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Integrating Post-Hegelian and Psychoanalytic Perspectives: Jessica Benjamin's Contribution to Civil Philosophy

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Introduction

Jessica Benjamin is well known in psychoanalytic circles for her conception of intersubjectivity. Psychoanalytic discussants of her work are aware of its normative import but for the most part they leave either implicit or unexamined Benjamin's engagement with political or social thought. Benjamin is a practising psychoanalyst who regularly contributes to clinically informed psychoanalytic thought, and it is not surprising that this set of commitments are at the forefront of the current reception of her work. Yet her background in Hegelian recognition theory and post-Hegelian critical theory (most explicit in her early work) as well as her sustained work with the implications of second wave feminist thought and activism for psychoanalytic thought suggest that it is not arbitrary to consider her as a social and political thinker as well. Here I focus on Benjamin's conception of intersubjectivity in relation to the project of civil philosophy. This task has two aspects: first whether Jessica Benjamin's thought is usefully illuminated by regarding it as a contribution to a contemporary civil philosophy; second whether civil philosophy needs to be developed by such a contribution referring as it does to intimate relationships of parenting, love and therapeutically-facilitated growth that heretofore have been left outside its scope?

I should clarify what I mean by civil philosophy. Civil philosophy refers to a body of political thought that accords the world of human affairs, as Hannah Arendt called it, its own integrity and sui generis character.[i] The world of human affairs is detached from any otherworldly or transcendental conception of being. It is not necessarily that this 'eternal' order of being (Arendt 1958) is refused; rather, the world of human affairs is accorded its own, autonomous reality. All professions of religious faith are desacralized in this sphere; they are turned into a plurality of distinct, and contestable private professions of belief.

The reason why the world of human affairs is accorded its own integrity is not obvious, and should be clarified. It resides in a twofold normative commitment to first, the *sui generis* nature of being human, and, second, to the equality of human beings as distinct or unique instantiations of this sui generis mode of being. From the outset there is ruled out any hierarchical valuing of some humans in relation to others, a valuing that follows if one type of profession of belief is regarded as the only true one in relation to its competitors. Considering their this-worldly life and relationships, human beings are valued in what it is they have in common, namely their humanity, and, as distinct human beings, they are equally valued. From this perspective peaceful co-existence, and the other side of the same coin, personal security emerge as the primary good. Social pacification, then, as the primary good concerns the conditions necessary for securing the personhood of each individual as this is expressed in his or her action and relationships. It means that each person should be

free to engage their own projects, to live their own life, and to relate to others, without fear of domination, enslavement, or subjection to some form of human coercion or violence, however it is justified. The rationale for the state's power, authority, and sphere of action resides in what it must do to provide for such freedom; and the limits of this rationale mark the limits of legitimate state power, authority and action. This political vision remains as radical as it ever was.

In classical civil philosophy, associated with the early modern era, this being the prototype of civil philosophy (see Ian Hunter), the question of how a peaceful co-existence needed to be thought about and instituted occurred in context of sustained religious civil war. The *dramatis personae* in this conception of civil philosophy are adult men, many of whom are householders responsible for the material and spiritual welfare of those who come under their household jurisdiction. In this account, either rational acceptance of the necessity of such subjection, and/or fear of the state's authority, count as sufficient grounds for civil subjection. Individuals learn how to comport themselves on the terms of civil association as these are provided by the state's provision of a lawful framing of conduct and of punishment of breaches of the law.

As Hegel suggests in *The Philosophy of Right*, this account of civil conduct is limited because it relies essentially on an external set of prompts, even if these are internalized, rather than on an inner subjective capacity, self-awareness. This is not all that Hegel suggests. Far more radically than is evident in early modern civil philosophy, Hegel emphasises the extraordinary ethical and political challenge that attends the development and presence of the human being as a person, that is, as someone invited to be present in relation to both other human beings and the non-human world as the distinct subject or person that he or she is, as someone invited to exist as a self. Hegel proposes that the phenomenology of selfhood opens up a process whereby the subject who risks selfhood asserts (him)self. The claim that I *qua* self exist in the form of asserting a will that is mine is the elementary expression of personhood. At first, this process is driven by an abstract and absolute form of self-assertion that places all that is not pure will outside the self, and in this exteriority, as threatening the existence of the self. Yet this contra-positioning of pure will and that which lies outside the will dooms the self to lack of finding a way of becoming effective in relation to other selves and things. Hegel recasts civil philosophy in more psychological terms to encompass the processes by which the self can learn how to reconcile its need for self-assertion with its necessary dependence on other human subjects and things.[ii] Hegel shows that self-assertion acquires practical efficacy only if the self accepts that s/he is dependent on other selves for their recognition of his/her self-expression in his/her action (including how he/she has shaped or produced things to reflect his agency). The capacity for civil conduct on this account is a developmental achievement that is situated within a world that is structured as a practical project of co-existence between selves.

