I will take up these questions and suggest that the ability or inability to take oneself as someone at all can help us see assumptions about shared worlds that certain moral theories carry.

4. Taking Oneself as Someone at All: Moral Lessons from Trauma

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I described what it means to take oneself as someone at all: to have control over one's sense of one's experiences as equally real as other life events, and to be recognized by others through genuine and judgment-free listening. And when one can take oneself as someone at all, I have argued that one has the important, life-affirming sense that one shares a world with others. What has yet to be explored is the extent to which those who have not encountered trauma ought to offer therapeutic recognition to trauma survivors. I will assume that to some degree, non-survivors ought to offer therapeutic recognition to trauma survivors, to elevate their ability to take themselves as someone at all and to come to share a world with them. The question I will explore in this chapter then is in what sense failing to offer therapeutic recognition to a trauma survivor is a *moral failure*, and in what sense successfully offering therapeutic recognition to a trauma survivor is a *moral achievement*. Thus I take the phenomenon of either being able or unable to take oneself as someone at all to be able to offer a novel way to examine certain moral theories.

To have concrete examples at hand, I will refer to three kinds of responses that Susan Brison discusses. First, there is the victim-blaming case where a victim's assistance coordinator tells Brison that she should learn not to be so trusting of others and not to go out at night alone (Brison 2002, 9)¹. She also mentions a friend who encourages her to "buck up" and move on (Brison 2002, 16). Finally, there are the family members, including her parents, who chose to stay silent about her traumatic experience for fear of reminding her about it (Brison 2002, 10–11). Within these responses, the intentions clearly improve: the victim-blamer intends to share

¹ The attack occurred late in the morning.

some advice; the friend encouraging the survivor to move on is trying to offer optimistic support; the family members are cautious and worried about bringing up the attack as a reminder to the survivor of her traumatic experiences. But because these responses do not entail genuine listening to varying degrees, I take them to be failures of offering what I have called therapeutic recognition. The analyses of the moral theories in this chapter will provide an explanation of how these failures are failures of a moral kind.

The morality of offering therapeutic recognition could be examined in terms of whether non-survivors have an obligation or duty to offer it to trauma survivors. It could also be examined in terms of whether the ability to take oneself as someone at all is restored, and to what degree, as a consequentialist might. Instead, because my concern is the relationship between the survivor and non-survivor and the extent to which they share a world, I will begin with a view that takes relationships to be at its center. In this chapter I will analyze Tim Scanlon's version of contractualism and argue that this theory assumes shared worlds. I then take elements of Stanley Cavell's comments on moral philosophy to see what is morally at stake for the trauma survivor and non-survivor. In the end, I show that Iris Murdoch's views of morality offer the most room to help us understand the morality of the non-survivor failing to or succeeding in offering therapeutic recognition to the survivor.

4.2 **Scanlon's Contractualism**

In "Contractualism and Utilitarianism," (Scanlon 1982) Scanlon outlines the basic contours of his version of contractualism, which, at its core, is concerned with the ability to reason with others. One important question for Scanlon is explaining moral motivation: moral theories should be able to clarify "why moral reasons...strike those who are moved by them as reasons of special stringency and inescapability" and are not mere preferences (Scanlon 1982,

105). His discussion of morality begins with a focus on the relationship between interlocutors who feel compelled to either justify their actions to others, or demand that others justify their actions to them. He suggests that contractualism provides an appealing account of this kind of moral motivation, which is that when we are convinced that some action is wrong, what is “triggered” is “the desire to be able to justify one’s own actions to others on grounds they could not reasonably reject” (Scanlon 1982, 110). Wrong action is then defined in terms of failing to reason together to generate agreement about what constitutes a justified action:

An act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any system of rules for the general regulation of behavior which no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement (Scanlon 1982, 110).

Morally wrong action is that which cannot be justified to others, and so to act immorally is to act on a principle that someone can reasonably reject. Thus justification plays the central role in contractualism: the inability to justify ourselves to another constitutes a morally impoverished relationship, the primary symptom of which is that there is no agreement on moral principles that we can appeal to in successfully justifying ourselves to others. Conversely, coming to a justification of our actions to others is made possible by having been able to agree on moral principles, and for Scanlon, this is the mark of a morally healthy relationship.

Consider the responses that Brison raises in her work: the victim-blaming stranger and the encouraging friend and the loving family members who (likely unknowingly) prevent Brison from freely speaking about her experiences. A contractualist perspective on these responses would suggest that if these responses are morally wrong, it is so because they cannot be justified. That is, someone will reasonably reject the principles appealed to in making the justification for these responses (e.g., “I was offering advice for someone who seemed to need it”; “I was trying to cheer the survivor up”; “I didn’t want to remind her of the event”) and there will be disagreement about moral principles used to construct justifications of one’s actions. It may in

fact be true that there are no justifications for these responses, and that is what makes them morally wrong response.

But the emphasis on justification and agreement on moral principles does not properly capture the sense in which Brison took these responses to be morally insufficient on the part of the non-survivor. And if it is the case that these three responses are examples of failures to offer therapeutic recognition, then Scanlon's contractualist picture misses a morally salient aspect of these responses: it is not the lack of agreement on principles or a justification of one's actions, but that there is no sense in which the non-survivor and survivor share a world, where this means, in these cases, that the non-survivor moves away from the survivor and her world. Put in a less metaphorical way, what makes all three of these responses morally wrong, even the last two where the non-survivor's good intentions are more palpably perceived, is not that they are unjustifiable, but that they redirect attention away from the survivor and towards the non-survivor. The victim-blaming victim's assistance coordinator on the phone begins instructing Brison on how to comport herself *before* Brison has an opportunity to explain that the attack happened on a pleasant late morning. The dialogue between Brison and this interlocutor is not a genuine conversation: the interlocutor directs attention towards herself and her purported authority over how to understand Brison's experiences (as her fault, as avoidable, as giving us a lesson on how to comport oneself) and away from Brison, who is refused an opportunity to explain the details of her story. The friends and family who encourage Brison to move on, who avoid raising the attack as a topic of conversation, are not as willfully insistent that they have the right way to understand Brison's experiences. But they nevertheless are not concerned about offering Brison the space and chance to speak freely about her experiences and current state, but instead make assumptions about her without confirming them: for instance, they assume that not

thinking about the attack is best for Brison, or that she simply does not want to talk about the attack.

