Multiplicity, Essentialism, and the Dialectical Nature of the Soul

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from many disciplines and provides insights into the very fabric of our social development. There is much in Muller's study that will benefit the practitioner and theoretician alike.

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MULTIPLICITY, ESSENTIALISM, AND THE DIALECTICAL NATURE OF THE SOUL

A Review of *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* by Ian Hacking. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. 336 pp.

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UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY at the University of Toronto, Ian Hacking is a leading thinker in postmodern social constructivism. In *Rewriting the Soul,* Hacking explores the mental to-

pography of memory and its enigmatic role in the multiple personality movement. The book is a first-rate piece of scholarship; it is comprehensively researched, philosophically insightful, and accessible both to those intimately acquainted with the clinical world of dissociative disorders and to the educated layperson. Hacking provides a careful historical exegesis of the rise of modern psychiatry, of the phenomenology of trauma, hysteria, schizophrenia, and child abuse, and of the politics of mental health within the current context of the multiple personality crusade. His intriguing and spacious survey of the history of dissociative profiles covers the early days of French psychiatry, the ascent of psychoanalysis, and contemporary sociopolitical concerns. Explicit case material is provided with thoughtful precision. Hacking's fastidious chronology of the myriad faces of dissociation contextualizes multiplicity as one among scores of dissociative manifestations. His scrutiny of dissociative clinical case histories depicts the complications of multiplicity, thereby highlighting conceptual problems in efforts to isolate a core pathology that forms the essential organization of the multiple. Hacking also addresses different treatment approaches to illuminate variegated aspects of diversified clinical scenarios, including the patient-therapist relationship. All in all, this is truly a fascinating and important book, an impressively insightful and well-balanced look into the philosophical, psychological, and political nature of multiplicity.

In his initial exploration of the multiple personality question, Hacking is concerned with an ontological issue, namely, "Is it *real?*" The answer to this question depends upon yet another issue, the epistemological problem, that is, what is the criterion or method for determining the status of multiple personality? His third phenomenological concern is broadly to examine the appearance of pathology associated with multiplicity and its relation to the nature of memory and personal identity. The ontological question has divided the profession and the public, leading to clinical, sociopolitical, and legal tirades over false memory, and has direct implications for treatment approaches. From the pragmatic standpoint, intervention concerns override the question of ontological certainty, yet conceptual schemes necessarily influence diagnostic criteria and intervention strategies.

Across diverse theories of multiple personality, Hacking points out a causal fallacy made between symptoms and their etiology. He warns there are dangers associated with advocating a causal theory of multiplicity, for it directly informs the type of treatment espoused. Given the

fact that symptoms associated with multiple personality cluster around many different clinical pictures, the causal relationships of the syndrome remain murky.

Hacking radically challenges the causal hypothesis between childhood trauma and multiplicity that has been overwhelmingly supported in the clinical and empirical literature. Due to ambiguity surrounding this disorder, he argues, there are not universally necessary and sufficient conditions under which multiplicity transpires. The generalized causal attribution to chronic childhood trauma, such as protracted heinous sexual abuse, is specious. Correlation does not imply causation; the relation between child abuse and multiplicity is therefore an erroneous causal inference.

Hacking brilliantly points out the empirical pitfalls of the leading psychological instruments on multiplicity that purport to provide "validity" under the rubric of "science." With philosophical rectitude, he hacks away at the question-begging assumptions, faulty constructs, and circular self-support that empiricists hold to be fact, when in fact they do *not* hold up to rigorous scientific scrutiny. Hacking insists there is no conclusive "evidence that childhood trauma causes adult multiple personality" (p. 93). The attribution of childhood abuse as the universal etiology of multiplicity supported under the guise of empirical fact is therefore inexact and unwarranted.

We may interpret this dispute over etiology as a regression to the dialectical dilemma concerning Freud's original and revised seduction hypothesis, namely, is multiplicity the result of childhood sexual assault or is the abuse merely fantasized? While Hacking affirms the abuse etiology as illegitimate, he urges us instead to focus our attention on how "the multiple finds or sees the cause of her condition in what she comes to remember about her childhood" which "is passed off as a specific etiology" (p. 94). For Hacking, the question of etiology is not anchored to the past, but rather to the present and to how the multiple "redescribes," "rethinks," and "refeels" her past. As a result, the past becomes rewritten in memory, with new words, descriptions, and feelings that fall under the general canon of child abuse. This new vocabulary and the accompanying affects, conceptualizations, and memories, are produced, rather than reproduced. Hacking continues to argue that the very idea in which the false causal connection is forged is through the intervening semantic models that offer an explanation of how we come to be the way we are. In effect, the way we interpret our past through current semantic labels determines who we are in the present.

