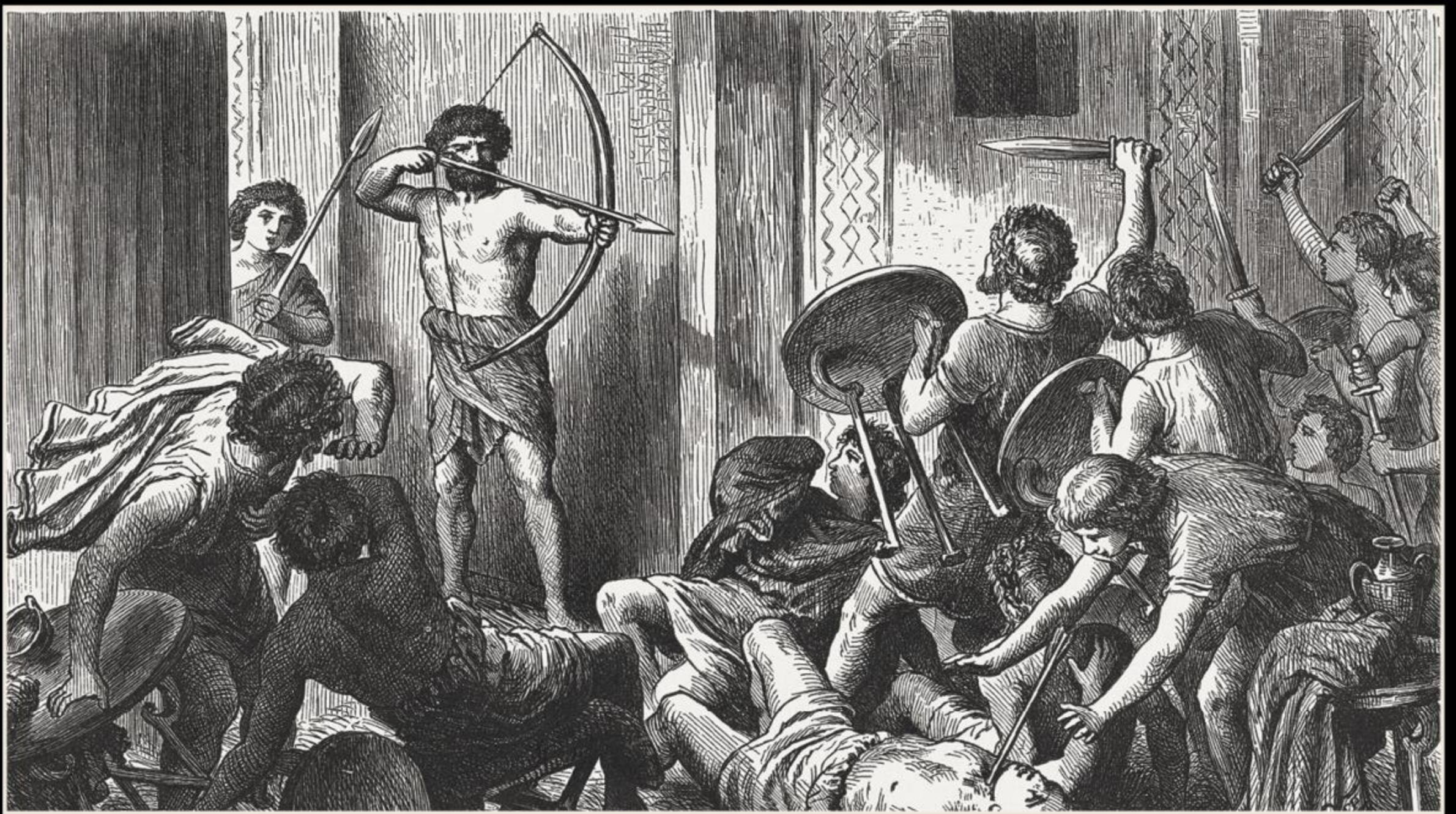


MATTHEW P. MEYER

ARCHERY AND THE
HUMAN CONDITION
IN LACAN,
THE GREEKS,
AND NIETZSCHE



THE BOW WITH THE GREATEST TENSION

Archery and the Human Condition in Lacan, the Greeks, and Nietzsche

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The Bow with the Greatest Tension

Matthew P. Meyer

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FOR JILL AND CHARLOTTE WITH LOVE,
For helping me aim high,
While keeping my eye on the target.

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Introduction

BOWS, ARROWS, AND ARCHERS

This book is a testament to the power of the bow as a symbol of reaching, of longing, of desire. It is an example of the force of one symbol to span millennia. Furthermore, it is the opening into a world in which we are all archers—both subjects to and agents over the internal and external forces which allow us to ready, aim, fire. It's undeniable that we are all subject to forces, some from within, and some from without, that limit our agency. But my hope is that in understanding these forces we can better find peace and strength, we can better steady our hands and our breath before our release.

The premise of this book is that the bow in specific, and archery in general, makes an excellent metaphor for the human condition. In fairness to the reader, while much of what is elaborated upon here stands up *without* the use of the metaphor of archery, I firmly believe that the metaphor of the bow and the archer, and the examples I will give from Greek literature and philosophy, as well as our allusions to Friedrich Nietzsche, make an understanding of the human condition *that much richer*. While I have no illusions that the bow or archery are a natural occurrences, the one-time ubiquity of their symbolic value and presence in cultures occur the world over. The bow was used as a weapon of war, as a tool for hunting, as a source of leisure, sport, and competition, and as a practice of Zen and inwardness. In its various forms, it can kill other animals and humans, be used to start a fire, or to create music.¹

THE BOW

For these reasons and others, the bow has had great symbolic significance for millennia. For instance, in Egypt and Greece and all over Asia it was associated with kingship and martial prowess. Take for example the *Satapatha Brahmana* (ca. seventh century B.C.E.) XIII.1.1.1-2: "The bow is the royal weapon par excellence; skill in archery is for the king what the splendor of divinity is for the priest."² In Japan it was associated with balance and life: "when drawn to its full extent, the bow encloses the 'All' in itself and that is why it is important to learn to draw it properly."³ The bottom of the bow is grounded in earth, while the arrow shoots through

the sky.⁴ There are clear etymological links between the terms “bow” and “life” in epic Greek. The bow, in its ability to fire an arrow, can also symbolize the intention to reach something at a distance. For this reason it has also been associated with desire.

The bow has served as a metaphor for the human condition. Four associations made with the bow will be the emphasis at various parts in our study: the bow and life; the bow and the warrior, including gods’ ordination of the warrior; the bow and the connection to virtue and character; and the bow and the connection to the “self” more generally, which must be used as something to go beyond itself.

The Bow and Life

The central concern for this book arose out of a happy accident, which is to say I happened to read two authors millennia apart who had in some form or another a central concern: the meaning of human life, and death, as it pertained to drives. In his seminar entitled *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan says “the drive incorporates the dialectical of bow, even of archery.”⁵ He is basing this observation in part on Heraclitus’ cryptic fragment that “the name of bow is life; its work is death,” (*To honoma toxon on bios, ta ergon Thanatos*). We will be exploring the meaning of this connection, between the bow, life, and death, throughout this treatment. For example, Heraclitus extends the instruction of the bow to the whole of the universe: “The harmony of the ordered world (*cosmos*) is one of contrary tensions, like that the harp and the bow.”⁶ There are plenty of other references to the connection between the bow and life (and by proxy, death). Sophocles has Philoctetes say, “Do not take my *bios* from me,” where *bios* can mean both “bow” and “life.”⁷ Or take for example the *Rjveda Samhita* (ca. 13th century B.C.E): “When the bows tips consort (that is when the bow is bent), they can bear the child (the arrow), as a mother bears a son, and when with common understanding they start apart (releasing the arrow), then they smite the foe. . .”⁸ The potential for this metaphor to speak to our purposes is remarkable. For one, the bow itself becomes the sources of life. Secondly, the bow “gives birth to” the arrow, which is capable of causing death in “smiting the foe.” One could place here the saying of Kahlil Gibran: “You are bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.”⁹ In each of these there is a third theme present that will turn out to be important in the formation of the internal tension of the human-as-bow, namely, the (m)Other (in Lacan’s formulation), or our first caretakers. It will turn out that an important factor in creating an internal tension, which then becomes a force for unconscious motivation, is a leftover trace of separation anxiety that happens as we gradually separate from our parents.

The Bow and the Warrior

We are all warriors. Not in the literal sense, of course, but in the sense of fighting a spiritual battle, or, if you'd prefer, "fighting the good fight." There is plenty of evidence the bow is seen by early cultures in these terms as well. In the Zen tradition, "The shape of the bow is like the quarter of a circle whose midpoint marks the grip of the hand. It symbolizes man in the world, enveloped in his material quaternary, whilst attempting to aim his spiritual bow towards a greater mark."¹⁰ We will look more at the connection between spiritual growth and the symbolism of the bow below.

The battles that the bow symbolizes can also assume external form, that is they can be against others. In the Islamic tradition, Gabriel says to Adam, "This bow is the power of God; this string is his majesty; these arrows the wrath and punishment of God inflicted upon his enemies."¹¹ Or again where Muhammad says: "there are three whom Allah leads into paradise by means of one and the same arrow, viz. its maker, the archer, and the one who retrieves it."¹² Like Zen *kyudo*, archery, the Islamic tradition of archery also has an apprenticeship element in which the pupil must be ready to receive the bow. This "readiness" then shows the connection between the internal spiritual world, and the external "battle," even if the latter is only symbolic.¹³

The Bow and the "Self"

For obvious reasons there are metaphorical interconnections between the spirituality of the bow and spirituality of the arrow. The bow of the mind must be finely-tuned to release the most accurate arrows. One can see the interconnection of the two in *Munadh Upanisat*:

Taking as bow the mighty weapon (*Om*) of the Upanisat, Lay thereunto an arrow sharpened by devotions; Draw with a mind of the same nature as That: the mark is That Imperishable; penetrate it, my dear! *Om* is the Bow, the Spirit (*atman*, Self) that arrow, Brahma the mark: It is penetrable by the sober man; do thou become of one substance therewith, like the arrow.¹⁴

Of course, the above connections are rather specific. In the Hindu account the *Om* is the method that one "uses" to "fire" one's spirit, the arrow, to Brahma, the creator god related to Brahman, Ultimate Reality. It is necessary to take a step back and look at the human-as-bow from a remove. One half of the "bow" of the human condition, one of our central concerns, is the human drive. Specifically, what is the human drive? What is that motivation that drives all other smaller motivations, moment by moment? To say that it is merely survival would be myopic. We don't need cell phones for survival. We do not need billions of dollars or five bedrooms for survival. No, there is something more that drives us: we are

always standing with bow drawn, aiming at the next thing. But as the above Upanishad suggests, maybe we can better direct our aim.

In the Islamic tradition, Shams-i-Tabrizi says, "Every instant there is, so to speak, an arrow in the bow of the body; if it escapes from the body, it strikes its mark."¹⁵ Of course, this speaks to potential and not aim. Likewise, in Buddhist symbology "the bow represents the volitional power of the mind which dispatches the five senses."¹⁶ There too, one sees the notion of the self as potential, but a potential that must be directed in a proper way.

The Bow and Virtue

Related to the metaphor of the bow and the self is the question: what should we be aiming for? Here too we can gather evidence from the ancient traditions, including Aristotle. First, we should note that archery is "a matter of eternal compromise."¹⁷ What do I mean by this? I mean that no one can simply *will* the perfect shot. Instead, one must always *take into account* the external factors which are not under one's control. In fact, it seems to be the case that the best archers are those who recognize their own limitation and similarly aim toward constant *improvement* as opposed to *perfection*.

Part of what is required in improving oneself is the initial recognition of blemishes or character flaws. If one imagines oneself to be perfect already, they are not only wrong but in all likelihood a narcissist who is not very fun to be around. Indeed narcissists often chalk up things that they have done wrong to others around them. Again, we could learn a lesson from the Hindu tradition:

Just as every blemish in the material of the bow must be corrected and allowed rather than concealed, so too with anyone who would prepare to become a vehicle for the *pranava* [a type of yoga breath focused on the Om]. All the karmic knots and cross-grains in one's character must be neutralized and one should resist every temptation to cover them up. Like a cosmetically beautiful but inwardly brittle or flabby bow, a person will crack or drop out of the endeavor if one persists *merely looking good* to others.¹⁸

The quest for improvement is always more than skin deep. Likewise a person can *look* perfectly normal, while at the same time be in intense or prolonged psychic pain. Any building of character can be likened to one (or more) of a number of possible archery metaphors. Two that are the most common are the proper tensioning of a bowstring and aiming at, and hitting, the mark.

The bow is an excellent model for the tension internal to human subjectivity; thinkers explored in this study will make this obvious. Nietzsche writes in the *Will to Power*: "It is precisely through the presence of

opposites and the feelings they occasion that the great an, *the bow with the greatest tension*, develops.”¹⁹ Keep in mind, it is possible to have too much tension, and this depends upon the quality of stringing of the bowstring. Again, as Publius Syrus said: “A bow strung too tensely is easily broken.” As one commentator explains: “If a bowstring is weak it can endanger the bow, for if it breaks at the point of full draw, the drawn limbs will have nothing to restrain them and will fly past the initial point of rest.”²⁰ It seems then, that the proper balance for optimal improvement in archery requires multiple factors: a properly strung and cared for instrument (the body or mind), taking aim at the right target, and taking into account external conditions. We will explore these themes throughout the book. Now let’s look at the symbolism of arrows.

ARROWS

Like the bow, arrows have a variety of metaphorical meanings that will appear throughout this book; however, unlike the bow and the archer, they will not get a dedicated treatment; they will be fired only on occasion. The two most obvious symbolic meanings of the arrows are their value as vectors—that is, as signs that aim toward something else—and the phenomenon of “being struck.” Each of these ideas merits a brief explanation.

An arrow is a vector; it points to something else. One of the central themes of Lacan’s dialectic of the drive is that it is a constant force (Freud’s *Konstanz kraft*). The drive, in its various forms of need, desire, and demand, is always pointing to something other than itself. What the arrow points to is always a metonymy—a substitute or a stand-in—that cannot adequately be disclosed and understood in terms of the first term in the relation. That being the case, the bow and archer in this book serve as “arrows” pointing to other more hidden elements of the human condition that do not readily disclose themselves. Sometimes all we have of the arrow is what it is pointing toward, and even the target may not always be as it first appears. Nonetheless, such vectors will be significant since the origins and destinations of such vectors may be opaque prior to reflection and analysis.

The other way in which the arrow will appear is in the form of “being struck” by something. There are two senses to this idea. One, we can be struck by desire, lust, or love. These emotions come out of the blue. This is of course mythologized in the form of Cupid and Eros—which will be discussed—but also in the more obscure ancient references to the arrow and bow string as phalluses. The second version of being struck pertains to the notion of epiphany or revelation. I do not think it a coincidence that three of the thinkers we will look at have an epiphanic quality to their work. Heraclitus was called “The Obscure” because of the simultaneous-

ly cryptic and evocative form of his statements. Take for example one of the fragments that will be central to our study: “The name of the bow is life; its work is death.” This fragment, even in English, is remarkable for a few reasons. The grammar of it evokes an arrow being fired at the beginning of the thought, hanging in the air over the course of the pause represented by the semicolon, and landing at its target: death. The arc of the arrow becomes a “lifespan.” What’s more, such a dynamic tendency of Heraclitus’ evocative words is typical; he refers to his own statements as “words and works” as if the thinking that comes along with them is a part of the statement itself. The words, like arrows, are what we see, and the works are what the words force us to do, how they work on us. Compare the idea of the “epiphanic arc” of the arrow to the following from the Zen tradition of *bushido*, or “the way of the warrior”: “The actual release of the arrow, like that of contemplative, whose passage from *dhyāna* [contemplation] to *samādhi* [rapture], . . ., takes place suddenly indeed, but almost unawares, is spontaneous, and, as it were uncaused.”²¹ Indeed, the moment of inspiration can strike us just as quickly as the release of the bowstring, or the hitting of the target.

We can find other examples of arrows as barbs of wisdom in the *Brahadaranyaka Upanisat* where “penetrating questions are described as ‘foe-piercing arrows.’”²² Other texts say “with the shaft of *gnosis* I shall pierce through every defect.”²³ Also in the Hindu tradition the holy man, or *sādhi*, is said to go “straight to the mark,” where going straight is associated with doing and saying the right thing. Conversely, the evil man, or the *aparadh*, is said to “miss the mark” or deviate or fail. “One who misses the mark (*avavidhyati*) grows evil (*pāpiyān*).”²⁴

While Lacan was more prone to giving cryptic lectures in the form of meandering meditations, and was reluctant to publish, some of his thoughts have a similar structure of an arrow being fired and leaving it up to the reader to determine whether they hit the target. He himself uses the metaphor of archery at least three times in *Seminar XI*, and, after discussing Heraclitus’ fragment, praises him for going “straight to the target.”²⁵

Lastly, in the final chapter of the book we will look at the works of Awa Kenzo, the famed Buddhist archery instructor of *Zen and the Art of Archery*. His writings, we shall see, also have the character of being shot—and we have to be in the right frame of mind to have them “hit” us.

ARCHERS

In the second part of this book, I will focus on what is within our control as human subjects. Guided by Aristotle’s metaphorical observation that “there are many ways to miss and only one way to hit the target,” I show that virtue ethics is indeed equipped to control drive forces.²⁶ In his

excellent discussion of the death drive in *Death and Desire*, Richard Boothby notes that there are two ways that the death drive can be expressed: through the imaginary in the form of violence, and in the symbolic in the form of creative sublimation. I posit that virtue ethics is a form of sublimation of death drive forces, which acknowledges at the same time the fundamental drives of the body, and other “Other” sources. The second half of the study ends with an exploration of Nietzsche’s metaphor of the great man as the one with the greatest internal tension, kept under control, and alludes to John Stevens’ description of *kensho* and Awa Kenzo’s Buddhist teachings on archery in *One Arrow, One Life* to promote the sublimation of desire and control of drive forces.

If we are archers, it would make sense that our drive is like a bow. Pull taut, aim, release, repeat. It is not by accident that Sigmund Freud refers to the drive as “Konstante Kraft”—a constant force. Through the insight of Jacques Lacan, we can see that the Greeks were onto something when they gave their heroes bows. The mythical bow of Heracles that winds up in the hands of Philoctetes; the bow of Odysseus—presaging the sword in the stone—which only the king could string, that ultimate sign of earned power; and Heraclitus who understood more than any one at that time, and perhaps since, the paradox of the living, the fragility of being alive, and the blessing of thinking well. But it ultimately it will take the coincidence of the themes—of the theory of the drive and the mythic symbol of the bow—to help us make sense of it all. What were these Greeks telling us in their stories of the bow? This is, of course, the central theme of this book. But to guide us through the first part of the text we will be using the theory of the subject and the associated terminology offered by Jacques Lacan. I want to make clear that this book is not *about* Lacan’s theory. Rather, it is application of Lacan’s theory of the subject to three specific Greek writings to breathe new life into the meaning of the bow and the archer as a metaphor for drive in those works, and beyond. Still, our use of Lacan’s terminology requires an introduction, which means a brief detour away from discussing the metaphor of the bow.

A BRIEF EXCURSUS INTO LACAN’S THEORY AND TERMINOLOGY

Before we begin our analysis of the bow as a metaphor for drive in Greek thinking, I would like to briefly set up how I will use Lacan’s terms.²⁷ In so doing, we should keep in mind Lacan’s own acknowledgment about his writing: “My discourse proceeds, in the following way: each term is sustained only in its topological relation with the others. . . .”²⁸ In other words, like the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who Lacan found so compelling, Lacan believes that words are anchored only in other words. To the extent that there is a “beginning” or a “first word,” it is

most likely lost to time, or, if one would prefer, the unconscious.²⁹ Furthermore, one should keep in mind that because of such “topological relations” between terms, many terms introduced here will be interwoven and shown to be interrelated in the first four chapters that constitute the first part of the book.

Drive

Our primary focus in the first part of the book will be the three parts of *drive*. By drive I take Lacan to mean the fundamental source of energy in life. In Lacan’s words it is the “primary energy whose aim is to suppress all tension and to keep the organism constant.”³⁰ Notably, Lacan says the goal of drive is to suppress tension—not erase it. Of course, there are different methods of suppressing tension and keeping the organism constant depending on exactly what threat the organism faces. One of the common themes in this text will be the difference between the organism as a biological phenomenon, which is largely inaccessible to conscious thought, and the imaginary ego, a “product” of sorts of the organism, which is “responsible” for an image of oneself and the decisions we make. It turns out that the ego is also an “object” to the extent that it is an imaginary “product.” The ego is the product of the subconscious response to the chaos of the otherwise multiple bodily forces. These bodily forces can first be identified with “drive,” but we will see that the maintenance of the ego also becomes a major task of the drive. It is not at all out of the question that we have competing drives; one of them aimed toward the unification of everything under the ego such that the world simply reflects our desires, and one that is set on freeing the cacophony of drives present simply as urges that arise up out of the body, called the death drive. Notably, even *these* bodily urges are shaped by language, parental upbringing, and culture more generally.³¹ The implication of this cultural conditioning is that there simply is no part of the self that is not infused with the Other.

Drive has three independent stages which first develop sequentially and are interwoven later in the adult: need, desire, and demand. Need is the part of drive corresponding to biological need and physical survival. It can only be associated with an object insofar as that object satisfies some biological need, for example, hunger, thirst. Because such needs are “material” or “real,” they are considered “intransitive.”³² Since at our earliest stages of development these are all met by the “mother” we, as infants, tend to confuse the “mother” with ourselves. We mistakenly think we can satisfy ourselves—we are whole, complete, and self-sufficient. In a literal sense the satisfaction of need corresponds to incorporation. In terms of Lacan’s registers of human experience, need corresponds to the realm of the “Real.” Essentially, the drive of need is ineffable, and thereby cannot be assuaged through articulation of desires or responses

from others. No matter what I say, I will have hunger, the need for sleep, a certain amount of human contact, protection from the elements, and so on. That said, drive is *not* and can never be fully satisfied by objects of need. "For if one distinguishes at the outset of the dynamics of drive it is precisely because no object of *not*, need, can satisfy the drive."³³

Desire

When compared to need, Desire already becomes once removed from "reality." First, a brief terminological note: Where I am referring to Lacan's theory of Desire as insatiable drive, Desire will be capitalized; if I am referring to the verb or to a concrete desire, it will remain lowercase. Desire is the part of drive corresponding to objects outside of ourselves, grounded in the unconscious faith that such an object will make us complete. This is called "primary narcissism" because we take objects outside of ourselves and in our imagination make them a part of ourselves.³⁴ Desire is not actually a desire for any one object (even though a person usually interprets it that way), but rather for ourselves to be our own complete object. No outside object can satisfy Desire. For this reason, Lacan makes two points: one, any concrete object of Desire is a placeholder for an impossible object. He calls the impossible object *objet a*. Unlike so-called objects of need, the objects of Desire, *objet a*, become transitive. What I desire now will change tomorrow, regardless of whether the desire I currently have is satisfied. So, even though I want a cup of coffee, what I actually want is to be whole (read: to have the joy of reunification with the mother). Two: since our goal is impossible, we can, on the level of analysis, recognize a difference between our aim, a cup of coffee, and our goal, which is impossible, of completeness. Ragland-Sullivan, a Lacan scholar, explains this well: "Desire is always desire for something else."³⁵ This "something else" is the elusive *objet a*.

Object a

The *objet a* is the placeholder for any object we could want. Insofar as we have deeper, and in some sense, unknowable reasons for desiring the object, all objects as *objet a* are equal. Here Schneiderman has it right: the *objet a* is "the place of a lack and its irreducibility. The *objet a* is a trace, a leftover, a remainder. We can summarize its concept by saying it leaves something to be desired."³⁶ For Lacan, *objet a* serves a function of bridging the gap between the imaginary—the object we think we want—and the Real, the need, or the drive internalized as an infant toward achieving wholeness with the mother. To the extent that we imagine the possibility of finding completeness through others, we ask things of those others to see how they respond. This asking of others is demand.

Demand

Demand is—at base—what it sounds like. Making an appeal to the other that they do or retrieve something for us. “Will you go get me a cup of coffee?” Whereas desire is the confusion of an object with the possibility of being complete (“I want a coffee”), demand mediates the desire through a person. But Lacan points out here that desire is at its clearest: *we never wanted the object in the first place*. “The object and goal of drive toward constancy converge in the Desire to be desired: in other words to be recognized by the mother so that the infant feels one with her.”³⁷ What we really wanted was wholeness, completeness, and love. So the demand is never about the object which is being demanded, but rather the response of the person being appealed to. Since the Demand is always made through an appeal (even the threat and use of force on another as we will see with Odysseus) it is found in the realm of communication and language, or what Lacan calls the realm of the *symbolic*. We desire the response of the other we can only receive when we ask something of them. But things are also demanded of us, and how we respond plays a major role in making up our “self” or “personality” or “character.” When we are concerned about what others want from us, and demand of us, we are essentially forming an imaginary image of ourselves as some “one.” This some “one” that we imagine ourselves to be is called the ideal ego.

Ideal Ego

The ideal ego is the false sense of self that imagines oneself as whole, self-reliant, confident, loved and complete. It is the imaginary ego which lacks nothing. This is always and forever impossible to achieve in real life (even the imagined ideal ego we have at the earliest stages of infant development was mistaken, it required an outside source in the mother for survival), but this does not stop us from desiring objects and demanding love in hopes to achieve it. The ideal ego first becomes formed as a result of two developments: the recognition of our voice as our own (there must be some “thing” this voice is emanating from), and the gaze of another (there must be someone that someone is looking at).³⁸ The searching of the ideal ego for itself sets into motion a certain separation from the mother that enforced by society (and by the demands of life on the mother, herself). This forced separation is what Lacan, adapting Freud’s idea, calls *castration*.

Castration

Castration has nothing to do with chopping off the male sexual organ in Lacan. Instead it has to do with the moment of separation from the mother, which occurs during the mirror stage. When Lacan “talks of

castration, he means the psychic impact of loss, difference, and individuation, and not biological emasculation in any literal or natural sense.”³⁹ One begins to feel incomplete and fragmented, even though at the physical level one is still very much intact. So really the separation from any object of importance thereafter becomes an instance of symbolic castration. Really, even the loss of a job individuates me: I used to be a part of something, and thing (my job) used to be a part of me. In being laid off, I feel as though I become torn from something against my will. We will see this fear of being separated especially in the taking of the bow from Philoctetes, and in Odysseus’ desire for the bow and the respect of his people in *The Odyssey*. Because we are not talking about a physical removal of an organ, we can see that the phallus in Lacan also holds a more important place than just the physical organ it might also refer to.

Phallus

The phallus has an unusual place in Lacan’s theory. Like his idea of castration, it does not refer to the actual male sex organ.⁴⁰ The phallus is presented as the interruption of the mother-infant relationship by the Father. But here the Father represents the “non-physical,” the interruption of sociality, language, law, and exchange in the place of physical connection, nourishment, and a bond “beyond words” with the mother. Admittedly, this appears to play into some common stereotypes of mother as caretaker and father as disciplinarian—but it is slightly more complicated than that, as we shall see in the chapter on Odysseus. Still we should note that separation from mother, brought about the introduction of the social, can create a kind internal split or alienation within the “subject” herself.

Two Aspects of Subject

The “self”-as-subject has roughly two aspects: the pre-language collection of experiences which constitute the “*moi*” or “me” and the linguistic-conceptual self of reflection called the “*je*” or the “I.” The *moi* is primarily constituted of images and is, therefore connected to the realm of existence Lacan calls the imaginary. This is the realm of the ego. Since desire is usually focused on objects, these become images and are considered part of the *moi*. Ragland-Sullivan points out that when the *je* becomes the “I” in speech, its object is actually the *moi*. The collage of the ego attempts to become a unified “I” that it can talk about.⁴¹ To say that the subject of speech (*je*) is the object of the imaginary ego is simply to say that my ability to speak informs my belief in myself as an individuated being: I can use my voice while you cannot use my voice. Interestingly, the grammar of the first-person “I” can be turned on its head. That is to say, we speak about ourselves *as if* our “self” is a third person.⁴² Consider the

difference between saying “I want coffee,” on the one hand, and “There is a wanting of coffee,” or even just “wanting coffee.” While at first glance the latter formulations might seem even more narcissistic than simply stating “I want coffee” they are actually a more accurate reflection of the feeling of our experience. Who is this “I” that wants? Similarly, when I am speaking, I see it as a reflection of who I am vis-à-vis your recognition or opinion of me. I am, for the most part, held accountable for my words. In fact, as we shall see, it could be the case that an entire career is made or broken on one statement or series of sounds (this has become magnified in the age of social media). It’s in this context that we can say that the Other is the object of my ego. To say that the Other is the object (or audience) of my ego is simply to point out that most of my actions are “performances” for others, even when that other is *the imaginary ego that I think that I am*. So, for instance, this operation can in fact help us operationalize “good behavior”: Am “I” the type of “person” who cheats on a test? To be a decision there must first be a question.

The *moi*, ego, regularly feels threatened precisely because the content of its existence is dependent upon images and the recognition of others who are outside of it.⁴³ The goal of the *moi* is narcissistic, but its reality is Echoistic, as in the Greek myth of Echo, who is condemned only to repeat the sounds of others. There is a tension here. On the one hand, we must reach outside of ourselves to say: this is me, this is not me. On the other hand, if we fixate too much on one object as constitutive of ourselves, this can lead to an unhealthy psyche which is incapable of properly appreciating the “new” and the “other.” The “*je*” on the other hand is the self which speaks. For this reason, the *je* is the “self” of Demand.⁴⁴ While the *je* demands particular “objects” of others, it finds these objects in *moi* or ego-thinking. If the *je* merely accepts the “identificatory mergers” of the fixated *moi* then the psyche becomes unhealthy and can lead to unhealthy narcissism and aggression. As Ragland-Sullivan points out, “psychic health” depends upon the *je* freeing the *moi* from its fixations.⁴⁵ In other words, we must be able to prevent ourselves from always demanding what it is we think we want in any moment: we are not the objects that we want. The term “narcissistic” comes from the figure of the same name in Greek mythology. Narcissus stared at his own image in a lake for so long that he turned into a flower. As Ragland-Sullivan puts it: “Narcissus died of his failure to quest for alterity.”⁴⁶ Nietzsche’s observation also applies here: “Convictions are more dangerous enemies of the truth than lies.”⁴⁷ Why? Because convictions not only depend upon the belief in an unchanging outside world, but also on an obsessive internal fixation built on the belief that we can have control over an unchangeable “self.” When persistence becomes obstinance in the face of changing conditions, narcissism becomes deadly, or at the very least antisocial and unhealthy. So, to use an earlier example again: If I become so obsessed with a promotion at work that I am constantly thinking about it, then my *moi* has become

fixated on the idea of promotion. If I then I tell myself “If I don’t get this promotion, I don’t know what I’ll do,” I have effectively, narcissistically, stopped my consciousness from taking in new experiences, and from allowing itself to change. But I have also done something else: I have taken the thinking of my consciousness and turned it into a petrified (though still imaginary) object that can be “talked about.” This would be one way to interpret Lacan’s re-articulation of Freud when he says: “Where the *moi* was, the *je* shall place itself.”⁴⁸

This self, and its parts, is essentially operating on three different registers at different times: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. “In adult life the three Lacanian registers seem inseparable. They work together to coordinate acts of consciousness, a coordination emanating from the Imaginary order of representations that exists as the interpretive record of the outside world’s symbolic data and of Real effects and events.”⁴⁹ The last of these can only be accessed at a remove of linguistic and imaginary thinking. In the above example, I can see upon reflection that it is unlikely that I need coffee to survive (in “Reality”). But, the register of the Real is the world that we *least* have access to. Why? Well because by the time we “understand” the world around us it is always in linguistic and thought-based interpretations that repeat concepts we are already familiar with, such as the statement: “I must have this promotion.”

Real

The realm of the Real is closed to our assigning a meaning to it. Lacan equates this to the unconscious. So for example, I have real needs to satiate my hunger. At the level of the real this emerges from my feeling of hunger, but by the time I try to “think” hunger, I have already entered the realm of the imaginary. The same can be said for sex and reproduction. At the level of the real these are biological needs which cannot be understood until we attach to them specific images. By the time sexuality becomes a “thing” for us, it is no longer based on “real” drives alone. In fact, virtually all of sexuality is driven by images, even if it is the image that is immediately in front of us.

Imaginary

The Imaginary is the realm of unconsciously assigning meaning and specific attachments to objects, or their mental equivalent, images. Here the relationship is primarily between my self—which is always a moving target in Lacan—and objects. The desire deals in the imaginary as it substitutes the inclination toward images for the vague and unimaginable drive to return to wholeness (which never existed in the first place). But at some point in our development we move even beyond images into the

realm of the language and conceptual thinking, in other words, the realm of the Symbolic.

Symbolic

The symbolic is the realm of language, the social, law, and exchange. Given that the symbolic requires the inclusion of images to turn into symbols, the two are not mutually exclusive. That said, the symbolic is always mediated through a third, namely language. Lacan basically understands language as an attempt to restore wholeness to the world through fictional objects (words). The whole function of narrative and talk therapy for Lacan are for the patient or analysand to “make whole” the meaning of their lives, particularly their symptoms, through language and narrative. The way I read it, it is not particularly important to Lacan that the patient’s story correspond to the Real, as long as it makes whole the meaning of their symptoms. The symbolic corresponds to demand insofar as it is through language that we must appeal to the other to recognize, love, or respect us. For Lacan, the symbolic has much to do with the ideas of metaphor and metonymy.

Metaphors and Metonymies

One might have noticed in the course of this brief review of key terms in Lacan the important connection between a sense of oneself (which, ultimately, corresponds to no “thing”) and language. It is in this context that that we should situate the superstructure of this book, namely, the bow, arrow, and archery as a metaphor for the human condition. Ragland-Sullivan explains the connection between the self, the unconscious, and the language of metaphor and metonymy well when she writes: “When Lacan said the unconscious is precisely structured—as a language—it is to metaphors and metonymy that he refers. A ‘self’ is selected, for example, on the basis of identificatory mergers with images (metaphor) within a referential context of combinations of objects (metonymy).”⁵⁰

We shall see multiple times in this treatment the identification of a character, or even one’s “character,” with a sense of self: Philoctetes’ “need” for his bow to survive, Odysseus “demand” on his people through the use of his bow, Aristotle’s idea that we are archers aiming for a target of virtue, and even Awa Kenzo’s idea of “one life, one shot.” While these metaphors will be fleshed out throughout the text, let’s first gain some clarity on the role of metaphor and metonymy.

Both metaphor and metonymy in Lacan have to do with the relationship between the signifier (e.g., a word or symbol) and the signified (e.g., a “real” thing). It will be appropriate then to begin our analysis with an account of Lacan’s distinction between *metaphor* and *metonymy* in “The

Agency of the Letter.”⁵¹ When Lacan is elaborating upon the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, he explains that the signifier never reaches the signified. The signified, as it were, always slides beneath the signifier in a way that we can construct a break or a bar between the two, S/s where the large S represents the signifier, and the small s the signified. Two points are worth noting with regard to this non-relationship. First, just because the signifier does not reach the signified doesn’t mean that the latter doesn’t exist. It simply means that it does not exist *in language*. And yet, language is all we have to bring its existence into common thought or discourse. Heraclitus plays at this notion as well in his fragments about naming: “The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.”⁵² Here the question is asked: is a signifier adequate to the signified? The same question is asked by the statement that will be at the center of this analysis: “The name of the bow is life; its work is death.”⁵³ The name of the bow may not be accurate to name what it does. So, regardless of whether we are addressing the metaphor, or the metonymy, this basic fact holds: language symbolically echoes something which can never be accessed linguistically. Secondly, both the metaphor and the metonymy remain on the level of the signifier. This means that in terms of Lacan’s three registers both ideas remain in the realm of the symbolic and therefore never touch reality. The relationship between the signifier and the signified in the metaphor is vertical, while we call the relationship of the metonymy horizontal. Why? Because the metaphor is a symbolic relationship that reaches “down” and anchors one idea to *another* in a way that mutually augments both signifiers in a way to create an excess of signification. Bruce Fink calls the metaphorical relation one of *condensation*.⁵⁴ It is a relation of condensation because it brings together several ideas (or at least two). So if we say Philoctetes identifies (the role of the metaphor) with the bow, we mean by this that the image of himself is condensed into the bow. The metonymy is said to, on the other hand, reach sideways. The relation between ideas is one of *displacement*.⁵⁵ Lacan gives an example to illustrate this: “thirty sails set out.”⁵⁶ Here the metonymy is also a synecdoche. A synecdoche is a linguistic relationship in which a part of something is used as a stand in for a whole. Here the “sails,” a part, refer to “ships,” the whole. As another example, Zeus is known as the “lightning bolt” since that is the weapon he uses. Ship and sails can be said to refer to each other without “augmenting” each other. We could also give the example of “wheels” for a car or “hand” for a hired worker. Synecdoches do not augment but refer to a whole, by the signifier of one of its parts. Metonymies more generally always point to something else.

Furthermore, metonymies are not metaphors. A *metaphor* refers to when one uses a term to anchor it to a wholly different set of signifiers, but that nonetheless relates the two sets in a way that mutually extends the possible signification of both. Take, for example, the phrase “Time

flies." There is nothing about time that leaves the ground. But we associate time, occasionally, with "going fast," and "going fast" with flight. There are other similarities we could unpack, but then that spoils the fun. So, how do the terms *metaphor* and *metonymy* gain import for Lacan?

For one, both ideas can operate while maintaining the bar between the signifier and the signified; between the Symbolic (signifier) and the Real (signified). In both cases words only refer to other words. The unconscious also has the structure of a language because of its metonymic structure—any signifier only refers to other signifiers. With respect to the unconscious, the linguistic can be metaphorically related to the non-linguistic as well. According to Lacan, the patient's symptom is itself a metaphor: "If the symptom is a metaphor, it is not a metaphor to say so. . ." ⁵⁷ This is not a conditional statement by itself, but the beginning of *modus ponens*, the conclusion being: "A symptom being an element in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element." ⁵⁸ Therefore, the symptom *really is* a metaphor; one in which the "flesh or function" as one level of signifier refers to something on the level of language in the form of analytic description. In pointing this out we are being *literal* not *metaphorical*.

Metonymy plays a role in the question of this project regarding desire. Desire, it turns out, is a metonymy. In a clever rewording of Freud's observations on Da Vinci, Lacan points out that scientific naturalism "envelops the pleasure of knowing and dominating with *jouissance*, these [assumptions about reality] amount to no other derangement of instinct than that of being caught in the rails—eternal stretching forth toward the *desire for something else*—of metonymy." ⁵⁹

The phrase "rails of metonymy" itself provides a nice metaphor. Our desire is like a runaway train. The reason we will never reach the Truth or Absolute Knowledge is because we desire *to* desire—to keep going. "The Desire to know or possess the Other(a) has been displaced into the Desire to be, to know, to have." ⁶⁰ We like the chase more than the capture. Desire *for* X is just a desire *to* desire. Desire, a metonymy, is a train on the rails as the mind races from one signifier to the next, never quite leaving the horizontal level of signifier *a* being replaced with signifier *a'*. Or, to put it more accurately in the realm of desire: moving from one *object a* to the next. I like to think of desire as a set of monkey bars on a playground. The fact of the matter is that we take pleasure in swinging from one signifier to the next not *because* of the movement, but in spite of it. We believe that we are getting ever closer to the signified, to the Real, to the Truth. But we are mistaken: "The S [signifier] and s [signified] of the Saussurian algorithm are not on the same level, and man only deludes himself when he believes that his true place is at their axis, which is nowhere." ⁶¹ In sum, the symptom is a metaphor for the Real, which is inaccessible through language, and *Desire* is a metonymy which refers always to something other than what it signifies. Another way of under-

standing this second relationship is to see it as the production of an excess of meaning to cover over a lack of meaning that occurs “naturally.” In the relationship involved in desire the “signifier installs the lack-of-being in the object relation, using the value of the ‘reference back’ possessed by signification in order to invest it with desire aimed at the lack it supports.”⁶² In other words, we so badly want things to be permanent—to *be*, period—that we attempt to *describe* them into Being. And we fail. But this is the entire content of the correspondence theory of truth presupposed by the natural sciences; namely, that my words refer back to describe something as it actually *is*. We miss the fact things have moved on, vis-à-vis time. So we are describing, at best, what it *was*. However, since language cannot “touch” things, we are not describing what “was” at all. Instead, we are describing description itself. And description, in this case, is desire.

The lack, the gap, which springs into existence between the signifier and the signified is the possibility of the subject herself. Without the initial space⁶³ for meaning there would be no room for “me” or more precisely “I”. Before we get into the significance of this gap for the subjects that we are, and more importantly desire, we must first traverse this gap with the arc of an arrow.

The Dialectic of the Drive

Central to our placement of the three key elements of drive—need, Desire, and demand—is what Lacan calls the “dialectic of the drive.”⁶⁴ In what follows we will find that dialectic of the drive is a dialectic of life and death at the level of the organism, the psyche, and the community. In Lacan’s allusion to Heraclitus’ fragment that “The name of the bow is life; its work is death,” we see that the real work of life *is* death, or one of its related concepts: entropy, change, chaos, and so on. At the level of the organism, the drive emerges as the need to survival at all costs. The living of one requires the death of another. Additionally, death is implied in life—if I am alive, I must someday die. What’s more, the very drive for more life (i.e., procreation) arises only because the species needs to be saved in the face of an individual’s death—what Lacan will call a “second life.” At the level of psyche, one version of “my self” requires the death of another. At the level of the community, while we hope that we can address the death drive through creative and collective overcoming, the dialectic of the drive can result in death both inside and outside of the community, for the sake of the survival of the community itself.