These are some ways to understand the non-survivor directing attention *away* from the survivor, and this is not a matter of disagreement on moral principles and justification. What makes this especially problematic is that the non-survivor is not in need of this kind of attention; it is the survivor who needs it, in light of terrifying experiences that question her survival and existence. The survivor is presumably not looking to produce “judgmental harmony” over the contents of her narrative. Although she is presenting a narrative, and what she says can be judged as consistent and making sense to any observer or interlocutor, what is centrally and urgently at stake is equally the intention behind sharing such a story. The narrative is not merely a description of events that provides the survivor with an opportunity to connect with other people, and in a particularly urgent way: it is an important part of her identity. As seen in chapter two, the order and reality of events are difficult to control for a survivor, but if she can put a narrative together at all, then she is able to see herself as someone at all in terms of having temporal control. So if her narrative is criticized, doubted or refused in any way, her identity is also criticized, doubted, or refused; her sense of self suffers. She is then looking for something like confirmation of her experiences, reality, and self, and what is at stake is her ability to take herself as someone at all, but specifically among others, equally real, as explained in chapter three. In other words, she is looking to share a world with another again in telling her story. I will expand on this explanation in terms of how the non-survivor’s response redirects this kind of attention away from the survivor later in this chapter, but first I will further explain the problem with a view like contractualism for the trauma case I am interested in.

The key reason why contractualism misses the problem of a lack of shared worlds in the trauma case is because it assumes a shared world among the members of the theory's scope. Scanlon lists some basic requirements to be included in contractualism's scope. He believes that "the general specification of the scope of morality applies to a being if the notion of justification makes sense to a being of that kind," and one specific requirement is "that the being constitute a point of view; that is, that there be such a thing as what it is like to be that being, such a thing as what the world seems like to it" (Scanlon 1982, 113). Presumably, Scanlon sets this scope with the anticipation of questions about whether or to what extent we owe consideration of non-human animals, plants, rocks, fetuses, or perhaps a God-like entity. But if we consider the perspective of severe abusive trauma, it is not immediately clear whether a survivor will fall within or outside of this scope. The being "must constitute a point of view," and it must have a sense of "what it is like to be that being" and "what the world seems like to it." Some forms of abusive trauma leave survivor's "point of view" intact — consider Brison's case, where she is able to recite to French police officers on three separate occasions what happened in her attack. She also seems to have some point of view, even though it is reduced in quality and she feels like a ghost among others. But if we return to chapter two, consider Precious's circumstances in her life as a young child, in the first few years of elementary school when she is sexually abused by her father on a regular basis. She does not seem to have a proper sense of time where she can even distinguish the first from the fourth grade; she cannot distinguish night from day; the abuse follows her, presumably in the form of flashbacks, when she is not being abused by her father. Her "point of view" or a "what it's like" to be her, or what "the world" seems like to her is entirely filled up by the abuse. Although this is *a* point of view, a what it's like to be her, a world — just a really terrible one that no one should have to endure — it does not, in any

appropriate sense, add up to a properly constituted self in any meaningful sense. She has no control over her sense of time, experiences, and thus, her self. Moreover, the idea of justification is not one that “makes sense” to such a being, not because such a being cannot make sense of the idea (which may or may not be true), but because it is far from what is morally salient to her and her circumstances. In other words, she is in some sense “the kind of thing” to whom justification would make sense, but this question is not yet on the table. All we know is that she is not in a position to engage in such conversation.

The problem with this scope is not that it is potentially exclusionary in some sense, but rather, that Scanlon is assuming relations where we are more or less mutually intelligible to one another. The difficult cases for Scanlon are ones with disagreements because of principle-rejections, but to disagree about which moral principles to subscribe to means that there is minimally some agreement on what is being discussed. But in the case of the non-survivor who cannot make full sense of the survivor’s narrative — and so, victim-blames, or moves away from the story altogether — there is no agreement on, or proper understanding, of what exactly is being described in the trauma narrative precisely because the non-survivor is not listening carefully to the trauma narrative. Brison describes what she takes to be going wrong when non-survivors, even well-meaning ones, cannot offer proper responses to a survivor sharing her trauma narrative: “They cannot allow themselves to imagine the victim’s shattered life, or else their illusions about their own safety crumble” (Brison 2002, 9). There is a problem of a lack of imagination, either because one refuses to allow oneself to exercise the imagination in this way, or because it is just not possible because what is described doesn’t make any sense. This kind of gap between two parties is not the kind of scenario that contractualism has in mind.

It may then seem unfair to Scanlon's contractualism to say that it cannot offer much explanation for a case like that of the non-survivor responding inappropriately and insufficiently to the survivor who has shared their story with them. But my point is precisely to highlight that a moral theory that assumes shared worlds will miss out on the crucial, deep, and morally salient elements of scenarios like the post-trauma relation between the non-survivor and survivor. The best a theory that assumes shared worlds can do is accommodate insights that are uncovered elsewhere, shoehorning the wrong emphasis into a situation where they are not relevant. I offer Scanlon as an example of such a theory to show its limits when confronted with a case like that of trauma. In the rest of the chapter I will consider moral views that do not assume shared worlds, and show that when faced with the conditions of trauma, the theories can naturally shed light on the morally salient aspects of the relationship between the survivor and non-survivor.

4.3 **Cavell: A Shared Moral Universe**

Recall in the previous chapter that sharing a world could be interpreted as achieving mutual intelligibility between parties, where this means being able to discern the point and appropriateness of certain speech acts². The point of beginning to explain one's traumatic past to a non-survivor, for instance, is not necessarily an invitation for advice about how to comport oneself going forward. The point of sharing one's traumatic past is also not necessarily to receive encouragement to move on from that past. The point of sharing these experiences in this case can vary widely, and mutual intelligibility, rather than agreement upon moral principles and offering justifications for one's actions, can help to explain what is morally salient in the relationship between the survivor and non-survivor. Emphasizing mutual intelligibility can make room for figuring out and navigating *whether* or *to what extent* interlocutors share a world, as

² See Chapter 3, page 70-72, where I discuss Anthony Laden's work on a mutual intelligibility being an important characteristic of a "shared space of reasons."

opposed to simply assuming a shared world between interlocutors. Stanley Cavell, in the chapter “Morality and the Basis of Knowledge” of *The Claim of Reason*, makes it clear in his reflections on moral theories that he does not assume shared worlds (Cavell 1999). In this section we will see the extent to which his views on moral philosophy can offer some insight into answering our original questions about the extent to which failing to offer therapeutic recognition is a moral failure.

