

Jacob Rogozinski

The Ego and the Flesh. An Introduction to Egoanalysis, tr. R. Vallier.

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In defining postmodernity, few would challenge the centrality of the ego as a key locus of attention. Indeed, the Cartesian *cogito* has been decentered, disassembled, and finally discarded by many critics in a line stretching from Heidegger to Lacan and later French postmodernists, who would perform, what Jacob Rogozinski calls, *égicide* (translated as “egocide”). In *The Ego and the Flesh*, he provides a sustained critique of those efforts to deny “thinking the mystery *that I am*” (1) and thereby offers a spirited defense of the ego’s query concerning its own nature and being.

Instead of acquiescing to egocide, Rogozinski maintains that the question, “Who am I? ... always arises anew, because it remains unanswered” (2), for the existential statement, “*I am, I exist...* resists every attempt to refute it” (5). His argument builds on a robust challenge to Heidegger, who turned Dasein to face Being, and Lacan, who would displace the ego for the unconscious. In the first instance, Heidegger would submit humans to the call of Being, i.e., Dasein is “the *Da-* of the *Sein*, the ‘there’ of Being,” but Rogozinski asserts that “*I am not* Being or time as such” (9). And as for Lacan, Rogozinski sees the “truth of the ego” dissimulated (8) and thereby forfeiting its own presence.

Building upon his interpretation of Nietzsche in the essay “European Nihilism” Heidegger depicted the Cartesian subject as standing as the master of nature, who, being metaphysically sovereign, exerts its will as it wills. The election of the ‘I’ with “its random desires and abandoned to an arbitrary free-will” (as the matter is put in “The age of the world picture”) focuses Heidegger’s critique of modernity and more particularly the ego’s very standing. The Cartesian subject would be replaced by Dasein’s engagement with Being. So instead of scrutinizing the world as a separate *cogito*, *Da-sein* – a “being-there” or “is-there” – would be embedded *in* the world. His entire project is directed at deconstructing the ego as such by authenticating the self through a reversal of Western metaphysics: facing Being, confronting death, and delimiting the ego to an anonymity, which is neutral to a Me and thereby asserting that “when existing being says ‘I,’ then ‘Dasein *is not itself*’ (17).

Rogozinski argues that Heidegger’s attempt to replace the ego with Dasein must by its very character, drive towards a self-destructive nihilism by 1) mistaking Descartes’ own understanding of the ego, and 2) conflating later nihilistic developments in European thought with the formulation of the Cartesian ego as such. If the self is no longer ‘mine,’ the resulting erasure of singularity and ‘egological difference’ homogenizes the I with the They, and authenticity thereby is radically compromised, for “only what most strongly resists the influence of the They can free me from my alienation, and this could not be enacted by a [Heideggarian] Self, but only by an ego, the me that I myself am, the ego that is always mine” (20).

Furthermore, Rogozinski maintains that a *self* is not the first experience of oneself, but rather a sense of identity arises when the ‘me’ demarcates from the ‘other’ through the relation to others and a self-consciousness both of those relationships and the irreducible presence of oneself. In other words, authenticity begins with a sense of oneself as an ego, as an identity distinct and thereby defined in contrast to ‘the other.’ Heidegger, by asserting Being as the presence of ‘my-ness,’ robs the subject of all concrete meaning and experience, “because the ‘there’ means ‘over there,’ or ‘on-the-outside-of,’ Da-sein must be understood as a *being-outside-of-I*” (39). And for Rogozinski, “the ego’s immanence is what saves it from being lost in the world” (43), by which he means the full acknowledgement of one’s I-ness. He proposes “egoanalysis” as the means of that recovery from the philosophical presumption of Dasein and the psychoanalytic betrayal perpetrated by Lacan.

Turning to Lacan, Rogozinski’s critique focuses upon the attempt to re-structure the psyche, again by subordinating and eventually ridding the ego of even the compromised authority Freud permitted. Indeed, demarcating “the narcissistic ego from the ‘true subject of the unconscious’ will give the Lacanian egocide its definitive status” (64). So, whereas Freud described a tripartite architecture in which the ego asserted its own agenda within a larger bio-social context of adaptation and survival, Lacan dislodges the ego altogether and assigns the unconscious as the authentic psychic presence, whose own desire is legitimated against the claims of the despotic ego. Thus, Lacan in *The Ego in Freud’s Theory* takes Freud’s original formulation, where the unconscious is an “acephalic subject... who no longer has an ego, who doesn’t belong to the ego” and bestows an authenticity upon that ‘presence,’ which he describes as the “‘barred’ subject that is no longer anyone, an X, an empty place, a ‘subjectification without subject’” (53). In short, the ego is not only an illusion in the calculus of psychic dynamics, but it is, at best, a place-holder, which, from the Lacanian perspective, is only to be purged in the ‘therapeutic’ triumph of unconscious desire.

