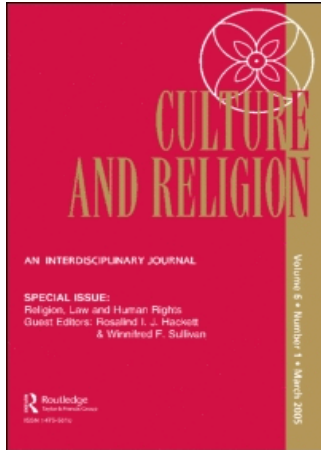


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Agency and Pain: an Exploration

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The notion of agency has become particularly prominent in social-science writing. This article identifies some of the weaknesses in the ways it has been employed in contemporary anthropology. It criticises the assumptions of self-empowerment, responsibility, and constructivism that are held to be essential to moral agency in much of that usage. Present-day conceptions of agency in this literature introduce—whether intentionally or not—a triumphalist vision of history. Drawing on recent neuro-physiological research, religious history and ethnography, it focuses on pain in order to think about agency in other than triumphalist terms. Triumphalist versions of agency, the article argues, are not only inherently questionable, they also distract our attention away from the need to understand how different traditions articulate the idea of living sanely in a world that is inevitably painful.

KEYWORDS: agency, self-empowerment, moral responsibility, pain, triumphalism, sanity.

What do social theorists mean by agency?

The word 'agency' is much in evidence in contemporary anthropology. Four decades ago it was not much used. What exactly does it mean? Philosophers tell us that it refers to the individual's capacity to act consciously and voluntarily upon the world.¹ But 'agency' is now employed in the social sciences to attack many things—the use of statistical reasoning, the idea of historical forces, the force of habit, traditional oppressions—and to celebrate self-empowerment, history-making, and individualism. An ethnographic or historical account that lacks evidence of a people's 'agency' is held to be a faulty account.² What underlies such judgements are the perceived opportunities and limitations of modernity.³ This notion of 'agency,' I argue, presupposes a teleological history and an essentialised human subject.

The concept of agency has been invoked, endorsed, and celebrated. It has not, to my knowledge, been systematically examined by analysts of culture.⁴ I want to explore it in this essay, but before I do so I consider briefly some ways in

which it is employed by well-known anthropologists today. In particular, I draw attention to their emphasis on conscious intention and self-empowerment, and their sense that they are called upon to answer the philosophical question of voluntarism and determinism. I go on to speculate on the role of disempowerment and pain in relation to forms of agency, a theme that has received inadequate attention. In my view pain is significant here for two interconnected reasons: as passion it is thought of as being the opposite of action, and as suffering it is thought of as that which progressive agency aims to eliminate. In conclusion I discuss some examples of agency from Christian and Muslim religious history, in which pain is central. But I do so less for the sake of 'understanding religion' than for exploring the nature of agency in 'secular life'.

Why has talk about 'agency' become so prominent *now*? Here is a tentative answer: Broadly speaking, the idea of agency serves to historicise social structures by according responsibility for progressive change to conscious actors. What classical Marxism conceived of as the action of a class-subject impelled by historical laws has, notwithstanding the interest in social movements, tended to become individualised and autonomised. For many reasons, historical collectivities and destinies have become increasingly suspect. All individuals, we are given to understand, have the moral capacity and responsibility to act for themselves. Two sociologists figure prominently in recent discussions about agency, Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu.⁵ Both of them began writing in the context of the old Marxist debates that sought to reconcile the idea of political activism with that of historical determinism, and both absorbed early critiques of structuralism for its inability to accommodate history and subjectivity, especially after the student uprisings of 1968. Giddens and Bourdieu are sources of inspiration to cultural analysts and anthropologists writing today, although they are not always uncritically followed.⁶

The anthropological literature on the subject is marked by a lack of attention to the limits of the human body as a site of agency. When the word 'body' is used, it is more often than not a synonym for the individual whose desire and ability to act are taken as unproblematic. We could, incidentally, all do with taking Freud's project more seriously. While Freud's claim to have produced a comprehensive theory of the subject having universal applicability has been rightly contested by many, his concern with our incomplete knowledge of and mastery over our bodies and desires remains highly instructive.⁷

There is a tendency for anthropologists who are not also Freudians to overestimate questions of conscious intention and controlled action.⁸ Thus in a valuable anthropological collection on embodiment and experience, Margot Lyon and Jack Barbalet propose a model of the body not as passive but as an agent constructing its world, a process in which emotion plays an essential role. They write that they want to extend 'the phenomenological notion of the body as an active agent in world construction through the consideration of the role of emotion in the process of social embodiment' (Lyon and Barbalet 1994:60). One

might suppose that the incorporation of emotion into their model would bring an uncertain element into action—bodily perturbations and physiological processes—but that is not so. Their idea of emotion is more like the eighteenth-century idea of sentiment than the older one of passion—more like an internal evaluation that guides action than a force that strikes the subject from outside as it were.⁹ ‘Emotion has a role in social agency,’ they write, ‘as it significantly guides and prepares the organism for social action through which social relations are generated’ (Lyon and Barbalet 1994:50). Emotion is viewed as a *homunculus* within the human body directing social action. A decade and a half earlier Michelle Rosaldo had given us a sensitive account of the role of affect in generating the institution of headhunting among the Ilongots of the Philippines.¹⁰ The recognition by these and other theorists of culture that emotion is central in social life is welcome. However, I am interested in understanding the passion of suffering in a different way. I ask whether pain is not simply a *cause* of action, but often itself a kind of action.

There is no agreement among contemporary researchers on what emotions are.¹¹ Some insist that they are impulses occurring entirely in the part of the body called the brain, others that they are intersubjective, located in the social space individuals inhabit. Sometimes all emotion is equated with desire, at other times desire is regarded as one emotion among others. However many theories, apart from Freud’s, stress the unconscious character of emotions. And everyone, regardless of whether they have a theory of emotions or not, knows that some emotions (‘passions’) can and do disrupt or disguise intentions. (But as Collingwood pointed out, emotion is not essentially opposed to reason; all reasoning—and therefore reasoned action—is itself charged with emotion.¹²)

Even in the growing field of medical anthropology, where innovative work has given us a cultural understanding of health and disease, the standard meaning of agency is taken too much for granted. The sick body is often represented no differently from the healthy body in that for both agency is typically regarded as resistance to power.¹³

I find such views troubling because they attribute individual agency to the sick body by translating all its states and movements directly into ‘dissent.’ For when anthropologists talk of getting at the subject’s experience of illness, they often refer not only to a patient’s words but to her behavior as though it were a form of discourse. Equating subjective experience with a text in this way seems to me unsatisfactory, especially when we remain unclear as to how the behavioral ‘text’ is to be decoded. In fact ‘dissent’ and ‘resistance’ are often taken to be an index not only of intention but also of meanings that can be easily read off from the behavior of a human subject when confronted with external power.

The anthropological use of ‘resistance’ has been rightly criticised for underestimating the strength and diversity of power structures.¹⁴ I am worried less by what has been called ‘the romance of resistance’ than by the more inclusive category of ‘agency’ presupposed by it. Of course ‘resistance’ occurs in every day life and it is often important to outcomes when it does so. My

concern, however, is that our fascination with 'resistance' itself comes from larger, supporting ideas. The tendency to romanticise resistance comes from a metaphysical question to which this notion of 'agency' is a response: Given the essential freedom of the human subject, and given, too, her own desires and interests, what should she do to take control of her own life (body/mind)? The assumption here is that power is external to and repressive of the agent, that it 'subjects' him, and that nevertheless the agent as 'active subject' has both the desire to oppose power and the responsibility to become more powerful.¹⁵ I shall argue against these assumptions. But to the extent that the task of confronting power is taken to be more than an individual one, it also defines a historical project in which increasing autonomy and consciousness of individual freedom can be collectively fought for. But that social project is rooted in an individual psychology. The fact that 'resistance' is a term used by theorists of culture for a number of disparate conditions (the unconscious behavior of patients, student disorders in school, generalised movements for civil reform, the strategies of labor unions, guerrillas struggling to evict an occupying force, etc.) indicates that a particular kind of essentialised subject-agent is common to them all.

Theorists of culture sometimes find themselves at once asserting and denying the existence of such an essence. Thus the editors of a popular Reader in contemporary social theory write in their Introduction:

From a theoretical point of view we need a subject who is at once culturally and historically constructed, yet from a political perspective, we would wish this subject to be capable of acting in some sense 'autonomously', not simply in conformity to dominant cultural norms and rules, or within the patterns that power inscribes. But this autonomous actor may not be defined as acting from some hidden well of innate 'will' or consciousness that has somehow escaped cultural shaping and ordering. In fact, such an actor is not only possible but 'normal', for the simple reason that neither 'culture' itself nor the regimes of power that are imbricated in cultural logics and experiences can ever be wholly consistent or totally determining. (Dirks et al 1993:18)

Because they are progressives (read: 'constructivists'), these social theorists disapprove of any talk of 'innateness.' They also want to present struggle (resistance) and dissent (deviation) as normal to human behavior. But 'normal' is a notoriously ambiguous notion, including both a descriptive statistical sense in which a *distribution* is normal and a prescriptive one in which being normal is being 'natural,' the opposite of pathological.¹⁶ Sliding between these two senses, the editors can deny that there is anything in the agent 'that has somehow escaped cultural shaping and ordering', and yet assert that 'culture' can never be 'totally determining.'¹⁷

That the human body has a changing life largely inaccessible to itself, that in various ways its behavior depends on unconscious routine and habit, that emotion, though necessary to every kind of reasoning, may render the ownership

of actions a matter of conflicting descriptions—all of this problematises both the intentionalist claim that the embodied subject is essentially engaged in resisting power or becoming more powerful, as well as the connected claim that the moral agent must always bear individual responsibility for her act. It also problematises the larger assumption that agency must be defined, in the final analysis, by a historical future of universal emancipation from suffering.