Hegel's development of civil philosophy is noteworthy for how it situates both the problem that civility is intended to address and the conditions of possibility of civility within the subjective dynamics of a society of selves. For Hegel, violence understood as violation of the existence of the other as a self is intrinsic to the project of living life as a self. In exploring what it means to be as pure will, the self renders all that is non-self as a legitimate vehicle or instrument of its expression; it therefore seeks to position the other as an instrument of its will, as a slave. Yet in so doing, the self

destroys the possibility of its recognition by the other, for denial of the slave's subjectivity makes it impossible for the slave to provide recognition of the self. It is this experience that teaches the subject that self-consciousness can only be recognised by another self-consciousness; this is the achievement of intersubjectivity. The slave, moreover, has something denied the master: the slave has the pleasure of objectifying his agency in things that he has worked on, and achieves an understanding of what is involved in making his subjectivity a worldly reality.

Hegel offers a fascinating and compelling account of how both domination and intersubjectivity are ever-present possibilities within the society of selves. In this way both domination and intersubjectivity belong *within* the civil condition, a suggestion that is rich in its implications. Hegel does not give up the early modern civil philosopher's insistence on the sovereign authority of the state as the public authority. Arguably he fills out the substance of this public authority in providing the lawful ordering of relationships so that they function as civil in character. Yet his emphasis is on the subjective dynamics of the self in the company of other selves, and on the process of the self's education as to the conditions of its existence. The early modern civil philosophers can be said to have discovered the project of selfhood in a private attachment to religious faith, but they resorted to the established mode of containment for selfhood in their type of society: the provision of a superior authority with the power to impose its will in order to secure the well-being of those under its jurisdiction. The radical shift they made in relation to this established patrimonial conception of superior authority, one that was organised in terms of a hierarchical relationship between the superior and his inferiors (I am drawing on Ian Harris's account of the hierarchical order that John Locke experienced and largely reproduced in his political thought), was the idea of equality of personhood. This shift required authority now to be thought of in terms that was reconcilable with equality, an impossible challenge for the patrimonial idea of authority. An uneasy compromise is made: the state is modelled on the hierarchical relationship between superior and inferior, while the terms of political association involve a social contract between equal persons.

Hegel's turn to the subjective dynamics of selfhood can presuppose the already established understanding of the need for the state as the public authority, and it shifts attention not just to what it means for a human being to exist as a self, but to how relationships between selves function. It is in this context that Jessica Benjamin's work can be appreciated. She not only works directly with the Hegelian exploration of intersubjectivity, she also works with post-Hegelian Critical Theory's analysis of capitalism in terms of the instrumental culture of domination, and with Critical Theory's use of Freud's account of the development of the self in terms of the internalization of paternal authority in the formation of a superego. In both cases she exposes the tendency for the Hegelian schema to trapped by its starting point–the singular rather than plural self as the subject for which all else appears as object for its desire and will. Benjamin insists on a different point of departure: not the singular subject who discovers that other subjects exist and that he needs them, but subject*s* plural, and already in relationship with each other. Their relationship or mutuality is as primary as the dynamics of their respective self-assertion.

Benjamin's feminist commitment drives her rejection of what she (and second wave feminist theory generally) calls gender polarity. Gender polarity, she argues, is what structures the psychic dynamics of the instrumental culture of a subject-object

relationship, it is these dynamics that underpin Freud's account of the oedipal crisis and its solipsistic resolution for the male subject, it is these dynamics that underwrite the male subject's investment in domination and the female subject's difficulty with self-assertion, and, finally, it is these dynamics that produce an inability to experience and value the self as a whole.

Benjamin transforms the Hegelian schema of the dynamics of selfhood with her insistence that we begin with a subject-subject relationship. Benjamin has been an important and creative contributor to how second-wave feminist thought and post-Freudian 'relational' thought could enhance each other. In the historically dynamic elaboration of this set of relationships over the period from 1978 until the present, she has helped to discursively constitute the culture of civility that she is committed to enabling in her clinical practice. This is a culture of civility that is structured in terms of subject-to-subject relating, that is where each is able to accept and recognise the 'separate subjectivity of the other' (First 2010, 683), and to 'take pleasure in the difference of the other's independent subjectivity (Benjamin 2000b, 48)'. In this culture authority has to be recast: it can no longer assume the form of the imposition of the superior's will, and instead it has to be embedded within and give voice to intersubjective process.

A society of selves

Benjamin's orientation to intersubjectivity makes sense only in relation to her taking as her own the problematic that centres on what it means to be a self in the society of other selves. This problematic is distinctly modern, indeed late modern, in character. It simply does not arise in the patrimonial kind of social order that Ian Harris attributes to the seventeenth century England of John Locke:

> Central to Locke's England was the notion and presence of superiority. Everyone had a superior. The servant had a master and the child parents. The parent too found his or her superior in the magistrate. Magistrates were themselves formed into a hierarchy, rising from the most humble justice of the peace to the monarch himself. The monarch too had a superior, for above all stood God (Harris, 1994, 17).

Superiority resided in capacities that inferiors lacked but on which they were dependent (Harris 1994, 18); it is these capacities that justify the superior's authority over his inferiors and require of him that he attend to their spiritual and material welfare. Locke (*Second Treatise of Government*, chapters 6 and 7) argues that equal personhood has to accommodate (and thus be compromised by) the different status conditions of being a wife, child, or servant, each of these placing the person concerned under the jurisdiction of the head of household.