In this chapter, Cavell is concerned not with a view quite like Scanlon’s, but views that claim moral conversation is futile because moral disagreements are rarely resolved and often end in stalemate. He understands morality not in terms of agreement about moral claims and conclusions about what one ought to do, but in terms of laying out one’s position to another in an intelligible way that fosters relationships with others — especially when there is disagreement. He argues that those who question the rationality of morality on the grounds that moral debates end in stalemate assume that “the rationality of an argument depends upon its leading from premises that all parties can accept” and that the “goal of a moral argument is agreement upon some conclusion, in particular, a conclusion concerning what ought to be done” (Cavell 1999, 254). Against this view, Cavell takes morality and moral conversation to be difficult work not because we often end up disagreeing with others about moral matters, but because clarifying our position to another can and often does fail, and so such efforts to articulate oneself cannot be taken for granted. Further, moral arguments are positions for which we will have to be answerable and take responsibility. Part of what this means is that when our position is challenged, we must further clarify and explain the landscape of our position when asked, taking responsibility for whatever is entailed by the position upon further probing. So the aim of moral discussion is not to persuade another to come to an agreement, but to “know and respect” one

another's position, regardless of whether agreement about what ought to be done is procured (Cavell 1999, 269). Thus the pressing issue for Cavell is whether the conversation and relationship continues, and if so, what its nature and quality are going forward. He writes:

What is at stake in such discussions is not, or not exactly, whether you know our world, but whether, or to what extent, we are to live in the same moral universe. What is at stake...is not the validity of morality as a whole, but the nature or quality of our relationship to one another (Cavell 1999, 268).

Unlike in Scanlon's contractualism, Cavell's moral view does not assume a shared world, for the question at stake is precisely "whether, or to what extent, we are to live in the same moral universe." This very phrase helps us move us away from a focus on justification and principle-agreement, and towards the idea of aiming for mutual intelligibility that is not presupposed in any given relationship — including, but not limited to, the post-trauma relation covered here. But what exactly is mutual intelligibility according to Cavell, and how is its success determined?

In the chapter "Rules and Reasons" from *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell compares the moral life to a game, such as baseball (Cavell 1999). Games have "Rules of Play" that settle "whether a given action is to count as a move when certain eventualities arise." Meanwhile, the moral life has no analogous rules or umpires who determine who is doing well or poorly, and, Cavell says, this is "essential to the form of life we call morality" (Cavell 1999, 296). That is, *we* determine our moral performance, particularly in the explanations that we provide for the positions we hold and occupy. Cavell calls these explanations "elaboratives": to be able to "say what you are doing, if that is competently asked; or excuse or justify it if that becomes necessary" (Cavell 1999, 311). The emphasis is not on occupying the same position as others, or appealing to a "rule book" to determine our performance; rather, it is important to map out the positions we occupy in relation to those of others. Knowing and respecting another's position alone is difficult work; more taxing is to get the positions to overlap given varied backgrounds,

perspectives, experiences, temperaments, and so on. Moreover, it would miss the point of morality, which is to share a moral *universe* rather than a particular moral *position*³.

Articulating oneself, being intelligible to others, and finding others intelligible, are just the problems that the survivor of abusive trauma has when she is sharing her story with a non-survivor who has trouble responding to it. With a focus on intelligibility over agreement or justification, we are in a better position to see what is morally salient, and wrong, about the three responses brought up in the beginning of this chapter — victim-blaming, telling the survivor to “buck up and move on,” and preventing her from talking about her experiences. The main issue is that in all three responses, regardless of the degree of good will on the part of the non-survivor, *there is a refusal to attempt to find the survivor or her story intelligible*. In so doing, there is an irresponsibility that characterizes this refusal. The victim-blaming response effectively attempts to restructure the narrative — that is, doubts or refuses to believe the survivor’s story — and suggests that the fault of the traumatic event is on the victim rather than the perpetrator or assailant. The response is roughly: “No, the event does not make sense as she describes it; it must be *x*, *y*, or *z*” where *x*, *y*, and *z* implicate the survivor. There is a refusal to understand the narrative on the survivor’s terms, even though the survivor is the most experienced on the matter; and the irresponsibility is in the hubris of thinking one knows better despite not having witnessed or experienced the event first hand.

Even with the presence of better intentions, a similar issue of refusing to find the trauma survivor’s narrative intelligible pervade the “buck up and move on” response from the friend, and the family member who directs attention towards trivial pleasantries. In the case where the

³ Another way of understanding this point can be found in Ted Cohen’s essay, “High and Low Thinking on High and Low Art”: “A world in which you and I never connected would be a horror. And so would a world in which we were exactly the same, and therefore connected unfailingly, with every object on every occasion.” The point of relating to others is to connect, but in moderation, for there must also be room to be oneself. See *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Spring 1993), Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 151-156.

friend suggests Brison moves on, there is an assumption that not “dwelling” on the traumatic past is what is best for Brison. In the case where the family member is unsure of what to say, and so either says “Isn’t everything nice?” or says nothing at all, they assume that Brison does not want to talk about her traumatic past. In both cases, the problem is that the non-survivors’ assumptions prevent them from being able to understand Brison’s experience of the traumatic event and what she is experiencing post-trauma. There is a refusal to try to find the survivor’s story intelligible.

Another way of picturing these three responses is by thinking of the survivor who is able to share her trauma narrative as opening a door to her world for the non-survivor to see, to consider entering into it, and to attempt to enter it⁴. The non-survivor gets a glimpse into this “other world,” a horrific part of which the survivor is describing, perhaps in gory detail, a world that is unsafe and in which seemingly no one can be trusted. The non-survivor may panic and deny, with however much good intention, that this is an accurate description of reality — they may blame the victim, tell the survivor to move on from this one particular, anomalous incident, or change the subject. When this refusal to hear the story and to see the survivor’s world occurs, the non-survivor effectively slams the door the survivor has taken great efforts to open. The tension is palpable: the survivor is trying to let the non-survivor in, and the non-survivor keeps, however firmly or gently, closing that very door the survivor is trying to open. When the non-survivor refuses to listen, denies the survivor the reality of the world she is describing, they are both keeping the survivor isolated, as well as maintaining their own ignorance of the survivor’s experiences and what her world is like. In this sense, the non-survivor is the one determining that they and the survivor will not “go on living in the same moral universe,” refusing to “know

⁴ If the survivor does not directly share her story to someone else, then consider a third party who conveys what happened. We might think of the door to the survivor’s world being opened, with help from the third party.

and respect” the survivor’s “position” — not an argument she holds, but “where she is coming from,” so to speak. The “nature and quality” of their relationship is that the relationship itself is at stake.