The paradox inadequately appreciated here is that the self to be liberated from control must be subjected to the control of a liberating self already and always free and aware of his own desires. Susan Wolf identifies this metaphysical conundrum and the failure of recent philosophers—including Charles Taylor—to solve it. In place of the obsessive attempts to define the freedom of the subject as its ability to create its self, Wolf offers an answer by drawing on the commonsense notion of being *sane*: ‘The desire to be sane,’ she argues, ‘is thus not a desire for another form of control; it is rather a desire that one’s self be connected to the world in a certain way—we could even say it is a desire that one’s self be *controlled* by the world in certain ways and not in others’ (Wolf 1987:55). This interesting notion of sanity presupposes knowing the world *practically*. It allows us to think of agency anthropologically in terms of people’s practical engagement with the world in which they live, including the discourse by which they routinely explain, defend, and excuse that engagement, and therefore of the traditions of argument on which they draw *effectively* (or, as J.L. Austin would put it, *happily*) for such purposes.

In my view there is no point in anthropologists trying to solve the old philosophical problem of free-will when theorising about the notion of agency. They would be more usefully employed enquiring into the conditions in which notions of ‘freedom,’ and of what counts as its absence, are used to assess behavior and assign consequences to that behavior in different traditions. Anthropologists might consider, for example, how the Western legal tradition, in defining insanity, has re-constructed the concept of a *responsible* (and therefore ‘free’) agent in particular historical circumstances, and how this contrasts with other traditions.¹⁸

Thinking anthropologically about agency

Assuming, then, that agency need not be conceptualised in terms of individual self-empowerment, or of universal historicity, how should it be understood? One might begin by looking at usages of the term (or what we take to be its equivalents) in different historical contexts. This would indicate not merely that agency is not a natural category, but that the successive conceptions of agency as a discursive category have opened up or closed very different possibilities for acting and being. I am unable to attempt such a history here, so instead I make some brief comments on contemporary usage.

Agency today serves primarily to define a completed personal action from within an indefinite network of causality by attributing to an actor responsibility

to power. Typically, this means *forcing* a person to be accountable, to answer to a judge in a court of law why things were done or left undone. In that sense agency is the product of pain. A world of apparent accidents is rendered into a world of essentials by attributing to a person moral/legal responsibility on whose basis guilt and innocence (and therefore punishment or exoneration) are determined. How did such a model of agency become paradigmatic? At least as far back as John Locke, 'person' was theorised as a forensic term that called for the integration of a single subject with a continuous consciousness in a single body.¹⁹ But no doubt the older Christian idea of salvation through individual conscience is also relevant here.

Moderns tend to think of responsibility *for* something as being founded on a relation between an act and the law that defines the penalty attaching to its performance or non-performance. Intention (in the sense of being a deliberate cause) may have nothing to do with the matter, as when someone sustains an injury on my property due to an accident. Where being an agent means being responsible *for* something, responsibility is first and foremost the means by which possible guilt or innocence can be circumscribed and punishment prescribed. However, agents in this sense need not necessarily coincide with individual biological bodies and the consciousness that is said to go with them. Corporations are both liable under the law and have the power to carry out particular tasks. The projects of a corporation differ from the intentions of the individuals who work for it and act in its name. Because 'corporations never die',²⁰ they can be described as agents but not as having subjectivity.

Agency also has the meaning of representation. In this sense the actions of an agent are taken to be the actions of those the agent represents. The concept of representation, central to this meaning of agency, has been the subject of longstanding debate in Western political theory. Is the representative finally responsible to herself (an agent in her own right) or to her constituents (as their agent)? Whose wishes should she enact in the representative assembly? There does not seem to be a decisive answer. The idea of representation underlying agency is rooted in a paradox: the paradox that who or what is represented is both absent and present at the same time (re-presented) (Pitkin 1967). Theatrical representation, where the actor's body makes present someone who is absent, exemplifies the same paradox without carrying the same question about political and moral responsibility.

Even when it refers to leaving undone what ought to have been done, the responsibility of individuals refers to an action in opposition to a passion. That is the reasoning behind the legal doctrine that 'crimes of passion' are less culpable than calculated crimes since in them the agent's capacity for reason (and therefore, in the Kantian view, for moral judgement) is diminished by the intrusion of an 'external force'. Like the act of an insane person, a crime of passion is not considered to be the consequence of an agent's *own* intention. Now that emotions are generally thought of as part of the internal economy of the self, the notion is reinforced that agency means the self-ownership of the

individual to whom power—'external force'—must always appear as a potential threat.

Thus 'agency' is a complex, relational term, whose senses emerge within semantic and institutional networks that define and make possible particular ways of dealing with people and things. Yet 'intention', which is variously glossed as 'plan', 'awareness', 'wilfulness', or 'desire' (terms whose linguistic opposites don't function grammatically in the same way) is made to be central to the attribution of agency in the human sciences. 'Empowerment', a legal term referring *both* to the act of giving power to someone or something *and* to the state of having thereby the power to act, becomes a metaphysical quality defining human subjectivity, its objective as well as precondition. Thus although these usages of agency make it clear that the idea has very different implications that do not all support each other, cultural theory tends to extract from them the metaphysical idea of the conscious agent-subject whose inherent abilities and desires orient her/him in a singular historical direction: increasing self-empowerment. But surely this distorts the practical requirements of social life?

Take the modern theatre, for example. Here the professional actor tries to set her *self aside* and inhabit the somatic world of her character—her gestures, passions, and desires. The actor's agency consists not in the actions of the role she performs but in her ability to *disempower* one self for the sake of another.²¹ Her action is at once her own, that of the dramatist who has written the script, and of the director who mediates between script and performance through a tradition of acting. In an important sense the actor is a part subject; her actions are not fully her own. *That she is not the author of the story doesn't mean that she is therefore its passive object.*

Writing about acting traditions, Edward Burns has made the interesting point that whereas the Elizabethan player sought to become an instrument of the text, to fuse himself directly with it by presenting a dramatic persona in an explicit, open-ended manner, the (modern) Stanislavskian actor by contrast constructs his own text—that of a being whose 'character' he tries to represent through the script. Burns suggests that there is a tension between the actor's self and that of the substantive character she projects, a tension that creates the effect among her audience of realism ('human' subject positions available for imaginative occupation) as well as of profundity (hidden 'human' meanings to be endlessly uncovered) (Burns 1990). These are two very different ways in which the actor's ability to disavow or *empty* herself articulates her agency in relation to a particular acting tradition. Of these two traditions the second is not 'truer' or 'more developed' than the first; it is just that in a subjectivising literary culture people take to it more naturally and regard it as 'more natural'.

A recent critic of modern styles of acting (identified as Strasbergian rather than Stanislavskian) makes the interesting claim that its strongly individualist bias leads to a devaluation of *plot*: 'seeing a play as a collection of individualized character portraits,' he maintains, 'means that plot, themes, images, rhetorical

figures, metrical forms, poetic motifs, and intellectual content of any kind become unimportant; they are, again, externals. As dozens of actors and directors have earnestly told me over the past three decades, "You can't play an idea." You can only play real, live, independent persons, so the theory goes, not literary constructs' (Hornby 1992:6-7).²² The assumption that real, live persons are independent of plots has interesting consequences. (I return to this point in the following section.)

The matter acquires an added dimension when we turn to ritual drama such as the Passion of Christ or the Martyrdom of Hussain. Participants here enact, identify with, undergo, the predetermined agony of figures in sacred narratives. In submitting themselves to suffering (in some cases to self-inflicted wounds) they seek in part to extend themselves as subjects.²³ This is done not in a random way but in relation to a specific narrative tradition. How helpful is it, therefore, to be always offered a choice between two mutually exclusive options: either an agent (representing only herself) or a victim (a passive object)?

It may be objected that professional actors disempower themselves voluntarily and temporarily, in the context of framed performances. But one should bear in mind that many, if not all, activities in social life are framed. The professional actor's concern to perfect a role on the stage is of a piece with the teaching and learning of rhetorical skills (speech, gesture, attitude, behavior)²⁴ by embodied agents in other domains where their actions are not absolutely 'their own'. In modern society these sites include law courts and political arenas, domains in which the self must be disavowed (whether sincerely or not) in the act of representing a client or 'the Law', a constituency or 'the State'—domains in which state laws *disempower* as well as enable the active citizen. (Incidentally, critics drawing on psychoanalytic ideas have proposed that *acting* in modern society can offer relief to the painful effort of having to live up continuously to one's idealised self-image precisely by *disempowering* the self.²⁵) In all such situations the partial ownership of the agent's acts, and their continuously re-defined nature, becomes evident. As opposed to a dramatic plot, acts unfold and are subject to re-description in ways that are often unanticipated.

Agency, moral responsibility and punishment: Oedipus Rex

I now want to speculate on whether the anthropological notion of moral agency necessarily presupposes not only conscious intention, but also 'responsibility.' I do this by discussing briefly the example of Oedipus.