Archery represents the dialectic of the drive for several reasons that will be explored throughout this study. For one, the nature of aiming and shooting for something beyond ourselves is an act that at that same time points to two movements. One, shooting points to the desire to remain alive, as in the case of hunting for sustenance, or killing an enemy in

battle, exhibiting what we have called need. Similarly, one may use archery to assert oneself (ego) in competition thereby attempting to demand the recognition of the other, and a recognition of one's own limits. In other words, we only need this projectile weapon to extend and augment, or maintain, the space of the self, either physically or psychically.

The literary examples I use will show that the life-death dialectic of the drive expresses itself through need, Desire, and demand. At the level of need, we'll see the bow in *Philoctetes* represent a life or death situation if the bow is taken from Philoctetes. At the level of Desire, we will see how Heraclitus locates "identity" in the continuous process of internalizing the outside, enfolding opposition, and generally in that a "thing"—the psyche included—"agrees at variance with itself." At the level of demand, we see in *The Odyssey* the bow represents kingship, hierarchical power, and potentially the threat of violence to ensure that the self, Other, and community stay in order. In each of these examples, the drive involves life and death, real, threatened, or at the level of the symbolic.

While the metaphor of archery makes for a very enlightening illustration—literary and otherwise—of the dialectic of the drive, and at a more global level, the human condition as such, most of will be elaborated upon in what follows also stands on its own. That is, the dual nature of human being as being both chaotic and controlled, both unified and fragmented, is not itself necessarily related to archery in itself. For that reason, I hope that the reader will find value in the research here outside of the scope of the archery metaphor. That said, I also hope, as I said above, that the examples and analysis of the connection between the metaphor of archery and the human condition that follows can enrich one's understanding of the former, while at the same time encountering some new philosophical and psychological insights into human nature.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In the next chapter I will use the earlier discussion of the shape of the bow as a metaphor for the tension at the center of our being. See Figure 1.0 on the next page for a table that outlines this structure. Here I will build on Kelly Oliver's idea of the "tensile" subject in *The Colonization of Psychic Space*. In brief, Oliver argues that the subject is stretched between two opposing realms: that of the subject as agent, and that of the structural elements of subjectivity as such—historicity, language, culture, etc.—which are beyond our control. I would put in that latter set the Lacanian concept of drive, as the total of each of the parts I discuss above.

The image of the bow serves as an excellent figure for the subject-qua-tensile-structure. The ancient bow has essentially two parts: the wooden body, and the bow string. The wooden body can further be divided into three parts: the lower limb, the middle section called the grip, and the

Part of Drive	Ancient Greek Illustration	Key Aspect of Bow	Level in Lacan	Potential Outcome	Rough Correlation	Related Concepts	Stage
Need Chapter 2	Sophocles' <i>Philoctetes</i>	Tool for survival; my life requires death of another	Real (inaccessible by way of image or language)	Repression of real drives	Physical survival		Pre-mirror (confuses mother with self)
Desire Chapter 3	Heraclitus' fragments	Image of unity in opposites: tension between changing self and desire for object permanence	Imaginary (object permanence)	Violence acted out through images	Search for wholeness in objects	<i>Je –moi</i> <i>Narcissism</i> <i>Identificatory mergers</i> <i>Death-work</i>	Mirror (sees self as whole—mistakenly—but still requires outside objects for completion)
Demand Chapter 4	<i>The Odyssey</i> , book 21	<i>Xenia</i> : Bow as social capital (prized item of exchange) <i>Basileus</i> : symbol of leadership (threat of violence)	Symbolic (level of language and exchange)	Sublimation of imaginary into meaningful language and creation	Search for wholeness in the recognition of the other	Phallus Name of the Father Phallic Injunction Castration	

Figure 1.0 **Structure of the Book.** This table shows the interrelation of the key concepts of the first part of the book and their examples. In addition, the left column shows the theme that will be central to each of the next three chapters.

upper limb. For the sake of our metaphorical argument, the next chapter will focus on the bowstring, and where it connects to the upper and lower limbs. We can then imagine the two limbs as connection points for a “subject” pulled across them. On the lower limb we can imagine the aspects of the subject that make up her facticity, elements that are outside of her control. On the upper limb we can imagine the existence of (or the desire for) agency, choice, intention, and “freedom.” While I do ultimately hold that we possess self-control in this book, I will also argue that any freedom we have is greatly limited due to elements in the “lower limb.” These elements will be called drives, the Others, and the subject position. The elements of the upper limb will be called subjectivity (by Oliver) and the ego (by Lacan).

Here the opposing forces are represented by the two ends of the bow, and the subject becomes the string drawn between them. But by turning our attention to one side of attachment of this bow—the side of agency, one can imagine the agent as the one who takes up the bow itself—as the archer. By turning our attention to the other side—internal forces—we see that pull of internal drives is strong. When not appropriately understood and controlled, such forces can be self-destructive or beget violence toward others. These forces will be broken up into Lacan’s concepts of Need, Desire, and Demand. Need expresses the drive toward bodily survival. Desire expresses a second-level development in which need energy is conflated with objects that are not necessary for survival, but are inbred with misplaced desire of others. Demand is a tertiary affair in which one expresses her desire to another in order to see what the other does in return; it is a test based in the desire to be desired by the other (i.e., if the other wants/loves/respects/fears me they will do what I want.). In order to explore these three concepts further in fictional action we identify them in works of Greek literature containing the bow: Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, the contest of the bow in book 21 of *The Odyssey*, and the fragments of Heraclitus.

In chapter 2, I argue that Lacan’s concept of *need*, or the aspect of the drive that aims toward survival, is illustrated wonderfully by the image of the bow in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*. Having described the notion of *need* in chapter 2, I now apply our first metaphorical use of bow to this concept. The thrust of the whole play is for Odysseus and Neoptolemus to convince Philoctetes to relinquish his bow, which is purported by an oracle to hold the key to Greeks’ victory against the Trojans. When he is confronted by Neoptolemus and asked to relinquish his bow, Philoctetes, who had, until their arrival, been stranded for years, says: “You take away my life (*bíos*) by seizing my bow (*toxón*). /Return it, I beg you, return it, O son./By the ancestral gods, do not take my life/bow (*bíos*) from me.”⁶⁵ The play on words here is important: the bow equals physical survival. According to Carol Poster, even though Sophocles first uses the post-Epic *toxón* for “bow,” the second use of *bíos* here is a pun, since the

name *bios*, can be used to name “life” or “bow” in Epic Greek, where the only difference between the two words was accentuation (*bíos/biós*).⁶⁶ This play on words allows Sophocles to represent linguistically the necessity of bow for Philoctetes’ survival. To the extent that the bow is an expression of drive for physical survival in Philoctetes, it also corresponds to the *need* aspect of the Lacanian drive. This chapter will end with an allusion to *desire*, to be described further in the next chapter, by arguing that even though the bow is an object not usually associated with survival, and thus perhaps connected to desire, in the case of Philoctetes situation, the bow is tantamount to survival and thereby connected to *need*.

In chapter 3, I argue that Lacan’s notion of *Desire*, the part of the drive that corresponds to the projection of the ego onto external objects, can be seen in the symbolic use of the bow in several of Heraclitus’ fragments. On the one hand, according to Lacan, Desire finds its roots in the desire for object permanence, from the point that the infant realizes the mother is separate from her. Yet, “Desire is always desire for something else.”⁶⁷ What’s more, we establish our own sense (even if it is a fiction) of a permanent self through desire. These themes can be seen on a metaphysical level within Heraclitus’ fragments on the bow. To cite one example, Heraclitus’ idea that “[the bow] agrees at variance with itself”⁶⁸ can be elaborated upon as the “source” of the Lacanian drive: the difference between the *moi* (my “experience”) and the *je* (the “I” or subject of speech). For this and other reasons, Heraclitus’ thoughts on the symbolism of the bow will be shown to provide an opening into the concept of desire, whereby we construct a notion of self by piecing together images of objects we long for. Thus, like the bow and the lyre, we, too, are always agreeing at variance with ourselves. While this is itself an important insight into desire provided by Heraclitus’ bow, we have not yet reached the most complex stage of the drive, demand, in which we appeal for the love and recognition of others—love being itself a type of substitutive metaphor—through the reference to objects. In order to illustrate this level of drive we appeal to Book 21 of *The Odyssey*.

In chapter 4 I argue that the Lacanian concept of Demand is the tenor of the bow metaphor in the *Odyssey*. Demand here means my appeal to the other that she recognize me. Odysseus takes part in an archery contest, which ostensibly has the purpose of winning back his wife, Penelope. Using Jonathan Ready’s work as a frame, I show that the bow holds the status of *demand* within the scene. Ready argues that there are two economies that “sustain [Odysseus’] household”: *xenia* and *basileus*.⁶⁹ *Xenia* refers to the gift-exchange among guest-friends. In other words, it is a showing of lateral peer status. The other aspect, *basileus*, means that the bow stands as a sign of hierarchical leadership. Both aspects of Odysseus’ ability with and possession of the bow lead to the ultimate goal: the restoration of his position with his wife, his household, and his place in

society. In the functions of establishing peer-group recognition, and hierarchical leadership, and the recognition—literally and figuratively—from Penelope, the bow becomes the perfect symbol of the Lacanian *demand*. Understanding the bow in this way—as a demand for recognition of the other—we can also tie it to the Lacanian concepts of the phallus, the Name of the Father, and castration, each of which I will do over the course of this explanation. In brief, we can see Odysseus bow as itself a kind of phallus—not a *biological organ* in Lacan but instead a *placeholder of power*—which has been passed from hero to hero. Odysseus intentionally leaves this phallus behind when going to battle in Troy to remind the people of Ithaca of his own status as Father and the Law. To lose this bow permanently would be equivalent to a sort of castration of power for Odysseus; thus threatened, Odysseus engages in what might be understood as an over-reaction in his slaughtering of the suitors at the end of book 21. Thus, Odysseus’ bow becomes a phallic injunction of sorts over against any of the suitors overtaking Odysseus own (m)Other-wife in Penelope, and his power in the form of this household. I conclude this chapter by arguing that the resolution at the end of *Odyssey*, in which the killing of Odysseus, Telemachus and others is halted only by the higher injunction of the law of Athena (she literally intervenes and dissuades the suitors’ families from violence against Odysseus) is an imaginary one. In other words, such a resolution is unrealistic. The only way one can undo the fundamental separation from the (m)Other (aka castration) is through the intervention of the divine. But, is there a way that we can cope with this separation, even if we cannot undo it?

In the second part of our study, we move from a purely negative, ruptured, split sense of the subject as was arrived through the exploration of the bow in ancient Greek literature, to a neutral and then even somewhat positive sense of agency—if only a limited one. First, I will explore the figure of the bow in the idea of subject as tensile structure. I consider this to be a “neutral” position of agency, because it basically understands the subject as a middle term between agency and the structures of subjectivity as such. This neutral position allows us to move into the more positive position of the archer—referred to ingeniously by Aristotle—who is *trying* to hit the mark. Considering the subject thus—as one who can respond to forces *external* to agency—we can see that even though the base of subjectivity is a lack or negativity, the possibility exists for us *adjust* to this reality nonetheless.

Chapter 6 will address how the image of the archer can give us a positive guide for dealing with drives and other forces. In book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle compares aiming for virtue to the shot of an archer. Aristotle points out there is only one way to hit the target of virtue and many ways to miss it.⁷⁰ What is most relevant and interesting about this analogy is that the good archer is responsible for harnessing and controlling many forces both within and without in order to hit her tar-

get. She is required to breathe deeply to steady herself, to judge the wind, distance, and so on, so that she can adjust her aim left or right, up or down, pull the string as taught as possible or give it some slack. And these are just some of the variables involved. Interestingly, the word root for *arete* and *aristoi* is the same as *arrow*: *Ares* or war. There are two ways to see this connection. The first is that the first men of virtue were heroes of war, which does give our contemporary Puritan notion of “virtue” a strange beginning indeed. The second is to understand war as the harnessing and disciplining of violent forces toward a particular end. Does not the person striving for excellence face the same task?

Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean is applicable to the Lacanian notion of drive in two ways. One, the drive aims for all sorts of things, and in so doing misses—for its goal is an impossible reunification. But, secondly, when we attempt to adjust to a “self”-effacing approach to desire and demand we can control our misguided desires to some degree. In the final chapter I will address the synthesis of these two sets of ideas.

The conclusion of the book addresses the way that virtue ethics involves a displacement of the ego. Another tradition involving archery falls in line with this idea as well: *kyujitsu*, or the Japanese art of archery. Awa Kenzo, the great teacher of Zen archery from Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery*, says in his “Great Way of Shooting Teaching” (*Dai-shado-kyo*):

Trust in the practice of the Way of the Bow.

Archery is not an art, it is a Way.

When you practice the Way, it is not just training in technique; it is spiritual forging.

Forging your spirit is to become empty, and to focus on your center.

To become empty is to become one with the divine—this is the Way.

To attain the Way is to manifest the Way.

The Way of the Bow is to manifest your self Buddha-nature and arrive at the ultimate.⁷¹

Admittedly, the Buddhist approach to mitigating internal tensions may not be for everyone. We will also look at another possibility: cultivating strong emotions while controlling—not suppressing—their release. This path is the one that sets up the title of this book and can be found most clearly in Nietzsche. Nietzsche imagines an individual who is prone to great swings of emotion for the purposes of developing creativity and a richness of character, while at the same time cultivating self-mastery over these emotions. To translate this back into Lacanian language: we admit of the most possible drives while sublimating them creatively as opposed to acting them out violently.

In the end I will argue that the numerous sources we will have looked at—Lacan, Homer, Sophocles, Heraclitus, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Kenzo—each arrive in their own way at the main premise of this book: that

the bow and archer serve as excellent metaphors for the tension at the heart of the human condition. I hope the reader will find that in that making that point explicit, we can go some way in understanding ourselves, and perhaps even lead more psychologically healthy lives.

NOTES

1. In this book we will mainly be looking at the bow and arrow, that is, the weapon. But we will have opportunity in the chapter on Heraclitus to like it to the lyre, in that they both have strings stretched across wood which holds it in tension.

2. As quoted in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of Archery," *Studies in Comparative Religion* (1971, 5:2), 4.

3. Theosophy Trust, "The Bow," *Great Symbol Series*, <https://theosophytrust.mobi/6888-bow#>. WrvjClgbOUk.

4. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Bow," 3.

5. Jacques Lacan, *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 177.

6. Coomaraswamy, "Symbolism and the Bow," 2.

7. Soph. Phil. 931-33. Also see Carol Poster, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2006, 39:1), 1-17.

8. RV.VI.75.4 as quoted in Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of Archery," 3.

9. Theosophy Trust, "The Bow," 1.

10. *Ibid.*, 4.

11. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Bow," 2.

12. *Ibid.*, 1.

13. For instance, when the bow is given to the pupil, there is a ritual in which the pupil picks up and sets down the bow three times, signifying the certainty of his decision, and his readiness. Furthermore, the grip itself is seen as a secret that is passed on through initiation. The teacher gives the bow to the student saying, "In accordance with the behest of Allah and the Way (*summa*) of his chosen messenger. . ." from Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Bow," 2.

14. MU.II.2.1-4 as quoted in Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Bow," 7.

15. *Op. cit.*

16. Theosophy Trust, "The Bow," 1.

17. *Ibid.*, 3.

18. *Op. cit.*

19. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, *The Will to Power* Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 507.

20. Theosophy Trust, "The Bow," 4.

21. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Bow," 9.

22. BU.III.8.2 as quoted in Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Bow," 3.

23. *Ibid.*, 4.

24. *Op. Cit.*

25. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177.

26. Aristotle, NE.1106b28.

27. Commentaries by Bruce Fink and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan have been absolutely essential in arriving at my understanding of Lacan. To the extent that those two readings differ in minutia, I try to focus on the shared interpretation so as to give the most coherent "reading" of Lacan's theory of drive that I can.

28. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 89.

29. By "unconscious" here I mean something that slipped past conscious awareness and therefore is permanently irretrievable by memory, even though it undoubtedly

"informed" our understanding at that time. Even if there is a first word that we "speak" how could one possibly recall the first word they "understood"??!!

30. Jacques Lacan, *Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Bruce Fink. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 100-101.

31. Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, xiv.

32. Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie. *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*. (Chicago: Illini Press, 1987), 74.

33. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 150.

34. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 74.

35. *Ibid.*, 81.

36. Stuart Schneiderman, *How Lacan's Ideas Are Used in Clinical Practice*, Aronson, 1980, 7.

37. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 73.

38. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 164, and Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 80.

39. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 55.

40. *Ibid.*, 55. See also Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Translated by Bruce Fink. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), "The Signification of the Phallus," 581.

41. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 176.

42. "The *moi* of the Lacanian subject normally 'speaks' to another about his or her own subject S (or *je*) as if it were in the third person." Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 176 referring to Lacan, Seminar III, p 23.

43. *Ibid.*, 48.

44. *Ibid.*, 86.

45. *Ibid.*, 50.

46. Op. Cit.

47. Nietzsche, *Human, All to Human*, S. 483, from *The Portable Nietzsche*, Ed. and Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1977), 63.

48. As quoted in Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 51.

49. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 131.

50. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 164. See also Jacques Lacan, "Of Structure as Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever," at <http://www.lacan.com/hotel.htm>.

51. Wrongly, Lacan gives the example of "sails" standing in for "ships" as an example of metonymy. Really this is an example of synecdoche.

52. "The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus." Fr. CXVIII in Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 83. 1995. I use the Kahn edition for all of Heraclitus fragments unless otherwise noted.

53. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Fr. LXXIX, 65.

54. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 15.

55. Op. cit.

56. Jacques Lacan, "Agency of the letter in the unconscious," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 146-178, at 156.

57. *Ibid.*, 175.

58. *Ibid.*, 166.

59. Lacan, *Écrits*, (2006), "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," 431.

60. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 83.

61. Lacan, *Écrits* (2006), "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," 431.

62. *Ibid.*, 428.

63. Compare this to Heidegger's notion Dasein (human being) as "the clearing" in, for example, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, Harper, 2008.

64. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177.

65. Sophocles *Philoctetes*, (931-33) as taken from Carol Poster, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language," 7.

66. Op. Cit.

67. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 81-82.

68. Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Fr. LXXVIII. I use the Charles Kahn edition for all of the fragments unless otherwise noted.

69. Jonathan Ready, "Why Odysseus Strings His Bow" (*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, Vol. 50, 2010, 133-157), 133.

70. NE II.6 1106b228ff. I will be primarily drawing on Glen Koehn's "The Archer and the Doctrine of the Mean" *Peitho/Examina Antiqua* 1 (3): 155-167.

71. Stevens, John, *Zen Bow, Zen Arrow*. (Pittsburgh: Shambala Publications, 2007), 13.

ONE

The Tension of the Bow

There is a fundamental tension at the heart of the human condition. On the one side of this tension is the will to be free, to intentionally determine and decide upon the major events in our lives. This side will be called *the Ego*. On the other side of this tension are all the aspects of our lives we cannot control. In Lacan, these aspects are called the *Other(s)*. We will discuss many variations of the Other in this chapter and beyond. Again, these “features,” the ego and its otherness, exist outside of any analogies that we could draw to the bow or the archer. Still, in what follows I will show that bow and archer are remarkable illustrations of these features of the human condition.

Now imagine that these two poles are the opposite ends of the staff of a bow. The string that attaches to both ends and holds them together is the representation of what we will call the *subject*. The term “subject” is fraught with philosophical baggage that cannot be completely unpacked here. However, the term does hint at its two sides as described above. On the one hand, we can see the subject as the one who is *thrown under (subjectum)* all its experience. In that light the subject is the one who is *subject to* various events. On the other hand, the subject can be opposed to objects as the one who is capable of conscious experience and free will. The subject conceived of in this way is held in constant tension between what it desires and what happens to it. For that reason, one can picture the subject as stretched across the void of the bow staff, being pulled taut because it is simultaneously being pulled in two opposing directions. Being pulled thus has many implications that will be explored in this chapter. For one, the subject expressed as a taut bow string becomes its own version of what Heraclitus proposes as a unity in opposites (Homer saw this too). Secondly, the subject-as-bow is *potential*. A bow contains a force held in tension ready to be utilized. One could argue that it is the

difference between the two sides of the bow—the ego and the Other—that makes that tension creative. Only when the world is different than the way I want it to be am I motivated to change something. In this analogy, some forces will be working in favor of our goals and our aims and others against it. This happens in archery with every shot. A bow can be perfectly taut and tuned, but the archer still must consider any number of external factors: the distance to the target, the direction and speed of the wind, the relative difference in elevation between the archer and the target, and so on. In other words, any reference to the bow-as-potential can only be properly framed within a context of considering external factors as well.

In this chapter, all three of the “parts” of the bow, the string and the two ends of the staff, will concern us. Though I am the first that I know of to use the bow as a metaphor for the complicated situation of the human condition, there are two excellent predecessors for understanding the subject as something in tension—rather, tensile, as stretched across two or more points. The first is Kelly Oliver, in her insightful work, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*. The first part of her argument pertains to our project and it will be worth spelling out. Oliver imagines the subject stretched out across two points: subjectivity, what we will call the ego, and subject position, which will include what we call the others. The second version of the subject as tensile structure will be taken from Jacques Lacan, a major focus of the first part of this book, Lacan imagines the subject as being stretched across four points: the body, object desires, language, and the ego. Of course, I will first address what a tensile structure is. Before I do, let’s outline the second and third moves in this chapter.

The second part of the chapter will focus on the one point of connection in the bow metaphor: the ego. This will happen in two steps. First, we will explore the origin of ego as Lacan describes it in infant development. The second part will elaborate on the ego as the “product” of introjecting unity or wholeness onto a fundamentally chaotic and fragmented set of bodily desires. The third part of the chapter will outline several parts of what Oliver calls the subject position, and what Lacan calls the Other. We will be using the tensile structure and stretched subject as starting points for describing these Others. Lastly, I will introduce the way that the Other functions through the iterations of drive, namely, as need, as desire, and as Demand, that will be examined in relation to early Greek thinking on the bow and archery in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

THE TAUT STRING: THE TENSILE STRUCTURE OF THE SUBJECT

Oliver has likened the situation the subject finds herself in to that of a tensile structure. A tensile structure refers to an architectural structure

that is given its shape and stability by virtue of being drawn across two or more stable points. The Denver airport would be a good example: the roof is given its stability and structure only by the way the fabric like roof is stretched across several upstanding poles. In what way is a subject like a tensile structure? According to Oliver the subject is stretched between *subjectivity* on one hand, and the *subject position* on the other. Subjectivity here means one's sense of oneself and one's sense of one's responsibility. Subject position refers to one's historical and social position in one's culture. In her words: "our experience of our own subjectivity is the result of the productive tension between the finite subject position and the infinite responsibility of the structure of subjectivity itself."¹

Given the fact that our "subject" is split between one's area of choice on the one hand, and the cultural underpinnings that constitute one's facticity on the other, subjectivity is thoroughly relational. Oliver points out that more than anything subjectivity is formulated through response to others and to aspects of my development that I cannot control. For example, I establish who I believe I am as a person with reference to my upbringing, race, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. While it could be that I "choose" to the extent that I either embrace or deny these aspects of my identity, I certainly do not create the ones that I can choose from. For instance, it would be nearly impossible for me to deny my whiteness, even if it is something I choose not to emphasize, given that others will react to me as if I am white. Furthermore, the drives and desires even at the most bodily level don't originate in one body—even sexuality is culturally conditioned. Our unconscious drives, always form and emerge amid a social context. One need only to look at changing fashion in homes or clothes, or the typical body shape that one finds in magazines to see that desire is social.

The picture that has been painted with respect to the tensile structure from Oliver's point of view is that the subject is stretched across two points. In Lacan's point of view, the subject is stretched across four points. In "On the Possible Treatment of Psychosis," Lacan suggests that the subject is:

stretched over the four corners of the schema, namely, S, in his inevitable, stupid, existence, o, his objects, o', his ego, that is, that which is reflected in the form of his objects, and O, the focus from which the question of existence may be presented to him.²

Let's parse this out into the following parts:

1. S—the *real* subjects (body-desires)
2. o—objects of desire as secondary energy-*imaginary*
3. o'—small o, other of the *imaginary* ego
4. O—the Other as discourse- *symbolic*

For the sake of our argument, however, one can imagine the ego falling to one side, and the three other components falling on the other thus returning to the tension as present in the shape of the bow. See Figure 1.1 below.

While Lacan imagines these as “four corners” the case can be made that they can be reorganized as I do above. Why? Because even though the ego winds up be strictly imaginary (and therefore “not Real”) it is still a different type of thing than the other three parts. While we will explore this difference in more depth in the next part of the chapter, suffice it to say that the ego is a unifying, organizing force, whereas the others tend to be chaotic and fragmentary by comparison. Thus, the ego tends to give us the illusion of control—what above is called agency—where the other three disrupt this illusion. When seen as a force aiming toward control, and those that get in the way of it, we can reorganize a subject as

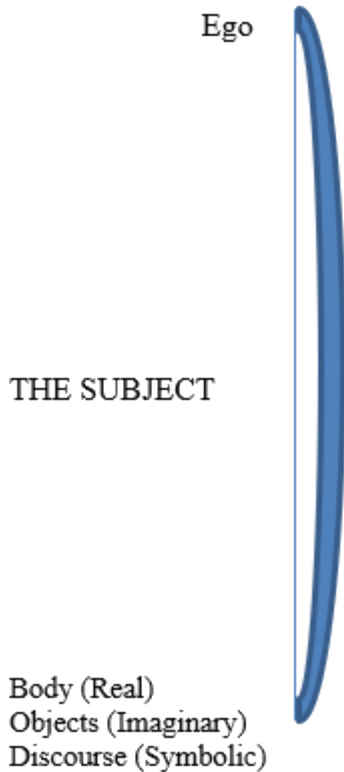


Figure 1.1. The Bow Image and its relation to the Subject. On the left side of the image, we see the aspect of the subject that we most identify with ourselves, and any control we have over ourselves, the ego. On the right side of the image, we have the constraints on and conditions of ego, according to Lacan’s three registers.

stretched across two points. Given that the subject is stretched across these two points (and four corners) I will now provide a brief explanation of each and the function they will have in this book. Later in this chapter we will explore the correlates of each: The Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic as they pertain to ego development. For now, let's look at these four corners of the subject.

The Body: "The Ineffable, Stupid Existence"

While Lacan often attempts to be provocative his use of the word "existence" must be put in to context. What he is referring to is the existence of the body; both as that vehicle of our consciousness, hopes, and desires, but also as that "black box" that will not disclose its contents without extreme attention, if it ever does. The Real body is always inaccessible from a standpoint of "knowledge" as knowledge is only disclosable in terms of language (the Symbolic). The subject is stretched across the body to the degree that the body is not only the organism—or machinery, if you'd prefer—through which we encounter the world, but also in that it is largely outside of our control. The maintenance of the living body happens according to autonomic process that we cannot control without great effort: breathing, digestion, the heartbeat, and so on. So, the body serves a dual function of being the only thing through which we can accomplish actions in the world on the one hand, and as a reminder of our utter lack of control—our frailty—on the other.

What's more, the body is the dark precursor to most of what we would understand as "our desires." While our conscious selves have some say—how much is yet to be determined—in the organization of those desires, they are, at base chaotic. The chaos that is the glut of bodily urges will come up again when we discuss the Others and the death drive below. For now, let me point that out the Other-ness of the body consists in what we cannot control about it, and in the dark origins of our desires. This is one of the many elements that sustains a tension in the heart of the human subject. Now we will look at the second point on the side of the body: the objects with which we identify in the formation of the ego.

"His Objects": Our First Desires

Infant development plays the central role in the development of the ego. For that reason, we will look at its role from several different perspectives in this chapter. First, we will look at the role objects play in the development of the ego. Later we will look at the way that the separation from the mother and the development of language also play a role in ego development.

A good portion of infant development happens in the form of the identification of certain objects with one's imaginary sense of self. An infant has very basic needs, and those needs are met in the form of response by caretakers. Initially, the infant identifies its needs with the things (people, body parts) that are meeting them, and only later realizes that they may not be met and that the things that were meeting them are indeed separate from the infant. Of course, the misunderstanding present in our initial situation would be quite a dream scenario: we would have the ability to meet all our own needs, and only go without for brief moments. But that is, of course, a misperception. We will discuss this more below. Once the infant does understand these primary objects as other than itself, it begins to look "outward" for satisfaction from other objects. *Identification* in Lacan has to do with mapping our existence onto objects outside of ourselves. Initially these objects take the form of the breast, the gaze, and the voice, as those objects that "naturally" remind us of the main source of our satisfaction, our mother.

What does it mean to say that the ego is made up of objects? The ego emerges in response to a multitude of drives that threaten our ability to maintain control. For instance, the helpless infant requires a caretaker to feed it, change it, and caress it. Its body is essentially out of control of itself. Here all its energy is aimed at having its needs met in the only way it knows how—crying. Then as the infant begins to see further, it associates the meeting of the needs with the presence of certain objects and the breast or the voice of the mother. Furthermore, in the mirror stage, whether accompanied by an actual mirror, the infant begins to mimic others in order to gain mastery over its own body. Or, more precisely, its own orifices and vocal equipment. For various reasons I will extrapolate later, we eventually map our existence onto any number of objects: our professions, our significant others, our possessions, and our beliefs.

The Imaginary Ego

One can probably guess that it is these objects just mentioned that compose the "stuff" of our ego. When I ask, "Who am I?" I usually answer that question with things I enjoy doing, my profession, my family situation, in short, my "objects." And yet, even if these are objects are not figments of the imagination, so to speak, their status as permanent parts of who I am is imaginary. Lacan calls the ego "imaginary" for two reasons: The first reason is in line with our conventional use of the term imaginary: that is, it does not exist but for in our imagination. One cannot locate the ego in any geographical, physiological, or spatial sense. One cannot point to an ego. The second reason the ego is imaginary is that it is composed of images, based on both real events in the past (i.e., memories) and fantastical ones (i.e., phantasies). This understanding of an ego is not outside of the realm of prior philosophical thought. As one exam-

ple, John Locke imagined personal identity to be composed of a cabinet of memories that we can draw from.³ Lacan's theory concerning the ego is not so simple. Perhaps it comes closer to David Hume's contention that personal identity is no more than images walking across the stage of consciousness.⁴ The important way that Lacan's account differs from Locke's account is that the ego is not a constant that exists, but is something that is formed in defense to the chaos of multitude of contradictory desires, and in the face of a fundamental desire is to please others.

Erecting the imaginary structure of the ego engenders a life-long struggle within the subject: How do I deal with the multitude of contradicting desires, many of which are anti-social, within the framework of a unified self that I supposedly always have control over? The paradoxes intrinsic to this scenario are many. For one, Lacan holds that we do not have control over our ego—it controls us. It would be more correct—and we will argue—that the ego is more of an Other than self. If we never do indeed encounter a unified “self” in experience, then such an illusory self is not something that can take charge, but instead an imaginary formation in response to a fear of deterioration. As we shall see, Lacan's version of Freud's death drive fits squarely in this space. Because of the *deep* recognition of the ego as a figment, as something Other than real, we protect it at all costs. Intuitive certainty is a strong placebo intended to cure needling doubt. Such a protective stance also makes accomplices of others. We need, in the default mode of our being, to have others recognize my ego as who I in fact am. It is just one universal and mutually shared case of the emperor having no clothes, and each of us is the emperor. For that reason, the desire for recognition and status and the hope to attract the desire of the other determines every move of the ego. It's notable that when we are insulted, or lose a job, we do not face immediate *physiological* threats. And yet our ego is bruised, and depending on previous experience, we may overreact in a way that is inappropriate. We spend much more time over the course of our lives protecting our ego than we do our body.

At some point, drive essentially transfers itself away from pure bodily survival, and into making sure that our imaginary objects persist. “*Pulsion* [drive] becomes connected to the infant's pleasure in object constancy—*jouissance*—in relation to a primordial other...”⁵ *Jouissance* in this instance is “the ecstatic sense of unity which preceded an infant's knowledge of separation from the mother. . .”⁶ In other words, after the realization of separation from the mother, the psyche begins to fight against anxiety by positing and reflecting certain objects. One of these objects is itself (i.e., the illusion of a constant being that one has constant control over). One of the elements of the illusion of control is self-mastery in the two most obvious forms we engage in childhood: continence and language learning. But desire also overextends itself in the goal of securing self-unity and maintenance. Desire expands from the objects required just

for the fulfillment of need, for survival, to being projected onto any number of inhuman objects, generally called *object a*. As soon as we have the imaginary ego and its objects, the subject, the being that each one of *is*, becomes alienated from itself. The subject is alienated from itself since it becomes split between this imaginary ego and the other Others that occupy the unconscious. This happens when we develop language. More precisely, when it takes up language, the subject splits “between an ineluctably false sense of itself and the automatic function of language (the signifying chain in the unconscious).”⁷ Importantly, both of these Others are not “me.” As the ego I am a false sense of a united self. Similarly, the language of the unconscious is not my discourse—I did not create it—rather, it is the discourse of the Other.

Language and the Question of Existence

As we shall see throughout this book, language plays a central role in the question of whether we have control of ourselves. If we do, it is because language has a central role in asserting control, through the language of reflection, thought, and self-talk. Lacan calls language the “discourse of the Other” primarily because of its liminal status as belonging both to us as individuals, in that it’s what we use to express ourselves to others, and belonging to others, in that we do not create the language we use each time we use it. Language, as the Other’s discourse, is the fourth pole over which the subject is stretched. Language is a double-edged sword for the subject. On the one hand it is a fundamental source of alienation. The words that I attempt to use to “express” my “self” are not words that I created: I inherited them. I jump into a complex and ancient chain of signification when I begin to speak. Complicating that acquisition is the fact that language is stored on two levels at once. Words and parts of words are stored away in the unconscious; they rarely come out but for in dreams and slips of the tongue. Yet we can choose to express ourselves even if it is through a “distorting medium of language.”⁸ The first acquisition happens early on through the child’s response to its absent mother. Of course, the child must come to grips with the fact that it is not the end-all-be-all of the mother’s existence. Separation “consists in the attempt by the alienated subject to come to grips with the Other’s desire as it manifests itself in the subject’s world.”⁹ In other words, I can begin to understand who or what I might be as *separate* from the ones who brought me into existence. Language, the symbolic order, allows for this same subject to ask the question: Who am I? It is “the locus from which the question of his existence may be presented to him.”¹⁰ Likewise Lacan points out that: “For there even to be a question. . . there must be language.”¹¹ The subject emerges as excess, as a question to itself. If the discourse which first alienates us from ourselves also has a restorative function, it is because it frees us from the imaginary world of objects as

well. Lacan notes that “the being of language is the non-being of objects” which exist solely in the realm of the imaginary.¹² Or in even stronger language “the symbol [i.e., signifier, word] manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing, and this death constitutes in the subject the etherealization of his desire.”¹³ Words provide a very hardy substitute for the thing we cannot have. To exemplify this, one need only think of how much she talks about goals, items, and people that she wants but does not yet “have.” We discuss homes before we buy them, kids before we have them, jobs before we even have the credentials necessary to acquire them. All this anticipatory speech is a metonymy or “stand-in” for the real things we do not have. This phenomenon may start as an infant calling out for its mother or father, but remarkably even as adults we talk about people and things that are not present. Talking about absent things has an effect on us, whether curative or anxiety-producing (usually the anxious thoughts are imagined and *talking* it out helps). Words fill the gaps between images and things, especially our own image of ourselves. “The human being has a special relation with his own image—a relation of a gap, of alienating tension. That is where the possibility of the order of presence and absence, that is another symbolic order [i.e., language], comes in. The tension between the symbolic and the real is subjacent here.”¹⁴ The symbolic, or the realm of language, is the “order of presence and absence” precisely because it can “give absence a name.” In short, language provides a soothing function when the things we name are not available to us. We will now look at how the ego is formed out of this matrix of the body, language, and the Other.

WHERE THE UPPER LIMB HOLDS THE STRING: THE EGO

In taking stock of our discussion so far, it is necessary to clarify the difference between the subject and the ego. Recall that the ego is only one “half” of the subject, and an imaginary half at that. It might be helpful to think of the colloquial use of the word “ego” in thinking about the difference; a person’s ego is their own sense of themselves. Often wrapped up with the idea of self-esteem, a person’s ego is her own conception of what others think of her. This going outside of oneself to project a “self” back onto oneself is an essential structure of Lacanian psychoanalysis. This structure matches up with similarly worded fragments from Heraclitus (cChapter 3). What’s more, it maps onto the shape of a bow, with the outward movement of a subject’s life taking a “straight line” and its projection back on itself taking the form of a backward arc. As we have noted above, the subject surges up as a tension between the “introjected” ego and the relative lack of understanding of those things that are both a part of us, and those which precede a thinking version of ourselves: namely, our bodies, our language, what others want and expect of us.

Therefore, the subject is a product of several tensions, of which the ego constitutes one part. When we do attempt to find that subject—that is some idea of that which each of us is—we must look *between* things—between words, relationships, and others. I will posit, however, that there is something that we can point to even if what we are pointing to is a lack. It is only through pointing to various areas of negation, of counterpoints, that we can get to the subject.

One of the tensions in question presents itself as the negation of what others think we are, or what we should be. “No,” I say, “I’m not that.” Or, “That’s not me.” Even moments of identity are offset by differentials—“I’m a Democrat, but I don’t...” We will see that the ego understands itself as much by what it is not, as by what it is (or imagines itself to be). It is important to note, then, that as something we “work on” and as something that is a *product* of the imagination, the ego is more “object” than “subject.” In fact, if it did not have the affective character of belonging to me, it would be just as much “Other” as all the others that we listed. Of course, since the other Others exist in *some* form, they could be said to be even more real than the ego. Also, because of this status as some imaginary thing that I form, the ego cannot possibly be the *source* of my agency, or my ability to make decisions about things. If anything, the ego might appear after I’ve already done something, to rationalize how I might be the type of person capable of doing the thing that I just did. Let me give an innocent enough example. I might be the type of person who loves pastries (I am) but I’ve also decided that to keep my weight and my cholesterol down I should limit myself to one pastry a week. This type of rational principle-following is a product of the belief that we can follow such a principle. The belief that we can follow such a principle demands a unification between the person who sets forward such a “maxim” and the person who hopes to follow it. But, alas, my misguided bodily desires are such that a pastry fills a gap in my emotional life, and so I happen to be on my third pastry of the week. It is at this moment that my ego returns to make excuses: “Oh, I didn’t bring enough to eat for lunch today,” or “Drats, I worked out and now I am starving.” Why do we make such excuses? Because to admit that I am not in control of my own desires—or that I do not have as much control over them as I would like—is more damaging to my ego than the pastries are to my waistline or cholesterol levels.

The Origin of the Ego: More on Infant Development

In the section above on Objects as one of the poles of the bow that is the human condition, we nodded toward the way that the desires of the infant play a role in the infant’s (and eventually an adult’s) sense of oneself. Before we proceed to discussing the way that the infant goes from the Real of need, to the Imaginary of desire, and finally the Symbol-

ic of Demand, I want to briefly spell out how this infant development might work in more detail.

Unlike other mammals, human infants are *fully* dependent on an outside caretaker at birth. This outside caretaker can be designated as the (m)Other (this doesn't have to be the biological mother). Initially, in the average infant-(m)Other relationship, the mother responds to all or most of the needs of the child. This creates the illusion from the perspective of the child of being a self-sufficient creature who has all its needs automatically by itself. As the child ages, the father figure, or as Lacan calls it, the Name-of-the-Father intervenes on the ability for the infant to remain "unified" with the mother. As Bruce Fink pointed out, the mother also has many other draws on her time that the infant must get used to. The Name-of-the-Father here represents the prohibition against incest, the "NO" that demands we socialize (outward) and become individuals. Such a demand is expressed through language.

With the introduction of the "No" the child must look elsewhere for unity—namely in the mirror. As the infant begins to see itself as "whole" this wholeness is given back to it from the outside. We begin to imagine the possibility of a unity—the *moi*, the ideal ego— "however, according to Lacan, individuals spend their entire lives, beginning thusly, chasing in vain after an unattainable state of harmony and mastery first falsely promised by the mirror."¹⁵

This identification of the "me" with the image in the mirror is encouraged by others. Imagine when we see parents hold their children in front of a mirror and say, "Who is that?" What's more we could see the way that the parents focusing on dressing their child in gendered clothing before the child has any say in the matter. But, alas, recognizing ourselves in the mirror (or the modern-day variant—the selfie) amounts to a *misrecognition*. This wholeness falsely represented by the image of the whole body is inevitable but also misleading. Closer to an accurate picture would be a kind of montage of the fragmentary inner nature of our thoughts.

But not even our thoughts are free from "organization." With the development of the ego as personality, as the "who" that I am, I also begin to project a container like "me" into which I put "my beliefs" and "my convictions" which also become reified in the imaginary ego. It is important next to see the way that ego relates to what Lacan calls his three "registers," or what I would call modes of being.

The Subject and Its Layers: The Real, Imaginary, and the Symbolic

According to Lacan, there are three registers of human experience: The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. We never really experience the Real except as a trace left in the register of the imaginary. This is because the whole of our conscious experience is filtered through images

of real or imagined things. The imaginary constitutes our first noticeable experience and begins to form at ages six to eighteen months. It includes our association with our own image in the mirror, or the image (*imago*) of our caretaker. But the imaginary realm includes aspects both perceived and fantasized images. Importantly, what we know as our own ego is formed at this time and as I've shown above, is also an image. It's for this reason Lacan calls the ego an *imaginary other* and an *ego ideal*. We will discuss this more in the section below on the body as other. For now, it's enough to observe that the ego "arises a crystallization of sedimentation of ideal images tantamount to a fixed, reified object with which a child learns to identify him or herself."¹⁶ The mirror idea becomes central to this account since it gives a false sense of experiencing our bodies as complete objects, even though we can only ever see parts of ourselves from our first person point of view. Identity in Lacan is always identification with another, even if that "other" is an imagined image of our self.