In Scanlon’s view of morality, conversations between interlocutors are taken for granted. The doors have been opened, the discussants who have met the scope qualifications have entered into a conversation, and the issue at hand is the discussion itself, as opposed to whether someone who has been speaking has been shut down prematurely by someone who refuses to listen, intentionally or not. In mainstream moral philosophy, there is a primary focus on agreement of conclusions, or persuading and compelling others to come to the same conclusion as one holds, but this emphasis is unhelpful in a case like trauma where we are trying to figure out what has gone wrong, morally speaking, when the non-survivor has failed to offer therapeutic recognition to a survivor. Cavell urges us to take up concerns of intelligibility *prior to* concerns of agreement on positions, and this shows us a “door-opening” framework for understanding the moral failure of the non-survivor who cannot listen properly to the survivor’s story.

Cavell is concerned about being able to “know and respect” another’s moral position, and thus being able to share a “moral universe” with others, without having to agree with that position. In the context of trauma, as I have shown with the three sample responses from Brison’s experiences, knowing and respecting must suggest that the non-survivor make significant efforts to move towards the survivor and enter into her world. Although knowing and respecting in a way that suggests non-survivors could find a survivor’s narrative to be intelligible, one concern with “know[ing] and respect[ing]” one another’s position is distance — these verbs do not necessarily connote proximity. What is needed in an explanation for the moral failure of not listening to a trauma survivor without judgment is something like

interlocutors' closeness with one another, or the lack thereof. I suggest further that the problem with the non-survivors' responses to Brison's attempt to share her story is that first, non-survivors tend to feel discomforted by the unfamiliar nature of trauma narratives and the world such stories imply we inhabit. Moreover, non-survivors lack of openness to being challenged and moved by what another says. In the next section, I consider Iris Murdoch's views on moral philosophy to help us understand exactly how a non-survivor can move towards a survivor's world to share it.

4.4 **Murdoch: Just and Loving Regard**

Like Cavell's views, certain elements of Murdoch's views on morality and moral philosophy are helpful in producing insights about the non-survivor who is unsettled by the survivor's trauma narrative because there is no assumption of shared worlds or mutual intelligibility. Because of this feature, Murdoch's views on morality can help us see clearly the problems of the non-survivor's inappropriate responses to trauma narratives Brison describes, from outright victim-blaming to the well-intended avoidance of talking about the traumatic event at all. In Cavell's work we saw that questions of mutual intelligibility between interlocutors are prior to whether agreement can be reached in moral philosophy. Murdoch can help us develop these thoughts by offering a way to understand these non-survivors as failing to set aside their own discomfort at the trauma survivor's story, which I argue indicates a lack of openness to being challenged and moved. I will begin by focusing on a basic assumption Iris Murdoch makes about the nature of human beings and the examples she uses to illustrate various arguments about morality and moral theories from her essays in *The Sovereignty of Good* (Murdoch 2001).

4.4.1 Murdoch on Selfishness

One important assumption that Murdoch makes in the essay “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” concerns the nature of human beings (Murdoch 2001). She assumes that “human beings are selfish creatures” insofar as we have a tendency to turn inward, avoiding challenges to our worldviews. This is selfish to the extent that it prevents us from paying careful attention to what others say and do. She explains:

The psyche is a historically determined individual relentlessly looking after itself. ... One of its main pastimes is daydreaming. It is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation or through fictions of a theological nature. Even its loving is more often than not an assertion of the self. I think we can probably recognize this rather depressing description (Murdoch 2001, 77).

The point in raising this assumption about the selfish nature of human beings is not to insist that it is true that people are generally self-soothing, self-absorbed creatures. For Murdoch, this assumption is going to be the basis from which she develops a view of morality that argues that what is morally praiseworthy is activity that makes possible the avoidance of this tendency to self-console, the avoidance of “fac[ing] unpleasant realities.” She claims that ethics should offer both “an analysis of ordinary mediocre conduct” as well as an attempt at answering the question, “How can we make ourselves better?” (Murdoch 2001, 76) She suggests throughout the essay that moving away from this “powerful energy system of the self-defensive psyche” is key to this improvement. What I want to highlight about this description of human beings, which I then think makes Murdoch’s view helpful in shedding light on the moral aspects of the trauma case, is that the tendency to “constantly seek consolation...through imagined inflation” and being unable and unwilling to “face unpleasant realities” indicates an avoidance of attempting to “share worlds” or mutual intelligibility with a hypothetical other person. This characteristic that Murdoch describes is of someone who is actively refusing to pay careful

attention to something external to themselves — for instance, someone else and what they are able to share of their experiences, particularly if what they say challenges or threatens to upend deep-seated, familiar assumptions about the world.

Echoes of Murdoch's "depressing description" of human beings can be directly found in a passage in Brison's description of the non-survivor who struggles to identify with the trauma survivor:

Even those who are able to acknowledge the existence of violence try to protect themselves from the realization that the world in which it occurs is their world and so they find it hard to identify with the victim. They cannot allow themselves to imagine the victim's shattered life, or else their illusions about their own safety crumble. The most well-meaning individuals, caught up in the myth of their own immunity, can inadvertently add to the victim's suffering by suggesting that the attack was avoidable or somehow her fault (Brison 2002, 9).

The connections between Murdoch's and Brison's quotes are straightforward, as if one author had the other in mind. The psyche is "reluctant to face unpleasant realities," like the non-survivor who tries to "protect themselves from the realization that the world in which [the existence of violence] occurs is their world." Non-survivors can get "caught up in the myth of their own immunity," an example of the psyche that "constantly seeks isolation," for instance, through "imagined inflations." The psyche's consciousness is "designed to protect [it] from pain," which recalls the non-survivor's refusal to "imagine the victim's shattered life, or else their illusions about their own safety crumble." Brison writes that even "the most well-meaning individuals" can fall prey to this self-soothing, self-consoling thinking, which can be damaging to survivors. Returning again to her parents' response to the story of her assault, out of caution and with the best intentions, they send cards in which they ask, "Isn't everything nice?" and directs attention to the "bluebird of happiness." Brison acknowledges the unique pain that parents experience when their children are harmed and they can do nothing about it, and that it

must have been difficult for them to hear that their daughter was attacked and nearly murdered in broad daylight. Still, even in this most well-meaning and understandable response, so long as they do not give Brison the opportunity to share her story or to talk about the assault at all, the parents are in some sense reluctant to “face unpleasant realities” and are “seeking consolation,” desperately so.

The problem with the non-survivor’s refusal or inability to offer therapeutic recognition is a kind of selfishness because the survivor is not permitted to say what she needs, whether it is to vent, to try to think through the experience out loud with someone who will not shut her down or blame her, or to be distracted from the effects of trauma. Expression of herself on her own terms is blocked by the non-survivor’s efforts to self-soothingly preserve their sense of the world as safe, people as trustworthy, to refuse to acknowledge that abusive trauma is common and generally cannot be avoided or prevented as one might assume.