The tragedy of *Oedipus* depicts a story of disempowerment that is neither voluntary nor involuntary. For Oedipus is an agent who, not knowing what he has done, makes a deep difference in the world. On gradually learning the secret of his past acts he inflicts terrible wounds on the body that performed them, on the self that can neither be recognised nor repudiated. Oedipus's final acts consist in his public renunciation of kingly power as both expression and consequence of pain. They embody and extend his passion—his agony—not of his conscious

intention. Oedipus's agency is constituted by the conflicting definitions of his predicament which is the outcome of his insistence on uncovering the truth of his origin. The act of disempowering himself is performed because, as the slayer of his father and the husband of his mother (a double transgression, both unknowingly committed), he is the cause of his subjects' unique suffering which will cease when he exiles himself from Thebes—that is, when he disempowers himself.

Michael Dillon (1997), whose impressive analysis of disempowerment has led me to write this section, observes that by finally 'taking responsibility' for himself, Oedipus becomes an agent in his own right. This is a suggestive interpretation but I am not persuaded that the notion of 'responsibility' is appropriate here. If we take that notion in its analytical sense (as containing the elements of imputability and liability to punishment) it seems to me that Oedipus is not responsible to any authority. He does not have to answer to any court (human or divine) for his actions—not even to what Christian casuistry would later call 'the internal court of conscience', a concept quite foreign to the Greeks.²⁶

In *Colonus* Oedipus explicitly denies that his transgressions were his own acts, and interrupts the Chorus, who refers to what he has done, by insisting that it was 'No doing of mine'. What he denies is not that he caused the death of a man at the crossroads (*that he had always known*) but that he murdered his father, which is a different act, and one which he had tried specifically to avoid. In what sense was he responsible for *this* act? By disowning the terrible thing done (parricide) he isn't saying that he didn't intend to kill. In that sense he recognises himself as the owner of a responsible act (as an agent). He claims that the act turned out to be not his own, that he was an unwitting instrument (agent) of the gods, and that as such his own intention was irrelevant. Yet when he discovers what has been done, he knows he must act—not because he admits or claims 'responsibility', but because he cannot live in the knowledge of who he is and what, being who he is, he has done to his father and his mother. That knowledge demands some resolution. Although Oedipus did not know 'the moral meaning' of his transgressive act at the time it was performed he nonetheless suffers for it. His subjects aren't immune from suffering either even though *they* have done nothing 'to deserve it'.

(Another question: Is Oedipus the same man at the end of the drama as he was at the beginning? By the end he has undergone horrendous experiences—the mental trauma of self-discovery and the bodily trauma of self-blinding. The self that now becomes visible is also the self that deliberately destroys its own capacity for sight. From a powerful, admired and protective king to a homeless, blinded, despised exile. Doesn't this rupture disallow a continuous personal identity for Oedipus, a Lockean self-identifying consciousness? And without that continuity, can we really say that at last Oedipus takes up responsibility for what he has done—or has responsibility ascribed to him?²⁷)

I am not arguing that what Oedipus does should be set in the context of

magical action as opposed to moral agency—that since he believed he had unwittingly released a dangerous pollution by killing his father he then sought to stop it by punishing and exiling himself. (This is what Freud saw in the Oedipus story—transgressions against magically-conditioned prohibitions that therefore have nothing to do with morality.)²⁸ I am urging that acts *can* have an ethical significance without necessarily having to be interpreted in terms of ‘answerability’.

Victorian anthropologists held the view that ‘magic’, being essentially the deployment of mistaken understandings of natural cause and effect, was a kind of pseudo-science—and therefore not to be confused with morality. ‘Religion’, on the other hand, when purified of its ‘magical’ elements, was held to be the original site of morality, because religion and morality both had to do with the responsibility of agents *for* their actions and *to* their God. Hence the ‘primitive’ belief that a human death automatically triggers a polluting substance contact with which causes harm to living humans is at once an erroneous understanding of natural causality and a moral status incompatible with ‘conscious’ action. Because moral action, for Victorian theorists as well as their present-day heirs, is the action par excellence of a ‘free agent’ who is answerable to God, or society, or conscience (the three being identical according to Durkheim). The opposition of magic/science to religion/morality appears plausible even now to many, but anthropologists in the twentieth century have problematised the concept of ‘magic,’ and more recently, of ‘religion’. There are also reasons to be skeptical of the sharp opposition between the realm of nature and that of society. Historians, sociologists and philosophers have now given us a deeper understanding of the ways in which the realm of nature is dependent on and interpenetrates human activity and experience. In so far as our understanding of ‘moral action’ depends on outmoded ideas of ‘magic’ and ‘religion’, can it remain unaffected?

The nature of Oedipus’s moral action may thus not depend on the concept of ‘responsibility’. One might say that Oedipus’s actions on discovering what he has done (beginning with ‘self-punishment’) arises from what Marcel Mauss called *habitus*—an embodied capacity that is more than physical ability in that it also includes cultivated sensibilities. Thus Oedipus’s self-inflicted pain should not, I think, be regarded as the outcome of a judgement about his responsibility. It is perhaps best not thought of as ‘punishment’ (a notion that has pretensions to being a reasoned and reasonable action), but as itself the passionate performance of an embodied moral sensibility. In the modern sense²⁹ to be responsible is to be accountable to an authority, to be prepared to give justifications and excuses for one’s actions, to know that one deserves punishment for failure to do one’s duty—a duty that one *could* and *should* have done. *Habitus*, in contrast, is not something one *accepts* or *rejects*, it is *part of what one essentially is and must do*. (The ethics of necessity encompasses tragedy.) I would suggest that Oedipus puts out his own eyes not because his society considers that he deserves to be punished for failing to be morally

responsible—or because *he* thinks he does—but because (as he puts it) he cannot bear the thought of having to look his father and his mother in the eyes when he joins them beyond the grave, or to see his children, ‘begotten as they were begotten’. He acts, in brief, out of passionate necessity. I am therefore puzzled by Dillon’s representation of Oedipus as a paradigm of moral ‘responsibility’.

Bernard Williams too maintains that the story of Oedipus illustrates the concept of moral responsibility (Williams 1993). Williams regards the idea of responsibility to be essential to the concept of agency, thereby virtually equating morality with criminal law. Even so his account is not quite as clear as it might be. Thus at page 55 he identifies ‘cause, intention, state, and response’ as the ‘basic elements of *any* conception of responsibility’, but at page 57 he concedes that modern law holds people responsible ‘in some cases, for outcomes they did not even cause.’ This attribution of responsibility without causality rests, he thinks, on a distinction that is ‘analogous’ to the one found in the ritual of ‘the scapegoat’, in being ‘a substitute for someone who is responsible.’ The analogy is surely misleading? Modern law defines the liability of legal persons such as landlords prior to any tort, whereas scapegoats are constituted in relation to specific transgressions. The landlord’s liability for damage to others that occurs on his property is quite different from the scapegoat’s role in carrying people’s sins away into the desert. As Franz Steiner makes clear, the scapegoat was not a stand-in for a legal culprit (someone who has himself failed to be adequately responsible), nor an expression of a primitive belief in *taboo*, but the ritual expulsion of evil from the renewed community (Steiner 1958, chapter V). The landlord is made responsible to society of which he is a member; the scapegoat’s function is to be outside it. It is precisely the radical Protestant idea that ‘true religion’ requires belief in individual ‘responsibility’ and that ritual practices occupy the domain in which magic and superstition also flourish, that gives us our oversimplified secular sense of the ‘scapegoat’ as a person who is blamed for the sins of others.

Like nineteenth-century anthropologists, Williams believes that the notion of ‘magical beliefs’ (such as pollution caused by homicide) cannot be the basis of ‘moral agency’. He is unlike them in thinking that the story of Oedipus is not essentially about primitive superstition but about what moderns would recognise as morality. However, he is like them in assuming that to justify this claim requires proof that the story contains a modern concept of responsibility, one divorced from superstition. ‘The whole of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that dreadful machine, moves to the discovery of just one thing, that *he did it*,’ he writes, ‘Do we understand the terror of that discovery only because we residually share magical beliefs in blood-guilt, or archaic notions of responsibility? Certainly not: we understand it because we know that in the story of one’s life there is an authority exercised by what one has done, not merely by what one has intentionally done.’ (p.69) Williams would have us understand Oedipus as a familiar ‘human’ individual, a character at once real and profound, whose moral status is independent of any *plot*. On that score there seems to be no essential

difference for Williams between the way a Fifth-century Athenian audience saw Oedipus and the way we are urged to see him. But the sense in this passage of the expression 'there is an authority' is obscure. It allows one to evade the question of precisely when, how, and by whom the terror at 'what one has done' comes to be construed as a recognition of one's 'responsibility'.

In the paradigm case of Oedipus it is not simply that he *unintentionally* offends against moral interdictions and that he subsequently makes this terrible discovery. It is that he is, from his very birth, *destined* to do so. Even his parents, Laius and Jocasta, contribute to that destiny by trying to evade it. And however much Oedipus tries to avoid it, he *unwittingly* acts in the way scripted for him. That plot is part of who he is. (Freud, famously, saw this plot as the working out of unconscious desires [1975:362-6], but we may regard it as the story made up of the actions of many persons³⁰). It is precisely the retrospective telling of this pre-script that serves to define his present status as a moral agent—not because it liberates him from his past but because it relates his agency to his *habitus*, the ability to act sanely—albeit tragically—in accordance with his experience and situation. The authority of the past is *not* necessarily a sign of psycho-pathology, as Freud the modernist taught.