In 1953, Lacan introduced the *symbolic*, by which he means the realm of language, of symbols or signifiers. As a child, when we learn the names of "things," we learn to assign signifiers to images. Why images and not things? Because we learn the object in the same way we learn about ourselves: by sight. One could say that everything real dies in an image, and everything imaginary dies in a signifier. Or, if you'd prefer to remain positive: the image is the afterlife of the real, and the word is the afterlife of the image. Learning the realm of the symbolic begins with a process called *alienation* in Lacan, and it takes place in the following way. As subjects, we are essentially brought into being through our parents' desire. Initially as newborns our perception of the world is inextricably linked with parents' responses to our needs. Eventually at the mirror stage we begin to identify our body with an imaginary subject. But we "realize" two things at some point. One, we are in competition for our parents' desire with other things. And that part of our parents' desire incorporates the way that we behave. In other words, when we try to please our parents—to remain in line with what they desire in and for us—this demands a change in our behavior. Both these things are related to our transition into speech. First, at some point we desire to speak to address what we interpret as new and complicated concerns. Many parents are aware of that frustrating period when a toddler "knows" what they want, but they do not yet have the words to express it. More importantly, our parents begin to encourage certain behaviors or discourage them by saying things like "good boy" or "bad girl," and so on. Lacan argues that we enter speech as we learn to deal with prohibited behaviors.

According to Dews, "When a child stops trying to possess or be the object in the mirror at around 18 months of age, the specular subject of identification becomes a social one."¹⁷ In other words, we no longer just identify with our "whole" body in the mirror, but also our imaginary ego.

We can be hurt or feel good without being physically hurt or pleased. One way this happens is by mapping what our parents (or the social) want and what they don't want onto the "goal" or our own person-ality. In asking the question, "What should I do, or not do?" we are essentially asking: "What does the other want? In what is the other lacking? Thus, where do I fit in?"¹⁸

One of the things the child inevitably encounters in trying to please her parents is determining what is off limits for enjoyment vis-à-vis the body. It's in this context that Lacan takes up the Oedipus Complex and develops it further. In Freud's version, the child desires to kill his father and "marry" his mother. Recall that for Lacan, virtually all desire stems from the desire to find an imagined and mythological unity with our primary caretaker—the one who can meet all our needs in premature infancy. For Freud, these roles of "father" and "mother" are gendered, but in Lacan they do not have to be. So, too, are Lacan's notions of the phallus and castration more or less gender-neutral (though they do on occasion align with the male genitals). In Lacan's account, the child wants to align its desire with its parents' desire so that it, the child, will be the (only) object of their desire. But there are certain behaviors that need to be prohibited for the child to be socialized. For Lacan, phallus is the first bodily source of *jouissance*. In a child playing with "itself" it faces a castration threat—that is the imperative that we should "cut it out" lest *they* "cut it off." This threat itself is imagined (which is to say both made up and over blown). But that doesn't matter so much since the child wants what its parents want. In the imagined castration, the genitalia become "negativized." In other words, they become a reminder of what not to do, touch, play with, and so on. Importantly all of this is still in the realm of the imaginary. So, what does this have to do with the entrance into the symbolic, the realm of words? Fink describes it as a child

giving up the imaginary one (the image of the penis as representing a precious but precarious source of *jouissance*, since it's in danger of being taken away) for a symbolic one (being values for other things that one is in life, for one's qualities or abilities that are desired by the Other). The "negative" (or minus) image is given up for a more positive symbol.¹⁹

In short, the child gives up masturbatory pleasure for approval from parents and others. But the positive symbol of the phallus that results from this trade-off is what becomes the *master* signifier for Lacan. This *master signifier* is a cypher, as one thing that is converted to another with no discernible remainder. That is, it creates a space that becomes the source of all signification thereafter. This changeover makes sense when we consider that in the realm of the symbolic, we give up playing with our "selves" for "playing" with words. But the speaking also becomes an important part of development and learning how to deal with separation

from the mother. When a child can't speak, the mother's absence (lacking image) is painful, but the child can alleviate this by using words (symbolic) to alleviate this pain. As Fink puts it: "Whether naming the absence of the mother or the absence of the penis, language has the power to alleviate the oppressive weight of absence by the very process of naming it and signifying it."²⁰ This is what Lacan means when he says "the phallus is the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole."²¹ The desire to be social and socially accepted overrides the desire for bodily pleasure and in so doing establishes recognition, confirmation, and affirmation of our egos as a primary source of meaning and what we value in our lives.

Notice that the movement from the purely imaginary realm of images, and the image-threats of castration and absconding parents, to the symbolic realm of language has nothing to do with the "reality" of the referent. One case in point is that threat of castration has no plausible reality. In fact, for Lacan, the "real" as an experience we can confirm is impossible. The real is personal, but the language we use to process the real is universal.²² Once this symbolic replacement by language has been made, the real remains, by contrast, ineffable. Since the real is what we *were*, we become *alienated* from our selves (our real subject selves, not our imaginary egos). The installation of the ego—as really a counterforce to bodily drives—becomes the completion of this alienation. Why? Because the *variety* of the drives can never be fully satisfied in a structure that has at its core *universality* and *unity*.

The Structure and Parts of the Ego

Boothby notes that there are five key aspects of the ego.²³ First, the ego is a product of "primitive fascination," which is to say an unthinking focus that the infant puts on members of its own species, usually a specific member such as the mother or caretaker. The infant essentially uses the image, what psychoanalysts call an *imago*, as a promise of wholeness and self-mastery of the body that it might someday acquire. For that reason, the ego is modeled on the image of a whole body, and therefore, something that has boundaries. Because the ego is an imaginary projection of something without boundaries, we can never actually gain sight of ourselves. It is really an "object," or something produced by the imagination.

Hence the second key point: the ego is not something we inhabit as a subject, but that we mold and care for as an object.²⁴ This means of course that there are various ways in which we care for, protect, and so forth, our ego. Like a body it can be hurt and bruised.

The third key aspect of the ego is that it forms a connection between itself and others equally illusory unities, such as the egos of others, and other "objects" in the world. For Lacan, the ego, which because of its illusory nature, is sometimes called the *ego ideal*, is founded on a kind of

paranoia: a concern about disintegration, intrusion, destruction and the like. Whenever we see someone else who “has it together” our reaction is less one of admiration and more of jealousy. “It is, in fact, the earliest jealousy that sets the stage on which the triangular relationship between the ego, the object and ‘someone else’ comes into being.”²⁵ Lacan considers this a dialectical one; the ego forms in response to concerns about lack of self-mastery and integration, the other forms in relation to the ego, and the object forms in relation to one’s concerns about others. “The object of man’s desire. . . is essentially an object desired by someone else. One object can become equivalent to another, owing to the effect produced by this intermediary (the other person) in making it possible for objects to be exchanged and compared.”²⁶

The fourth aspect of the ego is that it is counterforce to the libidinal subject. The ego and the subject are “inscribed in imaginary tensions.”²⁷ That is, they are both constant forces pulling against one another. However, as we will see in the section below on the death drive, the ego pretends toward unity, while the subject tends toward fragmentation.

Lastly, the ego is resistant to change, deterioration, and so on. Lacan puts this point best in *Some Reflections on the Ego* as well. After discussing the dream of a patient of “in which the dreamer’s ego is represented as a stadium. . . given over to competition for prestige” Lacan says: “Here we see the ego, in its essentially resistance to the elusive process of Becoming, to the variation of Desire. This illusion of unity in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery entails a constant danger of sliding back into chaos form which he started. . .”²⁸ In other words, the ego is in a constant struggle to overcome chaos, multiplicity, and the feeling of being out of control. Now that we have looked at the origins and parts of the one side of our bow held-in-tension, the side of the ego, we must look at the other side of this tension, the various forms of the Other that make up part of the subject who I am.

THE LOWER LIMB AND THE STRING: VARIOUS OTHERS

In the most economical formula, the tensile structure of the subject would be stretched across the immediate moment of decision/response and various forms of the other. I do not say “I” here because the I, as ego ideal, is itself a form of the Other. I will first briefly identify each of those forms of the other and then illuminate how each creates a tension with respect to the possibility of claiming something as my own. The identifiable forms of the Other in the subject are:

- *Jouissance* (The Real, the Body)
- Desire (Imaginary)
- Language (Symbolic)
- Demand (Symbolic)

Jouissance as the Other: The Body

Jouissance, while having the sense of “extreme pleasure,” has more to do with returning to a primal state in which our world, bodies, and desires are one. The fact is that this was, and always will remain, an imaginary state. But the *jouissance* derived from the body can correspond to the Real since the body really does experience pleasure. Sometimes this pleasure can grate against social norms, or even our own goals. What’s more, there is a very real sense in which our body more generally gets in the way of our plans. Of course, to complain that it this way is to imagine that we could live without a body, which is senseless. Instead, one can see that like the archer who must control her breath and nervous shaking before every shot, we must adjust our plans to the limits and desires of our bodies. In the chapter that follows, I will show that the strain of drive that has do directly with the maintenance and growth of the body is what Lacan calls *need*. More on that below.

The first tension in our lives has to do with the tension between our bodily desires and our ego, or mental desires. This tension can take place in two ways. Firstly, there is the obstinacy of the body as that which will not conform to my plans. When I break my foot prior to going on a vacation, I am faced with the reality that my broken foot will spoil my plans. Or in an even more obvious way, no one desires an illness or cancer. More to the point, anytime my body is hungry, sick, has indigestion, is tired, and so on, I am not in control of the situation. Thus, my body grates against my desires. Or, the body has its own desires.

The second tension with the body emerges from the way in which my body can be the source of my desires, and it emerges from a prohibition. As we saw above, *jouissance* emerges from the primary desire to reunify with our mother, or our first caretakers. It is a desire for completion and wholeness. In contrast, while the body appears “whole” in the mirror, as we grow we begin to realize that is just a mirage; our bodies are unruly, fragmented, prone to breakdown, disruption, and the ostensible origin of thoughts that we’d rather not admit to having. Among other discoveries, we realize that the body can be a metonym for desire in the form of ecstasy, dissolution, and distraction. Hence a truncated redux of the infant story is in order: The child wants to be one with the mother and thinks that this is the case for a time. When he begins to realize that this is not the case, that he has his *own* body, *this* body becomes a satisfactory stand-in for reunification: distraction will do. Some of this distraction comes in the form of attempting to master the body, primarily through movements of the limbs, the tongue and communication equipment, and gaining control over the urethra and anus. Other distraction comes in the form of playing with himself. This latter part is highly discouraged by the parents. The child is offered a “choice” in the form of a “No”: either you cease and desist, or we will disown you. The real “castration” threat

comes not as a threat of genital mutilation but parental separation. As we said above, the child's attempt to curry favor with the parents demands that she move away from self-play and toward the interaction with others. This means, among other things, adopting the use of language to express herself. But first, we must see how "I" and my body are a product of others' desire, and how I fit into that network of desire.

Desire as the Other: The Desire of/for/by The Other

One might be inclined to think that if *anything* belongs to me, it must be what I *want*. However, both Oliver and Fink highlight Lacan's position that Desire is always the Other's desire. What I want is usually what someone else wants first. While we could push back and say: "Oh, but I have the most unique desires in the world!" we would easily forget that we are the *product* of desire; namely, the desire of one or both of our parents. Thus, we began as another's desire. Secondly, desire always points outward to a world that, like language, is not of one's own making. As Oliver puts it, "drives don't originate in one body."²⁹ Desires are relational and transitory. For that reason, the unconscious emerges in a social way. We will see an example of this in Penelope in chapter four on Odysseus and demand. Desire is always selected—though even that might be too strong a word—from a variety of pre-existing objects. Let's now look at each of these aspects in turn.

The Drawback of Desire: The Desires of Our Parents (and others)

Like a bow being drawn back and ready to fire, we are objects of the Other's desire before we are even born. Our parents' desire to have us sets up expectations that precede our birth. Either we are born with the full intention of our parent(s), or we are "unintended." In the first case, it is apparent the degree to which parents hope, wish, and plan for the impending birth. In the second case our parent(s) would still have to plan, even if such planning amounts to planning for different guardians, or in the form of worry or concern. What's more, we are brought into language even before we are born through our parents talking about us and naming us. We shall explore this more in the section on language below.

After we have been physically born, and symbolically named, we still the face the pressure of living up to our parents' desire(s). Later in childhood, especially if we come from doting parents, we find ourselves in competition with the other draws on our parents' attention: job, other family, hobbies, daily tasks, and so on. It's important to note the degree to which this fundamental cooperation of desire and recognition of desire carries on into adulthood. In other words, often what we really desire *is* the desire of the other. In the immortal words of Cheap Trick: "I want

you to want me, I need you to need me, I'd love you to love me." *That is the origin of desire.*

Desire Cannot Be Satisfied

If the first fundamental aspect of the structure of Desire is that it is Desire for/of/by the Other, the second aspect is that desire exists such that it is never satisfied. In fact, the thrust of the desire outward traps the subject in a stationary tension. To the extent that we look for satisfaction of our desire in outside objects (which includes *people* in this account) we are always held in tension between what we want and what is outside of our control.

One area where this dynamic comes to the fore is in recent work on positive psychology, specifically the attempt to determine what goods or experiences will make us happy. Since the time of Lacan's work, much has been done showing the relationship between desire, recognition, and well-being. Two well established ideas in social psychology are the idea of the hedonic treadmill, and the idea of the progress principle.³⁰ Let's look at each of these concepts and the way they connect to desire and satisfaction.

The idea of the hedonic treadmill is a metaphor for Lacan's idea that desire is always desire for something else.³¹ How can this be? Our desires are always for something that we believe (wrongly) will bring a sustained and lasting happiness. But then one of two things happens: either we do not get the item we desired, or we do, only to realize that the object does not bring us the sustained happiness that we desired. As we have just seen, this is complicated by the reality that desire is constituted socially. The reason this object I have no longer seems so shiny is that I see you have a shinier object. It is the consumer equivalent of an arms race. Thus, any desire just morphs into another, and this is what is meant by a treadmill. We feel as though we are moving forward when we achieve certain recognition from Others for our acquisitions or achieve our goals. But the truth of the matter is that we are not actually going anywhere because everyone is moving forward at the same rate.

The other relevant consideration of how desire works is the progress principle, which suggests that we do in fact enjoy the progress toward a goal more than achieving it. Think of the last time you had a big goal in mind, such as training for a marathon or finishing a very difficult book. In either case when the marathon is completed, or the book is finished, there is a letdown despite the sense of achievement. Why this is the case is difficult to ascertain, but it is a common occurrence. But here too Lacan's notion of desire applies: desire is the desire to desire and to be desired. We want to want. When we want something specific, we want it because others want it. When we finally do get what we want, that sense of desire is momentarily lessened, only to return in a different form. We

will see this below in the chapter on book 21 of Homer's *Odyssey* in the way that suitors want Penelope and Odysseus' estate *because* each of *them* desires it, and *because* Odysseus desired it in possessing it in the first place.

To reiterate: one form of the tension that we encounter between the decision of the self and the subject position is between the drive of desire and the content of the desire which is always given to us by the other. The second form of tension vis-à-vis desire involves a second other: language. Remember that the first desire of the Other is in the desire of our parents; imagining us before we were born, getting our world ready for us, giving us a name. In a way, their naming us constitutes the first reification of our imaginary self. From then on, language and Desire (and Demand) are inextricably linked.

Language as The Other

While it might be an oversimplification to describe language as a "tool" for communication, the tool metaphor is accurate in one respect: like tools, we find language ready-made and available for our use. Language as a tool is handed down to us and is never of our own making. When I learn a language, I learn how to use a language that I had little to no say in creating. The best that we might be able to say is that we create specific sentences, thoughts, annunciations, and so on, as products from the raw material of language.

Lacan uses as a guide for his understanding of language the *General Linguistics* of Ferdinand Saussure.³² Saussure's structural account of language understands language on two levels: *Langue*, or the raw material of language, and *parole*, or how we use words in each annunciation or statement. Language remains Other because it is not of my making; the *langue* is of the Other's making. But since we are confined to using a language that always already exists we are alienated by this use of language. Every use of language has the character of "not quite," as in responding to someone who asks, "so is what you're *saying* is x?" by saying "not quite." This difference is essentially built into the structure of language as that which I both use most often to communicate and that which I did not create on my own.

The "paradox" of language has two consequences. First, because I do not have absolute control over the meaning of the words that I use to express myself, I inevitably fall short of "what" I am trying to get across. I am always relegated to the stance of rephrasing or revising "in other words." One might imagine the "what" of what I am trying to get across as non-linguistic, equally Other, and because it cannot be buttoned down,³³ as potentially even other than itself. But the "not quite" is the intersection of language and *desire*, since I want to say something other than what I am saying. What's more, my desires themselves are primarily

disclosed through linguistic communication. The confusing result is that even when I believe myself to be articulating *my own* desires in language, I am still using the Other's language to articulate them; they become the desire of the Other in virtue of this impossibility.

The paradox of language leads Fink to argue that one valence of the subject is "the stance one [i.e., the subject] adopts with respect to the Other as language or law."³⁴ First, we must acknowledge that just as laws are composed of language, language is composed of laws. It is in virtue of structure in Saussure's linguistics that meaning arises—not the content itself. As we will see in chapter 3, the unconscious "stores" information in the form of alternate expressions of familiar phonemes that create associations below the level of conscious assemblage. So, when I am learning language, my mind is operating on two levels: one conscious and one unconscious. Even if the idea of a deep grammar is debatable, a surface grammar suggests a set of factual pre-given rules that must be followed to "make sense" and these rules must necessarily have some "say" in *how* I can say what I am saying.

There are alternatives to running up against the uncanniness of language. The subject can, of course, refuse to speak. They could also write and speak in a way that "breaks rules" or develops neologisms. Still, these neologisms are more like amendments or augmentations to language. They require a reference back to extant words to be understood. What's more, Lacan argues the telltale sign of the psychotic is the break down in the wall between unconscious and conscious language. This split never properly occurs.³⁵ This last point is a good reminder that in Lacan's view "language has a life of its own" even when there is not such a breakdown. For one, language has its own rules and history that extend well beyond our own individual existence. Secondly, when we "are at a loss for words" it exposes a scary reality of language: For the most part, words find us (or they don't). This phenomenon can explain all sorts of linguistic faux pas: Freudian slips, the inability to find the right word at a time, the confusion of one word for one that sounds similar, and mixing clichés. Lastly, in the event of speaking or writing we do not have the *experience* of deciding between multiple words for what comes next. Even where a word may not come mind immediately, we do not have the lived experience of selection amongst multiple coexisting options (our linguistic thought is rarely like a multiple-choice question). Perhaps we reject a first word, but the second word just appears out of the blue.

The difficulty is that even as one's language imposes constraints on an open-ended expression by the subject, it is also the primary condition of the subject's possibility. Language allows us to pose the question of our existence. It is only in virtue of the constraints that the subject encounters that she can be. Never mind the fact that thought is itself linguistic, how do I know who you *are* but for what you say?

Which is to say that various forms of our unconscious bubbling up from within language create a tension between the aspect of the subject which purports to have choice, and that part—what we earlier called subject position—which precedes us. Existence may precede essence, but language precedes existence. In language preceding us it is outside of our absolute control. Furthermore, since others also have use of language they too can *interpret* what we are saying according to their experience of the word/world. Language as Other puts us in an opposition to the Demand from others, as they may expect that what we say be appropriate to the situation. In other words, if I say something wrong, that reflects poorly on *me* as a person. As an expression of desire, the language we use is subject to judgments of others not only in whether it is adequate to express our “view” but also as “our” view that is, some supposed outward expression of inner belief. To the extent that language is beyond our control, we are put into a double bind: if we speak wrongly, we may be socially punished for it for a much longer time than it took us to utter those fateful words; or, we do not speak at all, which involves self-exile from the social world. What we want instead of self-exile is usually its opposite: fitting-in. This is precisely where the intersection of desire and language as a coming-into-being of the subject takes place.

Considering that each of us beings as a product of desire of our parents, as “subjects” we come into being before we are even born through the speech (or silence) of our parents. In a very real way, in the beginning was the word. We are born into a field of *articulated* hopes, dreams, concerns, and so on. While we have considered this from the standpoint of desire, we must also consider this from the standpoint of language.

For a brief time after birth we feel a unity with our mother or caretaker such that we cannot distinguish between our body and theirs. But then during the mirror stage, we begin to imagine “our selves” as a separate being. This word “imagine” is of the utmost importance, because in a very real sense we cannot gain a whole new “view” on ourselves but for by way of imagination: I can see myself in a mirror, or I know the other is other by way of mimicking her. The imagination up to this point is our entire stock of mental contact. In many ways, Lacan imagines the conscious/unconscious as a *tabula rasa*, but one that is filled up in a register that we cannot access and are barred from. A major step forward for both the subject and language is nomination: the process of beginning to associate our imaginary selves with a name—our name—the name that our parents have given us. While one might think that the designation of a proper name might be a moment of cohesion for the elusive subject, it is quite the opposite. The proper name, and the learning of names of people and things is *alienating*. Why? Because any name I could potentially utter is not a name that I designated, but rather a name that another designated and I “learned.” We might imagine here already two parallel tracks and we hop from on to the other. On the one track is the inaccessible stock of

images (e.g., memories, perceptions, and fantasies), and on the other track is the names, borrowed from the Other who comes before. Lacan gives the second track, the rules and stock of names of language, the name “the symbol,” since phonemes and graphemes are only symbols (signifiers) of something else. But Lacan is a structuralist in that for him the meaning attached to any name (as a place-holder in a network) is a matter of chance and nothing more. For instance, the word “snake” has nothing essential to with the animal snake, it just so happens that it was a sound made that communicated a certain meaning well enough to have it “stick.” We will see in chapter 3 on Heraclitus and desire that Heraclitus also has a certain skepticism about the appropriateness of names for things. The arbitrariness of a certain word for a certain thing can have important consequences for knowledge of the world and ourselves. If names are random, then isn’t the knowledge of anything, in so far as knowledge involves the naming, taxonomy, and explanation of things in language, just a matter of intersubjective convention? While this *could* be the case, it is also the case that certain structures do tend to button down the subject and our involvement in the world, the very structure of language being one of these. But can we find the subject *in* language?

THE HUNT FOR THE SUBJECT IN LANGUAGE

In the introduction to this chapter, I laid out the distinction between the ego and the subject. I said there that the ego is an imaginary projection of unity onto disunity, of control onto chaos. The “subject” on the other hand, is the “whole” of both the imaginary ego and the influences of the Other. It is what lies beneath our attempts and inabilities to control the world around us. As unflattering as it might be, the subject is a more holistic view of our changing messy selves. That said, because the ego has so much control over what we say and our conscious lives—it is very bossy—it is nearly impossible to “see” the subject. One place one could look for the subject is in language, but this too is more difficult than we might think. To guide this exploration, I will use two of Lacan’s formulations to explore the possibility (and failure) of finding the subject in language. The first formulation is the subject exists only as “the word has wrought him or her from nothingness.”³⁶ The second formulation is: “it’s the subject himself who is not there to being with.”³⁷

Formula One: “The Word Has Wrought Him or Her from Nothingness”

In this first formulation, there is no subject prior to speech, whether my own or someone else’s. Remember that I am brought into being through the desire and speech of my parents. What’s more, as soon as the child begins to speak, she is cut off from a pre-linguistic realm, made a

separate “thing” which has been named, and thereby alienated from “herself.” Any attempt to articulate myself in speech is automatically alienating since I cannot *but* use the language of “others.” Thus, “subject” here should be taken in the sense of being subject to as in the rule of a king. The subject is “eclipsed by language” in the same moment they are “instituted in the symbolic order.”³⁸

There are two important “results” to consider in this process of alienation from the Imaginary, the realm of desired objects, to the Symbolic, the realm of language and the signifier. The first “result” is the resting place of phoneme: the unconscious. While this will be developed more in the following sections, suffice to say here that the inscription of signifying chains happens at the level of the unconscious. To put it another way: when repression takes place, it is a “word that is pushed down.”³⁹ That word, of course, can still be used in everyday language but it also is put into relations with other words that did not have immediate connections of signification associated based on their definition alone. This is what allows us to have humor, the interpretation of dreams, slips of the tongue, and double entendres, and so on. The “hidden” meaning of words—and parts of words—lives in their being there for us to mysteriously discover at later times in non-sensical, paradoxical, and ironic ways. For example, there are many jokes that depend upon the mishearing or misstatement of any number of benign words: pianist, nickels, supplies, and so on. But consider this as well: the other result of the imagination becoming symbolic (becoming social) through the process of alienation is that the word is already dead. For Lacan the articulation verbally and the inscription grammatically constitute being realized in a way that the living word becomes petrified. In being spoken or written the elusiveness of the way the “subject” is emptied out, forestalled by the word. If every word is the word of the other, then where do I exist in language?

But this is already the wrong way to have asked the question. Before we ask the question in a way that has an answer, let’s attempt to articulate what’s wrong with this first formulation: So again, where do I exist in language?

Formula Two: “It’s the Subject Himself Who Is Not There to Begin With”

The answer might at first appear simple. Imagine someone who says, “I am not a carpenter.” What this speaker purports to say is that she does not make a living building things. But alas, in so saying she is not saying *anything other* than anyone else who also does not consider themselves a carpenter would or could say. This is no different than any other “I” that purports to make some claim about itself. This “I” is not unique in naming the speaker—it just names any empty “I” position.

Here Lacan sees a parallel between thinking and speaking. Most of our “consciousness” is not self-consciousness. Right now, for instance, as I am writing I am thinking ahead to my next thought and the words streaming out of the pen are barely registering as I move onto the next. What’s more (and using a cliché transition such as “what’s more” only bolsters my case), the expression of my point requires *nothing* of some whole and unified self. The post-modern novel has shown us that the stream of consciousness is uncomfortable, fragmented, and scary. In some ways, it can only “make sense” to the one who is undergoing it (and perhaps not even the reader).

If not in the annunciation of “I,” where, then, might we find the subject in language? One possibility is that it cannot be found *in* any word. Rather it is found *between* words and in some formulations of words that denote necessity. Two phenomena are worthy of noting here. First, as Lacan points out, the signifiers in any given statement slide. Consider the fact that in the statement preceding this one, the word “slide” reaches back to qualify the word “signifiers.” As Saussure points out, the “meaning” (whatever that means) of words is determined by their context. Only a glimpse of the subject is present in the meaning that emerges after a statement has been uttered.

But that “interpretation” is not “in” the statement itself, either. So where can we see the subject (the one who interprets) in language? The uniqueness of the subject is only seen in the rare glimpse of the unconscious. Lacan thinks that this is articulated in statements that hint at an element of necessity. After all, language itself is a kind of necessary evil—a foregoing of a “pure” self for interaction with the other. For Lacan, the subject appears nowhere in what is posited—it appears only as *ne*, “not.”⁴⁰ Fink points out that phrases using *ne* almost always has the speaker denying the very thing they are saying as in “*Je ne sais quoi*,” or “I know *not* what.” Fink thinks the closest parallel in English would be certain uses of the word “but” as in “I cannot *but* feel bad for him.” The use of “but” in this way is quite remarkable. For one it serves to negate the root sentiment implied. To see what I mean consider removing the word “but”: “I cannot feel bad for him.” There is discord here between the spoken word of the “I”: “I cannot,” and bubbling up of something else “but . . .” We’ve now come upon two othernesses in language: language precedes us, and language excludes us. But a more difficult pill to swallow is that language also kills us. As Fink points out, “the signifier marks the cancellation of what it signifies.”⁴¹ Here the “but” announces the death of the subject of the unconscious: just as soon as it appears, it disappears. For this reason, “[t]he subject of the unconscious has no other being than as a breach in discourse.”⁴²

The ultimatum that we must own up to concerning the subject and language is this: either we remain “ourselves” and foreclose the possibility of entering into language (and thereby remain asocial), or we admit

that we lose ourselves in language, and that our only existence is in fleeting moments in a ripple in the fabric of someone else's weaving. Thus what applies to all things that are named, also belongs to the situation of the subject: "The name is not the death of the thing—the signifier is."⁴³ To the extent that language "kills" the thing that it names (by turning it into a symbol attached to an image), the ego does what it can to hold onto the image itself. But if language engages the ego in battle on one front, the body as the origin of drives engages it another.

THE DEATH DRIVE AS ORIGIN OF INNER AND OUTER CONFLICT

The tension between the unity of the ego and the variety of the drives is the site of the fundamental counter tension: the death drive. For reasons just elaborated, Lacan writes, "The ego . . . is frustration in its essence."⁴⁴ The death drive, simply put, arises out of the subject's drive to destroy the false unity of its illusory ego. Such a drive cannot rise to the level of consciousness, so it doesn't constitute a desire. Unlike Freud who, at least initially, viewed the death drive as attempting to destroy the biological organism, Lacan sees the death drive as the multitudinous desires of the body rebelling against the false unity of the ego. It's important to remember that for all intents and purposes, Lacan reverses our usual order of things concerning the subject. We might usually associate the "I" with substance of the subject, and the unconscious with some illusory nebula in the background. For Lacan it is the reverse: the real subject is the subject of the unconscious and the ego is imaginary object, only a small part of the psyche. The ego being made of a collection of key images with which we identify unconsciously actually prevents us from becoming who we are. Is this so unusual? Don't we usually associate an over-developed ego with inability to change and grow? It is in that context that Lacan imagines killing the ego. Boothby puts this point well: "Desire is split against itself in so far as only a portion of the forces animating the living body find their way into motivating the imaginary gestalt,"⁴⁵ in other words, the ego. Furthermore, "the imaginary ego is characterized by 'its essential resistance to the elusive process of becoming, the variations of desire.'" This is not a small matter. The "alienating tension" that develops between the body and the ego "affects all subsequent aspects of psychic life."⁴⁶

Consider the bow as a metaphor for human desire, and how this relates to the human inevitability of death. To truly understand what is meant by death in psychoanalysis or for example, existentialism, one must focus on death as a limit, as a guarantee of finitude for the thinking subject. Lacan expands beyond the notion of the biological with many of his concepts: The Phallus, castration, the drive, just to name a few. The same can be said for death. For Lacan desire emanates from a place

beyond memory, from our earliest possible moments of imagination. Many of these desires put us at odds with normal socialization, and so we must repress them or substitute them for more socially acceptable ways of gaining pleasure. The ego as an imaginary construct is also formed around this time in our development. Lacan's explanation of the death drive is that the initial subject is trying to "kill" the imaginary ego, so that its desires can be realized (which is impossible for other reasons). I use this example to emphasize one point: the death in the relationship between death and desire is not a biological death, but rather a struggle between a subject of the unconscious and its limitations, imagined or otherwise. The ego "kills" the subject of the unconscious in limiting it, and the subject seeks to "kill" the ego in reasserting its desire. "The death drive has its origins in the tension between the imaginary ego (holding out images that don't reflect reality) and the real of the body that is only partially encompassed by the ego."⁴⁷

In imagining the idea of a subject that through the metaphor of the bow, the death drive is situated as the tension that arises from the string holding together the two limbs of the bow. "The human being is stretched between conflicting claims exerted by the persistent influence of the imaginary contours of its ego identity on the one hand, and by exigence of desire alienated by the imagining of the other."⁴⁸ As one might imagine, a bow that is too tight has the possibility of snapping. With that in mind, the death drive can have two general types of outcome: some form of violence, to self or others, or some form of sublimation into something socially acceptable, with an entire continuum in between. Concerning the first outcome, violence, we will explore the role of aggressivity in Lacan. It is not surprising that the ego gets angry when it does not get its way, and the intense and constant force of the drive frequently forces the ego's hand. In the second outcome, sublimation, the ego and subject come to some tacit negotiation (not literally of course) in which one gains mastery over one's drives and uses them toward non-destructive means. Ironically, this second course really demands that the ego take a back seat, which can be part of the problem. We explore this second outcome in depth in the second half of the study, as "death work"; the intentional fragmentation of the ego can provide fertile ground for self-growth. We will look at the first possibility, aggressivity as violence, below when I set up the chapter on Odysseus. First, a word on the relationship between tension, death, and desire.

THE DEATH DRIVE AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION

It is our theory that the development of human subjectivity can be likened to a tense bow. The inner conflict of desire and control (or lack thereof) is then seen as increase in tension. Here what Nietzsche says in

the *Will to Power* is especially apt: "It is precisely through the presence of opposites and the feelings they occasion that the great man, *the bow with the greatest tension*, develops."⁴⁹ The development and attention paid to the formation of this tension should not be downplayed. While I will discuss the potential leveraging of this tension at length in the chapter on virtue, I will briefly hint at the direction the resolution of this tension can take.

In considering the archer, consider the bow as a static thing which is potentially dynamic. Of course, its value is not in its being static, but in its potential to use the built-up tension toward launching an arrow. Lacan himself—along with the other reference he makes to the bow—often talks about the arrow of the signifier. What's more, as I will show, the signifier is always connected to desire in Lacan as interpretation is itself a form of desire. But one need not dive into psychoanalytical theory to draw lines between the archer, the arrow and desire. Indeed, the myth of cupid will suffice to give us some background.

The Roman god, Cupid, is essentially a transposition of the Greek god Eros. Eros, also known as Phanes, "the revealer" was the god of lust and sex (attraction). According to Graves' account of Cicero on Eros, he was a "wild boy, who showed no respect for age or station, but flew about on golden wings, shooting barbed arrows at random . . ." ⁵⁰ Eros was behind two of the most meaningful love affairs in Greek myth: having Medea fall in love with Jason before they purloin the famous golden fleece, and having Helen fall in love with Paris, the event that precipitates the Trojan War. In each of these cases it is Eros' arrows that do the work. In this way the arrow becomes a substitute for a directed desire—a vector of lust. These two cases are particularly telling if only because it is someone other than their own ego that is the source of the desire. Admittedly, not every desire is necessarily lustful, but desires do all have a similar structure: they are intentional vectors, aiming at something that we imagine we can possess before we possess it. The hint here is that which "points to," which indicates, can also "kill."

First, let's look at the physical implication of the arrow firing and hitting its target (if its target is alive). In a realistic way, the arrow is that which brings about death, and in so doing preserves another's life. It is in this context that Heraclitus, Lacan, and others imagine what can be called a "second life." By second life we mean that even though an individual is killed in the process of hunting or fighting in battle, the life of the group or species is continued. One kills so that she can survive, or at least her group or kin can. This is like the idea that desire can be tied to death through the sex drive: we need sexual intercourse so that the species survives. We only need the species to survive because we, the individual, will die. Already we can begin to see the entanglement of desire of life and death of lust and love and meaning. It will be one of our goals of this

study to use the metaphor of the bow and the archer to begin to disentangle this relationship.

Death between Possibilities

For the moment, let's take death, the kill, and the signification of the arrow strike in terms of what it might mean to the subject. Boothby notes that the symbol on the psychological plane serves the same function as death on the biological one: the symbol as the materialization of thought outside of ourselves indicates the tacit recognition of our own temporal limit.⁵¹

To recap, the subject is in tension with the visible and invisible conditions of its existence: its culture, language, family, body, and the interaction of these elements. It is both enabled and imprisoned by a language that is not of its making. It is severely curtailed in its apparent ego—an apparition formed in the first place to please others. It is misled by its primary and secondary objects of desire which, like its ego, have been provided to it by the Other. In its simplest formulation, the subject is split between a false sense of self on the one hand (the ego-ideal) and the automatic function of the unconscious on the other. What we will see in the drives of need, desire, and demand, is that each one is situated in the battle between the ego and the Others that make up the larger subject.

While each of these drives on the face of it appears to aim toward “survival,” reflection on the matter shows that they actually “create” tension in so far as they support an imaginary ego. In order to maintain psychological health, and, as I will argue, to make real “self-improvements,” or be creative, this same ego needs to be curtailed and limited. Therefore, the most basic of all drives, the death drive, where what aims to be “killed” is the imaginary ego itself, can also be the most useful *not* to fight against.

By that logic, what makes the coming-into-being of the subject at the same time a being-toward-death is that the fruition of the subject entails a certain disintegration of the ego.⁵² Or to put it another way, the “[f]orces of the real that are alienated by the imaginary structure,” writes Boothby, “of the narcissistic ego assert themselves against the structures of that organization.”⁵³ But what Lacan proposes is that it is this same disintegration of a unified ego that makes for the possibility of renewed possibilities of the subject. The relationship between the ego, the death drive, self-transformation and the metaphor of the archer will be explored further in the last two chapters of this book. For now, I will close by setting up the next three chapters by highlighting the theme of this tension and its possible resolution (or, as it may turn out, its magical resolution).

CONCLUSION: THE TENSION AS DRIVE IN EARLY GREEK THINKING

Recall that the fundamental drive present in each of us as subjects can be divided into three areas: need, desire, and demand. Each one of these sets up its own tension, making each of us a bow that is strung tight. Need is the biological drive to meet organic needs; thus, a tension develops between any organic need in question and its being satisfied. At the level of desire tension develops as a space between what we want (the release of some fundamental tension) and what we think we want. On the level of Demand, tension develops as a necessary outcome of the constant pressure to be recognized as being fully present, and the likelihood that others will not give us the recognition we require. I will briefly introduce these ideas and the way they relate to the early Greek sources I will use to exemplify them.

Let's use an extraordinarily simple example in terms of need. Imagine a person who is very hungry, alone in the woods. It is true that need is socially conditioned to the extent that one subject may see insects as a possible food source, another plants. Certainly, if craving and disgust drive what we see as the two potential extremes with respect to food, then the limits of our food sources are defined by our subject position as much as by our choice in the moment. In the same way my ability to eat these berries might be determined by the fact that I am not educated about what they are, a cultural fact, in combination with my desire not to poison myself. Still, even in this example we would grant that the need to eat is common to all, and the bodily drive attached to it is both very simple and very mysterious. One can imagine that the tension between subject choice (the ego) and subject position only gets increasingly pronounced as one moves up the ladder away from need-as-survival and toward the idea of desire of some object, or the demands we put on other people.

In each of the three scenarios we will encounter, we can see how the subject is stretched between their own needs and desires, and the demands put on them by the other.

Philoctetes' Need

In *Philoctetes* we will see a character who is stretched between the need of his body and the obstinance of his ego in two ways. First, the survival needs of his body will be at odds with the demand placed upon him to work for a higher cause; in this case giving over the bow which he needs for his own survival to Odysseus and Neoptolemus under the belief that it will help defeat the Trojans. Second, we will see the degree to which *Philoctetes's* snake-bitten foot becomes the focus of obstinacy and desire. It is the "reason" for his being exiled to Lemnos; it is the initial

catalyst of his being thrown into a savage state. Clearly, Philoctetes wants nothing more than his foot to heal. But his body, and the gods, have other plans. His desire is played against him to the extent that Hercules' oracle convinces Philoctetes to go with Neoptolemus and Odysseus because he will be healed. While Philoctetes wanted nothing more than to deny Neoptolemus and Odysseus the use of his bow (to the extent that he had the power to), the gods resolve the situation so that his will is overridden. In the end even Philoctetes sees the wisdom in aligning his desire with the desire of Neoptolemus, Odysseus, and the gods. The next character through which we will explore a tension between the ego and others will be Odysseus in book 21 of *The Odyssey*.

Odysseus' Demand

As we will see in chapter 4, Odysseus is a clear example of someone on whom others place demands. He finds himself in the position of defending himself against the suitors primarily because each suitor wants to be Odysseus. If they can take his place they will. They desire Odysseus and his estate because it belongs to Odysseus. Demand carries the structure of the desire to be desired. One only places demands on someone to see how she will react. Often, this leads to a confusing round robin of desire: the suitors all reinforce each other's mutual desire of Penelope and Odysseus estate. Is it valuable *in itself*? Perhaps the slowness of the decision regarding Penelope's next husband reflects the fact that the suitors *wanted to want* Penelope more than they wanted to assume the role of being her husband. It was a game of the ego competition as opposed to an attempt to bring a real change in their status.

Odysseus' reaction to the presence of the suitors sets up the perfect example of the discharge of a death drive in violence. I hinted above that the death drive can have a few possible outcomes: destruction of "self" (not necessarily a bad thing under the right circumstances), sublimation to creative forces, or violence toward the other. While the death drive begins as a tension between one part of an organism and its "neutral schema"⁵⁴ this is also the origin of aggression (what Lacan calls "aggressivity") toward self and other. To see this one needs look no further than Odysseus' contest of the bow and the slaughter of the suitors. It is Odysseus' ego which is at stake—not his physical survival. He is so concerned about saving his reputation, his legacy, that he is willing to slaughter all the suitors. To begin with we can see what Odysseus' ego is in fact made up of imaginary identifications with his bow, his household, and his wife-mother. This identification is very typical of a narcissistic ego which addresses its objects as part of its "self." It is these identifications that are at stake if he loses the contest. But winning the contest is not enough. Here sadism is just a "turning outward" of masochism.⁵⁵ Because Odysseus cannot destroy his own ego, he must destroy the suitors: "The ag-

gressiveness involved in the ego's fundamental relationship to other people is based upon the intra-psychic tension we sense in the warning of the ascetic that 'a blow against your enemy is a blow at yourself,'" says Lacan.⁵⁶ In this case, Odysseus' ego wins by putting to rest the desires of others, or to put it in a different way, the Others of desire. Importantly, this squashing of the others differs from animal aggressivity in one important way: animal aggressivity is usually the result of an impending threat. But here Odysseus has *already diffused the threat*, namely he has won back his household by winning the contest of the bow. Human aggressivity, as an outward turning of an inward conflict, will always go to excess either in the form of the spectacle, or in the form of sadistic excess. Here because Odysseus cannot deal with the harm to his own ego, he turns his aggression outward even after he has gotten what he wanted.