Although Hacking's argument is insightful on many levels, he makes the same question-begging assumption he accuses his contemporaries of making in regard to the abuse etiology, namely, that current descriptions, narrations, and semantic mediations of the past *determine* the self and identity. Much to his credit, however, Hacking postulates that labels such as "MPD" are historically situated and socially invented as a way of describing phenomena. What we have come to call multiple personality is due to the social construction of semantic practices that are historically situated within our cultural milieu. Hacking maintains that "memoro-politics" surrounding remembered or forgotten trauma is legitimated and made possible by the new sciences of memory. Hacking further questions the supposition that there is indeed knowledge of memory to be excavated and recovered.

With regard to memory and human actions, Hacking believes there is an "indeterminacy in the past," "an indeterminacy about what people actually did," particularly in regard to intentional actions that are reported "under a description" (p. 234). Hacking perspicuously delineates the shortcomings of attributing intentional states to descriptive events that were experienced in the past, and shows how past experiences are interpreted through current linguistic schemas that one could have hardly begun to contemplate at that time in one's personal history.

Memory, therefore, becomes a retroactive application of new description to past people and events. Furthermore, this process leads to a "semantic contagion," that is, the tendency to classify past actions via a new vocabulary and to group them under similar kinds or classes of events that acquire new meaning than ones originally experienced. Not only do one's own past thoughts, feelings, and events undergo transformation, redescription, and reinterpretation, but so do others' actions and intentional states attributed to them. Retroactive redescriptions may be either correct or incorrect (hence an empirical issue), but at the very least, Hacking asserts, we rewrite the past because we present old actions under new descriptions, many of which are derived from political rhetoric and the social conditioning of our day.

Among the various disciplines concerned with multiple personality there is one common assumption, namely, that the past *is* determinate; either certain events occurred or they did not. Hacking rejects this assumption. Semantic contagion, he argues, provides new ideas that are retroactively applied to old actions, thus creating psychological states that were never there in the first place. We do not reproduce unadul-

terated memories of actual events, "instead we rearrange and modify elements that we remember into something that makes sense," thus, "we touch up, supplement, delete, combine, interpret, shade" the past (p. 247).

Despite his concise inquiry into the nature of multiplicity and memory, he virtually ignores the ontology of the unconscious and its conscious manifestations. What Hacking fails fully to appreciate is the role of the unconscious and its dynamic influence on the vicissitudes of the self, memory, and personal identity. In the spirit of Wittgenstein, Hacking assumes that semantics and language practices alone structure reality, hence inner reality, but he neglects to consider how the multifarious and overdetermined matrices of developmental, interpersonal, and intrapsychic forces may operate on the formation and expression of multiple self-states independently of conscious cognitive-linguistic processes.

There has been a recent upsurge of attention in contemporary psychoanalysis to multiplicity of the self (Bromberg, 1996b; Davies, 1996; Harris, 1996; Joseph, 1989; Loewenstein & Ross, 1992) that Hacking does not address. In a series of articles, Philip Bromberg (1994, 1995, 1996a, 1996b) has advocated a nonunitary, nonlinear conceptualization of the self that accounts for a discontinuity of being in both normative and clinical populations. Whereas the notion of the decentered self gained attention through Lacan (1977, 1981) and postmodernism (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972; Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1979), the question of discontinuous self-states and normative dissociative organizations did not come to the fore until, as Hacking points out, the broader focus on multiplicity emerged.

Bromberg, with others (Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992; Mitchell, 1991), argues for a fluid, discontinuous, and dissociative interplay of self-states that vacillate between experiences of unity and cohesion on the one hand, and separateness and fragmentation on the other, thus making multiplicity a normative construct. The oscillation between relatively unlinked yet internally congruent self-states and the experiential coherency of a singular unitary self, Bromberg argues, is an illusory adaptive means of maintaining cohesive integrity and personal continuity through the vicissitudes of multiple self-experiences. Like Lacan (1936), who argued that the unified self is an imaginary construction based on the identificatory *méconnaissances* with the imago that provide an illusory sense of autonomy, mastery, and self-cohesion, Bromberg (1993, 1996b) urges us to conceptualize multiplicity as constituting the amalgamation of seg-

regated and disparate domains of mental reality while being able to "stand in the spaces" between feelings of unity and disunity, where disjointed self-states may be contained under the semblance of integration. Unlike Hacking, who believes that the self is ultimately constructed through linguistic and symbolic interactions imposed by language and social-political structures, Bromberg highlights the intersubjective space of the ongoing relational encounters that forge the contours of dissociative and multiply instantiated realms of selfhood.