In *Three Dialogues on Knowledge*, Paul Feyerabend makes the claim that classical Greek tragedy was at once 'a factual account of social conditions with a criticism of these conditions and the suggestion for an alternative' (Feyerabend 1991:97). But this position does not allow for the possibility that tragedy (like pain itself) may be actively lived as a necessary condition of forms of life, one that no amount of social reform and individual therapy can eliminate for ever. An 'impossible choice' is a choice between terrible alternatives that have been pre-scripted for one—but it is still possible to choose, and to act on that choice. The tragedy of Oedipus does not illustrate 'how institutions may paralyze action', as Feyerabend and others have put it. It shows how the past constitutes agency. By this I do not mean of course that no reform of social arrangements depicted in the play is conceivable. I mean simply that Oedipus *does* act, that he does so in a situation that was *not* his 'responsibility', and that he can act creatively without aiming at self-empowerment to free his city. I mean further that reform towards a more sane and just order cannot do away with pain—not merely because pain is part of the vicissitudes of life, but because it is intrinsic to the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic traditions of justice, and the secular tradition that has come out of the latter. The nature of *this* pain (punishment, repentance) is different from the one endured by Oedipus because it *is* rooted in the idea of responsibility. It implies that the acceptance of guilt and painful expiation opens the way back to a kind of just restoration.³¹ For Oedipus such a return doesn't exist.

A digression on pain (passion or action?)

When we say of someone that they are suffering we commonly suppose that

they are not agents. To suffer (physical or mental pain, humiliation, deprivation) is, so we usually think, to be in a passive state—an object not a subject. We readily allow that pain may be a cause for action (a movement to end suffering, say) but do not normally think of it as action itself. Pain is something that happens to the body or that afflicts the mind. Or so, at any rate, we tend to think. Yet one can think of pain not merely as a passive state (although it can be just that) but as itself agentive.

Physical pain is of course the object of passion—but also of action. In Paul Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* we have a remarkable account of the attempts by an ailing subject to control his bodily pain mentally. This includes the use of metaphors. The most pervasive of these is the dark image of pain as a hostile alien thing within the body. Jean Starobinski points to the fact that Valéry employs musical tropes, as when he writes that 'Pain is due to the resistance of the consciousness to a local arrangement of the body. A pain which we could consider clearly, and in some way circumscribe, would become sensation without suffering—and perhaps in this way we could succeed in knowing something directly about our deeper body—knowledge of the sort we find in music. Pain is a very musical thing, one can almost speak of it in terms of music. There are deep and high-pitched pains, andantes and furiosos, prolonged notes, fermatas and arpeggios, progressions—abrupt silences, etc...' Starobinski observes that here the musical metaphor is closely connected to a plan for control because 'every metaphORIZATION implies an interpretation, and every interpretation involves a distance between an interpreting power and an object interpreted—even if that object is an event taking place in "my body"... For Valéry, "pain has no meaning," hence its indefinitely interpretable nature' (Starobinski 1989:386).

I offer, tentatively, a somewhat different conclusion. Using musical metaphors to fix the body's pain might be seen not exactly as giving meaning to brute experience but as a *process of structuring that experience*. I knew someone who used numbers to anticipate and categorise her experience of pain. Although, unsurprisingly, severe pains were numbered higher, a less obvious structuration was also at work: only acute, irresolvable pains appeared as prime numbers. Furthermore, the numbering varied according to the social context she was in: prime numbers were more likely when she was alone. Such structuration doesn't necessarily make pain 'meaningful'; it is simply a way of experiencing it. So the conclusion I offer stands opposed to Elaine Scarry's position in her influential study *The Body in Pain*, according to which 'the utter rigidity of pain itself' is universally reflected in the fact that 'its resistance to language is not simply one of its incidental or accidental attributes but is essential to what it is' (Scarry 1985:5). For although musical or mathematical structuration may not constitute 'language' in the ordinary sense, it does problematise the idea of pain-in-itself as a private, thought-destroying event.

Scarry asserts that pain is necessarily a private experience, and proposes that the experience of 'one's own physical pain' is the very paradigm of certainty,

and hearing about 'another person's physical pain' the paradigm of doubt—because it can never be completely confirmed (Scarry 1985:4). But questions arise here as to whether this claim is correct, and also whether it applies solely to pain or to 'feelings' of any kind.³²

Whether one can be certain of another's pain depends surely on who is expressing it to whom, and how—verbally, for example, or through lamentation, or by facial signs, or by the way an agonised or impaired body is revealed. One may suppress or cover up such signs, of course, but the point is that pain is not strictly speaking a 'private' experience but a 'public' rhetoric, as Wittgenstein taught long ago (1953, especially p.100). Indeed, if doubt about another's pain were always irresolvable, as Scarry (1985:28) claims it is, the repeated infliction of cruelty on victims of torture would be difficult to understand—unless the *repeated* infliction of suffering is to be accounted for as an obsessive epistemological act. Scarry's statement that in the eyes of torturers 'the objectified pain [of the victim] is denied as pain and read as power' is odd because the *denial* of a victim's pain implies a kind of certainty in the torturer's mind although her basic claim is that he is always *uncertain*. (Besides, to say that the pain of the victim is 'read as power' doesn't tell us why physical pain is inflicted, merely that it is. Why is inflicted pain chosen as the medium for inscribing and reading power if its effect is essentially so doubtful?)

Of course error—and therefore doubt—may occur not only in the context of reports of pain but of reports of any feeling. (As Collingwood once put it, I can't be wrong if I *feel* something—although I might be wrong, or simply lying, in *saying* that I feel it.)³³ However, addressing another's pain is not merely a matter of judging referential statements. It is about how a particular kind of moral relationship can be inhabited and enacted.³⁴ An agent suffers because of the pain of someone she loves—a mother, say, confronted by her wounded child. That suffering is a condition of her relationship, something that includes her ability to respond sympathetically to the pain of the original sufferer. The person who suffers because of another's pain doesn't first assess the evidence presented to her and then decide on whether and how to react. She lives a relationship. The other's hurt—expressed in painful words, cries, gestures (in short, 'a rhetoric')—makes a difference to her in the sense of being the active reason for her own suffering and for her response to the other's pain. It is a practical condition of who she and her suffering child are. (This applies equally to pleasures the two may share.) It's not that one's own pain can never be convincingly conveyed to others, but that *when* one feels the urgent need to communicate one's pain, and the communication fails, *then* it may come to be thought of—with added anguish—as unshareable. 'In order to construct self-narratives,' notes Susan Brison discussing victims of rape and torture, '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 [or unable?] to listen to what they endured' Brison (1997: 21-2).³⁵ The ability to live sanely after a traumatic experience of pain is always dependent on the responses of others. Pain, one might venture, is neither a brute reality undermining thought nor an interpretation. It is an active, practical relationship. But does this apply only to 'mental suffering' as opposed to bodily pain?

How clear is the distinction between physical pain and psychological (or social) suffering? All feelings of pain involve physical changes that are not only internal to the body (muscular, bio-chemical) but also externally visible (voice, demeanor, gait) and culturally readable. This fact alone complicates the too-neat distinction between physical pain and mental pain. Distressing emotions, too, are connected to chemical disturbances in the body. Chemical imbalances in the organism—whether associated with trauma or malignant cell growth—are as 'physical' as torn ligaments. It may be that physical pain is typically located by the sufferer in particular parts of her body and that this is what distinguishes it from mental distress. But mental states—themselves closely connected to social circumstances—are central in the experience of physical pain.

It has long been known that tolerance to physical pain is culturally variable. The latest research on the physiology of pain points to a more radical conclusion: physical injury to a specific part of the body is not necessary to activate the body's pain system. The notorious phenomenon of phantom-limb pain is not, it now seems, a curious anomaly. Pain is not merely experienced in the mind, researchers say, but generated by it.³⁶ The brain is the locus of complex interactions—including interactions between distressing memories, perceptions and emotions—whose result is the experience and behavior of pain. The familiar distinction between physical pain as something that is typically experienced in a particular part of the body, and mental suffering as a physically unlocatable experience, is not so clear-cut if we recall that in many cultures distressing emotions are experienced as being located in particular organs of the body (liver, belly, heart, etc.).³⁷ Even in modern society people recognise that they can be 'sick with anger' and 'flushed with embarrassment', and that these unpleasant experiences are at once physically located and socially anchored.

If research now indicates that the brain is the source and not the terminus of pain sensations, the latter come to be thought of as actions that are sited in social and natural contexts. *What* a subject experiences as painful, and *how*, are not only culturally and physically mediated, *they are themselves modes of living painful relations*. The ability to live such relationships over time transforms pain from a passive experience into an active one, and thus defines one of the ways of living sanely in the world. It does not follow, of course, that one cannot or should not seek to reform the social relations one inhabits, still less that pain is 'a valuable thing'. My point is that one can live sanely or insanely in a painful world, and that the progressivist model of agency diverts attention away from our trying to understand how this is done in different traditions.

Notes on cruelty and conscience

In the history of Western thought pain is closely related to punishment, penalty, penance, and repentance. Because pain is generally regarded in modern secular society as an evil, liberals have been much exercised to explain or justify the human infliction of pain on humans. (Theodicy is no longer a topic of burning concern.) The legal, moral and social science literature on the subject of punishment, war, and other forms of inflicted violence is immense.³⁸

In his essay criticising the hermeneutical tendency in legal studies, Robert Cover makes an impressive argument about the connection between judicial interpretation and the infliction of pain in the working of the law (Cover 1986). Law as an institution is premised on the existence of people who directly inflict pain on others or indirectly facilitate it—or even allow it to be inflicted on others. This, Cover points out, applies not merely to those who offend against the law, but to those who maintain it as well. For the judicial system is inevitably based on the threat or implementation of legally-sanctioned violence—including forcible fines, incarceration and even death. How, then, are ‘most of us’ induced to collaborate in the use of these painful measures?