Thus, in Philoctetes and Odysseus we will see two potential "resolutions" of the taut bow that constitutes the human condition. In the example of Philoctetes, who identifies very strongly with his bow, the resolution is "peaceful" but it is also brought about by divine forces. In the case of Odysseus, we will first see that the "bow" that is Odysseus "snaps" due to forces that are beyond his control; though, ultimately the conflict here is also resolved by divine forces. We will now turn to Philoctetes situation and explore it more detail as it concerns the bow as a metaphor for the human condition, and the aspect of the drive Lacan calls need.

NOTES

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3. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Hackett, 1996), II.27.
4. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Understanding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) I.IV.6.
5. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: Illini Press, 1987), 72.
6. *Ibid.*, 75.
7. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 45.
8. *Ibid.*, 50.
9. *Op. Cit.*
10. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1977), "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," 194.
11. *Ibid.*, 172.
12. Lacan, *Écrits* (Trans. Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 263.
13. *Ibid.*, 262.
14. From *Seminar II*, 323, as quoted in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 128.
15. Matthew Sharpe, "Jacques Lacan," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Accessed August 18, 2018. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/lacweb/#SH2a>.
16. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 36.

17. Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (New York: Verso, 1987), 29.
18. Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 121.
19. *Ibid.*, 136.
20. *Ibid.*, 139.
21. From Lacan, *Seminar XIX*, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 139.
22. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 77.
23. This section summarizes Boothby's discussion of the ego on pages 30-2 in *Death and Desire*.
24. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 32, in reference to Lacan, *Seminar II*, 44.
25. Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 11-17 at 12.
26. *Op. cit.*
27. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 31.
28. Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," 15.
29. Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, xix.
30. For a great and brief discussion of these ideas, see Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006), chapter 5, "The Pursuit of Happiness."
31. Lacan, *Écrits* (2006), "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," 431.
32. Ferdinand de Saussure, *A Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Translated by Wade Baskin. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959) Accessed August 16, 2018. https://archive.org/stream/courseingenerall00saus/courseingenerall00saus_djvu.txt. See especially chapter 3.
33. I am referencing here Lacan's notion of "anchoring points" (*points de capiton*) *Écrits: A Selection*, 154. Given the fact that language runs on two parallel tracks that have no necessary connection, Lacan imagines words, or phonemes, that "attach" to the unconscious. This is one explanation for culturally meaningful metaphors that develop over time. The metaphor Lacan uses himself is a reference to upholstery: the idea that a layer of fabric is buttoned down to the furniture—otherwise the two do not touch and can exist on separate planes.
34. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 31.
35. *Ibid.*, 45, discussing Lacan's 1938 paper: "The Splitting of the I."
36. *Ibid.*, 52.
37. From Lacan's *Seminar XIV*, Nov. 16, 1966, as quoted in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 52.
38. *Op. Cit.*
39. *Ibid.*, 8.
40. *Ibid.*, 38.
41. *Ibid.*, 41.
42. *Op cit.*
43. *Ibid.*, 65.
44. Lacan, *Écrits* (2006), "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," 208.
45. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 57.
46. *Ibid.*, 58.
47. *Ibid.*, 71.
48. *Ibid.*, 58.
49. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 507.
50. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*. 2 vols. (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 15.
51. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 227.
52. *Ibid.*, 199.
53. *Ibid.*, 151.
54. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, "The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power," 302.
55. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 41.
56. Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," 16.

TWO

Philoctetes' Bow: The Concept of Need

In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, we have a concise portrait of the human condition, replete with the complications of need, desire, and demand. Here the Irish poet Seamus Heaney's translation of the play's opening is remarkable:

Philoctetes. Hercules. Odysseus.
Heroes. Victims. Gods and human beings.
All throwing shapes, every one of them
Convinced he's in the right, all of them glad
To repeat themselves and their every last mistake,
No matter what.
People so deep into
Their own self-pity, self-pity buoys them up.
People so staunch and true, they're fixated,
Shining with self-regard like polished stones.¹

In the opening we see the chorus remind us of how arrogant we all are in assuming that our perspective on the world is right. We want to think that we know the objective truth, and that we have control over our possibilities concerning how to respond to that truth. But in truth, we are each "throwing shapes," even the desperate and stranded Philoctetes who stubbornly clings to his own misery. Still, in *Philoctetes* we see a person who is acutely trapped, abandoned, and in despair. Even with the indefeasible technology of Heracles' bow, Philoctetes suffers deeply every day with a wound that will not heal. The wound, we will see, represents the wound we are all born with—our impending death. The bow will represent our attempt to deal with the situation. In what follows we will explore the meaning of the bow and the wound in more detail, as

well as ascertaining the relationship between need and demand, since so much of the play is asking something of Philoctetes and others.

HERACLES' BOW: FRIENDSHIP AND HEROICS

In every case of myth we examine in this study, we will see that the bow serves as a symbol of two important aspects of Greek life: friendship and heroics. In so doing, the bow as a symbol touches on two of Lacan's Others: the other as another ego (alter ego) and the other as my own ideal ego. The bow appeals to the first in the form of friendship: Philoctetes received the bow as a result of his friendly deed toward Heracles. Here the memory of Heracles serves as an alter ego that drives Philoctetes' special duty of care toward the bow. But keep in mind—essentially this nostalgia is a product of Philoctetes' own imaginary thinking: Heracles cannot possibly care now that he is dead. (Of course, in Heracles' case this logic actually doesn't apply, because Heracles becomes a god, a fact that Philoctetes cannot possibly know until Heracles' intervention at the end of the play.) The bow also alludes to the heroic, first in the heroics of Heracles' himself, and then in the heroics that are prophesied about Philoctetes' bow taking Troy. In order to see these themes more clearly, I will give a brief recap of the play with an interstitial analysis of these two themes. All the while, we should remind ourselves that what is essential to Philoctetes about the bow is that his possession of it is necessary for his survival.

On his way to give sacrifice for a victory at Troy, Philoctetes accidentally praises the wrong god and is bitten by a poisonous snake. The wound is festering, smelly, and does not heal. Since the crew, which included Odysseus, could not handle the smell and Philoctetes wailing in pain, they abandoned him on the uninhabited part of Lemnos with just his bow. Some ten years later, after hearing the prophecy of Helenus, a Trojan prisoner who is also a prophet, Odysseus decides that he needs Philoctetes' bow, along with Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, to defeat the Trojans. So the ship returns to Lemnos to first attempt to deceive Philoctetes into relinquishing his bow, only to eventually realize that the prophecy is to include Philoctetes as well. Philoctetes is promised a cure at Troy, and so eventually agrees to go with. The bow here is a symbol of Philoctetes' need, and of Odysseus demand, but first and foremost it is a symbol of a heroic past.

The Bow as Heroic

According to Gill, "the bow is the special instrument of *arete*, that is, of heroic achievement. . . ." ² The bow as a heroic device appeals to the ideal ego: that imaginary and unified sense that we have of ourselves, in this case of ourselves leaving a legacy, or in ancient Greek terms dying in glory (*kleos*). Here it is the work of Ernest Becker that shines, as he dis-

cusses the “hero complex” as a response to the fundamental meaninglessness of modern life. For Becker, we all have to be “causes of ourselves” (*causa sui*) in a culture where gods and a strong sense of community meaning do not exist. One way to bring ourselves into existence is by imagining (though rarely accomplishing) a heroic feat that gives our lives purpose.³ So, in brief, the aspect of bow that appeals to a lineage of heroic glory is what ties it to the reification of an imaginary ego ideal. Here the possession and use of the bow constitutes a heroic deed that establishes one’s character. So even beyond the physical necessity—which is a focus of Philoctetes in his own thinking—of keeping the bow, Philoctetes will have ruined a hero’s lineage in not properly protecting the same. On the other hand, when Philoctetes has the opportunity at the end of the play to travel to Troy with Odysseus, not only will he be made whole again by curing his wound, but he will become heroic in helping sack Troy.

One interesting read on the play would be to see Philoctetes’ insistence on keeping his bow as a dereliction of duty to his community. So as the chorus points out, it is out of “self-pity” that he laments the loss of his bow. Of course, this type of self-pity—considering that taking his bow will most likely lead to death—is certainly understandable. But put in a context of sacrificing oneself for the greater good lamenting his bow becomes not only self-pitying but selfish. On that reading not even Philoctetes is blameless for letting his ego get in the way. Still, Philoctetes does have other reasons to be concerned with the loss of his bow, and they do not all relate to survival, heroics, or self-pity. Given that Philoctetes does understand himself as one in a line of heroes who has been entrusted the bow for safekeeping, he also is concerned about a failure of stewardship.

The Bow as a Sign of Friendship and Betrayal

Philoctetes exhibited his friendship to Heracles in the latter’s time of need by being the only person willing to light the funeral pyre of the dying Heracles at Heracles’ request. In exchange, Heracles bequeathed Philoctetes his bow, which could not miss. This theme of the bow being an object of exchange from one heroic figure to another was not uncommon: Neoptolemus was said to have his father Achilles’ bow, and Odysseus inherited his from the great archer Iphistos. Furthermore, Philoctetes’ good deed to Heracles is what sets up Philoctetes’ own trust in Neoptolemus later in the play, insofar as the latter feigns to be a good friend, one who is worthy of holding the bow. Important to the conclusion of the play is that Heracles was the rare mortal who became a god, since he was in Zeus’ favor and Philoctetes helped to give him proper burial rights. (In some ways, Philoctetes is the catalyst for his own salvation at the end of the play, given that Heracles’ intervention as a god is what ultimately convinces Philoctetes to follow Neoptolemus and Odysseus, and thereby find a cure at Troy.)

Upon returning to Lemnos, Odysseus attempts to convince Neoptolemus to deceive Philoctetes out of his bow. This appears to be a strange move, given that the prophecy appears to require that Philoctetes come along with his weapon to battle at Troy.⁴ At one point, Neoptolemus lies and says he would take Philoctetes home to Greece. Considering this kindness, Philoctetes offers to allow Neoptolemus to handle the bow. As Christopher Gill points out, this privilege is not given lightly and is seen by Philoctetes to be a continuance of the bow's heroic story thus far. Philoctetes says to Neoptolemus: "Have confidence; you are allowed to touch it, and return it to the giver, and boast that you alone of men have handled it, in return for your goodness (*arête*). It was by doing a good deed (*euergeton*) that I myself gained possession of it."⁵ But Neoptolemus has deceived Philoctetes, having no intention of giving it back. Interestingly, it is at this point that Philoctetes begins to talk to the bow itself:

My own dear bow, wrenched by force from the hands that owned and loved you, if you have any consciousness, you must be looking with pity at the friend of Heracles who will never use you any more. In an exchange of masters, you are being wielded by a man of many tricks, and you see low deceits as you look at my hateful enemy.⁶

It appears, then, that the friendship theme of the bow extends to the *bow itself* when Philoctetes uses the language of "my own dear bow" that he "loved." But there are several other aspects of this passage that need our attention. One, the name "Philoctetes" literally translates to "lover of possessions." Here he actually declares his love for the bow. Without a doubt this is an instance of what Lacan would call an *identificatory merger*, and we will look more at that below. But perhaps even more interesting is the degree to which Philoctetes is willing to anthropomorphize and imbue consciousness to an inanimate object, the bow. To extend human attributes to an inanimate object seems to be the epitome of what Lacan calls "the imaginary," which is the beginning of object constancy and ego development. But the exchange also belies a point about the realm of the "Real" in Lacan. As we saw in chapter 1, the Real is never accessible in itself and so it always exists as a kind of veil—a curtain that hides nothing. We imagine the existence of real things behind our experiences, but because we are unable to access the thing-in-itself, our "Reality" is usually a combination of our own images and our symbolic (linguistic) exchanges with others. We impart reality to such imaginations because "they work" in our pragmatic world of getting things done. So, in the usual instance, we ascribe reality to the world as *we* understand it by projecting a human way of understanding (the only way we know) onto the world; anthropomorphizing inanimate objects being only the most obvious example. Hence Philoctetes is not only imagining reality but projecting his own reality—consciousness—onto the bow.

Still, the barest understanding of biological need in Philoctetes comes not from attributing life to the bow itself, but in Philoctetes identifying his *own life* with the bow:

You take away my life (*bíon*) by seizing my bow (*bíon*).
Return it, I beg you, return it, O son.
By the ancestral gods, do not take my life/bow (*bíon*) from me.⁷

While several commentaries address the ethical and rhetorical implications of the exchanges between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, very few comment on the strong identification between Philoctetes' survival, sense of self, and the bow he possesses.⁸ In Philoctetes, we see three of the key themes that will appear in the Lacanian account of the drive, specifically the notion of a fundamental helplessness in the form of the wound, the fundamental identificatory merger of oneself with the objects deemed necessary for one's survival in the bow, and the problem of interpretation and language in the form of the prophecy of Helenus and the rhetoric of Neoptolemus and Odysseus.

In the Philoctetes, there are three central tropes that establish what will be our analysis of drive, specifically *need*, in the play: the wound, the bow, and the oracle.⁹ The wound will represent a fundamental theme of the play, which could fall under the heading of the human condition: the wound as symbol for psychic pain of abandonment. I will argue that there are two abandonments: first in the death of Heracles, and second in the form of Odysseus and his crew leaving him on Lemnos. He is almost abandoned a third time by Neoptolemus (and Odysseus) when he attempts to steal Philoctetes' bow. Luckily, Neoptolemus' compassion and the *deus ex machina* of Heracles intervene there. We will look at the psychoanalytic implications of these abandonments in terms of drive.

THE WOUND: FUNDAMENTAL HELPLESSNESS AND WANTING-TO-BE (*MANQUÉ-À-ÊTRE*)

Given our earlier account of Lacan's idea of infant development, I will only give a brief summary here to emphasize the parts of the account that are relevant to Philoctetes and the analysis of his wound. Recall that the infant first identifies with the mother because of its inability to provide for itself and its inability to distinguish between itself and its mother. The human infant is in a powerless position and one of slow development relative to other mammals. Lacan's concept of *need*, or the aspect of the drive that aims toward survival is illustrated wonderfully by the image of the bow in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. To the extent that the human being is inextricably linked with its biological organism, what Lacan at one point calls its "apparatus," it has certain biological needs, such as hunger and thirst.¹⁰ In the strictest sense, the needs of the infant must be met by

someone other than the infant herself, usually the mother.¹¹ These needs, in an immediate sense, can be satisfied. This food satisfies this hunger. But even this primary energy at the level of need has a representational residue, or Imaginary element, in part arising out of a confusion: food (or lack of food) is confused with the breast (or its absence), for instance. The infant then associates hunger (need) with the mouth and satisfaction with putting things (the breast) in it (the oral stage). "One can read backward to the earliest structuring of perception in relation to incorporation, and to the formation of an ideal ego."¹² An infant perceives what it perceives in the way it perceives because it needs to be satisfied. I can only become what I become in virtue of incorporating something from the outside, something that satisfies this need. As infants, we are not sophisticated enough to separate out the call for satisfaction with the satisfaction itself. The nascent ideal ego which is forming *includes* the availability of that which it incorporates, namely, the mother. For that reason, any realization of this ideal ego as a unified thing is impossible after the required separation of mother and infant for social purposes. Later, as adults, it is *the call for* satisfaction that matters most: I want to see if you will respond to my call to be satisfied, regardless of what form that satisfaction takes.

It goes without saying that in the *Philoctetes* we are dealing with adults, not infants. Nonetheless, Philoctetes' desperation puts him in an infantile state. The infantile state contradicts the potential power of his bow, which comes from a heroic lineage. In Edmund Wilson's famous commentary on the piece, "The Wound and Bow," we are encouraged to muse on the great tragic formula of the sick hero. Philoctetes whose bow and arrows cannot miss is the same Philoctetes whose wound does not heal. Philoctetes the infant is the same as Philoctetes the superhero.¹³ So what can Philoctetes do? Who can he be?

For Lacan, the center of any "subjectivity" and any motivation in life is essentially a vacuum or what he calls *manqué-à-être*, literally a "lack-of-being." Now in the sense of being a permanent, unchanging being, we have always lacked *being*. That is to say, following the existentialists, that the essence of human being is to define its own essence over the course of its existence. The breakthrough in philosophical thinking that existentialists accomplished was to acknowledge that we are all *here* before we are anything. Put another way: we can mold the material of our lives in any way we see fit, taking into account realistic probabilities and certain limitations, of course. This is the mature realization of a reflective adult. But as described above there is a time during the infant's pre-mirror stage—prior to the specter of separation from the mother and individuality of the infant—in which we do *feel* as though we have *being*, namely unity with the objects of our needs. As an infant I don't really *want* anything, as long as my basic needs are met. It is not our fault (or our choice) as infants that we confuse the breast (or bottle) with food. But as soon as we begin to see ourselves as separate beings we open up a wound—a lack—

that cannot heal. I realize my mother is a separate person than myself, and I must, indeed, go it alone. The separation of the infant from the mother is very similar to Philoctetes' exile. Remember, Philoctetes does not *do* anything morally wrong to deserve his wound-which-does-not-heal, and the subsequent exile. If anything, he was trying to do the right thing in making offerings to the gods. So his wound is something that anyone could receive, and indeed, all of us do.

There is another way to think about the symbolism of the wound. The wound represents the fact that as mortals we all die. We are born with this wound at birth, and there is no cure for it. Interestingly, Oliver Harris has placed the idea of death (and its realization or denial) within the structure of an adult mirror-stage, one which "grants us an image of ourselves, our lives, as whole, idealized, complete."¹⁴ It is only in the face of death (or a major loss, or a near-death experience) that I can see how alone, how much of an individual, I really am.

It's worth thinking on the conditions of *living* with this wound-that-does-not-heal as well. First, there are the physical circumstances. The wound—its stench and Philoctetes' wailing due to its intense pain—"caused" Odysseus and his shipmates to exile him. The wound as a first order unsettling of being—the on-going thing which causes pain, discomfort to self and others—now serves as a second-order separation: the casting out of Philoctetes from society. And for the Greeks, exile was tantamount to death.

In this exile we see the real source of Philoctetes' desire-to-be: the desire-to-be-*recognized*. Here Lacan hews close to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In Hegel's initial formulation when two beings (or different aspects of one consciousness) who are on their way to self-consciousness confront one another, the confrontation becomes a fight to the death.¹⁵ One of the beings encountered is so concerned about her biological life (the slave) that she is willing to submit herself to the other (the master). Now, how does the master win? By being willing to give up her own biological life for something higher—something beyond the Real. Initially the master attains and maintains control over the slave. But, importantly, the slave in submitting to the master also makes the master the master. "Why?" you may ask. Because one cannot be self-certain that she exists unless she has someone to confirm it for her. I am not alive, I do not exist, unless I am recognized by you. For who am I if I am not someone *for* or *to* someone else? Recognition is at play, even in survival, after all. Were it not for people who submit, there would be no master. For Hegel, this is a process that is integral to the development of self-consciousness in each of us. We have an internal struggle between that part of ourselves that wants to survive as we *are*, and that part of ourselves that always wants to move *beyond* what we are, essentially killing its former self in order to grow and change. The former self here can be identified with the *ideal ego*, and the latter with the myriad desires of the subject. The dynamic be-

tween the two is the death drive, as we saw in the previous chapter. What this means for Hegel is that we each wind up with an unhappy consciousness, one that knows that our “stable” selves are just one exile or death away from being completely destabilized. What it means for Lacan is slightly different: we should not always let the master, the ego, have her way, and we may need to recognize that this requires a very destabilized or decentered subject to emerge.

In Philoctetes’ case, it is really the wound that is the source of his exile. But it is also a sign of how fragile a healthy consciousness can be. It can be any outside factor—a snake bite, an accident, a stroke—that separates us from others (mentally and physically). And in so separating us, we lose the Other for whom we are a self—we lose ourselves in losing those who would recognize us as someone. Hence, we can see the wound as an impediment to socialization. And if the bow does turn out to be a concrete example of social capital through possessing some object others want, then the wound serves as a form of symbolic castration, cutting Philoctetes off from the very thing we all desire: to be recognized and loved.

Philoctetes’ wound is a reminder of our frailty, and the tentative nature of our nascent state that never quite leaves us. Philoctetes says of the pain of his unhealing wound: “She returns from time to time as if she were sated with her wanderings.” If the pain—the reminder of his never-healing wound—subsides and returns, it is only because as long as the wound remains unhealed, pain is always a possibility for it. The wound of insecurity and dependence that is a real aspect of both our biology and our psyche is a real aspect of our beginning, and a vector toward our end. The sad paradox of death is that it is only once we undergo it, that we no longer need to worry about it. Philoctetes’ wound is the possibility of death; “the possibility of having no more possibilities,” to use Martin Heidegger’s formulation. The wound is always there, but the attention paid to it comes and goes.

What we’ve happened upon here then are two fundamental poles of the wound as metaphor that converge in imaginary subjectivity: our fundamental dependence on the Other, and our impending death. All meaning is formulated in virtue of these two things: the arriving on the scene of the Other, and the possibility of there someday being no more meaning. These two boundaries also give us preliminary answer to a fundamental question: Why do things matter? They matter because they matter to Others, and because death provides the imaginary limit up against which our own possibilities have a certain urgency.

Philoctetes Wound as the Abandonment of Others

Philoctetes’ situation tells us something interesting about our dependence on Others. Firstly, remember that his abandonment makes him a

savage. This state ultimately signifies the barest survival. Keep in mind, Philoctetes can take care of himself. We are told he lives in a cave, gathers wood and water, and shoots wild birds. What does he shoot them with? His bow that he received as a gift from Heracles.

While we do not know that much about the friendship between Philoctetes and Heracles, we do know that Philoctetes was the only one to volunteer to light Heracles' funeral pyre. As Gill notes: "in this play the bow (and heroic achievement) is inseparable from genuine friendship. Philoctetes inherited the bow as an exceptional act of friendship. He was prepared to do something Heracles' own son couldn't bring himself to do."¹⁶ This is to say that the wound is representing Philoctetes' first loss, his loss of his friend Heracles. Such a separation is symbolic of the separation we all have at the center of our being, namely, the separation from the nourishment and warmth of the mother when we are born, and then again at the mirror stage when we begin to form our independent identity.¹⁷

Philoctetes also undergoes other more abstract separations. Philoctetes, epitome of the human condition, suffers the dictates of necessity. As Charles Segal points out: "Divine forces, in the form of the snake of the goddess Chryse that poisoned him, have isolated him from society; and divine forces (the oracle and Heracles) will effect his return."¹⁸ In other words, as Plato says about human beings in general, Philoctetes is a "plaything of the gods."¹⁹ Of course the double problem is this: "The wound cuts Philoctetes off from human society. Yet as an affliction from an inscrutable malevolent-seeming divinity who reduces an innocent man to a life of brutishness and agony, it also cuts him off from the gods."²⁰ It is an untenable situation Philoctetes must live with; he is cut off from both humans and gods due to nothing of his own doing. While the initial separation comes in the form of Odysseus and his crew abandoning him because of his "foul-smelling" wound, suddenly Philoctetes is also separated from his crew, his home, his family, and more generally his way of life, all because of his wound. To be clear: when Philoctetes becomes an *agriotes*, a "savage," it is not because of a decision he made but rather a situation that has been forced upon him. His abandonment freezes in time his human development. Still, he does retain some control. After all, he is able to keep himself alive despite his recurring pain.

Which brings us to the third potential abandonment. When Philoctetes is having a conversation about the possibility of returning to Greece with Neoptolemus, Neoptolemus briefly absconds with the bow. There are actually two abandonments here: Neoptolemus, who first appeared as a friend, and the bow, which we will see, is also a friend of sorts. First, the abandonment of Neoptolemus has a double meaning. On one level, it is a severance of an incipient friendship one that continues the strain of friendship attached to the Heracles' bow. In fact, the scene with Neoptolemus is a re-enactment of the original friendship-gift (*xenia*) as evidenced

by Philoctetes proclamation: "Have confidence; you are allowed to touch it, and return it to the giver, and boast you alone of men have handled it, in return for your goodness (*arete*). It was by doing a good deed (*euergeton*) that I myself gained possession of it."²¹ Neoptolemus realizes the importance of his being a temporary trustee, or at least pretends to: "I am not sorry to have met you and taken you as a friend. For a man who knows how to do a favor when he has received one is likely to be a friend more valuable than any possession."²² Considering this is prior to the impending deception that Odysseus forces Neoptolemus into, the words are portentous. It is at this point that Philoctetes sadly imagines the situation from the bow's point of view. More on that in a moment.

Let's look at the deeper level on which Neoptolemus' betrayal constitutes an abandonment. Consider this: Philoctetes has been alone on an uninhibited island for some ten years, and Neoptolemus is the first person he has really talked to in that time. The promise of return that Neoptolemus peddles constitutes a re-birth of sorts, a second chance for Philoctetes' life to return to normal. Like a newborn infant, or like Plato's prisoners in the cave turning around to see the fire, Philoctetes "eyes" must adjust to the possibility of a new life. In other words, Neoptolemus appears as not only a friend, but as a mother-figure who promises a rebirth of sorts. It is in this context that we should see Philoctetes giving Neoptolemus the bow in the first place: as his savior from his island exile, Neoptolemus momentarily takes on the role of (m)Other and becomes fused with Philoctetes' purpose and life. His betrayal in keeping the bow is a reminder to Philoctetes that he is again utterly and hopelessly alone. Neoptolemus almost stealing the bow is yet another threatened abandonment.

THE NAME OF THE BOW: IDENTIFICATORY MERGERS FOR SURVIVAL

The bow, as a central theme in the *Philoctetes*, and *the* central theme of this book, plays the most important role as a symbol of drive. For one, we can begin by acknowledging Philoctetes' bow as a symbol of *survival*. While we will later make the case that there is *some* degree to which the bow is *desired* by Philoctetes, we can also make a strong case that it is *needed*. By extrapolating we will see that the bow can be representative of the Phallus, whose removal is tantamount to castration, and which would reopen the wound—or open a second wound—as described above.

In the potential robbing of Philoctetes' bow we have a third moment of abandonment—not by a person per se, but by an object, and by proxy, the gods themselves. As Segal pointed out above, in being bit by the snake, Philoctetes is not only abandoned by human beings, but also by the gods. Neoptolemus taking Philoctetes' bow is an abandonment by the

gods—in the form of bow of Heracles. But Philoctetes is baldly aware of his own failed role in this drama: “My own dear bow, wrenched by force from the hands that owned and loved you, if you have any consciousness, you must be looking with pity at the friend of Heracles who will never use any more.”²³ And recall that when Philoctetes begs Neoptolemus to return his bow he intentionally graphs his life onto the bow with the play on words in *BIOS*.

The play on words here is important: the bow is tantamount to Philoctetes' physical survival. According to Carol Poster, use of *bios* here is a pun, since the name *bios*, can be used to name “life” or “bow” in Epic Greek, where the only difference between the two words was accentuation (*bíos/biós*).²⁴ This play on words allows Sophocles to represent linguistically the necessity of bow for Philoctetes' survival. The equation of the word “bow” to “life” manifests the second portion of need as well: identification. Insofar as Philoctetes rests his survival on the possession of the bow, he has identified himself with the object. As the bow goes, so goes Philoctetes. Luckily, as readers and viewers of the play we do not have to witness this separation. After a change of heart, Neoptolemus relents and does not insist that Philoctetes give up his bow. He does so after, however, first implying that Philoctetes is making the wrong decision because he is wallowing in his own victimhood: “Stop just licking your wounds. Start seeing things.”²⁵ The “things” that Neoptolemus wants Philoctetes to start seeing are his connections to the community and to fate. In fact, if Philoctetes would just stop fighting his own destiny, “It'll be talked about forever and you're to be/ The hero that was healed and then went on/ To heal the wound of the Trojan war itself.”²⁶ In other words, if Philoctetes' exile was not originally his fault, and if it cut him off from his community and the gods, it is only his stubbornness at this point that continues his own afflictions. He can be made whole by listening to Neoptolemus, whose account is later repeated by Heracles himself.

One could argue, however, that Philoctetes' need to survive and his focus on the basics distracts him from seeing his role in a larger destiny or of a glory driven by desire. What we see from within the plot of the play itself, however, is closer to what Lacan means by need, and then only later desire: that Philoctetes confuses these objects, the bow and the wound, at different times with his whole ego. These are yet further examples of what Lacan calls “identificatory mergers.” The irony here is that from a perspective of survival, Philoctetes could not possibly be in wanting: his arrows never miss. And yet, he frequently focusses on the wound: that gap or lack that cannot be covered over by the possession of the bow (or of anything). The issue that Philoctetes is facing is one that we all face. We cannot possibly fulfill the fundamental desire (primary energy) of undoing the separation from the mother (or from our crew, our bow, Greece, and so on) and so we wrongly imagine that specific objects can bring about this unification. But as Ragland-Sullivan ac-

knowledges: “Real objects can never literally replace the lost objects of pre-castration desire,” or the desire we feel prior to ego formation.²⁷ None of this means that we should not take Philoctetes’ identification with his bow seriously. Let’s return for a moment to Philoctetes’ lamentation over the possible loss of his bow:

You take away my life (*bion*) by seizing my bow (*bion*).
Return it, I beg you, return it, O son.
By the ancestral gods, do not take my life/bow (*bion*) from me.²⁸

Or at another time:

My own dear bow, wrenched by force from the hands that owned and loved you, if you have any consciousness, you must be looking with pity at the friend of Heracles who will never use any more. In an exchange of masters, you are being wielded by a man of many tricks, and you see low deceits as you look at my hateful enemy.²⁹

Philoctetes’ lamentations to his bow are remarkable for several reasons. First, and most importantly, Philoctetes’ personification of the bow, imagining it might even have consciousness, is a form of what Lacan calls an “identificatory merger.” Such a merger is equating ourselves, or an important part of ourselves, with an outside person, place, thing, or idea. To some extent this goes beyond a usual identificatory merger in imputing consciousness to the bow. In this case, Philoctetes will equate his survival of his whole being with the bow, and this is indicative of Lacan’s notion of *need*.

We have said that Philoctetes is a “lover of possessions.” This is a bit ironic given how few possessions Philoctetes has on Lemnos. In fact, he has only one meaningful possession: his bow. But Philoctetes’ so-called love of his bow goes well beyond the love we might usually feel for various possessions, because his life is dependent upon his possession of it. While Odysseus and Neoptolemus may “need” the bow to sack Troy and attain glory, Philoctetes *needs* it for his very survival. The level of need—here meaning dependence upon—is not unlike the pre-linguistic, pre-mirror stage need of the infant.

First, the infant is born helpless and to that extent premature. It is completely dependent upon its caretakers for its survival. The survival of the infant is dependent upon its connection to the Other. Interestingly, infants do not just need food, clothing, and shelter, they also need love. Philoctetes’ love of his bow is indicative of his identification of his own survival with the bow, and the fact that the bow has not let him down when relies upon it, that is, it never misses. If the exile and the helplessness engendered by the never-healing wound set Philoctetes back into infantile regression, the bow becomes a substitute for the mother, as that thing outside of himself upon which he is dependent and with which he identifies. It is in this context that we see poor Philoctetes say: “my own

dear bow. . .” In English, the word “bow” has other signifiers: a way to tie a string, a motion one makes when bending over, the direction to look on a ship, but none of these would be relevant to the case at hand. However, in epic Greek, the word for bow *BIOS* could also mean “life.” There is a *direct* signifying chain between the notion of the bow and the idea of life via the signifier *BIOS*. As was noted earlier, the bareness of Philoctetes’ survival is what relegates him to the realm of the savage, and without his bow he would not even be that. Now let’s turn our attention to the way in which Philoctetes’ relationship to his bow/life expresses the aspect of drive we have called *need*.

Bios and Need

Need is the most biological of the three aspects of the drive discussed in this book. Even so, there are representational (read: ideal) aspects of need. In *Écrits*, Lacan notes that bodily need gives rise to representation; in fact, it is this mysterious connection that is the crux of psychoanalysis: “Psychoanalysis involves the real of the body and the imaginary of its mental schema.”³⁰ In *Driving Soma*, Patrick Miller sums up this position: “In the absence of the real source of satisfaction the urge to satisfy a need is met by a capacity to elicit a pseudo-experience of satisfaction, what is the *representative equivalent* of what is usually experienced in the body when an actual satisfaction of need occurs: this hallucinatory satisfaction of need is the first level of mental life.”³¹ Here we see the first move into the interiorization of a bodily encounter, the first imaginary. What Miller means here is this: when I need something to satisfy my hunger, I may reach for an apple. When no apple is around, I may imagine an apple. To some extent the very imagining of the apple is a way to satisfy my “desire” just in conjuring up this image. It is something that “I” am in charge of, even if I cannot make present something “real” to eat. To continue Miller’s point:

Mental life begins as the negative realization of a somatic activity: it causes bodily sensations to be evoked in the absence of actual need fulfillment. Or to put it differently, it allows the individual to deny the endosomatic excitation of need by a presentation of bodily sensations that do not have an actual somatic source. The *as if* bodily sensation is used as representation of an actual somatic sensation.³²

This process happens very organically, unconsciously, and the roots of this hallucinatory satisfaction probably go back to our earliest “thoughts.” In this light, it is not surprising that the infant “confuses” the breast or the bottle with food. That is, it would be natural to associate the image of the breast or the bottle with what it provides: food. Thus, it could be said that child *needs* milk, but *desires* the *breast*.

If we locate the birth of mental life as an outgrowth of unmet bodily needs, in the movement from the somatic to the imaginary, we can see it not simply as static hallucination of one object (the missing apple or breast), but as a continual augmentation of signifying chains. For every increase in representations available to us as things to be desired, we are also unwittingly building signifying chains that burrow deep into the unconscious. Freud believed that “consciousness is a sense organ” that mimicked bodily-unconscious processes.³³ The body can take on pain and even sores as a manifestation of psychic pain.³⁴ So the current flows two ways: unmetabolized bodily pain leads to psychic pain and unmetabolized psychic pain can lead to bodily pain and illness. Take Philoctetes as an example. Ostensibly it is a snake bite that initiates his never-healing wound. But why won’t it heal? Could it be that the psychic pain of the loss of Heracles and then abandonment by his crew continue to manifest itself in his unhealing wound? Is it a coincidence that Philoctetes wound will be healed precisely when he will be accepted back into the fold of human society?

The fundamental somatic functions that Philoctetes requires being alone on an island are protection from predators and to be a predator—to hunt in order to eat. These functions become grafted onto and identified with the possession of the bow. We said above that Philoctetes’ desperation makes him almost infant-like. If the breast is considered “food” by the infant, then surely we can say that the “bow” is equivalent to “life” for Philoctetes. The first level of imagination is the need for food and protection presenting themselves as representations that we would have anxiety in the face of. In other words, the ability to represent somatic urges psychically allows us to project them into the future. It’s not that Philoctetes realizes after the fact that he *did* need to eat something and forgot, or that he needed to protect himself, but he overlooked it. Rather his anxiety presents itself as his not being able to do something in the future—as an anxiety of not being adequately prepared. And what is the shape of this preparation? It’s the shape of the bow.

We see a second step in the representation that arises from need. Philoctetes associates his survival—both eating and not being eaten—with the bow. In no way do the ideas “food” or “protection” literally appear on the surface of the bow. No such ideas are embedded in the physical bow, but the associations are embedded in the unconscious. Therefore, Life is the Bow. There is nothing deeper to this association.

But, such an association is what we were above calling an identificatory merger. The earliest example of this happens in the infants encounter with the (m)Other. According to Ragland-Sullivan, there are four key aspects to *need*:

- It aims for *organic* satisfaction.

- It is usually associated with the consumption of the newborn infant.
- It is a primary energy.
- It is satisfied in the realm of the Real.³⁵

Now we will address each one of these in turn. Need is satisfied organically because it does not go through the circuit of imaginary (no representation required), or the symbolic; we have needs regardless of whether we can adequately articulate or imagine them. For these reasons, need takes place most clearly in the situation of the new born infant. The infant may cry, but the cries do not articulate specifically what it wants. Nor does the feeling of a need demand that the infant itself has an image of what it wants. For these reasons, the need is considered primary. It is an instinctual motivation that is not connected to any other layers of representation. In the adult the clarity of this motivation can be clouded through specific interpretation. So, for instance, it is rare that as adults we are merely "hungry," we are usually hungry "for something." Because there is no interruption of the motivation with an interpretation, need still happens as real. We need water regardless of whether or not we feel thirsty. We need sustenance regardless of what we are hungry for. Because there is no interpretation or image associated with satisfaction as an infant, it is entirely possible, as we have seen, to mistake the instrument of satisfaction with satisfying the need itself. Now let's look at how these aspects of need can be seen in Philoctetes' relation to his bow.

Philoctetes is stranded alone on an island. It's remarkable how the basic needs of the average human being in wealthy industrialized nations modifies "needs" so that real needs recede almost entirely into the background. Not so for the castaway. The castaway struggles to meet the most basic of human needs: food, clothing, shelter, and protection from danger. In Philoctetes' case, his food and protection needs are met by his magical bow. The value of the bow is multiplied by the fact that without it Philoctetes is an invalid; because of his unhealing injury he is even more at a disadvantage than an average person would be. We can see then how Philoctetes' need is as fundamental as that of the infant, helpless without his bow.

Of course, Philoctetes is not *actually* an infant, and infancy is where Lacan usually locates the purest form of need. So, an adjustment to the idea of need is required. I would offer that whenever we strip away the extra layers of the imaginary (the realm of desired objects generally) and the symbolic (the realm of language), we are left with need. Philoctetes may dream of returning to his home, but outside of that his imaginary objects desired are limited. The pure survival instinct constitutes need as much as infancy does. In our understanding, though need may be a primary energy, it is not necessarily lost in further psychic development. Rather it is buried by language in a situation where lan-

guage is accepted and used as substitute, and almost constantly. Since Philoctetes has not spoken to anyone in years, his social life is diminished. Furthermore, the objects of his desire would be severely reduced to those which immediately satisfy his needs.

Interestingly, when Lacan talks about Desire he argues that objects of desire have the “representational residue” of the very first objects that meet our needs.³⁶ Here the drive to have organic needs met can be seen as a “primary energy.” The primary energy is discharged into the objects that meet our needs, the first of which is the mother, identified with the breast. As Ragland-Sullivan puts it, the earliest structuring of perception is in “relation to incorporation.”³⁷ This formulates the first rudiments of the ideal ego, or the “self.” We first perceive the objects that sustain us as part of who we are. Since Philoctetes is no longer an infant he does not identify with his mother, but he does identify with his bow (“Do not take my bow/life from me . . .”). While the breast may be the “primordial cause of desire” the bow is a cause of desire for Philoctetes, and one wholly based on need.

Need, a primary energy, aims at the Real because it aims at survival. The Real is an impossible realm to articulate precisely because as we enter into the realm of the imaginary and the linguistic realm of the symbolic, we lose connection with it. The Real is the realm which has importance as the unreachable ground of any system of symbols and values, and is arguably the realm of basic existence, basic organic survival. The realm of the real as survival is a pre-linguistic or extra linguistic demand that the body places on the world: eating, defecating, sleeping, breathing, and so on. In the position of the castaway we exist in the realm of the real, even if we don’t know it.

Like the mother/breast, the bow helps Philoctetes survive in an absolute sense. It is not so much an “object of desire” as something that Philoctetes identifies with himself. We already saw this in the passage where Philoctetes speaks to the bow as if it were a friend. The next passage we will look at touches on a point Heraclitus will also be making, namely the verbal bridge between the bow and life, which easily permits Philoctetes an identificatory merger between *his* bow and *his* life. After we look at this key passage we will look at the role of language more generally in the *Philoctetes* as a whole, namely in dialogue between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, and in the interpretation of the oracle regarding Philoctetes’ magical bow.

The poet Seamus Heaney may best capture the spirit of Philoctetes’ survival being dependent on the bow. He translates a key passage:

He’s [Neoptolemus’] condemning me to a death by hunger. I’m going to be a ghost before my time. The birds and the brutes I slaughtered with the bow, they’re closing in. I can see their beaks and muzzles

crowding up at both ends of the cave. They'll pick me clean. My life for theirs, eye, tooth, and claw.³⁸

Philoctetes here is articulating succinctly the point we made above: he equates the possession of his bow with his life. There are two points worth expanding upon regarding this equation. First, the bow hinges upon the even exchange of one life for another. If Philoctetes has the bow, he is the killer of beasts which keeps him fed and secure. If he does not have the bow the beasts and birds—the same ones he's "slaughtered"—will kill him. Second, and this is not apparent at first, the bow serves as the tool of power, the phallus, the confiscation of which amounts to castration.

The theme of the bow-as-life-as-death is a central theme of our entire investigation as it is the catalyst of the meaning of the bow-as-drive in Greek thought. Lacan acknowledges this in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* through his analysis of Heraclitus' fragment: "The name of the bow is life, its work is death."³⁹ There are two key components to this fragment that relate to Philoctetes' concern over the confiscation of his bow. The first is the relation of the life and death through the bow, and the second is the name of the bow.