The principle of hierarchy extends to the inner world of personhood and is expressed in different versions of the doctrine of *homo duplex*, the notion that human nature is divided between a higher and a lower part, the first associated with what is thought of as reason, and the second associated with what is thought of as animal instincts. The nature of this division is hierarchical with reason coming to master and regulate instinct. Rationalist thinkers such as Hegel, Freud, and Durkheim share this doctrine. The infant – the child prior to the acquisition of the capacity for speech—is thought of as not yet a subject or self, and until the child internalises the law or the ethical regime of instinctual regulation, he is viewed as outside civil society. Hegel

associates what he calls the habit of the ethical with a second nature which is acquired through education: 'Education [*Pädagogik*]is the art of making human beings ethical: it considers them as natural beings and shows them how they can be reborn, and how their original nature can be transformed into a second, spiritual nature so that this spirituality becomes habitual to them (Hegel 1991, §151, 195, emphasis in the original).' In this version of *homo duplex*, which opposes a second to an original nature, it makes sense for Hegel to speak of breaking the child's will: 'One of the chief moments in a child's upbringing is discipline, the purpose of which is to break the child's self-will in order to eradicate the merely sensuous and natural (Hegel 1991, §174, 211). Sex difference in this framework of thought is elaborated to become different roles each parent plays with regard to the child, the father instantiating the ethical demands of the state and civil society which reside in learning, work 'and struggle with the external world and with himself', the mother instantiating the internal ethic of the family which resides in feeling and piety (Hegel 1991, §166, 206). The hierarchical relationship of the second ethical nature to the original one is given expression in the husband's headship of the family: 'The family as a legal [*rechtliche*] person in relation to others must be represented by the husband as its head (Hegel 1991, §171, 209).'

The doctrine of *homo duplex* when conjoined with the idea of the human being as an individual or person in his or her own right involves an unstable and contradictory state of affairs. Equal personhood suggests the integrity of each human being as a self or centre of subjective life while *homo duplex* divides and splits this integrity in such a way as to justify a hierarchical order both between humans and within them

The essential normative commitment of Benjamin's work resides in the idea of the human being as a self in the company of other selves. As a self, the human individual is invited to be present in social life as a unique centre of initiative. In context of psychoanalytic discussions, Philip Ringstrom (2010a, 203) correctly identifies what is as stake for Benjamin as a 'relationalist' thinker: 'the need to distinguish the experiential subjective reality of the other as a separate subject from one's sense of self as subject.' He continues: 'That means recognizing the other as having her own centre of initiative, her own agency, her own mind, and that requires coming to terms with ways in which one represents the other in fantasy as opposed to how the other actually experiences her subjective sense of reality.'

Benjamin carves out the conditions of possibility of intersubjectivity in context of a political-practical (feminist) critique of the solipsistic conception of selfhood. For Benjamin, intersubjectivity is constantly breaking down with one or other self, and maybe both, refusing or unable to sustain the tension between self-assertion and mutuality, and letting mutuality be foreclosed by self-assertion. This emphasis in her work on breakdown and failures of mutuality as well as on the various forms of mutual recognition is not only consistent but arises out of a deeply considered practical politics: 'my theorizing of intersubjectivity aims clinically not at positing a simple ideal of mutual recognition but at viewing recognition and breakdown dialectically, enabling us to analyse breakdown and the way out of it (Benjamin 2000b, 50). When breakdown occurs, both subjects, Benjamin suggests, are likely to feel caught in what she calls a structure of complementarity: do or be done to. Even though one subject may assume the position of doer, the apparently effective assertion of his will occurs in a context where there is no mutuality, no space for each to be alive in relation to the other. Benjamin shifts our understanding of domination here.

It is no longer as simple a matter of one subject dominating another; to see it like this in fact is to invest in the psychic structure of complementarity. Rather she suggests there to be 'a deeper symmetry that characterizes power relations': 'Each feels unable to gain the other's recognition, and each feels held by the other's power –an unconscious symmetry that denies the actual power relation (Benjamin 2000b, 53).' Benjamin (2000b, 50) further clarifies 'the structural characteristics of complementarity in which the other's subjectivity is felt not as an outside separate being but as "doing something to me, making me feel something," which appears to offer the choice only of submit or resist.' The characteristic feature of complementarity is she suggests the inability 'to distinguish "is it you, or is it me?" (Benjamin, citing Pizer citing Russell, 20001, 51).' It is in our ability to recognize breakdown when it occurs, which resides in our willingness to know what it feels like, that the opportunity to repair mutuality resides. However, this opportunity depends fundamentally on our ability to *accept* breakdown as normal and recurrent, and to give up the moralism of thinking we can somehow be outside or beyond domination.