4.4.2 Murdoch on Intellectual Humility

Murdoch suggests that the disposition of intellectual humility is one prime example of how a person can be less selfish. Someone taking up the attitude of humility and honesty means that they are answerable to what is external to them, rather than the other way around. She illustrates this point with an example of studying a foreign language, in her case Russian, which I will use to draw a parallel to comment on the disposition of the non-survivor who is unable to offer therapeutic recognition to the survivor who shares her story.

If I am learning, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never really attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me. Attention is awarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny, or make unreal. The honesty and humility required of the student — not to pretend what one does not know — is the preparation for the honesty and humility of the scholar who does not feel tempted to suppress the fact which damns his theory (Murdoch 2001, 76).

Intellectual humility directs one's attention away from themselves and towards something or someone else — in this case, a foreign language. This attention is selfless in the sense that what one thinks, assumes, or wishes to be the case, are all set aside. Consider a student who is studying the French language and expresses skepticism about the merits of gendered nouns or referring to seventy as “sixty ten,” eighty as “four-twenty,” or ninety as “four-twenty-ten.” The student's opinions and wishes for the language to be structured and used differently is a different issue from the study, use, and command of the language. In this sense it is *not up to the student* whether it's a good idea to gender nouns or how to refer to the numbers between seventy and ninety-nine. The point here is that the intellectually humble student devotes concentrated attention towards something, appropriately setting aside their own concerns.

We should now be able to see the parallel between Murdoch's exemplary scholar and the ideal non-survivor who is confronted with a survivor's trauma narrative. Just as the honest and humble scholar “does not feel tempted to suppress the fact which damns his theory,” the non-survivor who can offer therapeutic recognition by listening to the survivor without judgment does not feel tempted to suppress the narrative that upends his sense of the world as safe, other people as trustworthy. More generally, the lesson is that intellectual humility prepares the moral agent to allow what someone says to challenge their moral assumptions and relationships with others. The “fact” that potentially damns the scholar's theory and the “narrative” that threatens to upend someone's understanding of the world both have the quality of being external to the scholar and the non-survivor, respectively. *It is not up to the scholar* what this fact consists in, and to what extent it threatens the coherence, consistency, or integrity of his theory. Likewise, there are things that are not up to the non-survivor who is faced with a survivor's trauma story. It is not up to the victim's assistance coordinator to decide what time of day Brison was attacked.

Surely a friend can offer advice if it is warranted, but it is not primarily up to her friend to decide the pace of her recovery. And although her family members were well-intended in their caution to remind Brison of the attack, it is not up to them to determine where to direct Brison's attention — whether on the “bluebird of happiness” or on her traumatic memories. Indeed, it can be helpful to have these latter forms of support try to offer ways to manage traumatic memories and reconnect with others, and surely there are ways to offer this kind of support that are more nuanced than saying “Buck up and move on” or sending cards that mention only positive generalities. But the larger point I am drawing attention to here is that the non-survivor's offers for support, intentions, wishes to avoid facing the realities of abusive trauma, are all secondary to the survivor's narrative and the need for others to confirm her sense that she is someone at all. Here then is a Murdochian way of explaining the wrongness of the inability to offer therapeutic recognition and share a world with the trauma survivor.

To be clear, my view here is not that when the non-survivor adopts the kind of humility described above, that they are necessarily able to offer therapeutic recognition, but that they are in a position to do so. With this kind of humility, the non-survivor is able to minimally be in a position of not knowing or fully understanding what the survivor is saying, letting the survivor be the one to teach the non-survivor something the latter knows little about. For the non-survivor, adopting this humility makes it possible to manage and tolerate the unfamiliar territory of the trauma survivor's narrative. This possibility opens the avenue of being able to offer therapeutic recognition — listening without judgment — which is what makes bridging the gap between the survivor and non-survivor possible. Listening without judgment requires a particular disposition of deference to the survivor and requires being able to say of the survivor: “It is not up to me whether her story is true, what her response or her thoughts or behavior post-

trauma should be like; I ought to offer her space to figure all of this out on her own terms.” In the next section, I will argue that the underlying characteristic of this disposition is a particular kind of *openness*, which I explain using Murdoch’s notion of a “just and loving regard” for another.

4.4.3 Opening to Being Challenged and Moved

One important aspect of offering therapeutic recognition to a trauma survivor I described in the previous chapter is shifting from thinking, “This kind of traumatic experience couldn’t happen to me” upon hearing the survivor’s story to realizing, “This could happen to me.” Intellectual humility is useful in making this shift because the survivor’s narrative and her sense that she is someone at all is prioritized over the various concerns and wishes the non-survivor’s carries. In the “This can’t happen to me” response, the non-survivor tries to understand the traumatic event by placing themselves in the survivor’s shoes, so to speak, and ultimately fails to do so by refusing to believe that abusive trauma, whether incest or assault by a stranger, could happen to them. This disposition is not intellectually humble because of the priority and centering of oneself in this imaginative exercise (which then fails). But to hear the survivor’s story, place oneself in her shoes, and realize, “this could happen to me,” places more weight on the traumatic event than on oneself or protecting one’s sense of safety and security. To make this shift, there is one more characteristic that we must lay out explicitly that helps us see the moral failure of not offering therapeutic recognition and the moral achievement in being able to offer it. I suggest that we turn to Murdoch’s idea of a “just and loving regard” from the essay “The Idea of Perfection”(Murdoch 2001) to understand an *openness* that is required to make this shift, and more generally to find the survivor’s narrative intelligible.

In this essay, Murdoch gives the example of a mother-in-law, M, who initially sees her daughter-in-law, D, in a negative light but comes to change this initial impression of D (Murdoch 2001, 16–17). M thinks that her “poor son has married a silly vulgar girl,” but time passes and M reflects on her judgment of D. She considers that she might be “old-fashioned,” “prejudiced,” “narrow-minded,” “snobbish,” and she admits that she is certainly jealous. So she says: “Let me look again.” Murdoch says that M’s “vision of D alters. . . . D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy, but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on” (Murdoch 2001, 17). She says of M in attempting to see D clearly, she is turning away from the “[temptation] to enjoy caricatures of D in her imagination”: “What M is *ex hypothesi* attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her *justly* or *lovingly*” (Murdoch 2001, 22, emphasis mine).