Philoctetes' life is dependent upon the bow, but only insofar as the bow can bring about the death of the predators and prey which surround him. In fact, Apollo, the god of archery, is also associated with death because of his arrows (and his bringing of the plague) in *The Iliad*.⁴⁰ The necessity of death gets at a very important aspect of need, which will also become symbolically important when we are discussing desire: the maintenance of life requires the incorporation of the Other. The survival of a subject requires maintaining a balance of the internal drives to grow and sustain ourselves and the external drives of the Other which is calling for our erasure. As the biological equivalent of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, the predator-prey dialectic is contained within the economy of the bow. With the bow Philoctetes is able to slaughter his prey required for survival and to fend off predators who could otherwise make him prey. The life of one requires the death of the Other. It is a mutually exclusive battle for incorporation of the other. If Philoctetes keeps his bow he is the one incorporated, if he loses it he is the one being incorporated. Lacan seems to understand this age-old truism with his reference to the "second life." He writes, "it is death that sustains existence."⁴¹ Or as Boothby puts it, in Lacan's thinking "Only can death refertilize the great womb of the universe."⁴²

The incorporation of prey via the death that the bow brings for Philoctetes mirrors the earliest formation of "self." In the early formation of the ideal ego, the self, "all perception is in relation to incorporation."⁴³ This process is repeated in Philoctetes' concern about losing his bow, namely

that his ideal ego will be disrupted through his inability to incorporate substance (*biotes*—"livelihood").

It makes sense to consider this need for incorporation to be repetitive, a spiral that becomes wider and wider each time it passes from a withdrawing center. It picks up speed. Lacan points out in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*: "The return of need is directed toward consumption placed at the service of appetite. Repetition demands the new."⁴⁴ In other words, need, a primary energy, is at base a pre-conceptual desire to incorporate the new and assimilate it into oneself.⁴⁵ That said, while the position toward the bow is established through need, the character of the bow itself takes on the status of the Phallus.

The Bow as Phallus and Catalyst to Language

The bow has significance in the realm of the unconscious as well. The fact that Sophocles, Heraclitus, Homer, and later Lacan, situate the bow as between "life" (read: sex/reproduction/survival) and death is significant because of its unconscious status as the Phallus. For Lacan the Phallus is always more than simply the male sex organ. In an amazingly clear commentary on a key writing in *Écrits*, Bruce Fink lays out the meaning of the phallus for Lacan.⁴⁶ The genital area of the infant—really male or female—essentially always remains a mystery. The parents place demand upon the infant that their genitals remain off limits. Of course, there is already a certain amount of physical pleasure or *jouissance* associated with playing with genitals by the time this prohibition comes to pass (the reason the prohibition is necessary in the first place). So, the bodily pleasure associated with this erogenous zone competes with the parental/societal prohibition against self-pleasure. Since the impulse toward genital play begins at the mirror stage, such a source of enjoyment is associated with the image of the genitals. The Phallus takes the image of the genitals which are off limits. The prohibition against masturbation, enforced not simply by the parents but by society, constitutes a castration threat. To avoid this castration, the infant resorts to making a tradeoff to please the parents. The tradeoff is exchanging the joy of self-pleasure for the joy of meeting the approval of the parents. In case it is not obvious, this is where we move from the physical joy attached to an organic body, the imaginary joy of one's "self" pleasing *others*. I am now looking for others to stroke my *ego*, as opposed to stroking my body. Lacan and Fink think a very important switch happens here. We move from a concern over the image of the phallus, as represented in the imaginary castration threat of the genitals, to the symbolic phallus, a placeholder of power and approval. Here, "the symbolic phallus is what is socially valued, valorized, desired."⁴⁷ In other words, our desire shifts from the satisfaction of a desire that involves the image of (not losing) the phallus, to a symbolic desire of meeting the demand of the Other (our parents). Interestingly,

Philoctetes does not seem to be in a position to favor the demand of the other over his need for the bow. But as we said earlier, the castration threat of removing the bow looms large here.

By the time we become adults we are already in the realm of the symbolic phallus. The symbolic phallus concerns the desire by/for/of the Other. In Philoctetes' case, the bow—for the moment in his possession—is the object of another's desire. Because this is the case, the bow simultaneously plays two roles: the object which helps Philoctetes meet his needs, and the object of the Other's desire.

For Lacan, however, the phallus is more than just a symbol, more than just any signifier. It is the map by which all signification is located. This seems like quite a leap at first. But one must only recall the shift that takes place in the response to the castration threat. It is not simply that the infant moves from one bodily pleasure to another, from one image of pleasure to another. By turning away from the genital impulse the infant is turning into a symbolic being. The middle voice is indicative of the realm of the fact that such a being is as much an effect of the realm of the symbolic as it is the cause of it. Fink points out that as newborns we have entered into a symbolic world that pre-exists us (similar to Heidegger's notion of thrownness). Our parents may have talked about us for nine months or more prior to our birth. Our name is usually chosen for us, our mother tongue determined before we are born. The mother tongue constitutes the realm of possibilities of expression. Fink also points out that language can serve as a pacifier for the child when she feels uncertain or abandoned: "whether naming the absence of the mother or the absence of the penis, language has the power to alleviate the oppressive weight of absence by the very process of naming and signifying it."⁴⁸ The mother's absence can be painful, and the unspeaking child will resort to crying. But once he speaks, he can "create" the mother through language. So for Lacan, there is no "negative" symbolic phallus, in the same way there can be a lacking imaginary phallus. Language can create what it lacks in imagination. Lacan says in *Seminar XIX* that "What the phallus denotes is the power of signification." We will explore this idea as well in Homer when we assess who has the power of interpreting the story of Eurytion, Odysseus or the suitors. As the very possibility of signification, the phallus is always replete with the desire of the other, insofar as anything "valuable" or being "meaningful" is a "having something another wants."

In Philoctetes, the symbolic phallus is the bow, simultaneously desired by Philoctetes, Odysseus, and by proxy Neoptolemus. In a repetition of infant abandonment, Philoctetes at one point breaks down and wails in pain. Now, ostensibly, the wailing is the result of the pain from the wound on his foot. But I would also argue that it could be seen as preemptive cry for the separation of Philoctetes from his bow-as-phallus. Shortly after that we hear his plea to allow him to keep his bow, which

includes, among other things, the equation of the bow with his life. Since “phallus” in this sense has to do with the symbolic, it has to do with language as well.

THE REQUIREMENT FOR LANGUAGE: THE RHETORIC OF COERCION AND MEANING OF THE ORACLE

The third main component relating to the Lacanian “self” and the drive in *Philoctetes* is signified by the oracle and the debate over its interpretation, a theme evident in three main components of the play. First, we see the reference to language in the debate between Neoptolemus and Odysseus regarding how to treat Philoctetes. The thrust of the whole play is for Odysseus and Neoptolemus to get Philoctetes to relinquish his bow, which is purported by an oracle to hold the key to Odysseus’ victory against the Trojans. Should they use deception or coercion? Or persuasion? The second reference to language is when Philoctetes undergoes a paroxysm due to the pain of his wound and is unable to speak. It is at this time that he entrusts his bow to Neoptolemus. Lastly, we see the role of language in the drive through the problem of interpreting what the oracle was asking for in the first place. It seems completely possible that Odysseus only heard what he wanted to in thinking that he could take the Philoctetes’ bow to Troy without taking the man. Lacan says, after all, “Desire is, in fact, interpretation.”⁴⁹

Bruce Fink gives us a wonderfully simple account of the relationship between need as organic drive and desire as a secondary energy via language:⁵⁰

Need→The Other as Language→DESIRE

This diagram will help us to give an account of Philoctetes’ equation of his life with this bow. We’ve already discussed the way in which Philoctetes’ physical survival is dependent upon keeping his bow—at least according to his interpretation. But what if there is a deeper unconscious association? Not at the level of hunger, or even images, but language?

One oft-quoted proposition of Lacan’s is that “The unconscious is structured like a language.”⁵¹ In order to give proper context to this idea, we must understand the structuralist account of language in which Lacan is operating. Lacan’s uses Saussure’s linguistics which proposes that words that make up a language have no inherent meaning. Instead, their meaning arises in their combination and use. Thus, we can distinguish between the *langue*, the total of all words in a particular language, and *parole*, a particular utterance or combination of words. However, language can be chopped even into smaller component parts: words and parts of words. To say that the unconscious is structured like a language is to highlight two components of the unconscious. One, it is made of

smaller component parts which are being stored at the same time we are consciously learning language; and two, in the structuralist account of language any "meaning" that arises out of the unconscious arises only in combination of these parts.

Sense from Nonsense

At the heart of the matter is how meaning can arise from "material" which has no meaning in itself. So, the letter "b" has no meaning, but by combining it with a "y" to make "by," we now have a word that means many things, such as a preposition that means "adjacent to." Even then these words only mean something in virtue of the context of an inherited language, and words enter and leave that language constantly by being invented and falling out of use. But to give an example that is outside of language that highlights this process, Lacan turns to the idea of the coin toss.⁵² The outcome of any single coin toss has no meaning. But imagine an extended series of coin tosses. For each coin toss, we can assign a symbol, say + for "heads" and a - for "tails." Now let's take a series of nine coin tosses: + + - - - + + - -. We can break the outcome into pairs, of which there are three separate possibilities: - -; - + (or + -); and + +. Now let's imagine that we give each pair an assigned number: - - = 1; - + / + - = 2; and + + = 3. The amazing part here is that even though we began this exercise with a purely meaningless series of random coin tosses, through recognizing patterns we can develop meaningful rules. For Fink, we can gain several important insights from this exercise. First, we must recognize that no one toss can determine the next toss. Still, the possibility of certain meaningful sets, 1, 2, or 3, arises virtually *ex nihilo* out of the tosses. Secondly, we must recognize certain *impossibilities* on the line of the signifying chain, such as a 1(- -) cannot follow a 3(+ +) in a group of three tosses.⁵³ But most important for Fink (working through Lacan's example) is that the "chain remembers or keeps track of its previous components."⁵⁴ In short, laws can come into being from pure randomness. Even if one argues that *we* (conscious beings) placed the values of 1, 2, and 3, on the types of pairs, we could rebut that 1, 2, and 3 do not have any inherent meaning. The result is that the cipher—the process of encoding itself—gives rise to syntactic laws. There is no meaning *in* the coin tosses, *per se*; all meaning is derived from "the way in which the symbolic matrix is constructed. . ." ⁵⁵ Thirdly, the counting itself constitutes a memory.⁵⁶ The first time we cipher the random tosses, "1, 2, 3," result through associations that are "automatic." It is well known that human beings search for patterns in things. Perhaps the one identifiable aspect of unconscious is its "rule making" even though this rule-making is rarely, if ever, intentional. Fink locates all these processes in the "grey matter." We can easily say they are the results of neurons firing if we like. The initial impressions, be it of words or coin toss patterns, themselves are opaque

and fade over time. What remains is an ingrained—seemingly natural—system. Things are remembered “for me” in the signifying chain itself. This is why when we say that the unconscious is structured like a language, we mean that like language, it is located “out there,” it is Other. It is only through various mysterious introjections that the unconscious affects us.

Such a material memory is why we can say that we have “meaning” and yet, at the same time, said meaning is always inaccessible and opaque. Meaning only appears “in” words (or anything) as a space *between* the signifier and the signified. How any particular meaning arises will always be opaque precisely because it is located in this between realm: words can only refer to other words. Why one word, such as “mug,” refers to one thing, this ceramic cup with a handle in front of me now, will always remain opaque. For that reason, Lacan represents the impasse between signifier and signified as a bar: S (signifier)/ s (signified). The latter remains hidden and slides under the first. For an example of this sliding under, consider the following sentence: John flipped the car. Here “the car” modifies the meaning of the verb “flipped.” Thus, “flipped” slides or moves under the weight of the “the car” at the end of the sentence. Without the addition, John would just be doing a gymnastic movement in the air. It is because of this retroactive structure that Fink can say about Lacan’s theory: “Meaning is not created instantaneously, but only *ex post facto*: after the event in question.”⁵⁷

Apposite the material memory of the signifying chain (1, 2, 3) itself, Lacan proposes that unlike the fading impressions of the conscious ego, the unconscious doesn’t forget. In fact, the signifying chains formed by unconscious associations are the only ones that are indestructible. As an example of this, we will compare Philoctetes’ unconscious attachment to the bow to Lacan’s analysis of Freud’s “Rat Man.”

The Rat and the Bow

Lacan suggests the unconscious goes further than breaking language (and the contents of the unconscious) into words, by breaking them into syllables and phonemes. According to a structuralist account, there is no reason that the letters r-a-t-t are brought together in just that way which would designate a certain type of rodent (*ratt* in German). But once those letters come together randomly, they begin to form indestructible “assemblages” in the unconscious. The example is from Freud’s famous “Rat Man.” Freud’s Rat Man identified with rats. In human beings’ treatment of rats, the Rat Man saw the unwarranted abuse and violence of innocent creatures. Is it the rats’ fault that they are considered a nuisance? Similarly, the Rat Man was himself abused by his father, and for no good reason.⁵⁸ But the word “rat” is located in larger signifying chains for the rat man. One, Freud points out that rats spread syphilis just like the penis. In

that way, the sexual abuse sustained by the Rat Man unconsciously ciphers itself into the word "ratt." Such an example is what Freud called a "verbal bridge," that is when one word becomes associated with another by way of links in their meaning, as opposed to just the phonemic or graphemic connections. In this case, *the potential of spreading a disease* links the words "rat" and "penis." In another example, the Rat Man feels that he owes something to the world, and the word "Raten" in German means "installments" (i.e., payments on a debt). There is also a verbal bridge to the idea that his father was a gambler, *spielratten*. The connections to "ratt" have no intrinsic meanings, but instead in the literal relations to the *assemblages* of letters that underlie them.

The most important point that Lacan makes about such an example is the way in which human beings become subject (read: subjugated) to meaning-less signifying chains. Consider this: the language we enter into is always Other to us. We may use it, but we never "decided" upon it, and we cannot "control" the existence of the signifiers that make it up. We are beholden to them—not only to express ourselves to others, but also in the way we narrate our own lives to ourselves. For the Rat Man the idea of the "subject" as one who is in control is turned on its head: we become "subject to" the Other that is language. In Lacan's skeptical tone: "once the structure of language is recognized in the unconscious, what sort of subject can we conceive of for it?"⁵⁹ What does this recognition of the parallel constitution of meaning through language and structure of the unconscious mean for our analysis of Philoctetes? How does it relate to his identification with the bow?

In the remainder of the chapter, we will answer these questions and come to a better understanding of the role of language in the predicament of Philoctetes. First, building on what we have said above, we should acknowledge what Lacan points out in *Écrits*, namely that the goal of therapy should not be to find the "meaning" behind any neuroses, but to find the key signifier (e.g., as the rat was for rat man). Fink writes: "To Lacan's mind, the unconscious consists of chains of quasi-mathematical [read: encoded] inscriptions, and—there is no point talking about the 'meaning' of unconscious inscriptions or productions."⁶⁰ Thus, we should worry about signifiers themselves (*die Ratt*) and *not* what they may signify. This is not some cop-out of a shortcut. Instead, since it is impossible to bridge the gap to the Real (what is signified in itself) the realization of the fluidity and non-meaning of signifiers in themselves must suffice. Epistemologically speaking, the secret to mental "peace" is that there is no "there" there other than what we see. To use a turn of phrase embraced both by Freud and today's youth: "Let's not make it a thing." Our problem, too often, is that we turn our objects and selves into things that exist in themselves, when, more realistically, we'd be better off understanding them as a fleeting interpretation of a passing moment. The second-guessing and obsessing that we do always comes after the

fact—and is therefore too late. Still at the root of our obsessions most likely lies some signifier thrust on us by chance, the most obvious examples being The Rat Man, and perhaps even the comic hero Batman, whose origin story involves falling in a well surrounded by bats. Bats and rats—and especially the words “bats” and “rats” have no meaning in themselves. It is only the coincidence of a signifier and a (traumatic) moment that “gives” those words so much stock. That’s why in therapy an analyst is not “revealing meaning” of any signifier itself, but rather finding the “irreducible” signifier: “the signifier—which *has no meaning*, and is irreducible and traumatic—to which he as subject is subjected.”⁶¹

According to this logic the name bow—as signifier—is not significant in some way that has a clear connection to some *other* meaning, but in its own right, as a key signifier that subjected the Greek mind to a certain frame of understanding. This is different, I think, than saying that the bow has an *inherent* meaning. Rather, the bow has a meaning that has developed, first in imagination, and then in language, into a symbol of heroics and survival. In this chapter, as well as the next chapters devoted to Heraclitus, Homer, and perhaps to a lesser extent Aristotle, the bow functions on an unconscious level as that which subjects heroes (or the virtuous) to certain repetitions and identifications. The key assemblage of letters in question is BIOS. We need not posit any inherent meaning to those four letters (though perhaps we could break them down into further units of meaning). Indeed, regardless of which usage came first, we could say the four letters are as connected to the idea of a “bow” as they are to “life.” Of course, we can point to the connection between the use of the bow and “survival” but we need not say such a connection is inherently found in the letters themselves.

Carol Poster points out that the *Philoctetes*—like most of the writing of Sophocles’ time—was intended to be heard.⁶² When Philoctetes cries out, “Do not take my BIOS from me” the audience would have “heard” the ambiguity without having to think about it. Interestingly, Poster focuses on the puns that incorporate other “cognates.” The reference then is to unconscious associations made by the listener to the heard words (i.e., signifiers). She points out that Sophocles’ pun “relies on the signification of ‘bios’ and its cognates ‘biote,’ ‘biotes,’ and ‘biotos’ as sustenance or livelihood (i.e., that which is needed to sustain life).”⁶³ The automatic associations point to a signifying chain that is below or beyond the level of an individual conscious memory. For instance, the first phoneme in BIOS is bi- as in *bia* or “force.” It seems reasonable to argue that there is no inherent connection between the letters b-i-a and the idea of “force.” But once we have established that connection, it does not seem strange to have it pop up in very different places: in the growth of the life “force” in BIOS, and in the destructive “force” of the bow, also in BIOS.

What’s more, this example of the bow/life connection with the phonemic root *bia* is particularly significant for our project. Though it is not a

matter of choice, it also appears to be no accident that the question of the organic drive—that of need—in *Philoctetes* comes down to a matter of force. It is force that drives Philoctetes both to *survive* and to *desire* the bow. Even if the letters b-i-a (i.e., beta, iota, alpha) have no deeper connection to the idea of force, once *that* connection is established it should be no surprise that unconscious forces filtered through the language of the other, should choose the bow (*bios*) as that with which Philoctetes identifies. The force of the bow is the force of life.

Helenus' Oracle

While *Philoctetes* has his crisis of need filtered through the linguistic connection of the life-bow, it is also worth noting that *Odysseus* and *Neoptolemus* also undergo a crisis of language. Technically, once we have filtered need through language directed at Others we have reached the level of Demand with respect to the drive. With respect to this analysis, discussing Demand is getting ahead of ourselves, but it is still worth taking a brief look at in closing.

The Other is another name for forces which precede or extend beyond the scope of our subjective consciousness. One of these forces is the constraint of the language we grew up in, our (m)Other tongue. However, another instance of the Other is the expectation of our parents, society, and in general what others want from us. Oliver Harris points out that for Lacan, another Other—especially that of the tragedy—is one's fate or destiny. It turns out that fate, like the ego, is a kind of projection that allows to escape responsibility for ourselves. Harris points out that even analysis is interpreted as an oracle of sorts: "We seek the analyst as oracle to explain us to ourselves, to mythologize us."⁶⁴ Still, we should not undervalue the power of fate as a meaning-making device. Like heroes, we wonder what happens when we do not know what is required of us. This is particularly true of interpreting an oracle: What happens when a specific utterance that places a demand on us is ambiguous?

Philoctetes is not a tragedy only because *Heracles* appears at the end of the play to intervene in order to convince *Philoctetes* to travel with *Odysseus* and *Neoptolemus* to Troy. Doing so will bring *Philoctetes* both physical healing and metaphysical glory. But it could have gone otherwise absent the intervention of a god. In several exchanges we see *Odysseus* seem to suggest that he and *Neoptolemus* can fulfill the prophecy of the Oracle simply by taking *Philoctetes'* bow. The severity of such an action can be seen only when we see the event through *Philoctetes'* eyes: his bow is his life. He needs his bow. The tension is felt by the audience because we feel as though *Odysseus* is getting it wrong. It seems that taking *Philoctetes'* bow by force would both kill *Philoctetes* and be a fundamental misunderstanding of the Oracle. But we should note that ultimately, the same thing that provides an incentive for *Philoctetes* at the

end—that Heracles tells him he will survive and attain glory—is what drives Odysseus’ cunning and meanness: the belief of a life beyond life. Here too, destiny becomes a depository of ego; one in which we move from the imaginary of the ego (that is, a self based on images that we roughly attach to physical person) to one of symbolic inscription. The key to tragedy for Lacan is that “Man aspires to destroy himself in order to have his being *inscribed* [in history].”⁶⁵ In other words, man wants to become permanent in being written down—he wants to arrest the flow of his being and become embodied in language.⁶⁶

Which brings us to the question of what is “contained in” an oracle. Language is, among other things, a set of pre-existing conditions with which we must deal. But a specific utterance can only have a limited number of meanings, right? As many Greek tragedies have shown, to interpret an oracle incorrectly can be a life-taking, life-ruining, or legacy-spoiling affair. Any encounter with an oracle demands an interpretation and interpretation involves choosing. Even taking a “literal” or “fundamental” interpretation of a text involves a choice.⁶⁷

Odysseus believes that Neoptolemus must just “commandeer the bow from Philoctetes.”⁶⁸ He states: “We need his weapons if we are to take the town.”⁶⁹ Later in the play Neoptolemus, almost in an epiphany, decides that the oracle is stating that they need not only Philoctetes’ weapons but also Philoctetes himself. Importantly, the actual words of the oracle that both Odysseus and Neoptolemus seem to be referring to are not preserved in the text of the play itself. Instead, the audience is left wondering until the end which man has it right.⁷⁰

Before we focus on a “correct” interpretation, let’s look at the meaning of this dispute. It is a classic trope for a tragic hero to interpret an oracle in a way that is counter-productive. By “interpret” I mean assigning referents (or signifieds) to certain signifiers. Take Oedipus as an example. Oedipus hears that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. He tries to escape his fate by leaving those people he believes to be his parents. The problem is that Oedipus doesn’t know that he was taken at birth, and raised by a different family. So, in mistakenly identifying his guardians as his birth parents, he leaves his home. The rest is history. The “lesson” we are taught by Oedipus is that no matter how hard we struggle to do so, we cannot escape our fate. This of course is a different type of “necessity” than the one implied by need, and hews closer to desire, since it involves a distinct interpretation. That said, the need present there still involves two important factors that we have been exploring in this chapter: the drive and the Other.

We can see that destiny puts the destined person in a contradictory position that involves both parts of the bow in its metaphor for the human condition. On the one hand, Destiny constitutes an Other, that is, something that his beyond our control. The whole point of Fate is that it exists regardless of our thoughts about it. That said, Fate or Destiny *re-*

quires a response. Insofar as it Demands a response, Fate appeals to the ego, which believes that it can control things. Does one embrace Nietzsche's principle of *amor fati*? Or does one set one's own fate into motion by attempting to escape it, as Oedipus does? The tragic irony of Oedipus is that in his attempt to escape fate, he activates it. What would have happened if Oedipus didn't believe the oracle, and simply stayed with his adoptive parents?

But a different type of understanding is going on in the play *Philoctetes*. Here the problem is not misaligning words with things, but, apparently, missing or ignoring words altogether. We can find the reference to the most likely prophecy of Helenus. As we said above, Neoptolemus appears to have the correct information, which is later repeated by Hercules, that Neoptolemus and Odysseus need Philoctetes as well as the bow. But it takes a special kind of arrogance to ignore key parts of the oracle as Odysseus does. Odysseus' drive is particularly strong in terms of desire and demand. His desire to reify his own legacy (imaginary ego) is very strong; but this is also a demand that he believes Destiny has put on him to take Troy and to become the hero. Each of these shows the narcissistic tendency to incorporate or even annihilate the other in an attempt to assert oneself. Thus, within one play, we see elements of need, desire, and demand, and how the latter can go very awry.

Need, Desire, Demand Revisited in Philoctetes

We have seen that need is the drive of primary energy associated with our earliest organic needs. Furthermore, the drive energy we associated with need aims at the Real, that is, at a pre-conceptual—because pre-representational—confrontation with reality. There is no ideation required in the process of being fed, and so on, at the most basic level.

In the play and character of Philoctetes, we saw that Philoctetes' survival needs were infantile and basic. His bow that cannot miss became associated with the only tool to accomplish those needs. For Philoctetes, the threat of removal of the bow amounted to a castration threat. In addition, because the bow meant a path for achieving glory to Odysseus, and by extension Neoptolemus, the bow was inaugurated into the world of demand. We have said that Demand is just a need articulated or insinuated to the Other. Its most concise formulation is need articulated through language. But these various guises and perspectives the bow takes on—as can any word or symbol—it is elevated to an object of Desire, a central object of desire given its potential to win the war for Odysseus. We will see in chapter 4 the way that Odysseus' "survival" has more to do with his glory or legacy than any physical survival; and there too his struggle for glory is connected to the bow.

Deus Ex Machina

The audience of *Philoctetes* never gets to see a natural resolution to these competing desires. Such a resolution, even if it would be violent, doesn't exist because of a last-minute intervention by Heracles who informs the three principals that Philoctetes is indeed necessary to win Troy, and that if he goes with Odysseus, his awful wound will be healed. As one might imagine, such a *deus ex machina* plot twist belies the rather combustible potential of need, and of competing desires. What if Philoctetes had been stripped of his bow and left to die? It would be very difficult to see Odysseus and Neoptolemus as heroes then. What if Philoctetes, after his paroxysm, returned to good health long enough to slay Odysseus and Neoptolemus with his bow that does not miss? In other words, one could imagine multiple scenarios in which the basic drive for survival, and the derivative but no less strong desire for fame and glory could have led to a catastrophic outcome, absent the intervention of a god.

From Need to Desire

Philoctetes, abandoned on Lemnos with only his bow gives us the perfect example what we mean by need as an element of drive in adult life: I must stay alive at any cost. Even if the bow is not itself sustenance, or not itself protection, it becomes the object to fulfill those needs, as a means to an end. That is, the bow provides a means to get sustenance (*biotes*, livelihood) and a means to protect himself. It's true, Philoctetes is a lover of possessions, his bow, but only because it provides the only reasonable means to his survival in his situation.

In the next chapter, we will see what happens when a regard for self and for objects that one identifies with oneself keeps traveling on what Lacan has called the rails of the metonymy of desire. Philoctetes may have been right that he needs the bow to survive, but there are many objects that we identify with, including a certain image of ourselves, which are not necessary for survival. In looking at the fragments of Heraclitus, in combination with the idea of Desire as a secondary energy of drive, we will see the extent to which we can mistakenly take an object, a belief, or even our own selves, as necessary when they are not. To the extent that basic bodily needs do indeed have to be met, they are an acceptable infringement on our fundamental notion of choice. However, when we confuse a non-necessary object with a necessary one, we go down the road of an unhealthy psyche, and perhaps even sow the seeds of interpersonal violence. In the next two chapters it should become clear why this is the case and how we can address it.

NOTES

1. Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1961), 1.
2. Christopher Gill, "Bow, Oracle, and Epiphany in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Greece and Rome* 27 no. 2, (1980): 138.
3. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (The Free Press, 1973). See especially chapter 1 where Becker introduces his argument about heroism as a response to the psychological problem of denying death.
4. Gill, "Bow, Oracle, Epiphany," 137.
5. Sophocles *Philoctetes* (667-70) as quoted in Gill, 138. Gill notes that while the prophecy is never explicitly stated to the audience, it is apparent that Neoptolemus appears to have it right at 1137-42, to wit, that *Philoctetes and his bow* are needed to defeat the Trojans, and that *Philoctetes will be healed by Alcepius if he joins them*. Odysseus seems to think otherwise, or just disregard the inclusion of *Philoctetes himself* in the prophecy.
6. So. *Phil.* (1128-37), as quoted in Gill 138.
7. So. *Phil.* (931-33) as taken from Carol Poster, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language" (*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 39, No. 1., 2006), 7.
8. For an exquisite treatment of the rhetoric and social implication of the exchange between *Philoctetes* and *Neoptolemus*, see James Boyd White, "Persuasion and Community in *Philoctetes*." In *Heraclitus' Bow* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 7-26.
9. This three-part division is owed to Gill, see above.
10. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*. (Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981), 164.
11. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 72.
12. *Ibid*, 73.
13. E.O. Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987).
14. Oliver Harris, *Lacan's Return to Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 147.
15. G.W.F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Trans. A. V. Miller, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): see sections 178-95 on "Lordship and Bondage."
16. Gill, 138.
17. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 218.
18. Charles Segal, *Sophocles Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 98.
19. An interesting parallel here is the English translation of Lacan's thought that when I am a "plaything" of my thoughts, I *am* not. The contrast is between when I am simply experiencing the world, and when I am reflecting upon that experience. In the first instance, it is *as if* I am a plaything of the gods, because I am not in charge or fully aware of what I am doing.
20. Segal, *Sophocles Tragic World*, 98. See also Paul Woodruff, "The *Philoctetes* of Sophocles." In *A Companion to Sophocles*, by Kirk Ormand, 126-140. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
21. So. *Phil.* 667-70.
22. So. *Phil.* 671-673.
23. So. *Phil.* 1128-37.
24. Poster, "The Task of the Bow," 7.
25. Heaney, *The Cure*, 74.
26. *Ibid.*, 73.
27. Ragland-Sullivan, 82.
28. So. *Phil.*, (931-33) as taken from Carol Poster, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language" (*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 39, No. 1., 2006), 7.
29. So. *Phil.* (1128-37), as quoted in Gill 138.
30. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 302, as quoted in Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 60.

31. Patrick Miller, *Driving Soma: A Transformational Process in the Psychoanalytic Encounter*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), xx.
32. *Ibid.*, xxii.
33. *Ibid.*, xxiv.
34. *Ibid.*, xxxii.
35. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 73.
36. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 154.
37. *Op. cit.*
38. Heaney, *The Cure at Troy*, 52.
39. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177.
40. Hom. Il. 1.33
41. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 300.
42. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 68,
43. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 73.
44. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 61.
45. It is interesting that here too, Lacan hues close to Hegel who in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In his analysis of section 168 J.N. Findlay writes: “(The nature of Desire: to abolish the otherness of the Other.)” <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/help/findlay2.htm> accessed 7/11/18.
46. Bruce Fink, “The Lacanian Phallus and the Square Root of Negative One,” in *Lacan to the Letter*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 129-140.
47. *Ibid.*, 137.
48. *Ibid.*, 139.
49. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 176.
50. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 6.
51. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 216
52. Incidentally, the following coin toss example also has meaning for articulating the relationship between chance and necessity. While each toss is of course open to chance, the likelihood that we will find patterns makes it seem necessary.
53. See note 52.
54. This and preceding example come from Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 18.
55. *Ibid.*, 18.
56. Not unlike computer memory, not all memory must be “aware.” To store information is enough to constitute memory in this sense.
57. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 64.
58. Now we would think that the reason that Rat Man chose rats as his “spirit” animal would have to be contingent on circumstances—there are many other animals needless disregarded by human beings.
59. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, 292.
60. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 21. Fink talking about a passage on page 212 of *The Four Fundamental Concepts* in which therapy comes down to not revealing meaning but “reducing signifiers to their non-meaning (lack of meaning) so as to find the determinants of the whole subject’s behavior.”
61. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 251. In the treatment of Lacan in this book, I have tried as much as possible to stay away from the Lacanian algebra and stick primarily to his linguistic structures. Still one can see in this discussion of getting at irreducible signifiers the notion of a cipher. Hence, the mathematics so annoyingly present in Lacan’s later work is there to show that laws and patterns become meaningful by being juxtaposed even if individual signifiers have no meaning. This is mimicked in the structure of the unconscious—it thrives on connections between signifiers which have no meaning on their own and are not decided upon by any conscious ego.
62. Poster, “The Task of the Bow,” 7.
63. *Op. Cit.*
64. Oliver Harris, *Lacan’s Return to Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 155.
65. Lacan, *Seminar VIII: Transference*, 98 as quoted in Harris, *Lacan’s Return*, 155.
66. See Harris, *Lacan’s Return*, 152-5 for more on this.

67. A key phenomenological fact that many "literalists" or "textualists" or "fundamentalists" from interpretation of the Constitution to sacred texts such as the Bible or the Quran seem to forget.

68. *Ibid.*, 7.

69. *Ibid.*, 10.

70. See n. 5 and 9.

THREE

Heraclitus' Bow: Death and Desire

In the previous chapter we saw Philoctetes' attachment to the bow rise above the level the Desire and constitute an actual biological need. As a reminder, drive is the overall "impulse" toward the constancy of one's own existence. Drive can be split into three parts: need, based in the sheerest biological survival; desire, the constancy of oneself in objects; and demand, the constancy of oneself through recognition from others. Need here constituted the relationship to an object deemed—pre-reflectively—necessary to our biological survival. We saw that Lacan sees need as an "organic drive toward organic satisfaction."¹ While there is certainly an aspect of "desiring" in something we need, there is arguably an intersubjective acknowledgment that certain objects transcend mere want and extend to the level of something required for survival at a biological level.²

The focus of this chapter will be placing the metaphor of the bow in Heraclitus, and Heraclitus' worldview more generally, in conversation with Lacan's notion of Desire. Desire reaches beyond the level of biological need. Desire can be described as that force of energy aimed toward objects that transcend organic need; it is a force that is pervasive in every human activity regardless of its relation to survival in the biological sense. What's more, Desire is universally the result of a mistaken and unconscious confusion: that some object desired will lead to a permanent satisfaction. The motivation for various instances of Desire is unconscious and can be traced back to our infancy. Specifically, Desire is result of a failed *jouissance*, or an imagined wholeness or unity with our (m)Others, or caretakers, in infancy.³ In this imaginary state of *jouissance* there is no reason to desire anything since there is no gap between "what we want" and "what we are." If drive is conceived of as fundamental *pulsion* or energy that aims toward constancy, then Desire is the part of

that energy that aims (back) toward constancy of the subject.⁴ In other words, it is desire that plays a key role in how one constitutes oneself, by “picking” objects of importance which, in turn, turn us into an object, that is, something permanent.

In this chapter, we will see that bow serves as a metaphor for Desire, as much as it did a substitute for need. While lecturing on the “drive” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan quotes a fragment of Heraclitus: “To the bow is given the name of life (*Bíos*), and its work is death.” Lacan then goes on to say, “What the drive integrates at the outset in its very existence is a dialectic of the bow, I would say even of archery.”⁵ I will argue that Lacan’s allusion to Heraclitus in his comment on the “dialectic of the drive” can be expanded upon through four key insights that are shared by the two thinkers: 1) Desire is the difference between *many* aims and *one* goal, 2) Desire constitutes the *internal variance* of the subject (which can be seen as a wanting for object permanence), 3) Desire is a *stationary tension*, and 4) Desire *folds back on itself*. With respect to the above four key concepts, the bow is a metaphor for Desire. This relationship is nested within a larger framework in which the bow stands in as metaphor for drive (the genus of desire) more generally. To analyze the relationship between the bow and Desire, I will be intertwining insights about desire in Lacan’s theory with the analysis of Heraclitus’ fragments that pertain to said insights. Before we begin our analysis of Desire in Heraclitus and Lacan as it pertains to the bow, let’s look at some similarities between the method of the two thinkers.

The Obscurantists

Granted, the term “obscurantist” usually carries with it a negative connotation. It generally refers to one who intentionally wishes to obstruct knowledge. However, both Heraclitus and Lacan foster obscurity intentionally, in order to achieve a reaction in those who hear/read their works. Particularly, each wanted to draw into question the possibility of “knowledge,” that is, some set of information or interpretation that is beyond question. Among the many warnings that Heraclitus gives about learning is: “Let us not concur casually about the most important matters.”⁶ For Lacan’s part, he warns: “My *Écrits* are unsuitable for a thesis: they are antithetical by nature: one either takes what they formulate or leaves them.”⁷ Compare that to Heraclitus’ warning in what scholars believe to be the first entry of his writings: “Although this account holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard.”⁸

Secondly, and building on this first point, both thinkers have rather cynical accounts of the abilities of their fellow human beings. Heraclitus writes: “They hear like the deaf. The [common] saying is their witness:

absent while present."⁹ Compare this to Lacan talk about the situation of the average patient: "the ears are made *not* to hear with."¹⁰

Thirdly, both thinkers have a keen focus on language as tool for the provocation of thought through puns, word games, and so on. Both attempt to be cryptic in hopes of allowing the reader/listener to arrive at their own conclusion through epiphany. Also, both utilize plays on words in order to accomplish this. I will just give two examples from Lacan. Lacan discusses The Name (*nom*) of the Father; he also calls this this The No (*non*) of the Father to emphasize its prohibitive effects. Of course, *nom* and *non* are only one letter apart in spelling, and sound virtually indistinguishable in their pronunciation, which is the way Lacan's lecture audiences would have heard them. Another example in Lacan involves his famous term, *jouissance*. He offers that people also get enjoyment from their interpretations, playing with language, and so forth. In so doing he refers to *jouissance* as *jouis-sens*, literally, enjoyment (as in the sense of a word used). The clearest example of a play on words in Heraclitus is the one that we have already begun to examine: the homonymy of *bios* for "bow" and "life."

But, importantly, for both thinkers the play on words and riddles are not *just* riddles for the sake of offering the reader a challenge. Instead, the riddle of language shows us something about the "riddle" of things themselves. In Uvo Hölscher's estimation: "The point conveyed by the riddles form is: Things, too, present a paradoxical secret reality, which, at the same time is manifest. Things themselves are a riddle to be solve—one only has to be able to read the cipher; that is, one must learn to understand the visible as a sign as self-proclaiming, of the invisible."¹¹

For both thinkers, if the purpose of language is to hint at what can neither be said, nor made apparent. Lacan recognizes the emptiness of language in two ways. Firstly, on multiple occasions, Lacan notes that "Lack," by which Lacan means a space in which meaning can be generated, "only comes into being through being named."¹² Language, as a symbolic matrix, shows us that "the signifier functions to realize an order of being that did not exist before."¹³ Or put a different way: "The being of language is the non-being of objects."¹⁴ Furthermore, while many philosophers might be inclined to begin with the question of God, or of beginnings, or of existence, Lacan points out that "For there even to be a question (an excess) there must be language."¹⁵ That is, to think against the fullness of what presents itself to us just through sense, there must be a language in which to have thought. Still, for Lacan, language, or he as calls it the *symbolic*, is the site of all meaning, personal or otherwise. At first glance, this might be a point where he and Heraclitus differ. For instance, one fragment of Heraclitus is *physis kryptesthai philei*, usually translated "Nature loves to hide." Is there then a nature or a universal order? Perhaps, but such an order, it turns out, is not one that is disclosed in a straightforwardly objective or scientific way. Martin Heidegger

translates the same fragment as “Being {emerging appearance} inclines toward self-concealment.”¹⁶ In other words, the very fact of beings appearing to us tends to hide behind the objects that are disclosed in the process. We lose the process for the product. Of course, part of the process of disclosure is the naming itself, which we look at more closely throughout this chapter. But we see a very similar idea in Lacan’s observation that “the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing, and this constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire.”¹⁷ It is the fact that language can speak of non-objects—nothing, things that don’t exist—that draw out the possibility of desire indefinitely. In other words, in both visions of the relation of language to reality there is a stubborn, or perhaps even impossible, barrier between the real and our attempt to disclose it. Somewhat ironically—since it is the truth we want—it is desire itself that constitutes the gap. The pleasure principle of linguistically modelled thought obscures the reality principle to the point of non-disclosure. For this reason, Lacan imagines a Copernican revolution in Desire, one in which the subject is constituted by the language available to her as opposed to the usual order of the subject disclosing her desires in language. With that, let’s look at what desire looks like in each of these thinkers, and how this relates to the tension of the bow.

DESIRE AS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ITS AIMS AND THE “GOAL”

One central aspect of Desire is the difference between its aim and its goal, or the forestalling of the impossible point at which desire has achieved its singular aim hidden behind all the others. Freud makes a similar distinction which Ken Gemes explains well: “Freud often uses the aim/object contrast to differentiate the characteristic activity of a drive (the aim) from the particular things that drive focuses on at different times (the objects).”¹⁸ We might say that there is the directionality of a drive, and then the object it is headed toward. The directionality and the thrust itself are not halted even in achieving its aim. For example, while I may think that I want a cup of coffee, what I really want is a feeling of satisfaction, unity, and comfort, one which ultimately goes back to my infantile development. Meeting this goal is impossible precisely because Desire transcends the objects that it purports to seek satisfaction in. In other words, Desire always constitutes an excess regarding “what it desires.”

As has already been discussed in our treatment of the origin of the *moi*, or the imagined self, in chapter 1, the original and primary aim of the infant psyche is reunification with the mother. All our relations of Desire aim at that goal of that impossible reunification. But, importantly, and as a metonymy the goal is structured as the *indefinitely* deferred referent, the aims themselves always look different than the goal, that is, the ultimate

point of reference for desire. A person worried about amassing wealth would not claim (nor probably think) that they are doing so as a substitute for reunifying with their (m)Other (primary caretaker). Conveniently, Lacan turns to the metaphor of archery to explain this phenomenon: "In archery, the *goal* is not the *but* [aim] either, it is not the bird you shoot, it is having scored a hit and thereby attained your *but*."¹⁹ I aim at a bird in an archery contest, which constitutes my aim, *in order to* score a point, my goal. In this example, Lacan plays on the ambiguity of the word *but* in French. The word *but* can mean both "aim" and "goal." Tellingly, the word *but* oscillates between two possible but related meanings: the object we are aiming at, our "aim," and the thing we actually hope to accomplish, our "goal." In this example, the goal differs from the aim: the goal is to score a point, but we can only do this through aiming at the bird. While in the process of shooting, the aim of hitting the bird eclipses the real goal of scoring more points.