Keeping the clinician's role in mind, Benjamin is interested in how this acceptance can transform the experience of complementarity from being one of shameful participation in domination to a creative working with an opportunity to learn more about what it is the patient may need the analyst to understand:

> … an intersubjective view regards breakdowns as structurally built into relationships. One way to say this is that the complementary structure is necessary in order to reveal the paranoid-schizoid parts of the patient that are there to get treated. Unfortunately, once under way this structure will certainly draw out the analyst's corresponding parts, enveloping her mind to one degree or other. Only by enlisting the analyst's subjectivity to play the opposing part in the split can the patient hope to reveal certain parts of self. (…)
>
> The question is whether the dramatic play that is enactment can be performed differently when the analyst knows it is happening and succeeds in "playing" the part (this usually happens when the patient is helping or when the patient and analyst have been there many times before). … Ultimately, as the relational position emphasizes, psychoanalysis is about being able to speak about what has occurred between analyst and patient (Benjamin 2000b, 52).

Benjamin offers what we might term a pragmatics of self-awareness in her work. While mostly couched in the clinical discourse of psychoanalysis, it is a political project for the question of how human beings are to act and relate as selves is a political question. In her insistence on a dialectics of achievement, failure and breakdown of mutuality, Benjamin embraces the decidedly unsentimental normativity of civil philosophy. There may be a tension between her political project and clinical work as Reis (2010a, 234) suggests, but if there is, it is because these are two distinct registers of action, not because Benjamin's conception of mutual recognition is ideologically normative in the way that Reis suggests it is.[iii] There is nothing nice about a society of selves; domination inheres in the project of selfhood, just as intersubjectivity does.

Jessica Benjamin's account of intersubjectivity

Jessica Benjamin is interested in the question of how do each of these subjects come to do something other than enact what she calls the structure of complementarity, the structure of domination, and become present to each other, thereby facing what she calls 'the double task of recognition': how does each subject make known their own subjectivity and recognise the other's (Benjamin 1998, xii)? She agrees with Hegel that inherent in the subject's self-assertion is the absoluteness of the simple posit 'I am', all that exists is me, the principle of omnipotence. What she works with is the self-defeating nature of this assertion, that in turning everything into a projection of the self, there is nothing external to the self, and specifically no other self who, in knowing what it is to be a self, is able to recognise this claim to self-ness on the part of the subject. She is still within Hegel's analysis, but she is interested in how Hegel and classical psychoanalysis are unable to overcome the monadic orientation of their starting point: the single subject who asserts itself. To clear the space for her starting point in a subject-subject relationship, she does two things. First, she engages in critique of classical Freudian psychoanalytic thinking both as such and as it was expressed in the post-Hegelian Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental culture (see Benjamin 1978). Second, she discovers in Winnicott's psychoanalytic thinking a resource for enabling her 'intersubjective' development of the Hegelian schema.

Benjamin's critique of classical Freudian psychoanalysis is self-consciously perspectival: two perspectives orient it.[iv] The first of these is that of the child, and especially of the daughter, who wants to be something other than the object of parental pedagogy, or the instrument of realising the parent's needs, who above all wants to be recognized for who she is, someone who is a self in her own right. If she is to be recognised as the distinct being she is, then she has to be accepted in the wholeness of how this distinct being manifests. It is in Benjamin's dissertation that this standpoint is most manifest. There she offers a critique of the Freudian idea of internalization, the process whereby the subject acquires an intra-psychic capacity for self-mastery, as a process that requires the subject to split 'good' and 'bad' objects. Benjamin (1978) argues that Freud's emphasis on the formation of the superego via the mechanisms of identification and internalization naturalises something that Freud could not work with: 'the reality of parental power (Benjamin 1978, 45).' Freud was unable to see 'the social origins of internalization', these residing in the aspects of parent-child interaction that he neglected: 'the denial of recognition, the imposition of meaning, and the invalidation of the child's fears, perceptions and autonomous acts (Benjamin 1978, 45).' Splitting involves the internalization of the instrumental culture of the subject/object relationship (Benjamin 1978, 80). The outcome of splitting is domination, a three-fold relationship of domination by the subject over its own nature, the domination of the other subject, and the domination of the natural world (Benjamin 1978, 80). Splitting makes it impossible to be a 'a whole self' (Benjamin 1978, 263), and it involves a process whereby the subject projects onto others his internal division between 'good' and 'bad', thereby making it impossible for him to accept others in their wholeness as selves, and instead leading him to treat himself and others in terms of how well or not they perform.[v] In the following passage from her dissertation, we can hear a passionate defence of the desire of the child to be accepted for who he or she is by his or her parents:

> The central variable in determining the degree of splitting is whether the
> parents themselves are able to perceive the child as whole and allow
> themselves to be perceived as such. (…) If the parents' determination to be
> thought good overrides their recognition of the child's feelings, this wholeness

perishes. Splitting occurs to the extent that the parents themselves are defending against their own 'badness'. Their ability to accept that the child will not always be like them, mind them, accept them, respond properly, are essential to the child's ability to accept them 'realistically'. This depends upon the degree of differentiation the parents are able to maintain, the degree of autonomy and separation they have achieved from their own parents (Benjamin 1978, 250).