I want to focus on Murdoch’s sense that taking up a “just and loving” regard for someone or something constitutes moral activity. This idea clarifies the moral qualities of successfully offering therapeutic recognition to a trauma survivor, and conversely, the failure to offer it to a survivor. The shift from seeing D as a “silly vulgar girl” to regarding her in a “just and loving” way is moral because M is improving her vision of D. This shift in regard is just because she is clarifying her vision of D, removing conservatism, prejudice, narrow thinking, and elitism — none of which have to do with D but everything to do with M’s tendencies. Her vision of D was inaccurate in the sense that it was incomplete; it was clouded by her biases, her feelings, her old habits. Likewise, shifting from “this can’t happen to me” to “this can happen to me” is moral in the sense that the non-survivor is improving their vision of the survivor and her trauma story. And this shift in regard is just because the non-survivor is clarifying their understanding of the

world as capable of yielding abusive trauma regularly and the survivor's place in that world, and effectively correcting their sense of the world as predictable and safe.

A further way to interpret the "just" in the just and loving regard is to consider the notion of "openness." What makes the regard Murdoch describes just, and which I think applies in the trauma case, is that there is something fair that M is doing when she says, "Let me look again," but not where being fair means being "objective" and seeing something as anyone else would see it. Rather, M is being fair in that she is *open to being wrong*, to being corrected, to the need to look again because she may have made some mistake. She may have overlooked something, been biased, snobbish, and so on. In saying "let me look again," she is *open to being challenged*, creating space to have her views feel the stress of questions and doubts. The non-survivor who attempts to or successfully takes up the just and loving regard for the survivor similarly is open to being challenged about, among many possible assumptions and views, one's safety in the world and the extent to which others are trustworthy. In offering therapeutic recognition by listening to the details of the survivor's story without prematurely interrupting and judging the survivor, the non-survivor takes up this kind of *just* regard towards the survivor. It is important to note that the non-survivor is not only saying, "I don't know anything about these kinds of incidents," something like a declaration of bankruptcy, or a lack of understanding. The non-survivor is further adding that the trauma survivor's story might indicate that the non-survivor's understanding of the world might be wrong and in need of correction, which is an acknowledgment of something like a debt, a need to correct assumptions or beliefs.

The *loving* nature of the regard M describes can also be understood in terms of openness: there is an openness to being *moved* by what another says. We might say that M is open to altering her position, but not just by replacing beliefs found to be unsound, although this is also

true of M. But the further point is that M is open to altering the entire way she sees D: M not only thinks D is “not vulgar but refreshingly simple” and so on, but presumably, for instance, she also no longer thinks that her son has married beneath him. Her entire outlook on D has changed, such that, we might say, she feels *closer* to D. Similarly, it is not just a few beliefs here and there that are tweaked and altered when the non-survivor shifts from thinking of the trauma survivor’s story, “This can’t happen to me” to realizing, “This could happen to me.” Taking up this regard is not just to alter a position about something or someone, *but moving towards them*. This interpretation then takes loving to involve *closeness*, and so being moved is about a certain kind of metaphorical movement: being close to another person allows one to have the sense of joining another’s world. This interpretation fits with a common understanding of what it means to love another person in the romantic and familial sense: to want to be with them, not just physically, but in their world by being a significant part of their life in both quotidian and transformative moments.

To be in someone’s world or life in this way often involves adjustments and changes, usually on the part of both parties. When this kind of relational commitment is made, we would think that something is wrong if, to take a stock example, one person in a relationship was doing all of the housework, and the other person just left dirty dishes and laundry lying around. We would probably think that this other person ought to make the shift in thinking and behavior: at least put the dirty material in a designated location; contribute towards the cleaning of these materials; not get defensive when the old behavior is pointed out; and so on. The point is to not *always* to move towards the other, but to strike a healthy, however seemingly elusive, balance between the two parties moving towards one another. This kind of adjustment is, I think, following Murdoch, not just a change in behavior, but a kind of movement towards the other

person. It is moving away from old tendencies and habits that are incompatible with living with this other person, and moving towards a new, shared life with the other person. And what makes this movement moral is that it is a selfless or unselfish activity that draws oneself out of the tendency to retreat to familiar landscapes and instead attempt to join another's world.

Murdoch's idea of the just and loving regard helps to clarify the moral nature of offering therapeutic recognition as an achievement: the non-survivor diverts their attention away from themselves to face the "unpleasant reality" of the survivor's narrative to see it as clearly as possible, no matter how uncomfortable it makes them feel. Less obvious is the application of the just and loving regard that the survivor can take up towards herself. I will now explain how the survivor can take this regard for herself, particularly in the case of Precious, and the sense in which her work towards recovering her sense that she is someone at all is also a moral achievement.

4.4.4 "Moral Scratch Work"

Taking up the just and loving regard means being open to being challenged and moved, to better see the person or entity external to oneself clearly, as the proper object of that regard. What this means for the survivor is that she must do two things: first, taking up the regard is *to see clearly*, that is, openly in the ways described above; and second, what it is that she sees more clearly is herself, so she must *take herself* to be the proper object of the open regard. I do not mean to suggest that these tasks must be completed in order, but to separate the pieces of taking up a just and loving self-regard to better see and understand them. The former task may be facilitated by, for instance, seeing someone else partake in the just and loving regard as a model. This modeling of the regard might be directed toward oneself, or towards another, but the point is that there is an example to see, understand, and follow. Precious, I think, is able to eventually

take up a just and loving self- regard — she is able to become open to being challenged and moved by her own story — because she is able to see the just and loving regard modeled. First, it is exemplified by her alternative education teacher, who exercises it towards Precious and her classmates. Second, the regard is exemplified by herself when she is able to offer this regard with great ease to her son, even before he is born, for example, when she refuses to consider adoption despite her teacher's protest. That she was even in a position to argue with her teacher about whether to give her son up for adoption to focus on her education was indeed a sign that Precious was coming to a position where she could both engage in the act of an open, just and loving regard, and that she saw her own self as the proper object of that regard.

The challenge of each task is wrapped up in the other. The latter task of taking oneself as the proper object of the just and loving, or open, regard is particularly difficult not only because it may seem or feel unusual to take oneself as the object of a regard when one is used to regarding others instead, but primarily because the requirement of being open to challenge and being moved requires a significant amount of *vulnerability*. Being potentially wrong about anything, from assumptions about the world to one's own interpretation of one's experiences, requires not knowing with certainty, and thereby taking risks. People who are victimized by abusive trauma have had their physical and psychological vulnerability exploited, which then places them in a position where they at least have difficulty, if not are unable to, engage in the openness of the just and loving regard — either for others or for themselves. That is, whereas an untraumatized person can walk around in public — for example, in mass transit — with ease, someone who has been traumatized may feel she is unable to take the same risk of walking around in public, expecting not to be harmed. Two examples of this vulnerability where the just and loving self-regard come into play are in self-blame and in coming to articulate and label

one's experience as "abuse," "trauma," "incest," "assault," "rape," and so on. Recall from chapter two that self-blaming in the aftermath of trauma is one documented way trauma survivors attempt to regain control over one's life. To take up a just and loving regard towards oneself would be to remain being open to the possibility that the traumatic experience was not one's own fault. Relinquishing that little sense of control that a survivor has developed may feel too risky in the aftermath of a traumatic event, and so self-blame may seem like a rational option for the survivor.