Hacking's inattention to the dynamic processes of multiplicity and their unconscious correlates is a palpable conceptual limitation to his thesis. Not only does he not account for the complex developmental, relational, and intrapsychic processes that affect memory, identity, and the self, he furthermore does not differentiate the cognitive-linguistic mediation of past events (e.g., trauma) from the affective and defensive maneuvers attached to them.

Hacking peripherally addresses the notion of defensive processes when he examines the question of "false consciousness," that is, "the state of people who have formed importantly false beliefs about their character and their past" (p. 258). False memory, Hacking contends, is only a small part of false consciousness. He is concerned with "deliberate suppression" and the mental operations of "deceptive-memory," which may be likened to Sartrean bad faith, or forms of psychoanalytic denial, such as disavowal. Hacking localizes these functions within the conscious agent, allowing the freedom and responsibility to "know" one's soul.

Whereas psychoanalysis has traditionally been preoccupied with how the dynamic past influences and structures the present, Hacking focuses on how the present structures the past. Rather than coming to think of the self and the soul as formed by the past, attached to "memoro-politics," one should understand the soul as the capacity to "know our character, our limits, our needs, our propensities for self-deception" (p. 260). The psychoanalytic endeavor is no longer the Delphic decree, "Know thyself!"; instead, "we constitute our souls by making up our lives, that is, by weaving stories about our past, by what we call memories" (p. 250). Thus we create "a life, a character, a self" through new descriptions (p. 251). As a surrogate for the soul, memory becomes the locus for defining who we are.

Not only does Hacking question the first-person privileged access and epistemic verity of memory, but also the authenticity of repressed flash-

backs and restored emotions that lead to abreaction. Of course, psycho-
analysis is sympathetic to the subjective distortions of the inner world
and their infiltration into objective reality, but the question still remains,
where does one draw the line? No matter how "objective" knowledge-
claims become, our clients still know their own subjective inner experi-
ences directly (whether real or imagined) and we do not. While the ac-
curacy of self-knowledge remains epistemologically doubtful, I still
know what I had for breakfast this morning and others do not. This is
authoritative by virtue of my privileged access to my uniquely subjective
experiences. Within the context of repressed flashbacks associated with
sudden and spontaneous emotions and images, self-report overrides
epistemological certainty, albeit this is always subject to analytical in-
quiry.

    Hacking states that repressed flashbacks are "not intrinsically different
from other remembering," concluding "there is no reason to believe that
the flashback experience is better at getting at the unvarnished truth than
any other type of remembering" (p. 253). For all practical purposes, this
claim is insipid. There are enormous qualitative differences between typ-
ical remembering and recovering repressed traumatic material. Any clini-
cian who has treated dissociative abuse victims would not even question
whether or not there was (is) trauma; the question becomes, "what
kind?" Palpable distress simply does not pop up out of nothing as pure
exnihilation; it emerges out of conflict. The psychoanalytic task therefore
bears the onus of deciphering this conundrum. As for "truth," this will
also depend upon what kind of truth one is talking about. To quote
Freud (1900), "The unconscious is the true psychical reality, *in its inner-
most nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external
world*" (p. 613). As Freud suggests, the unconscious soul is that which
we can have no *direct* knowledge of as such; it may only be understood
through its conscious manifestations. From the Kantian standpoint, in
alignment with Lacan's conception of the Real (*réel*), the soul, as the
ding-un-sich, is empirically undetectable. The nature of the soul there-
fore becomes a definitional issue.

    But what are we to make of Hacking's conception of the soul? Is mem-
ory the key to the soul? If memory is "the way to have knowledge of the
soul" (p. 95), then perhaps Hacking has a point, because memory will
always suffer under epistemological interrogation. If the soul is more
than the mere reliance on memory, then Hacking's hypothesis becomes
myopic and narrowly circumscribed. Is there an essence to the soul that

is immutable or is this organization as ephemeral, fractured, and discon-
tinuous as many contemporary psychoanalytic thinkers maintain today?
Bromberg and others advocate the multiple-dissociative hypothesis pre-
cisely because it allows the punctuated, nonlinear, and disparate organi-
zations that comprise psychic life to coexist within self-structure. Yet the
question remains: What is the self? Is it nothing more than a fleeting
moment held together by memory, as Hacking seems to suggest, or is it
dynamically informed by the past, its own personal history? For Hacking,
the past is always revised and modified retroactively, hence the soul is
always rewritten. In placing ontic primacy on present-day semantic de-
scriptions, he annuls the causal efficacy of genuinely dissociated states,
repressed memories, and the unconscious-relational processes operative
without the aid of semantic suggestibility.