In her suggestion that the parents will be able to accept the child's separateness and distinctness of being only if they have achieved this for themselves, Benjamin implies a historically situated intergenerational struggle for a non-authoritarian individuation (the term 'authoritarian individuation' occurs in Benjamin 1978, 130). She also provides a bridge to what becomes a major theme in her work, namely Benjamin's feminist insistence that only if the mother is positioned as a subject in her own right can the infant-mother relationship be realised as a subject-to-subject relationship. In her argument that Freudian psychoanalysis does not position the mother as a subject in the infant-mother relationship, Benjamin is not only indicting psychoanalysis, she is treating it as a powerful contributor to the structure of domination that denies the mother's subject status. Benjamin throws down the gauntlet in *The Bonds of Love*: 'No psychological theory has adequately articulated the mother's independent existence' (Benjamin 1988, 23).

Since Benjamin does not want to overcome, but to retain the monadic phenomenology of how self-assertion can collapse into domination, she wants us to learn from the psychoanalytic depiction of this phenomenology. It is her keeping in play the historically complex and layered landscape of different kinds and degrees of individuation, and her refusal to say that we can ever leave behind what she demonstrates to be the inherent gender polarity of domination, that ensures that her conception of mutual recognition is rich, historically specific, and experientially dynamic. Her work contributes to the historical experiences that it investigates; the possibilities she discerns are given weight by her ability to recognise and name them. As she says: 'The position from which I write—that of a psychoanalyst involved from the beginning with feminist thought—is not one that can rely on the well-worn grooves of an established discourse. Rather it is located in the context of a tension between the discourses of psychoanalysis and feminist theory (Benjamin 1995, 1).'

Benjamin says she 'began her fascination with psychoanalysis as an undergraduate reading Freud and Marcuse with the hope of finding in psychoanalysis the answer to the great social questions of the 60s (Benjamin 2000a, 292).' In discovering the 'Freudian orthodoxy' of the Frankfurt School (Benjamin 20001, 292), she says 'I found my way toward an appreciation of Sullivan and British object relations', the Middle school associated with Fairbairn, Winnicott, Bollas and others.[vi] She could use the indication of empirical infant research that prior to speech acquisition, and from birth, the baby already exists as a distinct subject and is engaged in a reciprocally communicative relationship with its mother. In *The Bonds of Love* (1988, 12), referring to the shift of psychoanalytic focus from oedipal to pre-oedipal development, Benjamin comments, 'The last twenty five years have seen a flowering of psychoanalytic theories about the early growth of the self in the relationship with the other.'

I now briefly present the argument of *The Bonds of Love*, since the essentials of her argument are to be found here. She declares intersubjectivity as her point of departure, proposing that infant research and Bowlby's research on attachment demonstrate that sociability is a primary not secondary phenomenon, and that it is 'two living subjects' who are involved in the challenge of coexistence (Benjamin 1988, 16). Her target is the monadic Freudian account of the subject for whom the caregiver appears 'as the object of the baby's need, rather than as a specific person with an independent existence'. The Freudian baby is somewhat autistic: 'the baby's relationship with the world was only shaped by the need for food and comfort, as represented by the breast; it did not include any of the curiosity and responsiveness to sight and sound, face and voice, that are incipiently social (Benjamin 1988, 16).'

In explaining her 'intersubjective view', Benjamin (1988, 19) says it emerges '[f]rom the study of the self who suffers the lack of recognition as well as the new perception of the active, social infant who can respond to and differentiate others'. She acknowledges her debt to Habermas for the concept of intersubjectivity, and says 'I have taken the concept as a theoretical standpoint from which to criticize the exclusively intrapsychic conception of the individual in psychoanalysis (Benjamin 1988, 19-20).' She clarifies how she will use the terms mutual recognition and intersubjectivity, each of these seeming to stand in for the other: 'Because intersubjectivity refers both to a capacity and to a theoretical standpoint, I will generally call the capacity recognition and the theory intersubjectivity (Benjamin 1988, 20).' Benjamin does not reject the intrapsychic view, but resituates it so that it is placed in relationship to the intersubjective view: these become 'complementary ways of understanding the psyche (Benjamin 1988, 20)'. The intrapsychic world of the self is dynamically linked to the experience of the self in relating to others. This means that the intrapsychic world of the self never becomes a closed system. In potentially being open to new kinds of experience in relating to others, experience of a kind that defensive intrapsychic structures cannot accommodate, it is clear that the person is not reducible to its intrapsychic determinations. At the same time the intersubjective encounter is influenced and shadowed by, the unconscious aspects of intrapsychic life.

Of the need for recognition, Benjamin follows through the Hegelian proposition that the self needs confirmation of its existence in the recognition of the other:

> A person comes to feel that "I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts," by being with another person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her existence, her independence. Recognition is the essential response, the constant companion of assertion. The subject declares, "I am, I do," and then waits for the response, "You are, you have done." Recognition is, thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response (Benjamin 1988, 21).

Recognition is so essential to the sense of self that Benjamin compares it to the 'essential element in photosynthesis, sunlight, which provides the energy for the plant's constant transformation of substance.' It is recognition that, as the expression of the aliveness of the subject who recognises, confirms the sense of being alive as the distinct being that one is for the subject who is recognised. It is literally a 'life-giving exchange' (Benjamin 1988, 22).