For Lacan, the ego’s dismemberment results from the fault lines that formed with its very conception, i.e., the mirror metaphor portrays the original misconceived (or mistaken) step in the ego’s creation as an enduring illusion. However, Rogozinski makes the cogent point that in the mirror’s reflection

I see myself, I recognize *myself*...as if I had captured my gaze in it. So that I may identify myself with my reflection and transfer to it the character of being mine, of being me or ego, I have to be *already* identified with myself. In order to recognize the image of my body in the reflection, I must *have a place of residence* in this body, live it already *as mine*. (56)

So, on the one hand, we perceive that the ego recognizes itself because it already *is* a self, a subject who possesses a sense of ‘my-ness,’ and on the other hand, Lacan refuses to recognize the ego’s standing, despite its obvious presence and instrumental roles in psychic economy and capacity to initiate imaginary or symbolic identifications.

One might well agree with Lacan that the ego ‘evolves’ from the unconscious to serve the psyche for certain purposes, but to then argue that the ego is only an illusory subject is to misconstrue the ego’s undeniable presence of itself as a subject. That this self-consciousness is

lodged in its own locus of psychic activity does not consign its legitimacy to some indenture to its origins. The two domains—conscious and unconscious—engage in an interior dialogue, and in that exchange the just claims of each are developed. In other words, Rogozinski charges that not only is the mirror trope erroneous as Lacan employed it in terms of theorizing about the origin of the ego, the disingenuous dismissal of the ego's own certainty as a cognitive agent aware of the world and itself in it, misconstrues agency with wide-ranging ramifications. Rogozinski is not, however, concerned with the ego's cognitive roles, but rather argues for its phenomenological bodily standing.

In grounding the ego in the body, Rogozinski draws an important parallel between Freud and Lacan: Freud originated his work in the psycho-somatic illness of his patients, i.e. the spasm, cough, paralysis, pain, each of which presumably pointed to a psychic origin, yet he worked as a dualist and restricted his vision to the mental domain, which he demarcated from brain states and certainly the soma itself. So by

excluding the somatic from the field of analysis, Freud barred himself from thinking what he calls the 'ego-body.' Instead of anchoring the ego in this originary unity—that of an ego that would be body, of a body that would be ego—he dissociates it. He makes it into a 'mental projection' of the corporeal surface, its transposition on the psychic plane. (73)

Rogozinski then offers a formulation of the ego's origins in the soma, and following William James, affective life then is firmly grounded in the body.

Rogozinski argues that Lacan's strategy, directed at freeing the subject-I from alienating identifications with an Other, radically reinterprets the recurrent Freudian theme, "Wo Ich war, soll Ich werden"—"Where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud 1933, 80)—by reversing Freud's original meaning: Freudian psychoanalysis remained committed to strengthening the ego "to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id" (thus Freud in *New Introductory Lectures*). However the Lacanian ego requires, instead, the submission to the Other, "where I, me, the ego, was, the Other now comes forth to subject me" (78–9). Having first defined the ego as an imaginary illusion and placing the unconscious "subject" as the signifying "language" of the psyche, the ego is left in its primordial emergence, forever demoted to being subject to the Other of a deeper subjectivity.

Lacan's theory according to Rogozinski vacillates between assigning the 'subject' a universal and neutral function and a singular subjectivity, and in either case, one alienation is continuously exchanged for another in the signifying chain of psychic discourse. Rogozinski insists on terminating the sequence of identifications with the Other (in any of its presentations) and recognizes the basic epistemological structure that must confer logic to Lacan's schema:

Does not all identification necessarily consist in being identified *with itself* in order then to be able to identify with this other? How can I identify myself with an other if it is not me who recognizes myself in the other, or if I did not already exist prior to any identification? Lacan's thought does not allow for a response to these questions. (70)

The ambiguities and the vortex of schemas Lacan draws of the psyche basically reflects an aporia that this simple observation emphasizes: identifications require a something that must identify, and that something is an ego, a faculty that can represent the other, and itself, for that matter. So while Lacan's commitment to reconfigure the unconscious in psychoanalytic theory dislocates the ego altogether, the *logic* of that move cannot be sustained. So, for Rogozinski, the ego's subordination (ironically invoked under Lacan's "return to Freud") highlights Lacan's radical departure from the Freudian program, where, despite the obstructions to the ego's exercise of reason and independence from unconscious forces, still stands at the fulcrum of psychoanalytic theory.