Unlike an archery contest, Lacan finds that the circuit of the drive never reaches its goal—a final point, an end to striving—even while hitting what it aimed for. For this reason, Lacan imagines the arc of the arrow going up and over the object desired (what he calls the *object a*) and returning to its source.²⁰ As the instantiation of a lack, the goal is ever-receding. In fact, one could say that the goal is *behind us*, in that it is an imaginary past which did not happen once, and cannot happen again. The Symbolic, the realm of language, and the Imaginary, the realm of representation (of everything), reify a past time that we cannot possibly access in the present. When we consider the ever-receding goal of reunification, tantamount to the dissolution of the individual we understand ourselves to be, it becomes apparent that the "arrow" we fire is never quite hitting the mark. There is always a glancing shot, a missing the mark, which in turn turns the failure of the shot back toward the archer herself. It is for this reason that Mladen Dolar uses the metaphor of the boomerang to describe Desire.²¹ The boomerang reaches its end, its aim, only to return to the source. Having no other telos, the boomerang's "goal" is its source. Lacan's point about having scored a hit in archery constituting the goal reinforces what Heraclitus finds: the work or aim of archery is different than its source.

Perhaps the notion of this inevitable return, a fundamental lack of progress, is a little too pessimistic for some. In the latter half of this study we will look at the way in which the human-as-archer can change and improve. While our focus in that part will be Aristotle's virtue ethics, in situating what we can and cannot overcome in terms of our drives and outside forces we might look to Cicero:

The [archer] must do everything he can to hit the target (*skopos*), and yet it is this act of doing everything in order to hit the target and realize his plan, which is, if I may say, the end (*telos*) that the shooter is seek-

ing. It is this that corresponds to what we call the sovereign good in life, whereas hitting the target is only something that can be wished for, but it is not something worth being sought after for its own sake.²²

The Cicero-Lacan-Heraclitus distinction between aim (target) and goal (end) speaks to what is the central issue of desire: our mistaken interpretation of what we want and what we are capable of controlling. If we are aiming only for the target, then we forget to do everything we can to hit it. It is like students who come into office hours to say that they are unhappy with their grades and forget to ask how to improve them. If we forget that we can only do what we can, or that we can only have things for a short time, or that names are only an approximation of reality, then we are mistaking the viewpoint of our own false ego for a broader and much messier reality. And as Aristotle reminds us: "It is not wise to put a false construction on things." In looking more closely at the difference between what we are aiming for, and the actual goal, we will look at two phenomena each intertwined with each other: names and things, and desire as interpretation.

Targets: Desire as a Difference between Names and Things

The difference between an aim and *the* goal can be mapped onto a general difference between "names" and the "things" they name. Before we apply Lacan's logic of Desire to Heraclitus' doctrine of names, it is important note a few relevant points about the place of names in Heraclitus' thought. One, "the name was for archaic thought [e.g., Heraclitus] in general the model of how language works, comprising that which later was distinguished from the word as 'idea,' 'meaning,' or 'notion.'"²³ In other words, the name was inclusive of the "concept"; it was the spiritual flipside to the material being of the thing named (though such a distinction in those terms may not have been recognized). Two, the concern of Heraclitus is not so much a difference between names and what they name, but names and the underlying *unity* of what they name disjointedly. Consider the following fragment: "The god: day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. It alters, as when mingled with perfumes, gets named according to the pleasure [flavor, taste] of each one."²⁴ Roman Dilcher notes about this fragment: "The name will only be able to denote one side of the opposition or the opposition in one field."²⁵ In the naming the "and" (e.g., winter *and* summer) must become an "or" (e.g., *winter* and *summer*). Insofar as winter is only winter in virtue of an opposing season, the name "winter" is misleading: "by their very function to refer and to denote one single thing, they disregard what it essentially is, its place within the whole."²⁶ Keep in mind that this "singling out" of a particular thing that overlooks the whole is precisely what goes on in Desire; we focus our immediate attention on *this* object of desire, on satisfying *this* desire while at the same time missing that *Desire*

as such is not something that can be satisfied. Or to put it back into language used in the previous section, we frequently confuse our aims with our goal. The last point to be made regarding names is that for archaic thinking a name, in naming a concept, named the function as much as the thing. In other words, the very naming of something as a "bow" elicited an understanding not only of "what this thing is" but also "what this thing does." The recognition of this double-reference ought to remind us that the goal-oriented nature of desire is built into the very thing which expresses desire, namely, language. As we will see, every "This is x" implies a "I want this to be x," which in turn implies a "I want to be (x)."

Despite the original goal of unification being forever deferred, Lacan believes that in his unique insight into the human psyche, Heraclitus went "straight to the target."²⁷ Here is the fragment of Heraclitus with which Lacan is dealing: "The name (*honoma*) of the bow is life (*bios*); its work (*ergon*) is death."²⁸ Heraclitus' most likely concern in this fragment is the disconnect between names and functions. The focus on the name (*honoma*) versus the work (*ergon*) should get us to see that the fragment revolves around three key themes: language, reality, and, importantly, the *unnamed* space between the two (represented in Charles Kahn's translation above by the semicolon). Ever since Heidegger we have recognized that primary mode of interpretation is to see things not as discrete objects but only in a web of reference and *as* useful for us.²⁹ Language only instantiates and reifies reference points in our engagement with the world. A hammer would not be called a "hammer" were it not understood to be used "to hammer" in a nail. Furthermore, our initial engagement with such objects is a *visible* engagement with "objects" that precedes any *conceptual* (invisible) engagement with them. It is difficult to determine how much of this Heraclitus would have realized, and that is not important here. The important part is that there is a long history of debate over the relation between words and things, and both Heraclitus and Lacan enter that debate. If the debate has been situated around the relationship *between* words and things, it is the "between" itself that both Lacan and Heraclitus want us to focus on, even as each plays with other dichotomies: life/death (*Bios/Thanatos*; *Eros/Thanatos*) and stasis/*dunamis* (or its substitute: *epea* "word"/*ergon* "deed").

The Bow as Desire/Life/Death

Heraclitus' bow fragment turns on a pun. It is thought that in Epic Greek, the word *bios* was written without accents. *Bios*, the Epic Greek word, can mean either "life" or "bow" depending upon the context. (Recall in the last chapter the productive ambiguity in Philoctetes' plea not to take his bow/life from him.) Carol Poster points to the fundamental problem that Heraclitus is highlighting here: "Ontology could only be dis-

cussed in words; and words, in some manner, not only signified things but served to construct phenomena by reshaping the way in which raw sense data were conceptualized and interpreted.”³⁰ According to Heraclitus, the way we discuss beings alters the very *being* of the beings under discussion. To use words to describe something is in effect a change not in the thing being described, but rather in the relationship between the thing being described, and the person to whom they are being described (including ourselves). So, per Heraclitus, words are not suited to the things they describe—the bow “problem” just being the most poignant example of this. In this example, “the name now asserts precisely the opposite of what is in reality the case”³¹ —the name asserts “life” when the function of the bow is “death.” Words are a static marker which overlay a fluid target. It is not our concern here to “solve” this problem. Rather, with the problem of this inevitable difference between words and the “things” they name, Heraclitus is performing the same issue that is central to Lacan’s structural insight about metaphor and metonymy; namely, such forms of reference never reach the signified that is presumed to lie beyond the signifiers. Or, to put it a different way, there is no “immaculate perception”³² unaffected by the conceptual prejudices of the thinking and speaking perceiver, and unaffected by the overdetermination of language itself.

But Heraclitus appears not to be concerned with the world devolving into pure relativism. Rather, this fragment, in combination with others, appears to be saying something about the way *all* humans experience the bow. Thus, the “symbol” of the bow can be taken on two planes, the linguistic (name), and the physical (thing named). Hölscher breaks it down in the following way: Bow, *bios*, as a written symbol—a proper symbol in Lacan’s terminology—is life. The bow as a *physical* symbol—what Lacan would call the image—is death.³³ While we cannot “think” both at the same time, they exist on a phenomenological continuum in thought. The impossibility of articulating this continuum in any other way is designated by what Lacan would call the Real—the realm of the impossible. Therefore, we have completely organized each of the registers of human experience into one thing, the bow: The image (the physical bow), the symbol (the name “bow”), and the absent presence of the real (the impossibility of bridging the two). On the linguistic plane (the realm of the Symbolic in Lacan) the “bow” symbolizes life apropos its *name*. In other words, the signifier *Bios*, refers equally to “bow” and “life.” On the physical plane, the bow symbolizes death because of the “work” it can do. To adapt the famous Winston Churchill saying: Language is a poor substitute for reality, but it is the best one we have.

For Lacan, the “name” is of central importance to the development of the speaking subject’s understanding of the world. Symbolic representation is only available to us as a response to the prohibition against reunification with the (m)Other as laid down by the Father.³⁴ In his own inter-

pretation of the Oedipal drama, Lacan calls the paternal intervention the "phallic injunction," which happens through Law or the "Name-of-the-Father, a play on the identical pronunciation of the French *non* [no] and *nom* [name]." ³⁵ In some sense every name becomes a "no" to the extent that it partially determines the understanding of a being to the exclusion of all other possible understandings.

The bow then—in its name being different than its work—serves a metaphor for the very essence of the problem of naming: the signified will always slide beneath the signifiers which point to it. The lack or gap that pops up between words and things to the attentive mind is the space in which the excess of signification is created.

Arrows: Desire as Interpretation

Desire is located precisely in this gap between words and things. For Heraclitus this might be initially ascertained in terms of his view of the function of the oracle: "The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither declares, nor conceals, but gives a sign." ³⁶ Where it pertains to the communication between the individual and the gods it is up to the human individual *to interpret*. This interpretation will inevitably reflect what the interpreter wants—or in the case of Oedipus, doesn't want. For that reason, Lacan goes as far as to say "Desire, in fact, is interpretation itself." ³⁷ The great unseen paradox of Heraclitus' fragments in general, but of the bow fragment in specific, is that while *names* are dead, it is the *work* of interpretation that brings them alive. Heraclitus fragments—and any "writing" for that matter—needs a reader to *be* anything at all. But once it has a reader, and a good one at that, the words come alive. In Lacan's terms we could say that the "signifier installs a lack-of-being in the object relation." ³⁸ In other words, there is a space opened between the word and the signified in which the subject creates itself. This creates the illusion of a subject's "being" in the assertion of any particular interpretation. "Coextensive with language, yet desiring from within, the *je* ["I"], or the speaking ego] mistakenly thinks it can represent its own totality by *designating* itself [as "I"] in a statement." ³⁹ This mistaken self-designation is tantamount to self-constitution. The constitution in question here is particularly Greek, not Judeo-Christian. In designating myself with the expression *je* ("I") I am making of chaos an order; I am narrating myself into an imaginary presence by unifying disparate events and objects, as opposed to creating something *ex nihilo*. And here is the key to the Lacanian-Heraclitean insight—even if there is no Oedipal drama required for Heraclitus—that language springs up as the result of an irreparable rupture. I speak *over* the gap that is my "core" being—a lack brought about by an initial separation. As some Heraclitean scholars point out, Heraclitus' own fragments—not unlike Lacan's puns—are intentionally difficult so as to all of a sudden jump out at us: "All Heraclitean sayings are

discoveries: insights that dawn upon the thoughtful soul like the solution to a riddle."⁴⁰ Or take Roman Dilcher's account of the same: "The words are arranged so that all of a sudden a profound insight springs into the mind from beneath the surface. . ."⁴¹ This *beneath the surface* is expressed by Lacan through the language of the unconscious. When we understand language is the result of a secondary energy, as a pathway opened up only first by an initial frustration, "'law' ('no'), Desire, and language become indissolubly linked in conscious associations whose relational links reside in the unconscious."⁴² In lecturing on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Lacan acknowledges, "The father, the Name-of-the-father, sustains the structure of Desire with the structure of law. . ."⁴³ Both Desire and law involve an initial separation of self from world—first to project into the world a "goal" which is impossible to reach, and then prohibit—through language (for what is the law if not composed of language?)—the reaching of this initial Desire.

Desire and language are deeply intertwined in Heraclitus as well, but this time from the standpoint of divinity:

The god: day and night, winter summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. It alters, as when mingled with perfumes, it [oil or fire] gets named according to the *pleasure (hedonen)* of each one.⁴⁴

The wise is one alone, unwilling and *willing (ouk ethelei kai ethelei)* to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.⁴⁵

Note that in the first instance the fire, or oil, is named according to the pleasure (*hedonen*) of each perfume (or incense). In other words, the perfumes themselves *tend toward* certain names. Things desire as well, apparently. In the second case, the wise is willing and unwilling (*ethelei kai ouk ethelei*) to take on the name of Zeus. Again, it is the wise, or wisdom itself, that is ambivalent about being named. In each case Heraclitus introduces a distance between what is named, and the names given—and it is the situation itself that calls for a name. As Poster observed: "Heraclitus is an early example of a *logos* philosopher. . . he believes that investigation of language can provide information that is not exclusively linguistic. He is an early example of the linguistic turn in Greek thought."⁴⁶ What Heraclitus wants to investigate is the human attitude or attunement in the moment of nomination. As Roman Dilcher points out: "If the Heraclitean notions are used by a barbarian soul, by someone unfit to think in the right manner and to act wisely, then all words he may employ will be spoken in vain."⁴⁷ In any case, one gets the distinct sense that for Heraclitus language transcends its user, and, like Lacan, can even serve to determine the fate of its user. So, if what lies under language is essentially "unnamable," what we are naming in each case might be desire itself: "Desire, a function central to all human experiences is the desire for nothing nameable."⁴⁸ Like the failed search for *jouissance* or completion

in objects, words also don't quite get to the real. Or as Lacan says in *Television*: "Words fail."⁴⁹

Let's pause here a moment to sum up the basic argument about names. Heraclitus sees a fundamental split between things and their names, with the insight that all things, and all functions for that matter, are sliding beneath a layer of words on a slick layer of time and change. Heraclitus takes advantage of this separation itself to invoke in his reader/listener a break between words and their meaning. His thoughts have been compared to lightning, but one could also compare them to arrows. The pun of the bow being named life is itself an arrow—landing on its target of death. Lacan recognizes the same rupture. It is the space between individual and individual, and words and individuals, that is the site of Desire, language, and law. Every name is a "no" insofar as it is a substitute for the nervous energy created from the inability to reach our *actual* libidinal goals of reunification with the (m)Other. Language becomes a substitute for our inability to recoup our losses, a way of making ourselves whole again.⁵⁰ The Desire for any object, *objet a*, is itself an expression of the loss of the primordial connection between self and other.

Lacan's notion of Desire, the part of the drive that corresponds to mapping the existence of the ego onto external objects, can be seen in the symbolic use of the bow in Heraclitus' fragments. Desire is a "secondary energy" that derives from *jouissance*, or the pleasure associated with having all our needs met as an infant.⁵¹ Desire finds its roots in the Desire for object permanence of both the other and herself. Interestingly it is the "no" of the forced separation—the "phallic injunction"—that pushes the infant into language. Because we are forever looking for substitute objects to replace our imaginary lost ones, language is forever "talking about something else" in the same way that Desire is always Desire for something else. Therefore, the linguistic plane and the "physical" plane are both metonymies, with each object referring to the next, though ne'er the twain shall meet.

The bow itself, like Desire, contains a complicated instance of what Lacan means by metonymy: one signifier referring to a different signifier on the same plane, here the plane of life and death. This relationship is best captured in the common saying "Death is a part of life." Every life "refers to" a death, as far as we know of no living being which will not die. A parallel can be drawn between the absent referent of death in life, and the difference between aims and goals. We could point out that death is the "goal" or end of life. Apposite death being a part of life, Dilcher reads the place of God or Zeus in the fragments as one of this contradiction. The name Zeus—*Zenos*—has at its core *zen*, life, but Zeus is also the bringer of death.⁵² But that would not be the same as suggesting that we all aim to die. Within the fragment there lies a metonymy in which life (hidden in the word for bow) always refers to death.

Seen in this way, as a reciprocal oscillation of life and death, the bow (and Zeus) involves more than just a physical tension of the string holding in tension the two limbs, but also a *symbolic* tension. It is remarkable the degree to which this tension is sustained and preserved in Heraclitus' own language. The statement begins by describing the bow in one way, "the name of the bow is life." Then, like an arrow fired and hanging in the sky, the reader is held in suspense until the statement hits the mark, "its work is death." The concept "bow" is held in tension between its name, "life," and its work, death. Brooks Haxton's poetic translation is even more compelling: "The living, when the dead wood of the bow springs back to life, must die."⁵³ For Haxton, even the bow itself partakes in the cycle life and death. While the bow remains static, the wood remains "dead," when it is in use, it becomes alive. While the wood of the bow is "dead," static, others remain alive, when it is alive, drawn back to fire, others will die. This fragment is so interesting to Lacan because he sees the same metonymy present in the sex drive, insofar as sex is always referring to death and vice versa. Let's turn to this relation.

Life-Death-Sex-Second Life

Without a doubt, the seed of Desire involves a biological component before it exceeds it. We Desire survival before we Desire permanence. Biologically, the "presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death. . ." ⁵⁴ because death demands procreation to continue further life.⁵⁵ Lacan's reference to the bow first appears in the context of discussing the relation of the sexual drive to the larger issue of drive as such. It is only in this context that Lacan's question makes sense: "Is it surprising that its final term should be death, when the presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death?"⁵⁶ In Heraclitus' formulation that the *name* of the bow is "life," not sex. But for Lacan the drive for survival is bound up with the avoidance of death, and all three—life, sex, and death—become caught up in language in the circuit of Desire. Therefore, sexuality is one of the expression of drive as fundamental energy that aims toward constancy.

Lacan informs of us that sexuality occurs between the two extremes of the "analytic experience": The primal repressed and interpretation.⁵⁷ According to Lacan there is a mismatch between the ongoing force of Desire and the finality of human sexuality, and so the satisfaction of the drive remains "partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality." By "finality" he means its telos, reproduction. Presumably there would be much less to sexuality if its "draw" were to stop at procreation. In other words, "[I]n a lifetime individuals continually change objects and goals in their Desiring quest. One major arena where Desire is meant to be satiated is sex. . . But no object—be it a person, thing, sexual activity, or belief—will finally and permanently quell Desire."⁵⁸ Though sexual

urges can be temporarily discharged using the body, Desire nonetheless carries on post-coitus; all sexual drives must be partial. What begins as sexual ends as something else. So goes the dialectic of sexuality: there is something repressed (always a result of social interaction for Lacan, never "nature"), this repressed expresses itself in a symptom, or releases itself through the body. Being unable to ever permanently empty out the source of the repression, the drive is a *Konstante Kraft*—a constant force—that is always sustained in tension.⁵⁹ There can be (or appear to be) a release of this tension in which the counterpart to sexuality becomes the Desire to return to a tensionless state, that is, to be dead. But Desire always returns as "desire for something else" and the temporary state of state of satisfaction "leaves something to be desired." We will explore this idea below in the section on Desire as a stationary tension. Before we do, I'll make one more point about nomination and identification.

Nomination and Identification

Language is one way to pacify this inner tension. Lacan claims the unconscious is "constituted by the effects of speech on the subject" and it is "structured like a language."⁶⁰ By this Lacan means to address two key connections. One is that language is another thing we manipulate to establish a "self" over a lacuna that is left once we undergo the fundamental separation from the primary caretaker: "Just as the child has been manipulating objects for many months, it now learns to manipulate words in the same manner: both to situate self in the world and as an aid to mastering the experience of division from the mother."⁶¹ The second connection is the parallel between the structure of language and the structure of Desire, both as a metonymy. Here "metonymy" refers to the way that one word just refers to the next—or other words. Lacan assumes Saussure's position that the meaning of a word is only the area that is carved out by its difference from other *words*. In other words, words refer to words and nothing else. Desire is the same way— "being caught in the rails—eternally stretching forth towards the *Desire for something else*—of metonymy."⁶² So both Desire and language cover a gap and extend into indefinite repetition in virtue of ineffaceable unconscious that expresses itself through both. "A 'self' is selected, for example, on the basis of identificatory mergers with images (metaphor) within a referential context of combinations of objects (metonymy)."⁶³ In short, the unconscious shares the structure of language because our way of making sense of the world becomes linguistic once we are introduced into the social world. Similarly, the self is formed as a combination of "images" and "imaginary objects," or words.

The space between words and things for both Heraclitus and Lacan is the space of thought, play, and interpretation. On the one hand, we are "bound" by these words by being thrown into a language that is not of

our own making. Desire forms as our misguided energy is put into a focus on finding ourselves in objects outside of ourselves—those objects themselves being primarily constituted by language. On the other hand, there exists the possibility of *recognizing* this difference between things and our understanding as an opening to wisdom and growth. Thus, the one who does not recognize this difference remains “dead,” while the one who does recognize can become “alive.” Conversely, death for Lacan does not mean only biological death, but the realization of the death of the “self” within life. A healthy psyche is one which is prepared to do “death work,” or what amounts to an acknowledgment of its own lack of permanence.⁶⁴ At the symbolic level the life and death becomes a matter of a relationship to oneself and how one speaks about oneself. Here the “death” involves “letting go” of beliefs about the self and objects of its Desire. By embracing fluidity—as fungible Desire, as interpretation—we arrive at the second insight of Lacan and Heraclitus (though certainly not theirs alone): the internal variance of the “self” and “objects.”

DESIRE AS INTERNAL VARIANCE OF THE SUBJECT: THE BOW AS OTHER THAN ITSELF

It is important to remember that “real objects can never literally replace the lost objects of pre-castration Desire”⁶⁵; they cannot possibly replace the wholeness “experienced” prior to separation (castration) from the maternal other. And yet this very Desire is exactly what motivates us, what drives us forward in our endeavors: “All efforts to give meaning to one’s life manifest Desire.”⁶⁶ Desire, as interpretation, and like the unconscious, is linguistic. It is channeled into certain socially pre-given “aims” and “objects.” But here uncertainty shares the same ground as (imagined) certainty: “For there even to be a question (an excess) there must be language.”⁶⁷ If language is the product of an initial separation, the social order is itself a dialectic between self (internalized otherness) and other (projected objectivity). I take up the project of “explaining” myself only to the degree that I invite variation into the imagined consistency of my own subjectivity. Here too, the subject (the imagined object of Desire) is like the bow in its internal variance from itself. Heraclitus writes: “They do not comprehend how a thing *agrees at variance with itself*; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.”⁶⁸

We have seen how the dialectic between self and other, society and the individual, open a space in which meaning is created. The internal variance mentioned in the fragment above has two more facets that we will explore further below: the constant tension of this “state” of Desire, as opposed to the tensionless state of death, and the idea that Desire is a force that always “backward-turning” (*palintropos*) toward its source. In this section we will delve more deeply into the “selection” of the self

from the world and the internal variance that creates. If I am always Desiring the other, and desiring *that the other Desire me*, then that same "I" must always itself be other than that itself. "In Lacan's dialectical context Desire first emanates from the *moi's* [i.e., my ego] thrust toward recognition of/from/about the Other(a) [i.e., the idea of who I am to the other person]: Who am I? What am I to you? The space between the *moi* and the Other(a) is, therefore Desire."⁶⁹ To explain this further, I must first situate the parts of the "self."

The Subject of Desire

We (falsely) establish our own sense of permanent self through Desire. But, like Freud, Lacan imagines the "self" as being composed of three parts: *moi*, the *je*, and the Other(a). These parts, however, do not cleanly align with Freud's id, ego, superego. Instead, Lacan imagines that the idea of a permanent subject is actually an "effect" of language. One can see this in the above quotation. Here the Other(a) does not mean the "other person" but rather *who I am to the other person*. When I imagine "myself" as some object, I am othering myself by trying to put a stable image *on top of* a porous sequence of Desires, actions, events, images, and so on. The *moi* then, is the effect of the desire for our own permanence. The Other(a) and the *moi* relate insofar as the *moi* is that which wants to be constant—to be that Other(a) that the others see. The expression of this "want-to-be" (lack; *la manqué*) is precisely the pronoun "I" or the *je*. While we cannot draw absolute symmetry between the two, we can map Freud's triad onto Lacan's in the following way: the "*moi*" is like the id to the extent incorporates images and Desires that are disconnected and need to be analyzed to be understood; the *je* is like the ego to the extent that asserts the existence of an I; and the Other(a) is like the superego insofar as it is psychic incorporation, what Lacan calls "introjection," of the way the *I believe others see me*. While it is not necessarily an "ethical concept," the very idea that it is the incorporation of the social makes the Other(a) and the superego similar. In what follows, I will show that Heraclitus' fragments incorporate a similar idea of a disconnected self.

Heraclitus' idea that "[the bow] agrees at variance with itself"⁷⁰ can be elaborated upon as the "source" (*die Quelle*) of the Lacanian drive: the difference between the *moi* ("me") and the *je* (the "I" or subject of speech). The *je* is essentially the *reflective* and Narcissistic subject, the one which says "I am." The *moi* on the other hand is the pre-reflective self: the one which does not try to figure what "it" is, but simply is. As Ragland-Sullivan concludes: "The key to relative psychic health and self-knowledge lies in the direction of *je* de-objectification from *moi* fixations."⁷¹ I must take account of, and choose, those things that I thought were "me." Above we saw the idea of "identificatory mergers." We can now put this idea into play. The *moi* merges with objects it believes to be necessary to survival. These "objects" can be people, things (or more to the point images of things), beliefs and the like. The *moi* has its origins in infancy

and begins as utterly disintegrated, an arm here, a leg here. "What are these things? Are these mine?" But confused with the array of limbs are the face and the breasts of the (m)Other. The *moi* (mistakenly) identifies the body of the (m)Other with its own as-of-yet un-integrated body. Thus, infants necessarily fixate on objects outside of themselves in a more or less "natural" formation of their idea of self. As soon as they begin to *articulate* this "self" (however tenuous it may be) in language, the *je* shows up on the scene. Ragland-Sullivan puts it this way: "The subject of reality reconstruction or subjective perception—the *moi*—is elusive, kaleidoscopic, and evanescent, whereas the subject of meaning and speech—the *je*—seeks to 'translate' the *moi* while adhering to cultural stipulations."⁷² One can mistakenly imagine the *moi* as a static object. This is the ultimate Narcissism, because it essentially folds all of the Others which make up its "self" into an ideal and unchanging object. Consider Lacan's translation of the famous Freudian phrase: "*Wo Es war, soll ich Werden*" which is usually translated as "Where the Id was, there the ego shall be." Here Lacan translates as "There where *it* was, it is my duty that *I* should come to being."⁷³ In other words, drive, expressed through Desire, imprints itself on a collection of objects and announces "It is I." Ragland-Sullivan sums up the point thusly: "Where the *moi* was, the *je* shall place itself."⁷⁴ But, as Ragland-Sullivan also points out, one must avoid at all costs the temptation to imagine the *moi* as a Real object. "Narcissus died of his failure to quest for alterity."⁷⁵ What makes Narcissus turn to into a flower is his unwillingness to *leave* his own mirror image of himself that he saw in the lake. Any *image* of oneself in so clear a definition is in fact necessarily just that: *Imaginary*.

Now let's consider the so-called "self" in relation to Desire. For Lacan the existence one of aspect of the subject, the *je*, requires the "death" of another, the *moi*. Death is best understood as the limits, as the disintegration, and disunity of elements of the ego. A healthy ego requires the recognition of its own limits and disunity. For this reason, the maintenance of a healthy ego requires what J.B. Pontalis has called "death-work."⁷⁶ Pontalis does not give us instructions on how to do such work other than to acknowledge that for every *attachment* formed through Desire, there is another "*process of unbinding*, of fragmentation, of breaking up" that we must also acknowledge in ourselves.⁷⁷ In fact, like Heraclitus asking us to see how the bow "agrees at variance with itself," it is *in the acknowledgment of death itself* that the ego becomes healthy. We have to let go in order to maintain. To sustain my concept of my "self," the "I," requires that I "kill" my actual experiences of the Other.⁷⁸ If I refuse to acknowledge new experiences (i.e., let them live), then I risk becoming Narcissus. This explains *why* it is so painful to lose (or lose meaning in) objects or ideas we consider ours: they are as much a part of holding together our ego ideal as anything can be.⁷⁹ But it also gives new meaning to the idea that the same thing which is named life, *works* through

death. "Gradually acquiring its own 'identity,' the *moi* is a narcissistic subject that is always threatened by its own otherness to itself."⁸⁰ In short, the ideal ego is always in a "struggle to the death" with its own Otherness. To create a narrative self that holds together, the narrative and transcendent *je* must kill the immanent experience of the *moi*.

We can return to our discussion of Heraclitus, then, by remembering one interpretation of the bow fragment: that the life of one requires the death of another. The bow becomes a symbol of this requirement, and thereby situates itself in the gap that is Desire. Long before philosophers used the jargon of authenticity, or introduced the strong sense of a *cogito*, Heraclitus wrote: "I went in search of myself."⁸¹ Such an understanding is contradictory to the notion of a given self: if it was apparent and stable to us, why must we search for it?⁸² As multiple commentators point out, this flies in the face not only of the later *cogito*, but also the contemporaneous Delphic wisdom: *gñothi sauton*—"know thyself." Because the "stuff" of the self is always changing, it is impossible to "know oneself." If knowing equates to a settled matter, searching, by contrast, represents an ongoing project. If we put this in the context of internal variance, we can see that a healthy sense of self is nothing but the integration of change; as soon as we begin to identify too strongly with some image that is unchanging, we begin to lose a healthy sense of self.

Internal Variance and the Death Drive

As Alain Badiou points out, Heraclitus is for Lacan a thinker of discord and of the death drive. Whereas Parmenides' *Poem on Truth* advocates for the unity of thinking and being, Heraclitus fragments do the opposite. Badiou points to an important passage in "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis" where Lacan writes about the death drive that it is "a vital dehiscence that is constitutive of man, and which makes unthinkable the idea of an environment that is pre-formed for him, a 'negative' libido that enables the Heraclitean notion of Discord, which the Ephesian believed to be prior to harmony, to shine once more."⁸³ The "negative libido" is that which creates the separation such that one can once again see space between fundamental categories: man/woman, ego/drives, thought/being. But remarkably, Heraclitus is also the thinker of the One, and the Logos. Lacan understood this as anti-philosophical, and anti-tradition, a tradition which had not even been established yet. That's because Heraclitus see the One *as* flux, as constantly open to revision, such that the river is the *same* river that we cannot step into twice. Lacan explains the paradox well: "Heraclitus tells us—if we introduce absolute mobility in the existence of things such that the flow of the world never comes to pass twice by the same situation, it is precisely because identity in difference is already saturated in the thing."⁸⁴ Hence, like the idea of the subject, and of the bow, everything is other than what it is: it agrees at

variance with itself. Here Badiou describes the relation between this line of thinking in Heraclitus and Lacan's idea of the death drive well: "In fact, what Heraclitus allows us to think—and what Plato, on the contrary prohibits—is the death drive. The Platonic effort to identify difference through the Idea leaves no room for it; Heraclitean discord, on the other hand, anticipates it in every effect."⁸⁵

Importantly, if discord is the dynamic movement of the Real, then the One is the sense-making stabilization of the symbolic order. This has huge implications for "the origins of philosophy" as well as for Lacan's understanding of what is required in response to the death drive. As regards the origins of philosophy, there is believed to be a line that runs from Parmenides through Plato in which thinking is identified with being (and knowledge is identified with the good). Plato takes the level of Ideas—which exist in a separate ethereal realm—as more real than the individual things all around us, and in fact precede those things as their cause. According to Plato, the discord we encounter in the world is the result of our clumsy body's weighing down of the soul, which then has difficulty "un-forgetting" what it learned in the realm of Ideas.

By contrast, in Heraclitus, it is the discord that is real; "war is the father and king of all," he says.⁸⁶ And yet, in the Logos all are One. In other words, it is the symbolic order that brings things together. This is even true of the classical logical syllogism, whose word-roots are "syl" — "together" and "logos" — "word, statement, reason." If we wanted to be even more daring we could point to one of Heraclitus most cryptic fragments (and he has a few!): "Graspings (*syllapsies*): wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant (*synadon*) dissonant (*diadon*), from all things one and from one thing all."⁸⁷ Importantly here, every vague reference to language—*syllapsies*, *synadon*, *diadon*—can also be a reference to "things" and vice versa. "Graspings" (*syllapsies*) can be translated as "syllables." Conversely, "consonant" and "dissonant" can be translated as "concord" and "discord." According to Badiou, the implication jibes well with Lacan's idea of an "intimate connection between the theme of the One and the theme of the Logos. This for Lacan is an essential thesis. It will later be formulated in a structural fashion: the aphorism 'there is something of the One' [*il y a de l'Un*] is constitutive of the symbolic order."⁸⁸

Lastly, this reversal of difference over identity says something about the death drive as well. If all is discord, then the ego can only provide a false and temporary unity. The discord of desires, drives, and so on are bound to prevail. That said, the symbolic order provides a healthy solution to the problem of multiple drives by giving us the tools to "make" sense of the world—as opposed to a situation where we are waiting to find the sense already there and made for us. As we said above, one way to use the symbolic order to free-up our desires is death-work.

Death and Desire

Pertaining to the question of “death-work” and its relation to desire of the subject are also the following fragments from Heraclitus:

Yearning hurts, and what release may come of it feels much like death.⁸⁹

Dionysus is their name for death. . .⁹⁰

Dionysus is the god of wine, intoxication, and the unity that comes from falling back into the whole (such as the feeling of the happy drunk). What Heraclitus appears to be driving at is that to be impassioned, in the throes of desire, is death or death-like. This squares well with Lacan's argument that the ego and the underlying drives of the subject involve the death of each other: the conscious self dies at the hands of unbridled desire(s), and the multitude of drives—here presented in the name of Dionysus—are killed by the controlling ego. The latter is almost more dangerous because the absolute will of the ego can lead to narcissism, and violence and aggression toward the Other. But of course, the former poses a threat as well—it is the path of madness. Consider that madness is not usually associated with a lack of engagement in the world, but to too much of it. They usually involve not a lack of speech, but a lack of a filter—as if all desires and concerns are articulated at once.

Of course, for Heraclitus, everyone's “grip” on reality is tentative. He tells us that *ethos anthropos daimon*—Kahn translates this as “Man's character is his fate.” This is of course cryptic: is it their fate decides our character? Or that our character is determined by how we react to our fate? Haxton takes a position on this by translating the same fragment as: “One's bearing determines one's fate.” If the Stoics are correct in seeing Heraclitus as an ancestor, it is the second interpretation that should hold sway. That said, Vernant offers another interesting interpretation of this fragment.⁹¹ For Vernant, tragedy is what takes place between two interpretations. Here *daimon*, fate, represents the divine interpretation, while *ethos*, character, represents “man's” perspective. Thus “man's” fate is caught between the two interpretations. In fact, in Lacan, “fate” represents the ultimate Other: it provides an opportunity to imagine that there is something permanent and intentional of which I am a part. Thus, a reading on things inscribes itself into being, thus making it a symbolic interpretation. “If only I understand what is asked of me correctly,” thinks the one who believes in destiny. But this structure should not dissuade us from the fact that this symbolic interpretation can never touch the real.

Because of this necessary ambiguity concerning what is a “correct” interpretation, we must see the self and the universe in constant flux, or to put a spin on it, a constant variance in which multiple perspectives must ultimately be backward-turning. There are several fragments of He-

raclitus that play at the limitations of the human perspective. Some of these play at the difference of perspectives between gods and men. For example:

A man is found to foolish by a god, as a child by a man.⁹²
 Human opinions are toys for children.⁹³
 The most beautiful of apes is ugly in comparison with the race of man;
 the wisest of men seems an ape in comparison to a god.⁹⁴

Then there are some fragments that compare one animal's perspective (including the human animal) to another:

Asses prefer garbage to gold.⁹⁵
 Swine delight in mire more than clean water; chickens bathe in dust.⁹⁶

These two types of comparison allow Heraclitus to make a jump to a more global perspective:

The fairest order in the universe is a heap of random sweepings.⁹⁷

Note that the first set of fragments places man between animals and gods. But the point is one of admonition: if we think the ape ridiculous, we should see what humans look like from the perspective of the gods!

Even though the human perspective is not directly stated in the second set of fragments above, it is implied as an absent present: a third animal viewpoint. Isn't preferring gold just as silly as preferring garbage? Why is clean water the only way to bath? Human beings are arrogant in that they believe their opinions to be aiming at something "real." Because of the constant possibility—nay, inevitability—of perspectival shifting, any objective perspective is unavailable to us. Like Lacan, Heraclitus believes the Real—independent of an imagination or system of signification—is impossible. Or, if not impossible, available only to those who can leave their selves behind.

That said, as archers we are nonetheless obligated to aim and shoot as well as we can regardless of whatever fate holds in store for us and regardless of our inevitable uncertainty. As Harris puts it: "This is the lesson of tragedy. As egotistical, self-oriented humans, we are caught between modes of interpretation, one of which will always be devastating."⁹⁸ In the end the devastation occurs because of an intrinsic lack of knowledge attached to a fundamental lack of being (read: permanence). "Against the idea of an adequate (heroically self-willed) ego, transparent to itself, [Lacan] describes one that is fundamentally oblivious to its own truth 'the unconscious is the subject unknown to itself, misapprehended, misrecognized, by the ego,' Lacan writes in Seminar II (1991, 59)."⁹⁹ Such misrecognition is fundamental to Heraclitus as well. Whether he is calling his fellow humans "sleepers," or saying that they don't comprehend things correctly, it seems our fate is to be confused by our situation. Still we are encouraged by Heraclitus' hints: "The hidden attunement is better

than the obvious one."¹⁰⁰ Could it be that this internal variance, hesitation, tentativeness, is itself the hidden attunement? Let's now look at how this internal variation of Desire is born out of the "constant force" of the drive forming a stationary tension.

DESIRE AS STATIONARY TENSION: THE PROPERLY STRUNG BOW

The internal variance and integration of change that are necessary for the maintenance of a "healthy" sense of self require us to admit of a certain necessary tension that is always present in the ego. Again, this tension is exemplified also in the image of the bow: "The bow exemplifies a harmony based in tension. The purpose of the bow depends on a balanced tension between life and death, simultaneously causing and sustaining each other."¹⁰¹ Above, tension was laid out in two directions: in the biological direction in terms of life requiring death to survive (and hence the misnamed "bow" as "life") and in the psychological direction of maintenance of a shifting *moi*, imagined self, beneath an ironic speaking subject, *je*.

And yet to some extent, the constant pressure of self-integration, over against the illusion of self-objectification, is that which ensures a healthy psyche. The constancy of the tension allows for an integration of change and the Otherness that the imagined constancy of an objectified self cannot. "We must consider the drive under the heading of the '*Konstante Kraft*' that sustains a stationary tension."¹⁰² For Lacan (and Freud) this tension—though at points raised to the level of symbol—exerts itself even at the level of the central nervous system through its "homeostasis of internal tensions."¹⁰³ But this tension is necessary—for better or worse—for us to identify ourselves as subjects, or, even to operate. Furthermore, the *moi*, that part of the ego which is immersed in the present, arises out of a state in infancy "characterized by conflict and tension because it depends on the specular recognition from another for its own existence and perpetuation."¹⁰⁴ This tension becomes the alienation that charges the drive to search for itself outside of itself.

For Lacan, the image one's own kind that is outwardly a source of desire, when turned back on itself, constitutes an alienating tension: "Living animal subjects are sensible to the image of their own kind. This is an essential point, thanks to which the whole of living creation isn't and immense orgy. But the human being has a special relation with his own image—a relation of a gap, of an alienating tension."¹⁰⁵ What Lacan is getting at here is that the "image" of the human being is not just of a physical body, but a representation of its-self to itself. This image must remain imaginary since it requires a view of "our whole selves" which every great thinker since Aristotle has noted is impossible. This alienating tension is what allows Heraclitus to say: "I went in search of myself."

The idea of “finding” myself is problematic for reasons I will explain now.

If we are to take Plotinus’ memory of Heraclitus fragments as accurate, then Heraclitus also understood the notion of a constant tension involved in the self (and everything) by his observation that “It rests by changing” (*metaballon anapauesthai*).¹⁰⁶ For Heraclitus, the wise realize that it is not in some calm, restful state that human beings in particular, or life in general, continue to thrive. In fact, Heraclitus notes in two consecutive fragments in Charles Kahn’s translation: “all things come to pass in accordance with conflict,” and “War is the father of all and King of all”; the imagined “self” is included in this “all,” and Desire is part of this conflict. Desire, as a force that drives us, also rests by changing and serves as the conflict in which all meaningful things come to pass for us.

The stringing of the bow (more on this in the chapter on Odysseus) and the lyre bend the limbs, or bend the neck, and *hold* the movement of that bend in place. One aspect of its being—the *dynamis* of the bending and the holding—agrees with the aspect of its being which varies from it—the *stasis* of its being held in tension. The very movement between *dynamis* and *stasis* is what Heraclitus refers to elsewhere and is to represent a dual nature of things—one ahistorical and atemporal, and the other historical and temporal.

The bow serves as a reminder of the dual nature of things, the hidden nature of things. Perhaps this is what is meant by Heraclitus’ claim “Nature loves to hide.”¹⁰⁷ Whenever we believe we have arrived at one “state” of things, if we are awake, we see it just as quickly receding, fading, running away. Life entails death. Stillness preserves a prior instance of movement. Harmony requires the violence of an initial and internal separation. As regards, Desire and the “self,” we must properly realize that we are not static objects (à la Narcissus) but instead fragmented and fluid beings that are constantly changing. The origin of this change comes from our Desire to reunite and be whole. But ignoring this origin—Desire itself—is precisely what gets in to psychical trouble.