By sense of self, Benjamin means something like Winnicott's conception of an inherited potential: as she puts it, 'innate capacities for activity and receptivity towards the world (Benjamin 1988, 125).' In later work she (1995) uses Christopher Bollas's (1989) development of Winnicott's conception of the self as the idea of the unique idiom of the individual.

Self-other differentiation is a continuous process for the two (or more) subjects are continually negotiating their likeness (as each a self) and their distinctness as different selves. This is something entirely different from the classical psychoanalytic conception of relationship as either separation or fusion (symbiosis). Attunement between mother and baby, or between lovers in erotic play, does not involve the collapse of differentiation. The joy of such a dance is found in 'pleasure in being with the other (Benjamin 1988, 31.

Benjamin proposes that the continuing process of self-other differentiation involves an ability to live and work with the paradox of recognition: a fundamental tension between self-assertion and dependence of the self on the other for its recognition. Instead of resolving this paradox, Benjamin wants to keep its tension alive: 'The ideal "resolution" of the paradox of recognition is for it to continue as a constant tension, but this is not envisaged by Hegel, nor is it given much place in psychoanalysis (Benjamin 1988, 36).'

The paradoxical nature of intersubjectivity is a theme that Benjamin sustains throughout her work. Matching the baby's paradoxical experience of needing to assert itself yet being deeply dependent on the maternal other for recognition of its self-assertion, is the challenge for the mother that she accept the paradox of both being deeply connected to her baby while also needing to recognize her baby's independence as a subject in its own right (Benjamin 1988, 14-15). Domination, for Benjamin occurs, when for one reason or another the ability to sustain paradox is lacking: 'the inability to sustain paradox in…interaction can, and often does, convert the exchange of recognition into domination and submission (Benjamin 1988, 12).

Unsurprisingly the ability to sustain paradox in the child is linked to this ability in the maternal subject. In later work Benjamin (2004, 13) talks of the importance of there being a 'mental space of thirdness in the caretaker', which will be communicated to the child, a space that the caretaker creates in 'being able to hold in tension her subjectivity/desire/awareness and the needs of the child.' Benjamin explores this proposition in two ways. The first is her use of Winnicott's (1971) account of the infant's development of the ability to use the object. The second is her critique of gender splitting and her exploration of the conditions for over-inclusive gender identification.

How is the baby to develop an efficacious and creative sense of self, a sense of being alive in relation to other subjects and things? If the baby/analysand only relates to the world in terms of its intrapsychic projections, creative possibilities of learning from and being enriched by this world are denied the subject. Specifically, the subject is also denied the recognition of other subjects for to enjoy this recognition, the subject has to be able to accept and reckon with the external reality of these subjects. Winnicott argues that the baby has to develop 'a capacity to use an object'. This occurs through a process whereby the subject destroys the object, but discovers that the object, the other subject, actually survives this attack. In effect, the subject

discovers that it is possible to destroy the object intra-psychically, yet the other continues to exist 'as an entity in its own right' despite this. This can occur only if the mother/analyst does not react, either defending against the attack, or counter-attacking. The mother/analyst has to be able to stay present, connected and constant without retaliating or walking away. 'Destruction, in other words, is an effort to differentiate' in Benjamin's (1988, 38) language:

> In childhood, if things go well, destruction results simply in survival; in adulthood, destruction includes the intention to discover if the other will survive. Winnicott's conception of destruction is innocent; it is best understood as a refusal, a negation, the mental experience of "You do not exist for me," whose favorable outcome is pleasure in the other's survival. When I act upon the other it is vital that he be affected, so that I know that I exist—but not completely destroyed, so that I know he also exists (Benjamin 1988, 38).

Winnicott (1992) is explicit that the mother/analyst need to know and accept her hatred for the baby/analysand, especially in relation to these attacks on her, which enables her not to act out this hatred in retaliation. For Benjamin, of course, the question is whether the mother can be available in this way if she is not culturally positioned as a subject. Benjamin finds in Winnicott a powerful theoretical-psychoanalytic resource for keeping both recognition and destruction in play in a way that Hegel was not able to achieve:

> It seemed amazing to find in Winnicott (1971) a psychoanalytic basis for that very intersubjective tension between recognition and destruction that Hegel first elaborated. What Winnicott offered, unlike Hegel, was an avenue to recognition that encompasses the negative, a reaction to destruction in a non-persecutory way that transforms it into an enlivening, if painful, encounter with limits and externality (Benjamin 2000a, 293).

Let us turn to Benjamin's historical account of gender splitting as the basis of domination. She is interested in 'how domination actually works' (Benjamin 1988, 4), and especially in how it is 'anchored in the hearts of the dominated' (Benjamin 1988, 5). Benjamin's *is* a normative enquiry into the conditions of possibility of non-domination, but, at the same time, she is arguing that if we think we can 'solve' domination, we are not only engaging in illusion but also reinventing the binary structure of which it is part:

> In order to challenge the sexual split which permeates our psychic, cultural and social life, it is necessary to criticize not only the idealization of the masculine side, but also the reactive valorization of femininity. What is necessary is not to take sides but to remain focused on the dualistic structure itself (Benjamin 1988, 9).