To answer this question, Cover turns to the well-known experiments carried out by the social psychologist Stanley Milgram, and published in his *Obedience to Authority* (1974). In these experiments, persons were required by experimenters to administer what appeared to be increasing amounts of electric shock to subjects in an experiment said to be designed to test learning efficiency. In fact it was the agents apparently inflicting electric shocks who were the unwitting experimental subjects, the real aim of the experiment being to test their readiness to obey authority (i.e., to obey the experimenters who delegated and authorised what appeared to be pain-causing activity). The results, discussed in the book, demonstrated a high level of compliance by those who administered the ‘electric shocks’ despite feigned expressions of extreme pain on the part of the ‘experimental subjects’. In interpreting his results, Milgram makes a theoretical distinction between acting in an ‘autonomous’ state and acting in an ‘agentic’ state—that is, between acting in accordance with one’s conscience and obeying authority—which Cover finds useful for his own analysis.

(In *Modernity and the Holocaust* Zygmunt Bauman continues this line of reasoning—also by drawing on the Milgram experiment—in his explanation of the Nazi genocide of the Jews. It is the structure of social relations that inhibits the effectiveness of ‘conscience’, and thereby induces individuals to act with deliberate or indifferent cruelty. ‘The voice of individual moral conscience,’ he concludes, ‘is best heard in the tumult of political and social discord’ (Bauman 1989:166). This means that ideally the agent must represent himself as an individual.)

The idea of ‘conscience’ as moral guide and guarantee is of course an old one in the history of modern Western thought, although it is here put in a rather unusual context. Milgram’s experiment was heavily criticised by fellow

academics and the soundness of its design impugned. But whatever the scientific status of the experiment itself, the findings should not have been surprising. There is evidence enough from organised warfare alone that 'most of us' are capable of inflicting pain and death on others when the conditions are right. The army, which is designed to wound and kill, is not a rigid hierarchy of command escape from which frees an individual (and therefore compassionate) conscience. Flexibility and individual initiative are crucial to military tactics. (Military manuals emphasise that junior officers engaged in a local skirmish should not wait for orders from higher authority but take whatever initiative is necessary to pursue and defeat the enemy.³⁹) An individual conscience is always sited in relation to a particular horizon of possible actions. A soldier's consciousness is defined not by an abstract humanity but by his skills and tasks as a soldier. Since the soldier's main task is to win in battle, his individual conscience must therefore be ready to kill and wound the enemy in battle.⁴⁰ So, too, the conscience of the torturer must be ready to impose cruel punishment on the regime's enemies.

The difficulties with Milgrim's explanatory model about the human value of individual conscience should be evident. To begin with, his claim that only hierarchically-integrated individuals readily inflict pain or death on others because their own conscience does not inhibit them from so doing, is a tautology. Any cruelty inflicted by individuals on others, when they are not authorised to do so, can be written off as 'insane' or 'criminal' behavior. In other words it can be represented as the behavior of individuals who are either permanently without a conscience or temporarily unable to act in accordance with its dictates. But as in the case of war and of judicial punishment, moral autonomy ('conscience' in the Kantian sense) is certainly no guarantee that agents will refrain from inflicting pain and death on others. Furthermore, Milgram's model is unable to account for religious orders (monks and nuns, for example) whose members seek to cultivate non-violent or compassionate behavior within a formal setting of disciplined behavior.

The problem, I believe, lies not in the lack of autonomy or conscience but elsewhere—in the very existence of the Law that, by endowing the agent with responsibility for conquering the desire for transgression, his own and that of others, and with the assumption that this desire is always present in the human subject, inevitably builds on pain.

Thinking of pain as agency in religious history and ethnography

Pain inflicted as punishment can be eagerly embraced by those on whom it is inflicted and transformed into something other than was intended. But this process need not be seen—as it is too often done—in terms of a metaphysical desire to resist power. Instead we might more usefully trace its implications and consequences as action that affects the possible actions of others in different

domains.

Historians of late antiquity have made us familiar with the fact that sovereignty in the early Roman empire was realised to a great degree through public demonstrations of the emperor's power and munificence. The theatrical torture of certain categories of criminal was part of this necessary display of power. Famously, among those so tortured were the early Christian martyrs. Judith Perkins in her book *The Suffering Self* states that early Christian martyrologies 'refuse to read the martyrs' broken bodies as defeat, but reverse the reading, insisting on interpreting them as symbols of victory over society's power' (Perkins 1995:117). Far from shunning physical suffering, the martyrs actively sought to live it. Like Christ's passion on the cross, the martyrs' passivity was famously an act of triumph. That openness to pain was precisely part of the structure of their agency as Christians. And yet, it is not the symbolic significance of martyrdom that I want to focus on here—because the search for meanings leads us in Perkins's account to explanations in terms of false consciousness—but its effectiveness in creating new social spaces for action.

In the world of late antiquity, the Christian community was positively oriented (as the ancient world had not been) to sickness and human suffering. Where sickness could not be healed, Christians insisted that pain could be understood as valuable. This was different from two traditions that were more or less contemporaneous with the early Christian persecutions related in the martyrologies: Stoic moral philosophy (with its emphasis on self-mastery, its denial of externals such as suffering), and Galenic medicine (that regarded pain as a bodily condition subject to appropriate technical intervention).

Perkins argues that Stoicism was a ruling ideology: 'Epictetus' emphasis on the internal, on self-mastery, and self-formation, as well as his denial of the importance of externals [such as suffering], would have served to divert the attention of his students and others like them away from attending to social or material conditions. His teaching supported the status quo, and any affirmation of the status quo acts to affirm an elite's position. Stoic insistence that poverty and social position did not matter fitted into the elite agenda better than into an underprivileged one: as does the corresponding counsel that what did, in fact, matter was how well you did at being poor, imprisoned, or politically unpopular. This teaching, along with emphasis on control directed at the interior self, had significant relevance for the social body; it would work to restrain social as well as personal disturbances' (Perkins 1995:84-5). But this resort to the notion of false consciousness to explain political domination seems to me fatally weak. In the first place Stoicism was an ethic intended for the elite rather than the masses. As such, it encouraged withdrawal from corrupt public life and inattention to social and material conditions. We may therefore question whether it was an ideology well-suited to active involvement in imperial rule. Perkins overlooks the fact that a pessimistic acceptance of suffering as an ineradicable part of life, and a recommendation to adjust to social life as it is rather than to

seek to change it, may be mistaken both as diagnosis and as remedy, but it is not a denial that life is ultimately unjust. On the contrary, it is precisely because the world *is* viewed as unjust and filled with misfortune that the particular psychological remedies are proposed. Finally, how do we know that Stoicism 'would work to restrain social disturbance'?

According to Perkins, Galen's understanding of the sick body was adapted by the early Christians in their distinctive treatment of pain. Thus by a paradoxical development, the Christian embrace of suffering led, she tells us, to a greater concern for—and therefore a new kind of activity directed at—the diseased, the poor and the despised members of society. If Perkins is right, then we find here not merely another *meaning* of pain but also another *economy* of action. The self-subjection of these Christians to pain (at least as represented in the martyrologies on which Perkins draws) was itself a form of agency not because of their active intention (whatever that may have been), nor primarily because of the symbolic significance of suffering ('a text to be read' as Perkins puts it [p.152]). It was a form of agency because, as part of an emerging tradition, their public suffering made a difference not only to themselves (to their own potential actions) as members of a new Faith but also to the world in which they lived: it engaged with one's own pain and the suffering of others differently. An important aspect of the new economy of action (noted famously by Nietzsche, but not mentioned by Perkins) is the transformation of pain into a moral necessity. Suffering was not merely an unfortunate feature of an imperfect world. As the object of moral concern it had now become essential to the exercise of virtue.⁴¹

The distinction between looking for the symbolic meaning of pain (as an ideology) and for its agentive function may be illustrated further by reference to an ethnography of pain in childbirth among North American religious women just published by the anthropologist Pamela Klassen. Klassen tells us that many of the women she studied regarded giving birth without drugs to be an empowering act because—as one of them put it—'it's something that a man could never do.' Klassen is aware that this claim to power might be criticised for presenting an essentialised category of woman because not all women give birth. She thinks nevertheless that it can help to subvert the gendered image of male strength and female weakness. Klassen writes:

Perhaps in late-twentieth-century America, where women are taught to be observers and critics of their own bodies from outside, the pain of childbirth puts women back *in* their bodies. In this specific context, the counter-cultural force of pain holds an empowering, and for some, salvific dimension. In accord with Carolyn Walker Bynum, I cautiously assert that 'our culture may finally need something of the medieval sense, reflected so clearly in the use of *birthing* and *nursing* as symbols for salvation, that generativity and suffering can be synonymous.' Many home-birthing women are working towards such a coupling. (Klassen 1998:55).