The other example in articulating one's traumatic experience as, say, "abuse," "assault," "rape," "incest," etc., is best explained in an illustration from *Push* where Precious shifts from describing the flashbacks of incest to reflecting on the possibility, and later asserting both to herself and others, that she was raped by her father. After the birth of her son, Precious moves through various stages of becoming able to say of herself, to herself and to others, "I was raped by my father." Well before the birth of her son, and before she joins her class at the alternative education school, she can only recount extreme forms of abuse, primarily as paralyzing flashbacks. She may sense that this is wrong, but we just read descriptions of what happened to her in her past; she does not say that she was raped, that this ought not have happened to her, or that she was wronged. At this point, she does not take up the just and loving regard towards anyone, including herself, and neither does she see herself as the proper object of such a regard. She has no time or energy to question whether this is "rape" or "incest" or even a "bad" experience — she can only say it was an unpleasant experience, but not that it was "wrong" in any way. Such questioning requires the possibility that she is wrong, one way or another. If she thinks she does not deserve such unpleasant treatment from her father, or from her classmates who tease her about her weight, and she thinks she merits some basic amount of respect

everyone seems to be failing to express, she might be wrong: perhaps she really is the proper object of these unpleasant interactions, perhaps all these other people who treat her this way are right. After all, no one treats her with any respect. But if she thinks she does deserve this poor treatment from her parents, teachers, classmates, and neighbors, to question her experience would still invite the possibility of being wrong, even if being wrong would mean she thinks she does not deserve this poor treatment from others. The point is that these reflective exercises are a luxury: she is still in some part of “survival mode.”

But after her son’s birth, and after hearing examples of the use of the word “rape” in both Farrakhan, who she admires from a distance, and her teacher, who she personally admires and trusts, she considers that she might be a victim of rape and we read the phrase, “I think I was raped” (Sapphire 1996, 68). As a result of witnessing examples of sentences with the word “rape” in them, she sees that there are objects in this world — people — who can be subjected to a dehumanizing experience of a sexual nature called “rape.” Here she is considering herself as the proper object of a just and loving regard. She then quickly moves on to the assertion, “I was raped by my fahver” which entails that she see herself as the proper object of a just and loving regard (Sapphire 1996, 69). She sees herself now as someone who could be raped. Soon after she comes home from the hospital with her newborn son, her mother attempts to attack her, and in escaping the apartment, Precious exclaims to her mother, that she did not “steal” her husband as her mother claimed throughout Precious’s life, and shouts to her mother, “your husband RAPE me RAPE ME!” (Sapphire 1996, 74). She is no longer even the passive recipient of the terrible and immoral behavior (as in “I was raped by my father”), but the object of someone else’s unthinkable behavior towards her. Precious has come a long way, from passively experiencing flashbacks of traumatic experiences, to taking notes of examples of a just and

loving regard in others' behavior or language, to testing it out for herself and using her mother as a sample audience (but from whom she needs no feedback) before going on to face genuine audiences, like at the hospital when she has nowhere to go after she leaves her mother's home. There has been much preparatory work in taking up the open stance of the just and loving self-regard — indeed, “moral scratch work,” indispensable work that ought not be erased, and overlooked, just as the scratch work done in intellectual and academic work. She is then well on her way towards exercising it herself for others and for herself.

Being vulnerable in willing to be challenged or corrected is a task in itself, as shown above. But there is another aspect of this vulnerability for the survivor, which is in the openness of being moved. So far I have commented primarily on the kind of disposition and regard the non-survivor needs to take up in order to better understand the survivor, to be able to offer therapeutic recognition. In offering this recognition, the non-survivor is challenged to consider joining the survivor's world, so to speak. The non-survivor is also moved in the sense that as she is able to seriously consider, rather than deflect away from, the survivor's story and all that it entails, the non-survivor moves closer to the survivor and join her world. But in recovery, and in particular when she reaches out for support from others by sharing her story, the survivor is also being open to being moved. She is moving away from the uninhabitable world in which the traumatic event took place and in which she led a “spectral existence” in the immediate aftermath (however long “immediate” ends up being). In practicing being vulnerable, in the “moral scratch work” of, for instance, considering herself as the victim of rape, in asserting “I was raped” or “X raped me” to someone, she is moving away from that uninhabitable space and presumably trying to find a safe space to share with another who will “bear witness” to her

experiences. Thus the movement in bridging the gap between the non-survivor and the survivor who shares her story can be mutual.

4.5 **Mutual Movement**

The idea of mutual movement to establish and develop the relationship between the non-survivor and survivor returns us to two places in the dissertation, one point earlier in this chapter and another earlier in a previous chapter. First, mutual movement by both parties' parts returns us to the first two sections of this chapter, particularly to Cavell's views on morality, where the aim is not to agree on a singular position about what one ought to do, but to be intelligible to another and to find others intelligible. We also should see more clearly why Scanlon's contractualism is unable to provide the insights that Cavell's and Murdoch's theories provide in the trauma case. For Scanlon, what makes a failure a moral one is the lack of agreement on moral principles that guide one's action. Indeed, this may be a way to characterize the moral failure of certain relationships, and it may be that the trauma survivor can get to this point farther along the recovery process. But when someone cannot genuinely listen to the survivor and having the sense of sharing a world with her, then the moral failure is not a matter of agreement, but rather, about being able and willing to articulate and correct our beliefs and positions (which of course may affect our behaviors, but need not), and about movement and thereby closeness to one another. I have shown in this chapter that Cavell and Murdoch provide the conceptual apparatus to understand this kind of moral failure.

Mutual movement on the part of the survivor and non-survivor brings us back to an earlier point in chapter two as well in the discussion of control. The emphasis on both temporal and physical control is important if we think about movement: if the survivor is going to move away from the uninhabitable space of terror and its aftermath, she moves towards a shared space

with “those willing to bear witness” to her experiences as she learns to re-gain or gain control over her sense of her experiences as each equally real and perhaps with feminist self-defense practices, over her body. The survivor’s movement via temporal and physical control complements the efforts made on the part of the non-survivor to provide therapeutic recognition, a safe space to tell her story without judgment and to engage in the healing process. What allows the trauma survivor to see that there are safe spaces to tell one’s story, trustworthy people, in part is that *non-survivors provide such safe spaces and are actually trustworthy people*, that non-survivors help make it true that there are such spaces and people. Part of providing such a safe space is to acknowledge the traumatic event and the assumptions that come with it — one’s person is not as safe as one might initially have believed. But the safe space is also precisely one where those assumptions do not hold, or can at least be paused momentarily, where one’s body, story, sense of being someone at all — one’s self — *is* safe. In such a space, the non-survivor may realize that the world is not as rosy as they thought it was, and the survivor may realize that the world is not as absolutely dangerous as they thought it was. For the latter realization, a significant degree of temporal and physical control — control over one’s sense of the past as equally real as any other experience, perhaps underscored by physical control learned in self-defense training (or perhaps any other physical exercise or sport) — will be required.