DESIRE AS BACKWARD-TURNING: THE BENT BOW

The last way the drive integrates a dialectic of the bow is in the holding of its shape. “What is fundamental at each level of the drive is the *movement* outwards and back in which it is structured.”¹⁰⁸ The drive—and Desire in particular—mirrors the shape of the bow itself. The bow extends out into the world just to return to itself. Here too we are reminded of Heraclitus’ fragment first mentioned above: “They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement *turning back* on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.”¹⁰⁹ The bow extends out from the lower limb through the grip and then back through the upper limb. The “out

and back movement" of the drive refers to two movements. Out: the way an as-of-yet, and never to be fully formed, "self" (*le soi*) looks for pieces of itself outside in the "world." Back: The "self" then brings them back inward as a mirage of something solid and stable.¹¹⁰ Again, one cannot help but reference Heraclitus here: "The way out and back are one and the same."¹¹¹ The very diagram of the out and back nature mimics the physical extension of the tense bow out extending out and then back. As tension is put on the string, the limbs turn backward even more. Thus, the bow serves not only as a symbol for the out and back nature of the drive, but also the idea of the drive being held in tension.

The going outside-of-itself-ness of the psyche can, in Lacan's terms, be traced to trauma that happens as part of infant development. Lacan's genius lies in one simple realization: from the time of infancy onward we tend to understand being separated from loved objects a splitting of our selves.¹¹² We feel the leaving of our mother, our friends, the doubting of deeply held beliefs, as internal fragmentation. As we observed with Philoctetes in the previous chapter, and will again with Odysseus in the next, such a loss can also be experienced with the loss of certain meaningful objects such as Philoctetes' or Odysseus' bow. However, this splitting happens with any failed expectation. In short, one is most who she is when she is not being forced to define who she is. Likewise, when I have to lay claim to "what is important to me," I am forced to tell a story that effectively takes the outside world and brings it inward.

Cornelius Castoriadis captures the fragmentation of the psyche well when he writes: "It is no longer possible to think in terms of that which founds and that which is founded; we must rather think in terms of interchangeability and reversibility."¹¹³ It would be equally wrong to claim the world founds the self as to claim that the self founds the world. The backward-turning nature of Desire gives us the illusion of stability not only in ourselves but the in the world. In "establishing" the existence of desired objects I establish the existence of myself and vice-versa. The danger lies in not being open to the *turning*, that is, to assume that just because we perceive ourselves and other objects as stable, that they are or will remain that way.

In elaborating upon Lacan's comment about the bow integrating the dialectic of the drive, we have isolated and analyzed four key components of the bow as a metaphor for Desire that mutually fill out both concepts. First, archery and the drive both contain a difference between stated aims and the one goal, which can also be conceived of as a difference between names and things that opens the space for interpretation vis-à-vis Desire. Second, like the bow and the lyre, Desire is the space that allows for and necessitates and *internal variance* of the "self." Third, like a bow held at the ready, Desire is a stationary tension by virtue of a constant force driven "identificatory mergers." Lastly, like the shape of the bow, Desire is that which establishes the self through its "backward turn-

ing,” that is, its in-corporation of the outside world. The first indicator pointed to the unity opposites in the psycho-physical realm, namely that the life always includes death. Desires necessarily involve the “death” of others (not their literal death—but an imposition of ourselves onto them) and of the “former” self. A healthy understanding of this process must realize that this constant incorporation “heads toward” nothing (literally, death). The second indicator expands on this idea to suggest that anything—through time—must be inclusive of change. And the last indicator led us to conclude that in lived existence there is no “contradiction in terms” between constant change and the possibility of a personal self. We will next see that Desire—this drive that wells up out of the difference between a non-permanent self and the incorporation of substitute objects—is at its most developed form when it becomes Demand, or the seeking of recognition of the Other as mediated through a *stated* Desire for objects. To explore this, we will look at book 21 in *The Odyssey*, in which Odysseus strings his bow as a Demand for recognition from his wife and the people of Ithaca.

NOTES

1. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1987), 73.

2. Op. cit.

3. Op. cit. “The tragedy of the human condition is implicit in Lacan’s theory that both the object and the goal of the drive toward constancy converge in the Desire to be Desired; in other words, to be recognized by the mother so that the infant feels at one with her.”

4. Jacques Lacan *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 50; Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 72.

5. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177.

6. Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Fr. XI, 33.

7. As quoted in Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 15.

8. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 29, Fr. I.

9. *Ibid.*, Fr. II.

10. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 45. Emphasis mine.

11. Uvo Hölscher, “Paradox, Simile, and Gnostic Utterance in Heraclitus.” In *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by A. P. D. Mourelatos, 219-38. (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Press., 1974), 232.

12. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 126.

13. *Ibid.*, 127.

14. Lacan, *Écrits: Selections* (Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of it Powers,” 263.

15. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 172.

16. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Trans. By Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 121.

17. Lacan, *Écrits: Selection*, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” 104.

18. Ken Gemes, "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (2009), 54, n.1.
19. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 178.
20. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 179.
21. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (New York: MIT Press, 2006), 74.
22. Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, Trans. by Michael Chase, (Cambridge, MA: 1998), 195.
23. Roman Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*. Vol. Spudasmata Band 56. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1995), 122, fn.1.
24. Kahn, CXXIII, 85.
25. Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 125.
26. *Ibid.*, 125.
27. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177.
28. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXIX, 65.
29. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row), sec. 26-29.
30. Carol Poster, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39 (2006:1), 2.
31. Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 132.
32. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, section 37, out of the *The Portable Nietzsche* Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968).
33. Hölscher, "Paradox, Simile, and Gnostic Utterance in Heraclitus," 231.
34. Unlike Freud, Lacan moves away from gendered essentials. Thus, the parenthetical (m) is to suggest that whoever the primary caretaker is becomes the first Other. Similarly, The-Name-of-the-Father does not have to refer to the biological male parent of the infant.
35. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 54.
36. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, XXXIII, 43.
37. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 176.
38. Lacan, *Écrits*, Trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," 428.
39. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 46, emphasis mine.
40. Hölscher, "Paradox, Simile, and Gnostic Utterance in Heraclitus," 237.
41. Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 132.
42. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 55.
43. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 34.
44. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, CXXIII, p85.
45. *Ibid.*, CXVIII, p.83.
46. Poster, "The Task of the Bow," 16.
47. Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 133.
48. Lacan, Seminar II, p.223, as quoted in Boothby, 108.
49. Lacan, *Televisión*, (New York and London: Norton & Co., 1981), 3.
50. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 88.
51. *Ibid.*, 75.
52. Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 126.
53. Fr. 66, *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus* (Trans. By Brooks Haxton, Viking Press, 2001), p31.
54. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 176: "If all is confusion in the discussion of the sexual drives it is because one does not see that the drive represents no doubt, but merely represents, and partially at that, the *curve* of fulfillment of sexuality in the living being. Is it surprising that its final term should be death, when the presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death?"
55. This connection between sex and finitude is not unique to psychoanalysis, it is also a common theme in art. In *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion*, Leo Steinberg points out that the humanity of Christ in Renaissance art is

predominated by the focus on the sexual organ. For an immortal being there is no need to reproduce, but Christ is not immortal until after dies. Thus, the sex organ represents his ability to suffer death. In short, sexuality, reproduction, exist only because we do not live forever—once again in the creation of new life there is the shadow of death.

56. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177.
57. *Ibid.*, 176.
58. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 81.
59. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 181.
60. *Ibid.*, 149.
61. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 75.
62. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," 167.
63. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 164.
64. "It is in its fundamental process of unbinding [of the ego], of fragmentation, of breaking up, of separation, of bursting, but also of enclosing—[a] process that has no aim but its own accomplishment and whose repetitive nature brands it as instinctual—it is here that the death instinct operates. This is a process that no longer has anything to do with conscious death anxiety, but mimics death at the very kernel of being." Pontalis, J.B. "On Death-Work," in *Psychoanalysis, Creativity and Literature*, ed. Roland, as quoted in Ragland-Sullivan, 72.
65. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 82
66. *Ibid.*, 83.
67. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," 172.
68. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXVIII, 65.
69. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 76.
70. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXVIII, 65.
71. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 50.
72. *Ibid.*, 51.
73. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, "The Freudian Thing," 129. Emphasis mine.
74. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 51, referencing Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 128-9.
75. *Ibid.*, 39.
76. J.B. Pontalis, "On Death-Work in Freud, Self, and Culture," in *Psychoanalysis, Creativity, and Literature*, by Alan Roland (New York: Columbia University, 1987): p85-95.
77. *Ibid.*, 92
78. Cf. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, "The Freudian Thing," 138.
79. Especially relevant and fascinating here are the recent psychological studies that suggest that brain scans show activity in the same regions when a subject is asked about her political beliefs as when asked about questions important to her personal identity. See for example: <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep39589> .
80. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," 48.
81. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, XXVIII, 41.
82. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, also points this out when commenting on the fragment on page 116: "How can I be the object of my own search? This will make sense only if my self is somehow hidden, absent, or difficult to find"
83. Lacan, *Écrits*, 24, as quoted in Alain Badiou, "Lacan and the Pre-Socratics." In *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, by Slavoj Zizek, 7-17. (New York: Verso, 2006) at 10.
84. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar I*, 243, as quoted in Badiou, *Lacan and the Pre-Socratics*," 12.
85. *Ibid.*, 13.
86. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXXIII, 67.
87. *Ibid.*, CXXIV, 85.
88. Badiou, "Lacan and the Pre-Socratics," 14.

89. Brooks, Fr. 105, p 69. Kahn translates the same fragment quite differently: "it is hard to fight against passion; for what it wants it buys at the expense of the soul," CV, p77.
90. Ibid., Fr. 127, p89.
91. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Llyod (New York: Zone Books, 1988). See "Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy," 29-48, especially 36-37.
92. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LVII, 55.
93. Ibid., LVIII, 55.
94. Ibid., LVI, 55.
95. Ibid., LXXXI, 61.
96. Ibid., LXXII, 63.
97. Ibid., CXXV, 88.
98. Oliver Harris, *Lacan's Return to Antiquity*. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 134.
99. Ibid., 135.
100. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Fr. LXXX, p65.
101. Poster, "The Task of the Bow," 9.
102. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 181.
103. Ibid., 175.
104. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 46.
105. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and the In the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, Trans. by Sylvia Tomaselli, Ed. By Jacques Alain-Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1991), 232.
106. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LII, 53.
107. Ibid., X.
108. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 177, emphasis mine.
109. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXVIII, 65.
110. Consider Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, on this point: "In my understanding of Lacan, there is no infant sadism, per se, but only the experience of building a 'self' via identification with objects, first through passive fusion, and then through active identification," 53.
111. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, CIII. My translation.
112. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 57. "The Lacanian unconscious is the combined result of spoken language, a pre-maturation at birth and mimetic identification. A relative helplessness during the first 18 months of life makes of man a strange creature. . ."
113. Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, Trans. by Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 122.

FOUR

Odysseus' Bow: Demand and the Ego

In the previous chapter I analyzed the drive of desire as it was connected to Heraclitus' view of nature. Desire was at one end of our figurative bow of the human condition, on the other side was the ego or agency. In this chapter I will analyze the human drive of *demand*, which happens at the social level. The bow metaphor in *The Odyssey* will align with the part of the drive that Lacan calls demand. Demand here means one's appeal to the other that she recognize me. In what follows, demand will be shown to occur in the Odysseus' actions in books 21 and 22 in *The Odyssey*, first through his stringing of the bow, and then in the slaughter of the suitors. We will begin by situating the possession of the bow as a symbol of *xenia* and *basileus*. *Xenia* is the idea of guest-friendship and marks the bow as an object of exchange between "equals." *Basileus* on the other hand invokes kingship and leadership and thus marks Odysseus' bow as a symbol of hierarchy of which Odysseus' is the head. Next, the idea of demand will be analyzed in terms of these key scenes through the exploration of identity formation (and confirmation) and its relation to violence. In order to analyze Odysseus' identity formation, we will need to look at the role of competition and idea of honor in Odysseus' society. What's more, we will look at the notion of the Phallus as both representative object of power, and the power of granting signification to key events. Next, we will circle back to the way the bow, as an object exhibiting qualities of both *xenia* and *basileus* exhibits the status of the Phallus. We will conclude by posing the question of violence: is it the only way to respond to the affront to one's ego-identity?

KING OR BEGGAR?

After 20 years of travel, Odysseus has finally returned to Ithaca disguised as an old beggar. The disguised hero returns to his *oikos* to find it being depleted by the greedy suitors, who are “competing” over Penelope’s hand in marriage. At Penelope’s insistence the suitors have decided to settle the competition once and for all by a contest of the bow. The contest entails two parts. First, the winner must successfully string Odysseus’ bow—not an easy feat given its size and rigidity. Next, the successful suitor must shoot an arrow through the eye of twelve axe heads that have been aligned for the purpose of the competition. The person who is (first) able to do both will win Penelope’s hand in marriage.

The disguised Odysseus takes part in the archery contest with the purpose of winning back his wife, Penelope. Arguably both the bow and Penelope (along with her household) are objects of exchange, the possession of each of which constitutes a certain amount of social power. In this context, we can see the bow’s power as an object of exchange and communication. Jonathan Ready argues that there are two economies that “sustain [Odysseus’] household,” and both revolve around possession of the bow: the relationships of *xenia* and status of *basileus*.¹ As I noted above, *xenia* refers to the gift-exchange among guest-friends. In other words, it is a showing of lateral peer status. The other aspect, *basileus*, means that the bow stands as a sign of hierarchical leadership. The hierarchical aspect of ownership of the bow consists in Odysseus’ prowess in war. Both aspects of Odysseus’ ability with and possession of the bow lead to the ultimate goal: the restoration of his position with his wife, his household, and his place in society. In the functions of establishing peer-group recognition, and hierarchical leadership, and the recognition—literally and figuratively—by Penelope, the bow becomes the perfect symbol of the Lacanian demand.

MOTHER, FATHER, KING: XENIA AND BASILEUS

In his analysis of the bow scene, Ready ponders why the narrator of the *Odyssey* would bother to digress with a “detailed history of the weapon” in an otherwise tense scene. Odysseus first receives the bow in a gift exchange with Iphitos, who received it from Eurytos, “a renowned archer who challenged Apollo.” Furthermore, Odysseus did not use the bow while he was away at war but kept it safe at home. Ready further observes that the narrator emphasizes the degree to which Odysseus displayed the bow as an assertion of his identity.² While Odysseus does not “need” the bow in the same way that Philoctetes does, he does use the bow to establish an *ego* that he projects to others. His friendship with

powerful others on the one hand, and his firm rule over lesser others, on the other, serve to reify this personality and the glory that comes with it.

Ready describes a two-part economy of *xenia*, guest-friendship. There is the gift itself (which increases one's goods) and then there is establishment of a new relationship.³ In this way, the gift is not only about gaining the physical object, but social capital as well.⁴ For one who wants to attain and keep such relationships the exchange of gifts is important. The maintenance of the gifts attained is equally important. In Lacan's terms we can see the two aspects present in this gift-exchange of guest friends—in the object of *desire*, and in demand as the appeal to the other—are often intertwined. That is, in so far as concrete objects help bolster my ego through connections to others, the gift exchange has amplified my persona. Here, concrete objects can refer to other *people* as well as other *things*. The objects refer to other people in the sense that what I desire is only what I desire because others desire it. For Odysseus the bow is both: an *object a*, or a filler for ultimate Desire, and a demand that others recognize his status, what we will call the *phallus* below. This theme will repeat itself with respect to the suitor's fight over Penelope.

Related to the issue of social status is the claim that the bow—with its history—reminds the other suitors of Odysseus' position as *basileus* or leader. The first aspect of this is Odysseus' power to restore order to his household and his kingdom. He can grant or take away "love" through this restoration. We can relate this idea to Lacan's theory of demand when he writes:

Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is demand of a presence or an absence—which is what is manifested in the primordial relation to the mother, pregnant with that Other to be situated within the needs that it can satisfy. Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the "privilege" of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love.

In this way, demand annuls (*aufhebt*) the particularity of everything that be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions that it obtains for need are reduced to the level of being no more than a demand for love.⁵

It is no mistake, then, that Penelope suggests a contest for her love using the bow. The object represents restoration of Odysseus' love with Penelope through marriage, as well as with the love of his people, by re-assuming the role of *basileus*, or leader. As Charles Segal points out: "[Odysseus] will use it [the bow] as a bard uses a lyre, to create 'harmony' or order on Ithaca and to reveal and assert the truth and vitality of the past."⁶ So it is that we can symbolically link the desire with the reunification of a leader with his people to the primordial desire for reunification of each of us with the mother.

If Odysseus in this abstract way represents the imaginary possibility of reunification with the mother, he also represents the castration threat of the Father. In this scheme the suitors are like spoiled children who want unfettered access to their “mother” Penelope—not only sexually but with respect to the riches her estate represents as well. Odysseus then steps in with the threat of his bow to stop the suitor-children.

Yet another potentially valuable interpretation of this scene is to imagine the suitor-Odysseus-Penelope-Ithaca complex as one body politic. In this “body” the suitors represent the multitude of desires that bubble up without our control. In this picture the ego—here represented by Odysseus, the individual—responds reflexively and violently to reassert himself over the “many” drives. The restoration requires “unification” which requires violence.

In any case, what drives Odysseus is not only love, but the threat of the loss of power. The status of leader can also be interpreted as the social position of the Name-of-the Father or the Law, what can also be called the phallic injunction. While in his role of leader he assumes the role of the Law, the Father, or the phallic injunction, to lose his leadership (already on hold for so many years in his absence) would be the equivalent of Castration. While for Lacan the original castration happens as a result of being separated from the mother, any loss of a significant object or role can be experienced in a similar way.⁷ Lacan makes seeking love or—put another way—the *desire to be desired* as the central driver for social interaction. The symbolic castration happens not only as a separation, but as invitation to speak.⁸ If we cannot be unified and whole, we want, at least, to be recognized and heard. Or in Odysseus’ case, to be heard through violence. Odysseus’ purpose in massacring the suitors is not only to punish them and rid his household—*oikos*—of a bunch of leeches, but also to “send a message.” Namely, “I am going to decimate any forces that attempt to intervene on a restoration and reunification with both my family and my people.” And so, it is that Odysseus uses the bow as a circumscribed appeal or demand for recognition and love.

The drive of demand, then, serves as ego-constituting or ego-affirming mechanism via two conduits: the interconnection of the individual and others, and the recognition of the individual by others. Odysseus’ stringing of his bow emphasizes both aspects.

THE BOW/PHALLUS AS OBJECT OF EXCHANGE

Jonathan Ready argues that the reason Odysseus strings his bow is to re-establish his uncontested power over his *oikos* and his community. There are two aspects of the contest of the bow that emphasize this fact. The first is by emphasizing the “relationship *xenia* and the other is related to his position as permanent *basileus*.” *Xenia*, guest-friendship, through its

connection to previous owners, and the fact the bow serves as an object of *exchange*. Though the giver and the recipient may not be on the same plane, being given such an important gift—especially one with such significance of power—usually puts the recipient on a higher plane than those who did not receive it. The fact that the suitors are unable to string the bow, and Odysseus is, validates this fact: Odysseus is deserving of the bow and in a different “class” than the other suitors.

Odysseus received his bow in a “gift exchange with Iphitos.” It was a “prized possession” of Iphitos, its prior owner being a “renowned” archer Eurytos. Ready notes the importance of the fact that Odysseus did not carry the bow with him to war, but he did “used to carry (*phorein*) it in his own land.” (Od. 21.40) Ready writes: “How one dresses, accessorizes and generally comports oneself are all necessary types of performance and forceful assertions of identity but verse 41 provides a dictional cue to that effect. This line suggests that Odysseus his bow to be seen because the verb *phorein* points toward a conspicuous display.”⁹ The mention that Odysseus leaves his bow behind—at first mysterious—is clarified by this innocuous aside: Odysseus used to carry (really *phorein*, “show off”) his bow in his own land. He leaves it there in his absence not to protect the bow but to *remind* the others of his *symbolic presence* despite his *physical absence*. This naturally fits into the contest of the bow regardless of its actual outcome. What single item could better represent a suitor’s suitability to continue Odysseus’ heroic, fatherly, leadership than his ability to string Odysseus’ bow?

The explanation of lineage of the bow points to another important fact of demand for Odysseus: his connection to a larger context of meaningful relationships with noteworthy people. As noted by Levi-Strauss and others, gift exchanges extend social networks. Also complicating factors: the would-be exchange of the bow through winning the contest amounts to exchanging Penelope.¹⁰ The relationships established through gift exchange increase social capital. The meaning of the bow as a container for social capital is backed up by the other evidence Ready finds, such as Odysseus’ tendency to name drop when telling his own story. “In talking with the Phakians Odysseus emphasizes the extent of his rare and valued social relations. In doing so, he advertises his heroic credentials (he keeps the company of goddesses) and his aristocratic credentials (he keeps the company of other elites).”¹¹ The point of this exercise, again, is to demand of the Phakians that they recognize Odysseus as worthwhile. By bringing into language—the realm of the symbolic—Odysseus’ connection to the other, he is instantiating the desire to be desired—the desire to become a part of the other. Identity is always propped up by relation.

What is at stake in Odysseus’ boasting of his *xenia* is his desire for respect, which is to say, his desire to reestablish his leadership role. But another way he implicitly invokes his leadership is through fear. Ready also points to Odysseus’ “martial prowess” with the bow as a reason for

his status as *basileus*. In Ready's formulation: "The bow he received from Iphitos can stand me *metonymically* for those martial facts. When he carries it around with on Ithaka then, he ascends his martial prowess. Odysseus' choice of symbol should not surprise us."¹² Why? Here's where we can return to Odysseus' speech to the Phakians: "There was Philoctetes alone who surpassed me in archery when Achaeans shot with bows in the Trojan country. But I still say that I stand far out ahead of all others such as are living mortals now and feed on the earth. Only I will not set myself against men of the generations before, not with Hercules nor Eurytos of Orchalin" (Od 8.219-224). Importantly, Odysseus' bow used to be in possession of Eurytos, just as Philoctetes bow belonged to Heracles/Hercules. Therefore, there is some apportionment between the supposed skill and the heritage of these mythic bows.

When aimed outside of the community, the implied violence of such an accomplished warrior as Odysseus can be a point deserving of respect and admiration. But as Michel Nagler points out that in *The Odyssey* the bow "stands for violence used to control one's own community. . . . Most of this violence is symbolic, held in reserve. . . ; what we see in the climax of the epic [the slaughter of suitors] is what must occasionally happen and what they symbol always nears: the disguise drops, and the violence suddenly becomes real."¹³

Such an activation of violent potential corresponds to the phallic injunction discussed by Lacan. In the contest scene, the bow itself holds the status of the Lacanian *object a* because it is desired by all the suitors. As the marker for social and interpretive power it serves as a substitute for the Phallus. The phallus itself is not supposed to be equated with the male sexual organ. Instead it is "the first signifier of the social or Symbolic order" and it "commands exchange and communication."¹⁴ But in the scene of the suitor's slaughter, the bow becomes the *phallic injunction*. Odysseus' violence—more on this later—is a resounding "No" to the licentiousness and caprice of the suitors. What's more, it sets up the prohibition of access to Ithaka's mother: Penelope. As the Name-of-the-father and the "no"-of-the-father, Odysseus is reminding the suitors—themselves appearing to know no limits to their own *jouissance*—of their own castration; when they do not heed his warning, they must be gotten rid of. Of course, the intended effect here is not just to punish the suitors, but to send a message to the rest of Ithaka: Papa's back in town. In what follows, I will break down these connections and argue that Odysseus' response in these scenes constitutes an example of demand *par excellence*.

THE CONTEST OF THE BOW AS A MARRIAGE CONTEST

According to the myth of the marriage contest, it was not uncommon for desirable women to be considered prizes to be won. Such a trend fits into

a structuralist account of women as being objects of gift exchange between more powerful men. Both the bow and Penelope are objects of gift exchange, and therefore related to the demand of respect placed both by and for powerful men.

According to W. G. Thalmann, in his insightful analysis of book 21 in *The Swineherd and the Bow*, the contest incorporates three major elements of Greek life: the contest, male competition over women, and the actual or potential use of violence to establish one's place in a communal or extra-communal hierarchy. The contest was ubiquitous in Greek life. On one level, contests established social order within a community. There are examples of rhetorical contests, athletic events, and even agricultural contests.¹⁵ We can divide the contest into two categories: *Eris*, or strife, which attempts to establish rank or decide matters *within* a community and without the use of violence (typically). This was common of all sorts of *atheloi*, athletic contests. Conversely, *polemos*, or war, was also seen as contest—one *between* communities. It should be noted that even *polemos* did not signal an unquenchable hatred for the enemy. As in a contest, it was entirely possible to respect one's enemy that one is at war with. Homer even says that "we are united by the war that divides us." *Polemos*, however, happens when overt violence that is repressed within a community spills over and is aimed outside of the community. This violence is usually the result of excess drive arising from a competition in which the more powerful person on a hierarchy loses.¹⁶ The losing leader (which almost never occurs) must save face by exerting his power over other "barbarians." What will make Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors so important is that it is one of the first recorded occasions, fictional or otherwise, in which a Greek leader uses overt violence on members of his own community. Such violence is usually perpetrated in the name of maintaining order.

Thus, there are two orders that must be maintained. The first is order within the community, maintained either with the order established with the contest or with threats of violence. The second is the order between communities which is maintained through war or threat of war. But there is a third order that must be maintained as well: that is the order of the household, or *oikos*. Multiple scholars suggest that the Greek individual's identity was constituted at the intersection of these three orders: family membership, the rank in one's society, and one's national or tribal membership.¹⁷ One could go so far as to say without these three points of identificatory merger there is no individual; one is lost at sea (pun intended).

ODYSSEUS' DEMAND: "RECOGNIZE ME"

In what follows, then, I will argue that Odysseus' unprecedented violence against the suitors is a necessary move to re-establish his own identity insofar as it *is*—meaning it is tautologous to—his role as leader of his *oikos* and leader of his community. If the demand part of the human drive concerns the desire to be desired (i.e., envied, respected)—or the desire to be recognized—those values a person holds most dearly become part of this recognition. In other words, there is an interplay of individual values and social values. Julian Pitt-Rivers points out: "Honor provides a nexus between the ideals of a society and their reproduction in the individual through his aspiration to personify them."¹⁸ Honor, like recognition, is only meaningful if it is seen through the eyes of others (or through the ideal ego, which is arguably the imagination of the Other's thoughts). Thalmann expands on this idea by arguing that honor plays an important role in the "construction of the individual's self or her social identity, and in the formation of the community's sense of itself."¹⁹ It is the context of this interplay that the *oikos* as a matter of honor becomes important to one's own identity. It is not a mistake that Odysseus' identity remains hidden until he has triumphantly and violently re-established control over his *oikos*.

Ego, Identity, and the Social

In the Homeric epics, the *oikos* is the basis for an individual's (social) identity, as it is the nexus of family, community, and self. It sets up and proscribes roles according to age, gender, and class. These may seem at first like marginal concerns for the question of demand, but in fact they are central. The Lacanian ego is split between two fields: the realm of the ideal ego, the belief in a unified subject, and the ego-ideal, or the introjection of the Other's ideals.²⁰ The subject comes into being as she identifies with the Other's view of her. Fink goes so far as to say: "With the instatement of the ego-ideal, the ego is no longer subject to disintegration." Rather, the ego-ideal "provides a vantage point or a fixed point outside of the ego that gives the ego its unity, tying the ego together."²¹ Importantly there is no "substance" to the ego-ideal, and so our reference to it is always precarious and fluid. In addition, the comparison of one's self to the ego-ideal seems especially pronounced in honor-based societies. As some classicists point out, honor is a zero-sum game. This means that avoiding shame is as strong a motivator as gaining in honor. In the contest of the bow this is shown in a rather interesting way. On the one hand, honor is not lost *between* the suitors, since it becomes apparent that *none* of them will be able to string the bow. Instead, the concern is for losing honor in posterity. One suitor, Eurymachus, laments that failing to string the bow "will be a disgrace to those to come [i.e., descendants] to hear

of."²² For Leodes, another suitor, the failure is even more serious: "Friends, I can't string it. Let someone else take it. This bow will despoil many of the best of sense and life, since it is surely much better to die than, living, to fail of what we are constantly gathered here for, waiting day by day." To not string the bow is so disgraceful as to be worthy of suicide to preserve one's honor. We should pause at this lament to attempt to take hold of the multiple implications of Leodes admission. First this is foreshadowing Odysseus slaughter of the suitors in book 22 ("much better to die. . ."). Second, the admission evinces the strong tie between honor, or its opposite, shame, and the sense of one's *amour-propre*. One's self-worth is determined by the worth assigned to one by the eyes of the Other. Third, it alludes to the seemingly endless repetition of the failure of the suitors to do what they are there to do, namely, prove themselves to Penelope. Interestingly, in spite of the fact that most of the suitors' "work" appears to be comprised of eating Odysseus' food, drinking his wine, and raping his maidservants, the sheer repetition and the suitors' collective inability to "close the deal" appears to have worn Leodes thin, as if failing at this contest was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Preserving one's honor, in the Greek context, is about preserving one's core identity. In Lacan's view "self-consciousness arises in the following manner: by internalizing the way the Other sees one, by assimilating the Other's approving and disapproving looks and comments, one learns to see oneself as the Other sees one, to know oneself as the Other knows one."²³ One cannot have a sense of self but for as a matter of transcendence, that is, through stepping outside of one's immediate surroundings and into the realm of the imaginary. Scottish philosopher David Hume identified this problem when he noted that the existence of the "I" is never something that appears across the stage of consciousness as an empirical matter. Instead, what we have in consciousness at any moment is a parade of objects, memories, and desires, none of which constitutes the entire self. The "I" is a grammatical practicality, not a metaphysical reality.²⁴ Of course, Lacan picks up on this line of thinking through Nietzsche and Sartre and their critiques of the Cartesian *cogito*. Descartes takes for granted at the end of Meditation One of the *Meditations* and more precisely in *The Discourse on Method* that we have arrived at the indubitable foundation for knowledge, *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. But as Nietzsche points out: where is the "I" in thinking? The I is always already a transcendental point of view—a doubling. Most often it would be more accurate, thinks Nietzsche, to say "there is thinking."²⁵ As Fink puts it: "Whatever the subject is, it doesn't take itself as an object."²⁶ Put plainly, the subject is a stranger to herself, at least until she begins to see herself in others, to recognize her name as referring to her, to see the flash of recognition or lack of recognition that a sense of self first exists. The subject is never an object for itself. Instead, as Lacan understands it:

“The pure subject of science is, in the final analysis, nothing more than the Other inscribed in the living being, the knowledge of a tribal member’s culture that the tribal member manifests, unbeknownst to himself.”²⁷ This is especially true of the honor based society in which glory, honor, fame, and shame, control social identity. Here is the point of tie-in, a *point de capiton*, between the subject, demand, the *oikos*, and the contest of the bow: one only exists in Greek society to the extent one is recognized by inferiors as being superior (and to a lesser extent in the other direction).

The idea of recognition and approval is central to the question of Odysseus’ demand. Long before he slaughters the suitors in book 22, Odysseus arrives on Ithaka and disguises himself. What is the point of this disguise? The purpose is this: until Odysseus restores order to his *oikos*, and hence his community, he is not *fully* Odysseus. Put another way: he does not want to take on the role required of Odysseus until he is recognized by others as being worthy of that role. This sets the stage for Odysseus’ demand for his family and this people: that he proves himself worthy of their respect and praise *before* revealing who he is.

THE DEMAND OF STRINGING THE BOW

The stringing of the bow is perfect for this proving ground for several reasons: one, the competition serves as a marriage contest in which the aim is for the winner to show his worthiness in acquiring a bride and an *oikos*. It is a test of manhood that *identifies* a physical ability with a reputation. The identification of the physical with the imaginary is an echo of what happens in the mirror stage of our development: we develop our imaginary ego concurrently to when we are developing control over our body.²⁸ Perhaps this is why the idea of “proving oneself” through the bow and other means is such a common theme in honor cultures. In fact, “the stringing of the bow comes from a separate folktale, in which a husband returns after a long absence and must prove his identity to his wife, where it functioned as one of the recognition tokens.”²⁹ Secondly, the bow itself, I will argue, serves as a symbolic phallus that is the marker for power and a source of signification itself. Third, there is a parallel in which Odysseus stringing his bow and the shooting of the arrow brings himself back to an earlier version of himself—the one who used to carry the bow around Ithaka—after a long journey and time away. Odysseus’ journey home symbolizes a journey to *find himself* which in this case shares the geographical location of his home, his *oikos*. And lastly, there is the way in which the contest of the bow first conceals and then reveals then violence which is often required to establish an identity. Each of these will be examined more closely by considering the drive of demand.

Competition and Recognition

According to Thalmann, the most “intense forms of competition in early Greek epic and myth involve ‘male rivalry’ over a woman.”³⁰ In the courtship contest two tensions arise: one between hospitality (toward the competitors) and competition (between the competitors) on the one hand, and *oikos* and community on the other. The “prize” of these competitions is always the elusive *objet a*. At one turn it is the woman herself. Pindar writes of one such contest in which the father of the bride “placed his daughter at the mark, arranged in all her loveliness, to be the ultimate goal.”³¹ As we have seen in Lacan, there is always daylight between any given object of desire and the ultimate goal. We can already establish one difference here: the aim is to win the race, but the goal is the woman. But we could dig deeper as well. We could say the aim is to win the woman, but this is only to secure an *oikos*, which is to secure honor, which is to secure identity, and so on. Alas, the goal of a complete, unified, and unchanging self is impossible. We will always rely on the others either for material support or for recognition, love, and desire. This same structure—winning for the sake of what amounts to an infinite regression—is what we earlier referred to as the metonymy of desire. The aim (as a sign of desire) is always pointing to something else. Desire is always desire for something else. Thalmann points out two key things about the hidden motivations of these competitions. One, insofar as they entail “proving oneself” they are more for the sake of one man gaining esteem at the expense of another, than for the sake of winning the woman. The second is that all these competitions—even though they incorporate demand—are all the more shot through with erotic desire. Let’s look at these one at a time.

Demand and Desire

In Penelope’s contest of the bow, what matters to Leodes, Eurymakos, and Antinoos more than winning Penelope is not losing face. To repeat Eurymakos: “It will be a disgrace for those to come to hear of,” none of the suitors stringing the bow. Leodes would rather die than face humiliation. Antinoos calls off the competition rather than be exposed. But exposed as what? There are two ghosts haunting the suitors. The first is the ghost of their legacies—their future selves who could be glorified or forgotten depending upon the outcome of the challenge. The future Other. As Oliver Harris puts it: “Homer’s foundational epics are prolonged meditations on the relationship between mortal beings and immortal fame—*kleos aphthiton*, ‘fame imperishable,’. . .”³² But the other ghost looms larger: how does each suitor stack up against the absent Odysseus, that absent *Father*? Thalmann argues that the competitions were intense because they were competing to be *the* best. Even the beggar, con-

cealed Odysseus, is competing against his former self: "But give me the polished bow, and let me in your presence prove my skill and power and see if I have yet felt such vigor left as once there was within my supple limbs, or whether wonderings and neglect have ruined all."³³ Vigor is the key word here, as proving oneself turns out to be a competition of sexual vigor more than anything else.

Consider how sexual vigor gets translated into competitive intensity. Thalmann points out that "Rivalry forges bonds between people that are just as intense as love."³⁴ In fact, most of the relationships in *Odysseus* are between men and men, not men and women. Importantly, the notion of rivalry incorporates both the intense desire for some object, and the demand that another responds to us. What is not so obvious at first is that the demand that the other desist is in fact instantiated by the desire of the Other—the rival.

The Rival: Desire Is the Desire for/by/of the Other

In the remarkable chapter "From Mimetic Desire to the Monstrous Double" in *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard gives an insightful analysis of rivalry that is shot through with Lacanian interpretations of Desire and demand. It is worth quoting Girard's insight at length:

Our first task is to define the rival's position within the system to which he belongs, in relation to both subject and object. The rival desires the same object as the subject, and to assert the primacy of the rival can lead to only one conclusion. Rivalry does not arise because of fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object, the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions, but also, more essentially, in regard to desires.³⁵

What Girard has happened upon in his analysis of the structure of rivalry is the structure of the third part of human drive: demand. The Other demands something of me not only when she sets before me certain behavioral standards that I must follow, but also when she sets before me the motivation of action. In this case the motivation for action is itself one's desire. It need not matter whose desire comes first chronologically; in fact, like meaning in language, meaning in the form of motivation always begins in *medias res*.

To define this point further let's look at another aspect of Girard's analysis of tragic figures, which could be taken from Lacan word for word:

Once his basic needs are satisfied (indeed sometimes even before), man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for

what. The reason is that he desires being, something that he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being. It is not through words, therefore, but by the example of his own desire that the model conveys to the subject of the supreme desirability of the object.³⁶

In the name of demand there are three ideas that must be elaborated upon here. The first is *mimesis*, the second violence, and the third is the "content" of the subject. Concerning *mimesis*, or imitation, we have seen that the price for any given competition only grows in its value as more individuals are competing. This is a classical trope not only in epics and tragedies, but also in contemporary romantic comedies. How many times do we see a (usually male) partner attempt to win back her lover only *after* the desired person is in the process of flirting or establishing a relationship with others? The ex-partner grows in value in virtue of her status as the object of desire of someone else. Our desire for a person or object is never so heightened as when someone else shows interest in this object.

Given that a desired object becomes desired in virtue of its being desired by someone else, it always involves *mimesis*—I am modelling my desire after someone else's desire first, and only then it becomes mine. That is not unusual given the degree to which we learn both language and behavior by *mimesis* in childhood.³⁷ At first it appears that we have a chicken and egg problem here. Whose desire comes first? But such an objection can only be raised from a synchronic view, one which does not consider the evolution and dovetailing of individual subject time lines. If all our clocks began ticking at the same time, we could have no account of how or where or with whom mimetic desire begins. How could I possibly desire something—according to the mimetic view—if someone else did not want it first? In "real" life we are always already born into a world of language, customs, rules, and desires which precede us. Harris smartly calls these parts of our fate.³⁸ So, there is no shortage of models to imitate. Of course, as Girard also points out, because of a demand on us to be original, imitation is generally frowned upon once we become adults. Thus, the contest make sense: it allows us simultaneous desire something in the form of a prize and allows us to assert our individuality through bettering our competitors and *winning* that prize, making it our own and our possession. Competition seems to be a way to attempt to meet the double bind of demand put on us by society: imitate me, but you can't imitate me. In aiming for the same prize, in following the rules of competition, and in following the technique of a given sport or skill, we are imitating our competitors. But in winning, we are standing out. This latter part speaks to the internal contradiction of the subject: in aiming for

incorporating the object of our desire, we are always aiming to complete our being, yet when we finally have that thing we thought drives us we find that we are not complete. Completeness is a type of absolute being that is forever deferred. We are condemned to chase it in the realm of becoming.

The paradox: the person who “has it all” always seems so complete from the outside. After all, doesn’t she have exactly what we want? But that same person is still driven, desirous, demanding and responding to the demands of others and ultimately allowing their desires to be determined by what others want and expect. We are always bound to look at each other for the answer that none of us has. *That none of us has the answer is the answer.*

Competition, then, has exposed a deeper shared condition: that we are all looking for something. Given our analysis in earlier chapters and again in Girard’s account, we know what we are looking for: wholeness, completeness, being. Above we noted that the aim of these competitions is different from the goal. The aim maybe to win a foot race, or shoot an arrow through twelve axe heads, but the goal was the bride.³⁹ On a deeper level the goal was to be “whole,” which in the case of marriage is the formation of an *oikos*.

Honor and Recognition

If we cannot be “complete” or restore absolute wholeness, honor and recognition in competition may come close as a substitute for reifying the imaginary ego. Fame is the perfect formula for the ego: an imaginary thing born out of the desire and esteem of others. The formula for demand is desiring the Other’s desire. Once that is acknowledged we can see that the prize for stringing the bow becomes multifaceted. “For it is the notion of honor,” Thalmann writes, “together with the competitive ethos it engenders, that connects Penelope herself, Odysseus’ wealth, and his status as object of desire.”⁴⁰ According to this logic the rivalry is built up around an absent model: the younger Odysseus. Odysseus becomes an absent presence who’s the model for both the suitors and Telemachus’ desire. “A second marriage would bring to the new husband the aura of Odysseus himself,” writes Carol Thomas.⁴¹ In demand I desire the Other’s desire for me. But then I must ask: How do I get the other to desire me? By desiring what she wants. These competitors were shot through with erotic and competitive desire because “the defeat of other men for possession of a beautiful woman functions as a sign of sexual potency . . . Sexual potency is taken in honor-based societies as one of the primary signifiers of manhood.”⁴² “Desire,” Thalmann notes, “is fatally caught up in the competition, aroused by it, fueling it.” The suitors want Penelope, but they *want to be* Odysseus more. As Eve Sedgwick puts it: “male homosocial desire . . . passes regularly through a woman.”⁴³

What can we call the imaginary attainment of status, manhood, significance, and respect, all with relation to the Other? For the time being, let's call it the phallus. We will analyze how the bow represents the phallus, and the meaning of the phallus in terms of the relation of demand to signification.