In calling into question 'the splitting of gender polarity' Benjamin (2000a, 306) is not questioning sexual difference, and the salience it has always been given in psychoanalysis.

In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin (1988, 52) suggests that '[d]omination begins with the attempt to deny dependency.' This denial is expressed as a desire for omnipotence. Such a desire is relational requiring another that submits and identifies with the subject's omnipotence. In exploring the social structure of gender splitting, Benjamin

demonstrates how it is self-replicating. Her focus is on the rapprochement phase when the toddler is negotiating individuation-separation in relation to the mother on whom s/he has been so profoundly dependent. The boy does not achieve differentiation in relation to his mother, but rather rejects both her and his earlier state of infantile dependency on her, once he is old enough to identify with his father's emblematic masculine independence. The girl, on the other hand, is in a different position. If she turns to her father as an alternative object of identification, she turns in the direction of a figure whose subjectivity involves a splitting off of all that is identified with femininity: dependence, and passivity. Her father may narcissistically accept her identification with him as his due, and, simultaneously, reject her right to make it, which places his daughter at risk of both idealizing and envying masculinity: 'many girls are left with a lifelong admiration for individuals who get away with their sense of omnipotence intact; and they express their admiration in relationships of overt or unconscious submission (Benjamin 1988, 109).'

Benjamin's focus on the daughter brings together the two subject positions that inform her critique—being child, and being woman. In both the *Bonds of Love*, and *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (1995), Benjamin's analysis is fascinating for what it suggests of the daughters' struggle to find a feminist vision that actually accepts their deep implication in the psychic structures of gender splitting. She continually refuses what is so tempting for feminists, either a reversal of the usual hierarchical valuing of gender polarity, or a denial of its force in the adoption of some form of facile equal opportunity feminism.

At the same time, Benjamin conjures 'an altered culture of gendered expectations and parenting' where both parents 'can be figures of separation and attachment for their children.' This is a culture where men are available as parents, where men and women are practically experimenting with equality by abandoning mutually exclusive roles (Benjamin 1988, 114). Both male and female children need to be able to identify with a father who accepts this identification, and both of them need also to be able to identify with a mother who is 'articulated as a sexual *subject*, one who expresses her own desire (Benjamin 1988, 114, emphasis in the original).' Benjamin emphasises that the daughter's identification with her father, even if he accepts it, continues to be problematic unless she can also draw 'a sense of self from her mother (Benjamin 1988, 114).' Benjamin wants it to be possible for both boys and girls in their developmental trajectories to call on different gender and parental identifications that serve them, and to continue to have these available to them as differently configured patterns of masculine, feminine, and gender neutral identifications when they need them. This is what she means by gender over-inclusiveness.

Benjamin celebrates the changing dynamics of gender and psychic life. Yet she suggests also that change in the direction of gender overinclusiveness is contradicted by an ongoing structure of gender splitting expressed this time in a gender-neutral instrumental culture of performance which valorises the ideal of the self-sufficient individual (Benjamin 1988, 171-172, 187): 'The idealization of masculine values and the disparagement of feminine values persist unabated even though individual men and women are freer to cross over than before (Benjamin 1988, 172).' Dependency continues to be deeply feared and stigmatised. It is relegated to the private sphere while 'the public world is conceived as a place in which direct recognition and care for others' needs is impossible (Benjamin 1988, 197).' Benjamin suggests also that [m]en's loss of absolute control over women and children has exposed the vulnerable

core of male individuality, the failure of recognition which previously wore the cloak of power, responsibility, and family honor (Benjamin 1988, 181).'

She does not go so far as to suggest that this gender neutral denial of dependency is a reaction formation, called out by the power of feminism to articulate the costs and pain involved in 'the devaluation of the need for the other' (Benjamin 1988, 171), but she does say, 'the deep source of discontent in our culture is not repression or… narcissism, but gender polarity.' In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin posits women's demand for equality as 'a material change' that 'makes the intersubjective vision appear as more than a utopian abstraction', as 'a legitimate opponent of the traditional logic of subject and object (Benjamin 1988, 221).' 'Feminism, though many think the contrary, has opened up a new possibility of mutual recognition between men and women (Benjamin 1988, 224).'