But we need to think of the pain of childbirth not merely as a meaningful experience, and not so much as an image subversive of male arrogance (on that score, alas, it has not been historically very effective). We need to think of the pain directly as a constitutive element of giving birth. The point is not to argue whether or not birthing can be accepted as a moral basis of the Female claim to empowerment. It is quite simply that particular women in particular places and at particular times actually give birth in pain—and *this creates a new situation for the mother herself and for others*. For those who exercise it, the power to make another life and therefore other relations come into the world in pain is no less agentive for being particularised as well as unwilling (I refer, of course, not to the decision to have a child but the process of conception, pregnancy, and birth). Of course mothering is possible when the pain of birthing is prevented by medical means. I do not wish to be taken as saying that painful birth is intrinsically valuable—although the religious women studied by Klassen preferred giving birth at home among family members, and without the intervention of medical (i.e. pain-relieving) authorities. The point is that pain was not merely a negative, individual *experience* as modern medicine has tended to regard it, but an essential element in a distinctive social act in which others assisted and to which they responded. What I want to emphasise is Klassen's presentation of a form of agency that doesn't seek self-empowerment but is, quite simply, the activity that reproduces and sustains human relationships. It is not the *symbolic meaning* attributed to motherhood that matters here, any more than the self-interpretation of individuals as mothers. What matters is the becoming and being 'a mother' by means of the practical methods employed in various traditions. For the act of birthing doesn't merely produce another living body, it also helps to reproduce and extend a distinctive set of kinship relationships. The mother is an agent as a consequence of what she has done in a particular social situation—after the event, as it were—and not because of her desire or intention. (In any case, the desire that she have a child is not the mother's alone: other relatives are also involved.) Our tendency to think of childbirth as passive because unwilling and uncontrolled is deep-rooted. Even Simone de Beauvoir, observes Susan Brison, 'views childbirth and nursing as completely passive—and thus dehumanizing—processes, which keep women mired in immanence' (Brison 1997).⁴² Such a view, in its highly individualist and intentionalist perspective, rejects that birthing has anything to do with agency, with doing.

I discuss a final example of the role of pain in the economy of action—this time from the Islamic tradition. It is one based on the idea of the soul that is at least as old as Aristotle, and that has been absorbed into Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam. This requires us to attend not merely to the idea of embodiment (that human action and experience are sited in a material body) but also to the idea of what for want of a better word one may call ensoulment—the idea that the living human body is an integrated totality having developable capacities for activity and experience unique to it, capacities that are culturally

mediated.

Although the living body is the object of sensations (and in that sense), its ability to suffer, to respond perceptually and emotionally to external and internal causes, to use its pain in particular ways in particular social relationships, makes it active. Many traditions, including those we have learnt to call religious, therefore attribute to the human body the potential to be shaped for good or ill. They do not regard agency as being external to power (which is how moral and political resistance is generally thought of in contemporary anthropology) but as always saturated with it. According to this view, only corpses are beyond power/virtue, and therefore without agency.

Whether passive or active, the living body's materiality is regarded as an essential medium for cultivating the kind of agency that such traditions define as virtuous conduct and for discouraging what they consider vice. The role of fear and hope, of felicity and pain, is central to such practices. According to this view of the ensouled body, the more one exercises a virtue the easier—and less intentional (deliberate)—it becomes. On the other hand, the more one gives in to vice, the harder it is to act virtuously. This is precisely how many Muslims interpret the repeated Qur'anic declaration to the effect that God seals the hearts of stubborn sinners. The punishment for repeated wickedness is to be the sort of person one is: unable to distinguish true speech from false, and divine speech from human speech.

Ironically, the conscious intentionality typically demanded by agency theorists is here seen as important only where inexperience or vice prevails, for it is in those conditions alone that the inertial resistance of the body, as well as its fragility, need to be addressed deliberately by responsible practice. Note that I speak here of virtues (*fada'il*) and sensibilities (*ihsas*). Rites of worship (*'ibadat*), whose regular practice is in fact necessary to the cultivation of the virtues and sensibilities required of a Muslim, do require the silent enunciation of one's intention (*niyya*) to perform the prayer (*salat*), etc. at the commencement of the rite. The *niyya* is therefore an integral part of the rite itself. This indicates the complexity of an individual intent inserted into a larger practice that seeks to dispense with conscious intention.

Charles Hirschkind (1999) and Saba Mahmood (1998), have written doctoral dissertations on the Islamic revival in Egypt. The latter studied religious groups in Cairo run for and by women in which sacred texts are expounded with special reference to the cultivation of virtues required of Muslim women. The former studied the reception of religious sermons, both live and recorded on cassette tapes, that presuppose what he calls 'the ethics of listening.' Both Mahmood and Hirschkind provide detailed descriptions of practices directed at the cultivation of spontaneous Islamic conduct, in which painful emotions—fear and remorse, for example—are seen as central to the practice of moral discrimination. In different ways, their accounts reveal that 'virtuous fear' (*taqwa*) is regarded not simply as a spur to action but as integral to action itself. Apart from being necessary to the development of moral discrimination, the endurance of pain is considered to

be a necessary means of cultivating the virtue of patience (*sabr*), itself crucial to all processes of virtue-acquisition. Unlike Stoicism or medieval monastic practices, this Islamic tradition is not reserved for the social elite.

Physical pain and damage to the body are not celebrated in the central Sunni tradition of Islam, as they are for example among the early Christian martyrs, but forms of suffering are nonetheless intrinsic to the kind of agent a devout Muslim aspires to be. The most important of these is the universal experience of dying and death. The suffering generated by the loss of those she loves is shared with others through prescribed practices of burial and bereavement⁴³ pain that can never be eliminated. The devout Muslim seeks to cultivate virtue and repudiate vice by a constant awareness of her/his own earthly finitude, trying to achieve the state of equilibrium that the Qur'an calls *an-nafs al-mutma'inna*, 'the self at peace'.

The eleventh-century theologian al-Ghazali, invoked by the people that Hirschkind and Mahmood studied, expounds a distinctive psychology for Islamic devotional discipline. According to al-Ghazali, *an-nafs* ('the self' or 'the soul') is the site of continuous conflict between, on the one side, *al-'aql* (usually translated as 'reason') and, on the other, *ash-shaytaniyya* (literally, 'the satanic'), with the former striving for an equilibrium and the latter undermining it. According to this doctrine, reason is not opposed to passion but directs desire (*ash-shahwah*) in a virtuous direction by regulating the constitutive forces of the ensouled body. When the destructive principle of *ash-shaytaniyya* prevails, the vicious passions are generated.⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali's treatise is intended to assist both teacher and pupil in a collaborative practice whose aim is to embody and exercise appropriate Islamic practices.

Penalties, whether emerging as incapacity from within the living body's functions, or imposed as punishment externally, are regarded as a necessary part of learning how to act appropriately. This formative process is set within the Islamic tradition of mutual discipline: *al-amr bil-ma'ruf wan-nahy 'an al-munkar* (literally, 'the requiring of what is beneficial and the rejection of what is reprehensible').⁴⁵ The individual's acquisition of appropriate agency and its exercise are articulated by responsibility, a responsibility not merely of the agent but of the entire community of Muslims severally and collectively. If agency is to be defined in terms of responsibility (which I have argued above it need not always be) then we have here a case of agency that acquires its sense not from a historical teleology but from a biographical one in which the individual seeks to acquire the capacities and sensibilities internal to a particular tradition that is oriented by an eschatology. In this tradition, the body-and-its-capacities is not owned solely by the individual but subject to a variety of rights and duties held by others. And pain is integral to the articulation of disciplined power.⁴⁶ There is therefore a continuous, unresolved tension between responsibility as individual and metaphysical (eschatology) and as collective and quotidian (sociology). Hence this tradition requires the existence—or creation—of a space that is neither purely 'private', nor strictly speaking 'public' in the sense instituted by

law in liberal society.

However, the practices I refer to above should not be thought of as constructing actual people. Actual people are formed through numerous projects, accidents, and processes that are by no means always consistent or consciously directed. Ian Hacking has recently alerted us to the extravagant and confused use of the term 'construction' in contemporary humanist and social science writing (Hacking 1999). The word is intended, he points out, to convey the implication that 'things could be otherwise'—a political stance with which he has much sympathy, as I do too. Hacking is surely right to deplore talk about 'construction' that refers to the results of biographical and historical processes no one can have envisaged let alone planned. A builder 'constructs' a house to live in, an orator 'constructs' an argument to persuade an audience, an actor 'constructs' a character to perform. But persons do not 'construct themselves as social beings', whether dialectically or otherwise.⁴⁷ (Perhaps the professional con-man may in a sense be said to do so, but even there the phrase is inapt.) Doesn't the body that was formed in one's mother's body have anything to do with 'social being'? Don't other people's plots and chance events bring experiences one did not seek and cannot quite control? 'Self-construction', I agree with Hacking, is an illusion. It is also an ideology well-suited to our individualising consumer culture.

In Egypt (as in so much of the modern world) the processes that help to form people as social beings include two sources of disciplines that are most prominent—the secular state and its apparatuses, and the capitalist economy. The latter, especially, imposes its increasingly hegemonic discipline—'the discipline of the market'—in this phase of Egypt's history by means of familiar rewards (the promise of fulfilling all our desires) and punishments (unemployment, insecurity, rising cost of living, bankruptcy). In doing so, it also encourages the view of agency as individual self-empowerment, and of 'desire' as the most personal, authentic thing one has. There is clearly a conflict between the disciplines of secular state and modern market and those of the Islamic tradition described above. One result of that conflict is the latter's re-adjustment and reformulation in unpredictable ways.