Despite these conceptual drawbacks, Hacking's notion of the soul is
grounded in a conviction of what it means to be a fully developed hu-
man being. Having its source in ancient virtue theory and Aristotelean
teleology, *de anima* is the process of becoming one's fullest potential,
that of an actualized self-aware individual. Hacking underscores the exis-
tential notion of the autonomous free agent who is responsible for au-
thentic choice in constructing his or her own moral self. Identity and the
human soul are about "character, reflective choice, and self-understand-
ing" (p. 215) emphasizing the freedom to become and fulfill one's possi-
bilities. Indeed, this is what it means to be fully human. But is there a
true self to be discovered, to be actualized, who has been there all along
waiting to be revealed in therapy? Not for Hacking. This would imply
that the self, the soul, is static and determined, an unchanging essence, a
thing. For Hacking, the soul is not unitary, not essence, not "an unchang-
ing core of personal identity" (p. 6), it is no *thing*. Rather the soul speaks
in many voices from many different points of reference, a position that
many within contemporary psychoanalytic thought espouse.

The question of normative multiplicity has divided many thinkers
within the psychoanalytic community. Although dissociative paradigms
account for myriad dimensions of shifting self-states experienced as
"splits and fissures in subjectivity" (Harris, 1996, p. 548), this does not
mean that there is no unified or unifying process to psychic structure.
Lachmann (1996) and Lichtenberg, Lachmann, and Fosshage (1992) have
argued for a unitary process model of the self that allows for change and
multiplicity within an integrative network of psychic unification. Rather
than conceiving of the human being as possessing several "selves," each

with its own unique ontology, Lachmann assumes the existence of a singular self that strives for self-integration while sustaining the capacity for disparate self-state experiences to live and flourish. Pizer (1996) also underscores the ability of the self to endure and manage paradox as distributed forms of self-experience, and challenges the dissociative hypothesis that favors disunity over unity.

While the theory of self-as-process has been addressed by contemporary thinkers (Joseph, 1989; Kristeva, 1986), there seems to be an implicit theoretical assumption that process or change automatically nullifies the concept of essentialism.[1] Like many contemporary psychoanalytic theorists, I view the self as process, but unlike the polarity that bifurcates the self into *either* a unitary, singular, and cohesive matrix *or* a multiple, nonlinear, and dissociative mosaic, I maintain this antithesis is a false dichotomy. The question that needs to be posed is whether multiplicity can exist within continuity and whether process and flux can exist within a stable unifying psychic structure. Opponents of essentialism argue that theories of human nature that espouse universal structures of the mind ignore the individual, gender, social, and cultural forces that govern subjectivity, thereby conceptualizing the human being as a rigid, fixed, static, and immutable entity. As an alternative paradigm, the decentered, nonunitary, and dissociative characterization of multiplicity augurs well for a heterogeneous conception of selfhood that accounts for the discrepancies of human existence, thus valorizing psychic diversity without running the risk of ontological reductionism. The problem with this dichotomy, including the view Hacking professes, is that one fallaciously believes *process* automatically rules out *essence*.[2] The process of frag-

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[1] With homage to Heraclitus, the fundamental notion of the self-as-process originates with Hegel. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1807) compellingly demonstrates that the structures of the psyche are not opposed to essentialism at all, rather the appearances of consciousness are made possible through the essential, dialectical unfolding of subjectivity. This is further echoed in the *Science of Logic* (1812) as reason is shown to be the coming to presence of pure self-consciousness. Mills (1996) further demonstrates that the dialectic is the essential structural foundation of the unconscious.