Thus a blend of Cavell’s and Murdoch’s views of morality can generate productive insights into the post-trauma relations I am interested in: something like the disposition of intellectual humility is required for taking up the just and loving regard, which in turn can be interpreted as being open to being challenged and moved. Being open to being wrong and moved and thus being vulnerable constitute the moral fabric of mutual intelligibility, what constitutes the sense of sharing a world with others, for both the non-survivor and survivor.

Their relationship is not grounded in agreement of moral principles in large part because agreement of moral principles assumes shared worlds and mutual intelligibility. As such, agreement on what one ought to do cannot be the foundation of the therapeutic recognition offered by the non-survivor to the survivor, nor is it the foundation of the repair or bridging of the gap between the two parties.

The framework of mutual intelligibility and an openness to being challenged and moved helps us see more clearly the efforts required to offer and receive therapeutic recognition within the development of post-trauma relations. Moreover, this framework makes it easier to see that it is not so much that the trauma survivor does not put forth some kind of “special” work unique to trauma survivors in taking herself as someone at all, which would treat trauma as an anomaly, as a rare and “special” case that is treated separately from the framework or theory. Rather, in receiving therapeutic recognition, the survivor does the work of taking herself as someone at all, of taking up a just, loving, and thereby open regard, *under extreme and severe circumstances*. Meanwhile, “the rest of us” who are fortunate not to endure abusive trauma do so under relatively peaceful conditions. We can then see more clearly that *anyone* under her conditions would struggle as she does and would need the support that she does to recover her sense of self. It may be true that trauma survivors do “special” work in this sense, but perhaps the more important point is that survivors need extra support to do the same work the “rest of us” do in easier or at least simpler working conditions. The failure to offer the survivor support is not just a matter of rejecting or failing to accept her story or what she says, but it is also a failure to be open to being wrong and challenged and moved by what she says. Here I have taken the trauma case as a starting point to help us see the important aspects of moral conversation more clearly than if we had started with an ideal case where taking oneself as someone at all is taken for

granted. What we see, I have suggested in this chapter, is the moral significance of being understood by others in order to feel that we are someone at all, among others, equally real.

5. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have shown two aspects of the ability to take oneself as someone at all through the lens of severe abusive trauma as described by survivors. I have used a wide range of contemporary philosophers' works to make this phenomenon and its parts more visible. The list of authors I reference may not seem to be obviously connected, but what unites them all is the extent to which they can reveal and shed insight into the overlooked ability to take oneself as someone at all. I will close with a summary and some comments on the accomplishment of this work.

First, to take oneself as someone at all is to have temporal control, or the ability to see one's past events as equally real as other experiences. This problem manifests for trauma survivors as flashbacks, and I argued that flashbacks show the inability to take oneself as someone at all. Second, to take oneself as someone at all is to be able to receive another's therapeutic recognition, or non-judgmental recognition of one's significant or transformative experiences. Trauma survivors describe a sense of alienation from those who have not experienced trauma, which I argue should be understood as a lack of receiving therapeutic recognition from non-trauma survivors. I take the failure to offer therapeutic recognition to be a moral failure, and I described this as a lack of an openness to being challenged by what a survivor's trauma narrative implies about the lack of safety in our world and the untrustworthiness of others. Finally, throughout the dissertation, I have described this ability to see oneself as someone at all as having the sense of a shared world with others, where basic assumptions used to navigate the world and others are shared and a sense of existential isolation is avoided. I would like to close with two comments about the ability to take oneself as someone at all, which likely only serve as starting points for further investigation.

Taking oneself as someone at all is ultimately a practical ability. What I mean by this is that it is not a concept or an organizing principle for understanding ourselves, but rather, something that we *do*, something that we can practice and improve upon. Having temporal control, or seeing our experiences as each equally real so as not to be overwhelmed by past experiences, is an activity that one ultimately does on one's own, but I have suggested in the second chapter that this activity can be supplemented or even augmented by certain practices of physical activity. But I also believe that taking oneself as someone at all is best done, or culminates, with the support of and by interacting in meaningful ways with others. The problems of feeling extreme isolation, of being so overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness is best overcome through the support of others who can offer sincere confirmation of one's existence and the reality of one's past experiences.

Thus "we" who do not have direct experience with severe abusive trauma can get a clear sense of what it is that "we" take for granted by paying careful attention to what trauma survivors say of their experiences of life-threatening events at the hands of other people. I have tried to show that the ability to take oneself as someone at all is one such capacity that can be taken for granted and can be difficult to see. One important result of my investigation is that there is more space and conceptual language to understand the experiences and conditions of a wider range of people than has been traditionally allowed in the philosophical literature on the self. A potential way to develop the various themes elucidated in this dissertation is to continue investigating this ability of taking oneself as someone at all in other individuals or groups of people living in other extreme circumstances. In this way, by being more inclusive, philosophy in turn can be more thorough in its reflections on the self by expanding focus beyond cases where ideal or close-to-ideal conditions are assumed.

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 PHIL 107: Introduction to Philosophy of Art (Spring 2009, Spring 2015)
 PHIL 110: Philosophy of Love and Sex (Summer 2014)
 PHIL 591: Teaching Methods in Philosophy (Fall 2014)

As Teaching Assistant:

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy (Fall 2007, 2008, 2013)
 PHIL 102: Introduction to Symbolic Logic (Spring 2012, 2013, 2016)
 PHIL 103: Introduction to Ethics (Spring 2008)
 PHIL 110: Philosophy of Love and Sex (Fall 2009)
 PHIL 112: Morality and the Law (Spring 2010)
 PHIL 115: Death and Dying (Spring 2011)

Services

University of Chicago Alumni School Committee, Interviewer, 2016-2018
 UIC Philosophy Course Publicity Contributor, 2014
 UIC Philosophy Department Librarian, 2012-2013
 UIC Philosophy Social Media Coordinator, 2012-2013

Languages

Japanese: Native fluency; advanced reading and writing
 French: Competence in reading, writing and speaking