In this diagnostic portion of the text, Rogozinski argues that notwithstanding the reconfiguration of agency proposed by Heidegger and Lacan, each failed to displace the metaphysics of the subject in confrontation with its other, whether natural, social, or inner. The dominant Western temperament recognizes, admits, and fully engages with the dialogues which one conducts with 'oneself.' The reflective voice of interpretation remains despite the efforts to characterize its articulation as an artifice. For, in the end, what—or better stated, *who*—is left after the ego is philosophically deconstructed? Admitting the pretense of a 'me' in exchange with myself, this 'self' arising from both cultural learning and biological operations, nevertheless remains a *me*, one who orients 'myself' in the world. On this view, the underlying irony of this convoluted chapter in intellectual history is that the ego still stands, albeit bruised and battered, but still pointing a light towards the end of the tunnel, if nothing but to highlight what has been eclipsed.

With an emphasis on the organic primacy of selfhood, Rogozinski critique then turns to an advocacy for "egoanalysis," which is based on what cognitive scientists would call 'embedded cognition,' and what he describes in phenomenological terms. He builds egoanalysis on the experience of the ego's bodily sensations, specifically the immediacy of the self's being in its corporality. But the recognition of my "I-ness" is not coincident with awareness of the body, but rather the ego's self-conscious recognition of the 'space' remaining between me and my bodily sensations, whether derived internally or from the outside world. And that difference is the basis of egoanalysis, for whether awareness of the body as such, or acknowledging the difference or chiasm between 'myself' and an 'other,' a phenomenological account of the "remainder" brings the ego to face the mystery of itself as both in the world and outside it. Thus the title "ego and the flesh."

Drawing key elements from Descartes, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty, Rogozinski most evocatively singles out a phenomenological *remainder*, a concept derived from the notion of 'excessivity' developed by Lacan. However, an earlier source of this idea is found in Adorno's rejection of "identity thinking" and substitution with "non-identity" thinking, where a portion of the concept remains un-represented. The "excess space" refers to the remaining unaccounted portion of the object or concept (the missing aspects) and corresponds to that which is beyond the representation and thus unidentified (i.e., the non-identity). This latter excessivity is the site of the *not-yet-represented*, which offers the cognitive 'space' for creating modified or new 'concepts,' i.e., a source for creative expansion and renewal.

For Rogozinski, the remainder becomes the phenomenological signal of the ego's fuller identity, however the remainder remains essentially inaccessible despite various machinations to approach it phenomenologically. In the last chapter this limit is fully acknowledged and a declaration finally appears with a discussion of the ego's deliverance from its own alienation, where Rogozinski describes a knotting of the ego and the remainder in what is a return to myself

“by passing through the foreignness opened in me.” I am given to myself *as an other*, which is *me* and in this way alone am I given to myself in truth... [thus] the soul discovers its unity with the *Gottheit*, the deity in God. (294)

Simply stated, a transcendence or recognition of “the other in me” refers to the radical Beyond that lies outside representation; beyond knowledge; beyond the intelligent, self-conscious ego resides an intuition of an otherness that is mine. Ironically, echoes of Heidegger appear in what another discourse ascribes to the divine.

And so what begins as a noteworthy philosophical exposition of the problematic status of the ego and a keenly fashioned critique of the egocides performed by Heidegger and Lacan ends pointing towards a slippery road where philosophy has little traction. The ‘remainder’ to which Rogozinski alludes is truly inaccessible except by the intuitions that an intimate beyond of an ‘I-ness’ lies mysteriously silent and alien, yet present. The ego, as a rational, self-knowing agent cannot trespass into this territory. Yet, in answer to Lacan’s provocative question, “Who, then, is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my identity it is still he who agitates me?” Rogozinski does offer a response: inspired by Hölderlin (as was Heidegger), he would tie the knot (holding the ego and the untapped remainder together) by “*the reversal of the remainder*”—in which God and man both turn towards each other—and thereby “humanity could still have the experience of the remainder, experience anew the furor of becoming-One” (304). This religious prescription, in response to the postmodern attack, may strike most readers an utterly desperate and ineffectual tactic.

Nevertheless, Rogozinski offers a speculative hint of such a renewal in the political opportunity of recognizing the ‘remainder’ of the social outcast, “to try to situate *in the place of the remainder* the place of the pariah... the witch, the heretic, the insane... and all those excluded from the community” (306). Unfortunately, how such a politics might be configured makes no appearance here, and the book ends with a mystical declaration: “I am one with God” and “in every moment, I precede my own birth” (307). With that assertion, has an antidote to the postmodern poison been delivered to the expiring ego? Is this pre-modern pan-anthem a ‘solution?’ If it is, then philosophy has truly ended, ironically at the same place it began in its attempt to discern religious wonderment.

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