Concluding remarks

Let me try to bring this essay to some sort of conclusion. I have complained that those who employ the concept of agency self-consciously too often draw on an essentialised notion of the human subject and on a questionable vision of history as moral progress. They do not take up problems that I believe must be addressed if we are to understand what we can and what we can't do with the notion of agency. For example: What story is the agent a part of? (Not all stories are about destiny, although the Oedipus story was.) How is the speech and behavior of agents, both corporate and individual, normalised and disciplined? In what ways does pain—as passive suffering, as compassion, as

cruelty—make for different kinds of agency? Which plot makes the idea of ‘responsibility’ essential to the social description of an agent’s actions? When does ‘awakened consciousness’ become a necessary or possible frame for an agent’s behavior? These questions are not, I think, primarily psychological. They do not take ‘the inner life’ of humans for granted and ask how it is molded by ‘external’ culture. Nor do they ask how the intentionality of particular humans is externalised in acts that ‘generate’, or ‘resist’ social structures. The questions are directed at how ‘the human’ (differentiated, for example, from ‘animals’ and ‘gods’, as well as from ‘machines’ and ‘natural environments’) is historically realised and socially endowed with consciousness as well as autonomy, and at how different traditions articulate the possibilities for living sanely in a painful world.

In brief, these questions do not presuppose that ‘history’ is the construct of human agents. Nor do they assume that history is essentially a story of universal empowerment, as so many theorists of agency still appear to do. On the contrary, they lead us to ask how that story of the future has come to overwrite very different collective memories of local pasts.

Notes

An early form of this essay was given at the ‘After the Body’ conference at Manchester University in June 1998, and a later version was delivered as the Orr Annual Lecture at Dartmouth College (USA) in October 1998. I benefitted from comments by both audiences. I am especially grateful to William Connolly, David Scott, and Susan Wolf for extended discussions that helped me to clarify my argument at various points. My thanks also to the following for their critical comments and suggestions: Hussein Agrama, Veena Das, Charles Hirschkind, Amy Hollywood, Susan James, Ali Khan, Saba Mahmood, Kirstie McClure, Gyan Pandey, and Macklin Trimmell.

1. See, for example, Flew and Vesey (1987).
2. Thus Winnifred Sullivan, commenting on Sally Falk Moore’s historical account of changes in the law of an East African people, argues that Moore’s rejection of Geertz’s interpretive method appears in effect ‘to rob the lives of the people she studies of meaning and creative agency’, Sullivan (1994:14). How Moore’s contemporary account, published in the United States, can have deprived an East African people of their ability to act during the last century is puzzling.
3. Thus Lawrence Grossberg observes that ‘agency—the ability to make history as it were—is not intrinsic either to subjectivity or to subjects. It is not an ontological principle that distinguishes humans from other sorts of beings. Agency is defined by the articulations of subject positions into specific places (sites of investment) and spaces (fields of activity) on socially constructed territorialities. Agency is the empowerment enabled at particular sites and along particular vectors.’ Grossberg (1993:15). I agree with Grossberg that agency and subjectivity must be analytically separated, but disagree with his definition of agency in terms of ‘history-making’ and ‘self-empowerment’.
4. A relevant collection that deserves wider critical attention is *Other Intentions*;

Cultural Contexts and the Attribution of Inner States, edited by Lawrence Rosen (1995).

5. See, for example, Ortner (1984).
6. Thus in her book *Body of Power Spirit of Resistance* the anthropologist Jean Comaroff chides Bourdieu for his apparent neglect of the subjective viewpoint, declaring that, 'For all its cogency, [Bourdieu's] formulation leads us so far into the domain of implicit meaning that the role of consciousness is almost totally eclipsed. In his effort to correct what he perceives to be a subjectivist bias in prevailing views of human practice, Bourdieu goes so far in the other direction that his actors seem doomed to reproduce their world mindlessly, without its contradictions leaving any mark on their awareness—at least until a crisis... initiates a process of overt struggle' (Comaroff 1985:5). In place of this neglect of what she thinks of as agency, Comaroff endorses what she calls a dialectical approach—'the interplay of subject and object as this occurs in the course of "signifying practice", that is the process through which persons, acting upon an external environment, construct themselves as social beings' (ibid.:6). In my view Bourdieu *does* give consciousness (and 'false consciousness') a major role in his work—not directly in his famous notion of *habitus* but in the neo-Marxist theory of historical emancipation within which it is set. It is there that his notion of *habitus* can be seen as the form that 'false consciousness' takes through the compliant body.
7. Towards the conclusion of her study of early-modern theories of emotions, Susan James describes the steps by which 'desire' becomes the central force governing all actions. 'As with most realignments of this sort, however, its achievements are bought at some cost,' she observes, 'On the one hand, an increasingly generic conception of desire paves the way for the modern orthodoxy that beliefs and desires are the antecedents of action. On the other hand, explanations of actions grounded on the view that the passions only move us to act in so far as they are kinds of desire, or are mixed with desire, are often comparatively blank. Taken generically, desires lack the inflections that would make them explanatory. Once we begin to expand them, we are drawn back into the intricate and sometimes baffling territory of the passions' (James 1997:292). This tension between 'desire' as action and as passion, James suggests, has been uniquely addressed in our own time by Freud and his followers. Incidentally, the concept of 'interest' (including 'self-interest') which agency theorists often invoke, is another psychological term that has a singular history, and that presents itself to moderns as universal, natural, essential (see Hirschman 1977). The complicated genealogies by which we have acquired our vocabularies for talking about agency and subjectivity, and the changing psychological theories they bring with them, should alert us to the dangers of applying them without careful thought and qualification to any and all social situations.
8. I find it odd that Sherry Ortner should complain of 'the denial of the intentional subject, and of "agency"' in contemporary writing when agency-talk is so very popular in anthropology and 'the intentional subject' so essential to it (Ortner 1996:8).
9. Writing about the history of the emotions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Amélie Rorty observes: 'Instead of being reactions to invasions from something external to the self, passions became the very activities of the mind, its own motions. So transformed they become proper motives, and along with desires, the beginnings of actions. During this period, emotions also cease to be merely turbulent commotions: among them appear sentiments, ways of feeling pleasures and pains as evaluations, and so as the proper guides to action' (Rorty 1982:159).

10. 'The Ilongots we knew did not appeal to social rule or cosmic law in explaining their continued interest in beheadings; neither gods nor claims to land, nor politics, health, fertility, or a desire to excel was seen by them as a reasonable cause to raid... Men went headhunting, Ilongots said, because of their emotions. Not gods but "heavy" feelings were what made men want to kill; in taking heads they could aspire to "cast off" an "anger" that "weighed down on" and oppressed their saddened hearts' (Rosaldo 1980). The major emotion of *liget*, glossed by Rosaldo as 'anger, energy, passion', is the *cause* of action.
11. A useful discussion of various theories is contained in a recent book by the neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux (1996). I am grateful to William Connolly for directing me to it.
12. Thus: 'it is a matter of fact that discourse in which a determined attempt is made to state truths retains an element of emotional expressiveness. No serious writer or speaker ever utters a thought unless he thinks it worth uttering. What makes it worth uttering is not its truth (the fact that something is true is never a sufficient reason for saying it), but the fact of its being the one truth which is important in the present situation. Nor does he ever utter it except with a choice of words, and in a tone of voice, that expresses his sense of this importance... The writer is sometimes easily confident, sometimes nervous, sometimes pleading, sometimes amused, sometimes indignant' (R.G. Collingwood 1938:264). The entire Chapter on Language that precedes Book III ('The Theory of Art') is relevant here.
13. This can be illustrated by reference to a useful survey of recent work on the body by Margaret Lock who notes that 'Bodily dissent has been interpreted until recently as marginal, pathological, or so much exotica, or else has been passed over, unnoticed and unrecorded. Historicized, grounded ethnography, stimulated by close attention paid for the first time to the everyday lives of women, children, and other "peripheral" peoples has led to a reformulation of theory. The body, imbued with social meaning, is now historically situated, and becomes not only a signifier of belonging and order [as in the older anthropological work], but also an active forum for the expression of dissent and loss, *thus* ascribing it individual agency,' Lock (1993:141; Italics supplied; the syntactic hiatus in the final clause is in the original). Like the oppressed working class, the sick body is seen as dissenting, and for that reason as an agent trying to assert its interests. A single psychological model of autonomy thus underlies both cases. The problem, however, is that to *read* the sick body's behavior as 'expressions of dissent' we need different translation criteria from the one's we employ when we identify working-class dissent.
14. See, for example, the article by Lila Abu-Lughod (1990).
15. Although Foucault is often invoked by theorists of resistance, his use of that notion is quite distinctive. For example: 'there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge. There is certainly no such thing as "the" plebs; rather there is, as it were, a certain plebeian quality or aspect (*'de la' plèbe*). There is plebs in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities. This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement' Foucault (1980:138). This notion of resistance as the 'limit' of power has some resemblance to the Clausewitzian notion of 'friction'. See Carl von Clausewitz *On War* (1982[1832]:164-5).
16. See Ian Hacking (1990, especially Chapter 19), and also Georges Canguilhem