[2] It is important to define what we mean by *essence*. Originating with Aristotle, the term usually refers to that which necessarily makes a thing what it is, without which it would not nor could not exist. Unlike certain views of essentialism within the Anglo-American analytic philosophical tradition, which maintain that certain definitions describe or reveal the true or exact essence of a thing *in-itself*, following Hegel (1807, 1812), the essential nature of *Geist* as *aufgehoben* necessarily involves its dialectical movement that constitutes its structural ontology. From this account, essence does not suggest a fixed or static immutable property belonging to a substance or a thing; rather it is dynamic, relational, and transformative. As a result, Hegel underscores the notion that *essence is process*. Thus, what is essential is change constituted through temporal-spatial relations and the

mentation, separateness, discontinuity, and multiplicity is uncritically thought to be a fundamental contradiction with the concept of a singular, unifying, and integrative agent, when this assumption is simply unwarranted. What is *essential*, hence a necessary and universal condition of subjectivity, is the ontological process of the dialectic, insofar as if it were to be removed, consciousness and the unconscious would collapse to the ground. From this standpoint, the ontology of the self is a complex holism that allows for multiply-dissociated (hence alienated) shapes of subjectivity to phenomenally *appear* as distinct, punctuated, and discontinuous self-states within an integrative dialectical process. The ontology of the dialectical unfolding of subjectivity not only allows for multiplicity, it makes multiplicity possible.

Unlike Hacking, I believe there is an essence to the soul that his nominalism denies. This essence is simply the dialectic. As I have outlined elsewhere (Mills, 1996, 1997), the self is both the dialectical organization of conscious and unconscious processes ontologically *instantiated* within its own unique historicity, comprising a being who is active, teleological, and contemplative—an agency teeming with quiescent potentiality. Considered to be a dialectical structure of conscious and unconscious organizations, selfhood becomes a process of actualizing its potentiality-for-Being, sublimating itself in thought, action, and understanding. Bound within its temporal unfolding, selfhood is *being-in-becoming* one's possibilities that are both constructed in the moment and dynamically informed by the past. The antipode between the past and the present therefore proves to be a false dichotomy. The past and the present are equiprimordial, each having its own causal efficacy within the ontical relations to one another. By virtue or the dialectical organization of the self, the past and the present are in constant discursive modes of discourse, each informing the inner realities of the other. Thus, the self emerges from itself and passes away back into itself, coming to be what it already is, the process of its own becoming.

While the self is in constant flux, a state of unfolding possibility, there are also immutable structures that foster evolution and change within the nocturnal abyss of the mind. Without such stable, unified, and unifying structural *processes*, the self would have no cohesion, no organizing

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dialectical positionality toward similarity and difference that comprise its very nature, without which existence would not be possible.

functions at all, hence, no ground. The soul would be chaotic and amor-
phous, merely nonbeing. For Hacking, memory, identity, and self-repre-
sentations of the past are fleeting, but he never questions whether there
is uniformity and persistence in the unconscious regions of the soul, that
of the inner self, whether multiple or unitary. Hacking cogently demon-
strates that certain aspects of identity and memory come under the spell
of semantic construction, but this is certainly not a complete account of
the self or multiplicity. Like Locke's, Hacking's nominalism assumes that
personhood and the soul are not determined by one's biography, but
rather are determined by the way in which we conceive of our biogra-
phy. Hence, a person is comprised of consciousness and memory, noth-
ing more. While the agency of consciousness defines our self-identity,
the unconscious is the core of our very being, the primal self that holds
the secrets to the soul. Nothing in the external world can draw us away
from the reality of the life within.

   While one may not totally agree with Hacking's conception of the
soul, the self, or personal identity, his tenacious arguments are compel-
ling and his erudition impressive. Not only is this book historically infor-
mative and theoretically alluring, but it also has direct and important
implications for the consulting room. If there is indeed an indeterminacy
to the past that leads us to apply present-day descriptions retroactively,
then the self is merely a moment's construction, seduced by the semantic
rhetoric and clinical prejudices instantiated within our social facticity. On
this account, the soul is something that is made up from new meanings
that change the past; we reorganize and repopulate our memories; there-
fore, we rewrite ourselves. As a significant contribution to dissociative
studies, this book has profound implications for how we come to under-
stand the self, personal identity, and the soul.

   Theory entails a deep moral judgment. Clinicians need to reconcile
whether therapy of "multiples" leads to false modes of being, thereby
truncating human freedom, or whether it facilitates human possibility,
maturation, and self-knowledge. The pursuit of the soul is quintessential
to the psychoanalytic quest to understand oneself. We may say the soul
is the coming to presence of self-consciousness. Understood as a coming
into being, psychoanalysis becomes, in Freud's own words, "the science
of the life of the soul."[3]

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[3] Bettelheim points out that Freud's concluding remarks in his preface to the *New Intro-*

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ductory Lectures is more accurately rendered "the science of the life of the soul" (*Seelenleben liebt*), rather than Strachey's translation in the *Standard Edition* as "the science of mental life" (Cf. Bettelheim, 1982, pp. 72–73).

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