Concluding Remarks

I have argued that Jessica Benjamin's conception of intersubjectivity is offered as a self-conscious historically situated and practical-political project that is designed to enable a society of selves that is genuinely able to work with the principle of equality between selves. We can interpret her as pursuing the distinctive enquiry of civil philosophy into what does peaceful co-existence in a society of selves involve. The core move in her thought follows on from her feminist refusal to accept the attenuated expression of selfhood in classical civil philosophy, Hegelian and Freudian thought. There the self's humanity (what makes the subject like all others) is identified with a rationalist self-mastery and instrumental performance principle, but this is a type of humanity that requires the subjection of women and all that is identified as legitimately object to the subject's will. This is a self that refuses to know and accept its dependency on the other for recognition, and who justifies its desire for omnipotence in an instrumentalism that extends to all others, things, and non-human creatures. The civility of this type of selfhood is real as far as it goes, expressed as it is in a public sphere of the rule of law, but lawful action is but the other side of a systemic violence to selves, a violence that is practiced within the self as well as on other selves. Benjamin can be taken to be arguing that lawful domination is and must be inherently involved with gender splitting, and that the only way to explore a less violent condition of peaceful co-existence is to develop a practical critique of gender splitting. Such a critique require of those who would be selves that they learn to accept and maintain the tensions inherent in the paradox of recognition. This is a sophisticated and inherently civil demand of them, one that requires them to accept their engagement in the dynamics of domination as well as in those of intersubjectivity, and one that asks that they develop the capacity to repair breakdowns of intersubjectivity when they must and do occur.

Benjamin brings both love and domination into the civil domain (see *The Bonds of Love*, 5, 'This book is an analysis of the interplay between love and domination'), just as she brings both dependence and independence into the civil domain. In so doing, she makes it possible for us to enquire into the civil nature of the independent's subject's facilitation of the personhood or selfhood of a dependent subject. In asking how equality is possible between men and women, adults and children, analysts and analysands, she refuses to reinstate the gender splitting of subject/object by giving one term in this relationship responsibility, the other none. In thinking relationally always,

she insists on 'the participation of those who submit to power as well as those who exercise it (Benjamin 1988, 5).'

The question of authority is a constant theme in Benjamin's work. She rejects authority cast in the form of an external, albeit internalized, relationship of mastery of the self. She resituates authority in the space of what she calls 'thirdness'. In her later works this becomes a major theme, one that is only implicitly suggested in The Bonds of Love (1988). She (2004, 7) argues, 'To the degree that we ever manage to grasp two-way directionality, we do so only from the place of the third, a vantage point outside the other two.' This space opens up when each self is able to sustain the capability for the paradox of being both separate and connected, of needing to assert its will and being dependent on the other for recognition of its will. It is a space that enters into self-awareness when selves are able to accept breakdown and failure of intersubjectivity and to do what is needed to repair relationship and restore dialogue, 'each person surviving for the other' (Benjamin 2004, 10). Thirdness is not available in the dyadic impasse of complementarity. This reworking of authority invites an enquiry into how the state needs to be thought about if it is no longer to represent an external authority but to become emblematic of thirdness.

In all these ways, Benjamin suggests how we might recast the project of civil philosophy.

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[i] See my work in progress paper 'Ian Hunter's recuperation of civil philosophy'.

[ii] For Hegel a 'thing' has no subjectivity, it is 'the external in itself' (Hegel 1991, §42, 74); it is this that permits the thing to be available to the person who, in placing his will in it, makes the thing his property (see Hegel 1991, §44, 75-76).

[iii] 'An interesting question raised recently by Orange…is whether mutual recognition is the goal of all treatments. Is it for everybody? Benjamin's embedding mutual recognition within a developmental schema would suggest that it is. But, wrote Orange…what of the patients who

> come from families where they were excessively required to validate the parent's experience, often at the expense of their own development of a sense of self. Self-absorbed parents, who could not put their own needs for recognition on the back burner long enough to see their children as persons in their own right, either severely inhibited or crushed their children.

This is a crucial question, one that really goes to the tension between the theoretical and the clinical. In the creation of an elegant theoretical intersubjective theory has Benjamin universalized a goal for all patients and for all treatments, and in the process enacted a sort of theoretical domination that extends into the clinical? (Reis 2010, 234).' Reis shows in the example used here that neither he nor Orange understand what Benjamin means by complementarity, for mutual recognition cannot be coerced, nor do they understand how mutual recognition normatively discloses the dynamics of domination.

[iv] In her 1995 book, Benjamin (p.10) refers to the development of a perspectival conception of knowledge where theory is understood as developed from a particular subject position.

[v] 'We have taken the postulate of the whole self or subject, the 'pristine ego' in Fairbairn's terms, as a necessary grounding for the critical examination of the splitting and objectification which follow from internalization, the defense against bad objects. We have taken the postulate that human beings act upon and affect one another, because they need one another, in order to understand the way in which the reality that appears to be natural or intrapsychic is actually the congealed and internalized result of social praxis or activity. Finally, we have taken the need for authorship, agency and intention as a vantage point from which to explain how that need is alienated by making self the object of moral or instrumental judgment in the form of internalizing the good object, the 'moral defense,' or 'the performance principle'. To generalize, in each of these aspects of internalization the same objectification of self and others ensues. In turn, this psychological process of objectification constitutes or reproduces a culture in which activity is alienated to performance, product, or

uncontrollable process, in which recognition gives way to imperviousness, conformity, or impersonal judgment (Benjamin 1978, 263-4).'

[vi] This school refused to take sides in the Controversial Discussions (see Steiner), the dispute between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, although it is fair to say that they were generally more sympathetic to the Kleinian emphasis on the baby from birth as an independent subject than to Anna Freud's subscription to the orthodox Freudian view that in the first six months the baby is not a subject, but essentially a creature of instinct.