- (1966).
17. The guiding theorist behind this passage seems to be Sherry Ortner, who in a previous publication tried to resolve the contradiction between 'social structural determinism' and 'unconditional individual voluntarism' through the idea of 'a necessary dialectic between the two extremes' (Ortner 1984). (But what can a 'dialectic' between two explanatory doctrines mean? Perhaps the vague idea of a successive recourse to each explanation in turn?)
 18. There are some interesting studies, most of them quite recent, on this subject that could be examined by anthropologists. For example, Michel Foucault (1975), P.Guarnieri (1993), Thomas Maeder (1985), Richard Moran (1981), C.E. Rosenberg (1968), Richard Smith (1981), Janet Tighe (1983).
 19. *Person*, writes Locke, 'is a forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit, and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery. This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to itself past actions, just upon the same ground and for the same reason as it does the present.' *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book Two, Essay XXVII, Section 26.
 20. 'Corporations never die,' observed Henry Maine of their legal constitution, 'The decease of individual members makes no difference to the collective existence of the aggregate body, and does not in any way affect its legal incidents, its faculties or liabilities' (Maine 1931[1861]:154).
 21. The actor Alla Nazimova puts this as follows: "The actor himself should be a creature of clay, putty, capable of being molded into another form, another shape. An actor must never see himself in [a] character. I study the woman. I look at her under a magnifying glass and say to myself: "Is she right? Is she logical? Is she true to herself? Can I act that woman? Can I make *myself* over into *her*?" I am nothing. I am nobody. I have to reconstruct my whole self into this woman I am to portray—speak with her voice, laugh with her laughter—move with her motion. But if you can see the person as a living creature, quite removed from yourself, you can work objectively to adapt yourself to the part' (Nazimova 1949:512). What begins as the seemingly simple statement that the actor's role is to be a *mere instrument* quickly evolves into a claim that the actor must organize and stabilize for herself a *character* in relation to which her performance must be crafted.
 22. Richard Hornby's book is, among other things, an instructive account of the limits of conscious intention for effective acting.
 23. See the interesting article by David Pinault (1999).
 24. Burns reminds us that in early modern Europe 'Acting and rhetoric are never seen as distinct entities; the theory of acting is unnecessary, as are systematic manuals of its techniques, since the first is already present in the theory of rhetoric, and the second can be seen in one aspect as an aggregate of unclassifiable social and entertainment skills, and in another, in the special effects of master rhetoricians like Alleyn and Burbage, as a development from within a long-established rhetorical tradition. The dramatic traditions of the universities, the Inns of Court and the choir schools had long explored acting and rhetoric as, essentially, the same. We must not make the mistake of taking rhetoric in its modern colloquial sense as something strained, unreal, nearly ridiculous. To talk of acting in terms of rhetoric is to consider it as a branch of the study of human communication, of the development of the skills of "moving", "delighting", "persuading" and "teaching" other human subjects, as classical, mediaeval and renaissance culture conceived of it' (Burns 1990:10). Burns could have added that medieval and early modern rhetorical traditions had strong roots in Christian preaching and the

- performance of sacramental rites as well as passion plays.
25. 'In a safe, socially approved situation (at a party, on a holiday, or in a play) you are allowed to drop, temporarily, the *pain* of living up to your idealized self-image. You can even be a despised figure—an idiot, a villain, a coward—and not only not be abused or ridiculed for it, but even receive laughter and applause... The character weeps, but the actor feels ecstatic (from the Greek *ex histanai*, which means, literally, out of one's place) because he is liberated from his usual cabined, cribbed, confined everyday personality' (Hornby 1992:17-8; italics in original).
 26. I stress that my purpose is *not* to argue that 'the Greeks had no concept of responsibility'. My skeptical questions relate only to the case of Oedipus as presented by Dillon—and (see below) by Bernard Williams.
 27. See Susan James (2000) for an insightful review of debates about psychological continuity, personal identity, and the body.
 28. 'Taboo restrictions are distinct from religious or moral prohibitions. They are not based upon any divine ordinance, but may be said to impose themselves on their own account. They differ from moral prohibitions in that they fall into no system that declares quite generally that certain abstinences must be observed and gives reasons for that necessity. Taboo prohibitions have no grounds and are of unknown origin. Though they are unintelligible to *us*, to those who are dominated by them they are taken as a matter of course' (Freud 1960:18; the explicit references to Oedipus are at pp.68 and 80). According to Freud, not only are no reasons given for taboos, there is also no point in giving reasons for breaking them. This irrationality is what puts taboo prescriptions outside the domain of moral agency.
 29. Richard McKeon (1990) notes that the first use of the word 'responsibility' in English and French was in 1787, in the context of the American and French revolutions, and that since then its primary use has remained political. 'Responsible government'—meaning constitutionalism; the rule of law and self-determination—has become the model not only for responsibility as an ethical concept, but for responsibility as the essence of morality.
 30. In this case humans and gods. Some classicists have seen Greek gods as persons, and others as powers. In his survey of recent scholarship Jan Bremmer maintains that since the powers were personified the two interpretations are closer than it might at first appear. See Jan Bremmer (1994:22-3).
 31. In *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, Meyer Fortes (1959) attempts to show how the perspectives of Destiny and of Justice combine in Tallensi social thought and practice. A fascinating work that does not deserve the neglect it has encountered, even if in the end its conclusions are too sociologically reductive.
 32. In their 'Introduction' to Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and A. Kleinman, (eds.) *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (1992) the editors reveal an unresolved tension between two ideas. On the one hand, they regard pain as a pre-linguistic experience that is to be represented (hence 'pain resists symbolization'), and on the other, as an experience that is formulated in and through language *ab initio* (and is thus always 'influenced by meanings, relationships, and institutions'). This paradox may be the result of assuming that there are two kinds of pain, moral (mediated by the mind) and physical (objective, 'raw') pain, when these may in fact be two aspects of the same event—subjective and objective. Thus Roselyn Rey (1995) points out that 'the subject' (the sufferer) and 'the object' (pain treated by the diagnostician) are complementary linguistic representations of 'the same thing,' and not ontologically distinct.
 33. Collingwood (1938:158) maintained that feeling as opposed to thinking is a

- spontaneous state of passivity, to which the notion of failure doesn't apply because it isn't an intentional activity. Like suffering, one either feels or doesn't feel something. Secondly, feelings are essentially private in a way that thought isn't. Thus the act of thinking something may or may not be an entirely private act, depending on how one performs it. But that which we think (a particular thought) is always in principle directly accessible by others, and therefore public. According to Collingwood, as soon as any sensation is identified by the sufferer it becomes indissolubly linked to and stabilised by 'thought'—and, of course, altered by it. One might extend him as saying that pain can be shared because thought doesn't simply refer to a feeling, it instigates, fashions, and perpetuates it within a social relationship.
34. Veena Das has made this point more elegantly in her article on women's suffering during the Partition of India in 1947: 'Following Wittgenstein, this manner of conceptualizing the puzzle of pain frees us from thinking that statements about pain are in the nature of questions about certainty or doubt over our own pain or that of others. Instead, we begin to think of pain as asking for acknowledgment and recognition; denial of the other's pain is not about the failings of the intellect but the failings of the spirit. In the register of the imaginary, the pain of the other not only asks for a home in language but also seeks a home in the body' (Das 1997:88).
 35. I am obliged to Susan James for this reference.
 36. Ronald Melzack, well-known for his gate-theory of pain (Melzack and Wall 1982) has now radically revised his view (see Melzack 1993). Because pain is generated in the brain independently of damage to the body, says Melzack (1992), it can be 'felt' in locations of the body that do not exist. The same explanation will do for the phenomena of phantom seeing and hearing.
 37. For cultures of antiquity, see R.B. Onians (1951, especially Chapter V).
 38. Significantly, Jeremy Schneewind's (1998) massive history of early modern philosophy—*The Invention of Autonomy*—contains virtually no mention of cruelty, except in passing in the few paragraphs on de Sade. In the writings discussed by Schneewind there are many arguments concerning the place of divine punishment in a system of sanctions (fear of punishment and hope of reward as motives for obeying God's natural law). In that sense the infliction of pain is always part of a quasi-legal discourse—of morality construed on the analogy of law, and of 'responsibility' as essential to it. De Sade, of course, had no interest in constructing a theory of morality. His concern was to disrupt civilised convention and 'organized religion' (that is, to reject the idea of 'responsibility') by the pursuit of violent pain-pleasure as the expression of an indifferent Nature (see Octavio Paz 1998).
 39. See, for example, Callwell (1996 [1906]:171-2).
 40. Modern war is, allegedly, subject to the Geneva Convention that military action should avoid civilian targets. But it is precisely modern war whose deep involvement with logistics *requires* extensive damage to 'civilian targets'. Even the rule that in cases of 'military necessity' civilian casualties should be kept down to 'a minimum'—that they should not exceed the strategic advantage to be gained—has little meaning given that military commanders are expected *to win*.
 41. In a perceptive article entitled 'Can Morality Be Christian,' John Milbank cites some unpublished lines from William Blake: 'I heard a devil curse/ On the Heath and on the furze/ Mercy could be no more/ If there was nobody poor' (Millbank 1997:219).
 42. Brison herself takes a view opposed to de Beauvoir's.
 43. These practices, like many others, are strictly gendered. Only males may participate in the formal burial rites. This means that women are denied the

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- emotional closure that is effected by these rites. I am indebted to Veena Das for this point, and in particular for letting me see her Barbara Miller Stoler lecture on Hindu cremation ceremonies which equally rigidly exclude women.
44. See al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'ulum al-din*, Book 1, and Books 21 and 22.
45. The thirteenth-century theologian Ibn Taymiyya's *Amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* has been reprinted in Cairo several times since 1979, together with a long explanatory Introduction by the modern Egyptian editor.
46. In modern Arabic the transitive verb *addaba* means both to educate and to discipline or chastise someone. The substantive *adab* has several senses, ranging from 'good manners, politeness and decency' to 'humaneness' and 'Literature'—in brief, 'every praiseworthy discipline by which a person is trained in any excellence.' The derived form *ta'dib* thus signifies 'education' as well as 'disciplinary punishment'.
47. See footnote 6 above.

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