THE BOW AND THE PHALLUS

In Lacan, the Phallus doesn't represent the male sex organ, so much as an exchangeable symbol of power. As Fink puts it: "The Phallus, in Lacan's lexicon, the symbolic phallus, is what is socially valued, valorized, desired."⁴⁴ We will analyze how the bow represents the Phallus and the meaning of the Phallus in terms of demand, particularly in terms of the relation of demand to signification. But before we discuss the phallus as a social concern, we must acknowledge the gender concern, in particular, the equation of the bow-as-phallus with the penis. First, let's note Telemachus' claim about the bow when talking to his mother, Penelope, ahead of the contest: "The bow will be man's concern, all men's, but mine most all—for mine is the authority in the household."⁴⁵ In this passage we have the connection of three key ideas that will be equated with the idea of demand in *The Odyssey*; ruling the *oikos*, the bow being a symbol of authority, and the idea of a bow being an item of exchange between men.

Before we analyze the more abstract meaning of the bow, we can first do more to equate it with the role of the Phallus—where here we do near the male sex organ. The line of argument goes as follows: the bow can be a metaphor for the penis, the penis is the anatomical equivalent of the phallus. So, even though the notion of the Phallus in Lacan extends beyond the actual male organ, in so far as it can include this, and in so far as the bow can be a metaphor for this, the bow can also be metaphor for a broader notion of the Phallus.

Cupid, the Bowstring Strung Too Tight

Thalmann points to two passages to support the connection between the Phallus, penis, and the bow. The first comes from Apuleius' "The Golden Ass" in which a drunk Lucius is impatiently amorous toward the slave girl Photis:

Feeling the path of the dart already, I pulled my nightshirt up to my thighs and showed proof of my impatience. "Have pity," I said "Come quickly to my rescue. Now the duel, you challenge me to, is upon us as you see and no herald to part us. I'm strung taught with expectation. Feeling cupid's first arrow strike to the depths of my heart, I've

stretched my bow so tight, I'm afraid of the string breaking from tension . . ."46

It's interesting that the bow and arrow takes up a double metaphor here. On the one hand, we see Lucius struck by Cupid's arrow (or dart) and this is the cause of his lust. Of course, this lust causes him also to have stretched his bow so taught—that is to assume a tension requires release. Perhaps even more interesting, the bow and arrow metaphor takes an even more violent guise in Photis' response: "'Do battle' she cried, 'and fight hard, since I'll not retreat an inch, nor turn my back. If you're a man, attack me face to face; take aim; strike eagerly; kill me as you die. Warfare today admits no quarter.'"47 We can now build on the earlier analysis in two ways. One, with Photis' response again we have the metaphor of desire as an arrow to be fired. Secondly, to use the metaphor of war to describe sex is to further the idea of violence behind non-violent means—sexual activity (as opposed for the contest we discussed earlier). What is also present in Photis' demand is the desire to be desired. But her desire also demands that she disappear: "Kill me as you die." Is it a coincidence that the French call the moment after orgasm, *le petit mort*, "the little death"? Assuming the role of the slave-girl Photis' demand is to be dominated, to be "killed" and enjoy it.

The Phallus-bow connection also extends to book 21 of *The Odyssey*. Later commentaries, such as in the erotic *Priapeia*, play on the double-entendre of the "stringing of the bow." They imagine Penelope as a lightning rod of male desire, herself, egging on the suitors with the 'following challenge': "No man stretched his bow-string better than my Odysseus, who being dead, do ye now stretch forth yours. Thus, shall I see if there be a man unto him; that that man be mine."48 Here we see again three key aspects of the *lompethian*, or as Thalmann calls it, "heroic wooing," with respect to the Phallus. One, Penelope is the prize—the desired object. Two, there is an implied conflation (read: double-entendre) between one's facility with the bow—even the length of one's bow-string—and one's ability to possess Penelope (i.e., to pleasure her). The third component is the reference to an ideal type—the heroic Odysseus himself. Competition always occurs in the relation to an ideal type, be it a hero or a god.

Ruling the Oikos

The bow is "man's concern" according to Telemachus, and whoever can stretch his bow-string best is deserving of Penelope. But what if the person who can do this is in fact Telemachus, Penelope's son? We are close to Oedipal territory here. Thalmann points out several "moments" in this quasi-Oedipal drama that do not come to pass. After reviewing

these "moments" we will show how this relates to Lacan's notion of subject development vis-à-vis demand.

Telemachus does enter the competition with Penelope's suitors. While he never plans on "winning" his mother, he does plan on pursuing his Father's household. But what would happen to Penelope were Telemachus to win? Well, most likely she would stay with Telemachus. And even if there is no incest in their future, the sexual overtones of the "bow-string" and the shooting an air through the axe heads cannot be denied. That said, Telemachus tries to string the bow three times and fails, though we are told that on the third try he "could" have strung it. This implies two conclusions; one, Telemachus is taking after his father in his strength; and two, that Telemachus, understanding that his father is still alive, "accepts" his place in the family hierarchy.⁴⁹ In a second moment Telemachus stands *by* his father's chair, as opposed to sitting in it (Od. 21.433-434), one which his father was once willing to give to him (16. 42-45). Lastly, at 23.105-110, Telemachus allows his parents their privacy, and in so doing, "Telemachus is taught the prime rule of the nuclear family: the child stays out of the parents' bedroom."⁵⁰

What these three moments amount to is Telemachus' concession that for the moment his father Odysseus retains the power of the Phallus. This amounts to conceding the role of the fatherly *basileus* to Odysseus, and in so doing retains his demand on his son and his people. Lacan calls various aspects of this phenomenon The-Name-of-the-Father, the Phallic injunction and castration.

For Lacan, the meaning of the Phallus is the power of signification, and who has control over it. But in the examples used above the bow or bow-string does apparently refer to the penis. So how do we bridge this gap? The move from physical to the symbolic realm (from the penis to signification) happens via the ever-increasing conformity of the child to the parents' wishes. The apex of this needs to conform is seen in the castration threat. That is, a child who plays with himself (or herself) is an embarrassing and antisocial child. The parents put their feet down: "either you stop or I'm going to cut if off." Now, this is never actually said, but it is meant when we stop infants and toddlers from touching themselves. Children then can please their parents only by *not* doing something in response to the veiled threat of castration. Thus, as Fink notes, we have not a loss of something (the negation of self-pleasure) but more of an exchange. When it comes to *jouissance*, the extreme pleasure gained in doing what we want, in this case self-pleasure, we can be seen as "giving up the *imaginary* one (the image of the penis as representing a precious but precarious source of *jouissance*, since it is in danger of being taken away) for a *symbolic* one (being valued for other things that are in life, for ones' qualities or abilities that are desired by the other). The negative (or minus) image is given up for a more 'positive symbol.'"⁵¹ In short, the child gives up physical pleasure associated with masturbation

for the pleasure associated with doing what's right—the pleasure attached to approval from the parents and society. The key point here is that we cannot avoid the castration complex unless we move from the imaginary (the image of the penis, the image of the threat of castration) to the symbolic (the realm of communication and societal approval). It is the movement out of the body and into language. This is what Lacan means when he says, "What the Phallus denotes is the power of signification."⁵² Or as Fink puts it: "The Phallus is the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole."⁵³

The power of signification can be seen throughout Greek epics and tragedies in which determining the correct interpretation of an oracle can make or break the interpreter. But, thanks to Thalmann's analysis, we have the perfect example of a contest of interpretation tied to the contest of the bow. First, we should note that Odysseus—disguised as a beggar—does not challenge the suitors directly; to do so would be a breach of class protocol. Instead he asks to test his own strength (21. 277-280). Even phrasing it thus, he puts the suitors in a double bind. If Antinoos—the ostensible head of the suitors—"allows" Odysseus to compete, the suitors run the risk of the beggar winning and thus losing face (discussed earlier). If, on the other hand, they don't allow him to compete, and given the strength of Odysseus' superior rhetorical ingenuity, they are made to seem petty, and thereby bested by Odysseus' *rhetoric*. Either way they lose. And indeed Antinoos' response give away too much. It exposes his concern about Odysseus' winning, suggests that Odysseus is lucky just to be in their presence, and, finally, orders him not to compete. What are you so afraid of Antinoos?

But as both Thalmann and Nagler discuss, this is not the only way that Odysseus takes control of the signification in this scene. In his failed dressing down of Odysseus, Antinoos brings up the story of Eurytion's misbehavior at Peirithous' house. Here is Antinoos account of story, used to admonish the beggar, and worth quoting in full:

Wine crazed the Centaur, famed Eurytion, at the house of bold Peirithous, on his visit to the Lapithae. And when his wits were crazed with wine, he madly wrought foul outrage on the household of Peirithous. So indignation seized the heroes. Through the porch and out the doors they rushed, dragging Eurytion fourth, shorn by the pitiless sword of ears and nose. And hence across a feud between the Centaurs and mankind; but the beginning of the woe he himself caused by wine. Even so I prophesy great harm to you, if you shall bend the bow.⁵⁴

In this dressing-down, Antinoos clearly has an interpretation in mind: the beggar (Odysseus) is Eurytion, the menace, and the suitors are "the heroes" who are seized by "indignation." The threat is that the suitors will kick out the beggar, even bring him "great harm" if he does not back down. But as both Thalmann and Nagler point out, without uttering one

word, and resorting to the action of actually stringing the bow, the beggar Odysseus turns that interpretation on its head: it is Odysseus who is the hero, and the suitors, Antinoos chief among, them who have (like Eurytion) "wrought foul outrage" to Odysseus' household in his absence.

This conflict of interpretation offers an excellent opportunity to see how the issue of demand is related to the notion of Phallus as the power of signification. So long as Antinoos has not failed at stringing the bow (in other words, no one has yet called his bluff) he can keep the "phallus" imaginary: that he "could" still string the bow and win Penelope and Odysseus' household. That, and the all-important apparent difference in class statuses, allow Antinoos to demand of the beggar that he back down.

On the other hand, the reader and Odysseus see the writing on the wall. Antinoos' own account had been interpreted wrongly, and it will ultimately be the suitors who will be subject to "great harm." As Thalmann puts it: "The power struggle between Odysseus and the suitors becomes a contest over signification."⁵⁵ Here the Phallus—the power of signification over this portentous story about Eurytion—is the bow. Whoever can wield it best wins the interpretation over who plays Eurytion and who plays the hero(es) at Peirithous' house.

Notably, both Antinoos and the beggar-Odysseus are operating from a standpoint of demand. What's driving each of them is a demand for respect from the other. This respect is shot through with envy. As we saw early the suitors not only want Odysseus' wife and possessions, in part because they respect him as a great hero, they want to *be* him. What's intriguing about the whole scene, however, is that Odysseus does not respond verbally to Antinoos' threat. Instead, the next time Odysseus speaks is after he has triumphantly strung the bow: "I did not miss my mark, nor in the bending of the bow make long labor." (21. 430-431) This idea of "Not missing one's mark" is already doubly meant. Odysseus' mark is to prove himself capable in his abilities and to assume his leadership role as the primary possessor of signification, and thereby the Phallus.

What's more, this remark foreshadows the next time Odysseus does speak, now in book 22, when he says after revealing his true identity: "So the dread ordeal ends! Now to another mark I turn, to hit what no man ever hit before, will Apollo grant my prayer" (22.16-18). With this he points the arrow at Antinoos. Michael Nagler points out that the "what" which "No man ever hit before" is not just Antinoos. Rather it signals a paradigm shift in civic demand: Odysseus aiming at Antinoos marks the first time that violence is focused on one's community for the sake of restoring order and protecting one's own *oikos* from intrusions from the outside.

According to that interpretation, Odysseus could be simultaneously protecting order in three institutions at once: living up to the heroic repu-

tation of his former self, protecting the boundaries of his *oikos*, and in somewhat paradoxical way, restoring “rightful” order to his community. He does this by making sure that the one who deserves the status of *basileus* retains that status and that those who are not deserving—like Antinoos—do not get it. So even though the violence Odysseus does to the members of his own community in the name of demand is in some ways unprecedented, from another point of view is trying to restore and reinvigorate the traditional institutions of the honor code, the *oikos*, and the larger community.

Still, the unfolding of evens on this political scale seems like a regression model with respect to the normal child psychological development expressed earlier. There we said that the child is willing to forego the *jouissance* of self-pleasure under the imagined threat of castration in order to aim toward more socially acceptable ends. We also said that the child moves into language to express needs and desires as a replacement of the physical. Fink emphasizes the point well: “Whether the absence of the mother or the absence of the absence of the penis, language has the power to alleviate the oppressive weight of absence by the very process at naming and signifying it.”⁵⁶ This appears fundamental to analysis and talk therapy. But at a more conceptual level we can reiterate the point that violence and discomfort are sublimated using words. With Odysseus’ outrage, we appear to have the opposite move.

DEMAND: VIOLENCE VERSUS USING ONE’S WORDS

What happens in the case of Odysseus’ slaughter of the suitors represents, comparatively, a regression of sorts. If the usual progression is from violating social norms (in form of violence) to an attempt to please and fit in through using communication, the case of Odysseus is reversed. He begins by “communicating” when he asks to test the bow for the sake of his own strength. After he strings it his confidence and sense of righteousness is emboldened. It is at this point that he breaks the rules of community relations; he slaughters his own neighbors.

Per our earlier discussion, the death aspect of the bow also includes life. As Carol Poster points out: “Odysseus’ bow for example, serves as a weapon with which Odysseus kills the suitors who consume his storehouse of goods (sustenance) and thus as an instrument of his own restoration.”⁵⁷ In that way the bow restores Odysseus to full vitality, while at the very same time brings death to the suitors. Of interest is the connection between the word *bios* as both bow and life, and their mutual connection to the word *rood* *bia*, meaning “force.” One can imagine that the bow here serves as a means for Odysseus to recoup his old *life* by way of *force*, by placing a violent demand on the other. Furthermore, we can see Ody-

seus re-assuming his role as a kind of father-figure, one who on occasion must use violence to restore order.

It is worth noting that up until the slaughter there are "Three times, as *basileus* in relating to the people of Ithaca, is said to have been 'as gentle as father.'" (*Pater de hose epios hen*; 2.247; 2.243; 5.12).⁵⁸ But Odysseus' change in demeanor can be explained by the drive of demand. Demand, as we have seen, usually has two components, the desire for the respect, desire, and love of the Other, on the one hand, and the way that such a demand is made symbolic on the other. Usually this making-symbolic involves language, but recall that the enunciation itself is never fully complete. It is not that the enunciator wants what she says that she wants; rather she wants to be acknowledged and listened to. This is the reason we call certain non-verbal acts of desperation, "*cries* for help." It's not literally a cry or call, but rather the action itself takes on the symbolic response of demand to evoke a response from the other. In the usual order of things then, the infant develops language for two reasons: one, as a coping mechanism for an inability to have what it wants immediately—as a substitution for a desire or need. But secondly, in so far as I only became a self to the extent that I am recognized as one from the outside, language is that which *makes it possible* for me to demand recognition. The function of demand is interesting here. On the one hand, the demand that I enter into language—as a substitute for tantrums, crying and violence, or as a substitute for autoerotic behavior—comes from the outside. "Use your words," parents say. The invitation to language then is at the same time a prohibition on infantile behavior. In Lacan's account, the prohibition role is played by The Name (*nom*) of The Father, which is also a pun on what the *Father* says; namely, "no" (*non*).

In the saying "no" of the father, one can see a different type of infantile demand: the one which demands that you listen to your father "or else." This "or else" can be conceived of as imaginary castration, but in the case of Odysseus it is much more real; the no-of-the-father results in the slaughter of the suitors.

Demanding What?

There are two parts to demand. There is the *directionality*—an intentionality—and then there is the *thing demanded* of another. The first part, the intentional part, is an extension of drive. To get a good sense of this notion of drive, we might do well to go back beyond Freud to Nietzsche, and even Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer imagines that there is a will, an irrational force, that lies beneath all movement, regardless of whether the body is sentient or even alive. The movement of tectonic plates forming into mountains are also manifestation of this will.⁵⁹ A drive that deep has no *rational* explanation. Nietzsche re-imagines free will as the *will to power*, a force which demands power regardless of how much force it holds

to begin with. For instance, even the physically weaker “slave” expresses the will to power through psychological warfare—by convincing stronger humans to “stand down.” All of this is to say that demand, as theorized by Lacan, and expressed through the stringing of the bow and slaughter of the suitors in Odysseus, has a heritage. We can see Odysseus’ demand as at the same time an irrational force that surges up through him, and an exercise in power dynamics. We have explored the latter part of this idea. In the remainder of the chapter let’s explore the former.

The Irrational Force of Demand

After Odysseus has slaughtered the suitors in a way that is, depending on how you frame it, either heroic or primal, we are told that the suitors families want revenge from Odysseus and Telemachus, which presumably means their lives. But then miraculously Laertes, Odysseus’ dead father, appears to cheer on Odysseus. (Such an intervention is just like Philoctetes’ visitation from Hercules at the end of *Philoctetes*.) Odysseus and Telemachus appear to be beating the suitors’ families handily when the gods intervene on the families’ behalf to stop the fighting. Of course, what we have here is a *deus ex machina*, a divine intervention that may not hold up to modern scrutiny, much like the one we saw in chapter 2 with Heracles and Philoctetes. But in terms of demand we have a preserved hierarchy, one that is as engrained in Greek society as it is endemic to human behavior. The gods demand the fighting stop and the people listen. The deference expressed to the gods is part and parcel to the human drive: we must navigate a world in which others are more powerful than us, at the same time as we demand things of others.

We can draw a parallel between three phenomena of demand: First, Odysseus demands the suitors stop degrading his household first through the test of the bow, and then through using that same bow to slaughter the suitors. One could see this as an absolute “no” from the Father of Ithaca. Here the possessor of the bow is the possessor of the phallus, and thereby the determiner of key signification of events (e.g., the wrong interpretation Antinoos gives to Eurytion story). In this formulation, the winning of the contest amounts to a symbolic castration of the suitors (as in when Leodes said he rather be dead than so humiliated). The licentiousness of the suitors prior to Odysseus arrival is a low-level *jouissance* (I would argue actual *jouissance* would amount to consummating with Penelope). Seen another way the violence to Odysseus’ household (*oikos*), and thus to the status of the community also takes the place of a *jouissance*. While this may not constitute violence in the sense of *physically* harming a specific person, the suitors are violating the norms of a pre-established order, by ignoring the boundaries of the *oikos*, and by ignoring Odysseus’ role as leader of the community. They are, after all,

damaging his reputation and therefore his ego. The slaughter of the suitors represents an actual castration, an absolute renewal of the previous order, and assertion of Odysseus' ego. According to this formulation, it is not just the demand that is placed on Odysseus but the way in which he asserts himself through his demand on others that is part of a strategy for survival. This could have been prevented by exercising self-control by either party: Either the suitors could have stopped their pillaging, or Odysseus could have sublimated his own violent tendencies.

When aimed inward, then, the demand constitutes a kind of self-control through repression. It should prevent me from acting out. Either Odysseus or the suitors could have nixed those desires whose fulfillment would put them at odds with the social order. Aimed outward at the Other, the drive of demand is a suppression through real or implied violence. Both Thalmann and Nagler point out that any aberration of the outcome in the accepted order of things—any outcome that should not have happened may escalate to violence on a different level.⁶⁰ One commentator points out that “outbursts of violence are to some extent avoided by shewing contests in favor of famous and powerful.”⁶¹ When this does not happen—if a powerful person loses face—the resultant indignation is usually channeled up and out of the community through war. Usually there is a separation between *eris*, strife within a community, and *polemos*, war of one community against another. That Odysseus flouts this distinction is only in response to a threshold already disrupted by the suitors: “Community and family, usually kept apart by the house's threshold, here are joined and a basic distinction that organizes Greek conception of social space is blurred. This situation can be read as one of the dislocations that Odysseus must set right to resolve social order.”⁶² Almost as if the gods themselves represent order, they make for the imposition of the paternal on the disobedient children. While according to the suitors' families it is Odysseus who has done wrong, according to the larger order of things, it is the suitors who did wrong. It is again a contest of interpretations, and the gods have the final say.

For as much as the intervention of the gods settles the matter, it also creates a problem for the larger understanding of demand. While we can all abandon our infantile *jouissance* and fall in line—in response to the castration threat—there is no absolute guarantor of established order. Indeed, the order of which we are supposed to become a part must also shift over time, and it thereby makes for a moving target. But this is all we can expect in a situation where the ultimate meaning of *jouissance*—union with the all-embracing maternal of the world—is impossible.

Remember that for Lacan, there is no self-identity prior to the other-identity. We become a subject through the introjection of the outside. I become what I think others want me to be. This mysterious self-as-a-vacuum is what Lacan calls the other(A), that is, the unchangeable (and imaginary) being at the center of ourselves. If Odysseus is desperate to

throw off his guise and assert himself once again as *basileus* and leader of his *oikos*, it's because despite his status, he needs others to recognize this as well. Ragland-Sullivan observes that Lacan's idea of aggression is "a dialectical response to the quest to know the other (A) [i.e., one's imaginary ego] via others, at whom aggression is aimed in a displaced manner when narcissistic recognition is withheld."⁶³ One is aggressive toward others when they are uncertain of themselves. After twenty years of being away, and in the disguise of the beggar, Odysseus could not recognize himself, and what's more, others did not recognize him. We should take him at his word when, as the beggar, he pleads with the suitors to let him test himself. This understanding of aggression would have it that without the recognition of others, there is no way to recognize ourselves and we therefore are taking out our frustration on the wrong people. The idea of demand is baked in there. The other(A) is not some biological organ, rather it is a figment of our imagination that must be nurtured through our own illusions and the attention of others. The human drive as demand is the desire to transcend the contingency of time and change and become an unchanging thing. Because "I" cannot reify myself, I take it out on others. In important ways, the honor-based society is the materialization of the principle of demand: I am who I am (to you—which is all that I am) only to the extent I am honored, or I am dishonored. Reputation is the other(A) which I seek.

Let's give this one more reading: if Odysseus' redemption of his *oikos* requires the slaughter of the suitors, how could it be that he kills the very people whose respect he wanted to gain? Couldn't he have anticipated that the families of the suitors will respond with anger as opposed to respect and admiration?

Fink points out that when we internalize the ego ideal, the Other whose demands on us form who we are, we internalize the desire of the other. "Many people sense at times that they are working toward something they do not want, striving to live up to expectations they do not even endorse, or mouthing goals they know perfectly well they have little if any motivation to achieve."⁶⁴ If there is a "me," it occurs as a space between what the other wants from me and my realization that I don't want that. Could Odysseus simply have wanted to make the others disappear? Why does he need to eradicate the others? "I don't know why," he thinks. He's just going beyond, taking a shot, that no one he has attempted before.

The Bow and Demand: Possible Responses

Let's attempt then to give a holistic picture of the bow in *The Odyssey* as a metaphor for demand. First, the contest of the bow can only be understood as a contest of masculinity, in which the real prize is to be the best among one's male social "equals." Even though Odysseus is dis-

guised as the beggar, his whole reputation is on the line in terms of the rightful appropriation of his *oikos*. One wonders: would the suitors have returned his household to him if he had revealed himself, competed and lost? His legitimacy would then be in question, as would his identity. While Ready point out that the bow represents social capital in the lineage it connects Odysseus to, that lineage, too, would be in question if Odysseus could no longer string the bow. So, it's imperative for the sake of the "who" he is to compete and win. There is also an aspect of the competition of Odysseus' desire to retain his own identity across time. Does he still have vigor and the supply limbs required?

Concerning the "vigor" we also discovered the bow as the phallus—that social marker of something desired, and something which contains the power to determine meaning more generally. When Antinoos believes he is winning the rhetorical *atheloi* by comparing the beggar to the unruly centaur Eurytion, Odysseus proves him wrong by having the final "word": silencing and slaughtering the suitors.

Lastly, we saw that Odysseus re-establishes his identity through winning the contest and demanding respect of the suitors, only to slaughter the same people whose respect he demands. At this point we could imagine a kind of war of all against all, in which escalation is the rule, and in which respect, honor, and recognition are replaced with violence and submission. But just as we saw in Philoctetes, the gods, the ultimate founders and restorers of order, step in to stop the escalation.

But what could all of this mean for agency? Where does the severity of the bow-as-demand leave us for now? Sure, contingencies and circumstances of our day-to-day situation differ greatly from those of Odysseus. Our identities do still depend upon the way others see us. Our "selves" are filled with both the expectations and desires of those around us. These expectations and desires are constituted in language. Any assertion of ourselves is also, for the most part, constituted in language, in a symbolic framework. Say I achieve a promotion. What type of "thing" is a promotion? Is it a physical thing I can experience by way of my senses or consume with my mouth? Quite the opposite, it is a title—a title I can speak with my mouth. It is part of a symbolic matrix, and to a great extent the whole of my existence occurs in this matrix. So much so that "possibilities and impossibilities can be seen to derive from the way in which the symbolic matrix is constructed."⁶⁵ As the possessor of the bow-Phallus, Odysseus with the help of the gods restores his order and his interpretation of events. But like identities, these orders change and entropy over time. Odysseus breaks the mold of the Greek leader in using violence against his own community. Thankfully, most of us negotiate the oscillation of identity formation and confirmation without recourse to violence or the gods. That said, a person who is not well, who fixes too heavily upon the recognition/desire/love of others, will not respond well, and this may end up in aggression, outbursts, violence, or worse.

The Archer: Resuming Control of the Bow

In the previous three chapters we have seen the half of the human-as-bow in virtue of its external constraints—what we have called subject position or the Others—as they connect to the three parts of drive: need, desire, and demand. Were it not for the gods in Philoctetes’ and Odysseus’ cases, their short-sighted and violent reactions could have had much worse consequences. Even admitting need is rooted in a biological drive for survival, we must not forget that we still are able to control how we react to our hunger, sexual attractions, and so forth. As for desire, we can renounce our identificatory mergers with objects, ideas, and people—if we pay attention and remember our “death work.” As for demand, even if our identity is founded on the recognition of Others, we must remember that we can move beyond that point by letting go of our imaginary ego and opening up other possibilities. Even under the influence of demand, we have options as to how we respond to a bruised ego (and here Odysseus does not set a good example). We can react with violence through enacting the imaginary as we see in the case of Odysseus. In the chapters that remain we will look at two more options: sublimation through creation (and I would also say virtue), and repression, which has its own pitfalls. In short, there is a remedy for being overdetermined by each of the drives.

In the next chapter we will look at Aristotle’s way of framing the problem of self-control in terms of the archer bent on improvement and getting closer to the target. The archer, like Odysseus, or any of us, will always face aspects of her being and her immediate circumstances that are beyond her control. It’s how we frame and respond to these circumstances that will help us remain psychologically healthy.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Ready, “Why Odysseus Strings His Bow” (*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, Vol. 50, 2010, 133-157), 133.

2. *Ibid.*, 134.

3. Of course, this idea is first and best explained in Claude Levi-Strauss’ *Structural Anthropology*, Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schepf. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), Chapter 15.

4. Ready suggests: “One benefit for example is the ability to mobilize a group of people to help with a given project.” “Why Odysseus Strings His Bow,” 136.

5. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Translated by Bruce Fink. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 286.

6. As quoted by Ready, “Why Odysseus Strings His Bow,” 153., from Charles Segal, *Singers*, 55. It is worth noting that there is still much to be unfolded in terms of the connection between the metaphor of the bow and the metaphor of the lyre, including Heraclitus fragment LXXVIII, which likens the two, and then tells us that we do not understand how a thing agrees at variance with itself.

7. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 153.

8. *Ibid.*, 88.

9. Ready, "Why Odysseus Strings His Bow," 134.
10. See, for example, Rubin's discussion of Levi-Strauss in Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*, Ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo, (Boston: Mc Graw-Hill, 2008): 13-40.
11. Ready, "Why Odysseus Strings His Bow," 137.
12. *Ibid.*, 141.
13. Michael Nagler, "Penelope's Male Hand: Gender and Violence in the Odyssey," (Colby Quarterly 29.3: 241-257) digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq., 250-251.
14. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: Illini Press, 1987), 281.
15. W.G. Thalmann, *The Swineherd and The Bow* (New York: Ithaca, 1998), 110.
16. I think it's interesting to consider this understanding in light of the modern-day autocrat who will wage war on other countries just to avoid focus on the situation "at home."
17. See for example, Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow*, and Michael Nagler, "Penelope's Male Hand."
18. Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status." In *Honor and Shame: The Value in Mediterranean Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21-77: 22.
19. Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow*, 117.
20. Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 116.
21. *Op. Cit.*
22. *Od.* 21.99.
23. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 108.
24. See David Hume, *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature*, book VI.21: "The whole of this doctrine leads us to a conclusion, which is of great importance in the present affair, *viz.* that all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties. Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of that easy transition they occasion. But as the relations, and the easiness of the transition may diminish by insensible degrees, we have no just standard, by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time, when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity. All the disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union, as we have already observed." <http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/TreatiseI.iv.vi.htm>. Accessed on 7/23/18.
25. See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 47: "a thought comes when 'it' wants, not when 'I' want; so that it is a falsification of the facts to say: the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'." See also *The Gay Science* n. 267. For an extended treatment of this critique see Jonas Monte, "Sum, Ergo Cogito: Nietzsche Reorders Descartes," *Aporia*, (25:2, 2015: 13-24) http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/monte-Sum_ergo_cogito.pdf. Accessed 7/23/18.
26. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 104.
27. *Ibid.*, 110.
28. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 36.
29. Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow*, 141.
30. *Ibid.*, 154.
31. *Ibid.*, 156.
32. Oliver Harris, *Lacan's Return to Antiquity*, 149.
33. *Od.* 21.184.
34. Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 156.
35. Rene Girard, "From Mimetic Desire to Monstrous Double." In *Violence and the Sacred* (translated by Patrick Gregory, 143-168. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University, 1972), 145.

36. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 146.
37. It goes without saying that Aristotle makes this point in *Poetics* chapter 2.
38. Harris, *Lacan's Return*, 141.
39. I can't speak for the reader, but when I first read this part of *The Odyssey* I thought Homer really had jumped the shark—even more with the twelve axe heads than with accounts of the gods. That said, I assumed that the axe heads were perpendicular. Such a feat would be unimaginable, given the thickness of the axe heads. But, alas, my mistake was corrected by Russo, Joseph, Manuel Fernandez-Galiano, Alfred Heubeck. 2002. *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*. Vols. III: Books XVII-XXIV. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.144-45. The more likely explanation was that the feat was one of AIM and straightness of the arrow. The axe heads were most likely buried in a trench of sorts without their handles. So, the effect would be one of shooting the arrow through the EYE of the axe head sitting on its point—much like threading a needle. Given that this is the case, it is worth thinking about the metaphor of “straightness” of the arrow, vs. crookedness, as in being a “straight shooter.”
40. Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 182.
41. As quoted in Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 182.
42. *Ibid*, 201.
43. As quoted in Thalmann, 202. Another famous example Thalmann give here is the competition over Helen, which of course leads to the Trojan War.
44. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 137.
45. Hom. Od. 21.350-53.
46. Appul. Met. 2.15-18.
47. *Ibid*.
48. Priapeia, 69.31-38.
49. Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 217.
50. *Ibid.*, 220.
51. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 136.
52. From *Seminar XIX* as quoted in Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 139.
53. *Ibid.*, 139.
54. As quoted in Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 288.
55. *Ibid.*, 239.
56. Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 139.
57. Carol Poster, "The Task of the Bow: Heraclitus' Rhetorical Critique of Epic Language." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39 (2006:1): 1-17 at 14.
58. Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 132.
59. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, especially book 1 of vol. 1.
60. Thalmann, *The Swineherd*, 133.
61. *Ibid.*, 136.
62. *Ibid.*, 112.
63. Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, 77.
64. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 9.
65. *Ibid.*, 19.

FIVE

Aristotle's Archer: Killing the Ego and Self-Transformation

In chapter 1, I showed that the human subject is held in tension—like a bow or a tensile structure—between many forces, none of which is “itself.” In the chapters that followed we saw that the primary and secondary forms of drive energy, represented by the bow in each case, are prostheses to the ego. The ego is imaginary, our “personality,” which aims toward internal object permanence and constancy. On one level, the ego itself constitutes a flight from death—from change, entropy, decay, chaos, and lack of control. In this chapter I will suggest that there are ways of conceiving of the death drive that constitute a healthy approach to self-formation and transformation. Once again, we will use the bow as a starting point and a metaphor throughout. First, I will begin with an account of how the ego and death drive relate to Lacan’s comments about the bow in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*. Second, I will draw a much-needed connection between death-work and the spirit of aspiration in virtue of ethics. Following that I will use Aristotle’s metaphor of the archer in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to elaborate on this connection. How can we maintain and even flourish while recognizing that we are made of many conflicting emotions, failings and obligations? I think the answer lies in how we approach these. Do we suppress all but the acceptable emotions and drives? Do we not suppress any and act out in violence, turning the death drive which is aimed at killing the ego toward others? Or, do we sublimate drives in an attempt to first recognize them for what they are, but ultimately turn them into creative and transformative forces? What is definite is that if either the ego’s narcissism or the unchecked drives of the fleeting subject take absolute control, there will be destructive results. The metaphor of the archer will teach us, balance between the two extremes will be the key to psyche health.

THE CAUSE OF THE TENSION

One thread that was left loose at the end of chapter 1 on tension was the notion of the death drive as the ultimate source of this tension. Freud considered the death drive as a second way of an organism achieving homeostasis, by dissolving into nothingness. For Lacan, the origin of the death drive lies in the battle between the many desires of the “stupid, ineffable” body and the reification of an imaginary ego that is supposed to protect the subject from the hurt of not socializing properly. It makes sense to acknowledge that if one acted on every “desire” that occurred to her, that would create a tension with those around her. In contrast, the natural progression is to move this tension inward; between the ego and the subject of the unconscious. The death drive is the drive to kill the ego. This drive shows itself in several forms from self-destructive behavior, to self-sabotage, and self-harm. As we hinted at earlier, the death drive can also be aimed outward in the form of aggressivity. This aggressivity hinges on whether we aim the thrust of the superego outward or inward.

The superego is usually conceived of as suppressive, not productive. However, in a turn that is reminiscent of Foucault, Boothby reminds us of the positive and assertive aspect of the superego that allows (maybe even demands) that we enjoy ourselves. At minimum this enjoyment can be seen in the pleasure most of us feel when “doing the right thing.” To some extent, the superego makes possible the enjoyment of something that we wouldn’t otherwise enjoy (e.g., helping others) as a method of sublimating excess energy. That said, the superego is usually understood as a repressive force, one which limits the childlike id. If the id is the devil on one shoulder, then the superego is said to be the angel on the other. But, even for Freud this explanation is too simple. Freud pointed out that the superego must have direct contact with the id, even if it does repress it; it is closer to the id than to the ego. What’s more, the superego (like Lacan’s death drive) directs hostile energy toward the ego in the form of guilt and shame. In so far as the superego is involved in sublimation it has something to do with the libidinal interests of the id.¹ Sublimation means the release of anti-social drives through socially acceptable and creative ways. Boothby puts it well: “the greater the renunciation of the impulse, the greater the hostility of superego toward ego.”² For Lacan, the origin of the superego is to be found in the exclusion of the real force of desire in one’s imaginary identity. The “real” in this case refers specifically to the bodily drives that are not socially acceptable. The Cynic Diogenes famously masturbated in public, as if to say: “We all do this! Let’s admit and do it out in the open!” These offensive and harmful drives are what is left out of the imaginary ego—the personality and its “tendencies” we accept as ourselves. In reversal of this simple understanding, it is the superego that forces us to enjoy: “The superego is the imperative of *jouissance*—*Jouiss!* [Enjoy!]”³ How is this possible? Because the superego

is what allows us to give force to, and give meaning to, our fundamental drives. "The superego is essentially located within the symbolic plane of speech."⁴ One way of dissolving the tension between the subject of the unconscious and the ego is through sublimation of our drives in speech or other artistic expression. According to Ricouer, "Sublimation is the symbolic (linguistic) function itself."⁵ Put it in another way: sublimation takes nebulous and unspecified physical drives and raises them to the level artistic production. In Lacan's terms "sublimation is effected by the transition from imaginary to symbolic structures and, as such," writes Boothby, "is attributable to the work of the death drive."⁶ Hence we have come full circle. The ego, it turns out, effaces the real by moving drive energy into the realm of imagination and then maintaining the imaginary realm in the form of the ego and its objects. The real can only be freed through its sublimation into the symbolic realm, the creative realm, via the superego damning it up at the source. By entering the realm of language, *jouissance* can become "*jouis-sens*" or "*enjoy-meant*" and "unending circulation of [imaginary] objects [i.e., words]" whose possession and fulfillment is as simple as saying a word.⁷

THE THREAT OF THE TENSION

But what happens if the death drive doesn't come to word? What happens if the death drive, the attempts to disintegrate the ego, turns outward in the form of the imaginary (i.e., wants to bring its violent imagination to life)? Keep in mind the imaginary is not the illusory or hallucinatory. It's entirely possible for the ego to act out "in reality" to protect its imaginary existence. In doing so, it, the ego, delights in the images, primarily images of destruction, even destruction of its own body. In language, this destruction happens in the Greek tragedy where the tragic hero often engages in self-mutilation as an outward spectacle of his inner ruin, or more precisely, the ruin of his unified sense of self, or his ego. "Narcissistic aggressivity is enacted," describes Boothby, "on the level of literal violation of the body's imaginary integrity. . ."⁸ In that sense, bruising the ego has "real" effects if not handled properly. Not only does Oedipus suffer the enactment of his fate, but because of the offense to his person and legacy, decides he cannot stand to "look at" himself and gouges out his own eyes. But this type of reaction can be even more dangerous when aimed outward. Book 21 of *The Odyssey* is an extraordinary example of what can go wrong with the outward release of the tension in the imaginary realm. As we saw there, it is possible to direct the force of the death drive outward, even against one's own people.

In Lacan, the superego does double duty as both the provider of language and the injunction of the law. The ego is forced into language when it is prohibited from seeking joy through bodily means. On a politi-

cal level, there are implications for the relation between a ruler and the ruled. For instance, a leader can seek to sway her people through discourse alone, or she can seek obedience through real or imagined threats of violence. Here I must quote Boothby at length:

By collapsing the will of the people out of an imaginary register, political terror induces a pervasive atmosphere of paranoia. The body politic is atomized as each becomes preoccupied by the fear that every other member of the group may be a stooge or informer. In the same stroke, the psychological ground is well prepared for the emergence of a charismatic leader who enlists the structure of the imaginary to consolidate his own position of power.⁹

Indeed, while I'm reluctant to cast Odysseus in the same light as Hitler, Stalin, or Pinochet, Odysseus does use that spectacle of violence toward the suitors to re-establish his power. No doubt this has some relation to his being a man of few words. But it also has to do with the threat to his ego posed by the suitors offending his *oikos*, to which he reacts very badly.

The strongman or Odysseus example demonstrates why it is necessary to channel the ego's energy into the register of the symbolic using language, as opposed to acting out in the imaginary realm using violence. While Lacan doesn't give us a lot of specifics in this direction, J.B. Pontalis and other commentators have given some insight in the practice of death-work.

DEATH-WORK: FREEING THE SUBJECT TO NEW POSSIBILITIES

Is it serendipity or necessity that aligns the therapeutic practice of death-work with Heraclitus' notion that work of the bow is death? Elsewhere in Greek myth the bow is also the death-bringer. As it happens, the practice of death-work does not have to do with shooting a bow and arrow, at least directly. First let's recall that "from the psychoanalytical perspective, the death at stake in the death drive concerns the disintegration of the organism as such but of its psychological representation in the imaginary ego."¹⁰ What this means is that the "work" of death has to do with disintegrating and de-centering the ego. Heraclitus gives us another clue: "They do not understand how a thing agrees at variance with itself as in the bow or the lyre."¹¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, the subject, like the bow, agrees at variance with itself. Let's see what this means with regards to the bow first. On the plane of the physical, the bow begins as a straight piece of pliable wood which is bent to put tension on the string that holds together the two ends. First, the string is completely flexible and mobile prior to becoming stretched across the limbs. Then it becomes, at rest, a straight line. Conversely, the wooden handle beginning straight, has a curve introduced. Both elements agree at

variance with themselves. But the other aspect to consider is the potential of the bow—the string itself is pulled taut when at rest. This tension essentially preserves a static position of the bow. When pulled back the bent string forces the bow into action. Brooks Haxton translates the key fragment used by Lacan as “the living, when the dead wood of the bow springs back to life, must die.”¹² This translation reiterates two familiar oppositions in unity: the connection between the life of one, and the death of the other; and the connection between the potential of the bow in its tense status (stationary tension) as over against the violence in its actual release.

As is pertains to the subject we also have the life/death unity-in-opposites present: the birth of the ego requires the repression (death) of the multiple drives. Conversely the coming-to-be of the subject requires a disintegration of the ego.¹³ What's more, the underlying drives are held in stationary tension, either to be released in the realm of the imaginary as real, or imagined violence, or in the realm of the symbolic as creative production of meaning.

As we first indicated in the chapter on Heraclitus, it is, in theory, possible to short circuit the buildup of pressure as a result of this tension through what J.B. Pontalis called “death work.” Remarkably, such “death work” may lie at the basis of the metaphor of the subject as bow: its name is life, its work is death. To the extent that the subject can take control of this process, it involves a shift from imaginary *identifications* (e.g., “I am X,” or “I was born in Y, which means Z.” “There is a natural path that is meant for me,” and so on or, “X is definitely wrong, Y right.” “Z is the way things must be,” and so forth) to symbolic *articulations* which involve a confrontation with the real. The “realization” of death can only happen at the level of the ego, since above all else the ego's objective is to do just the opposite: to hold itself together and preserve itself. As Freud acknowledges, it is the ego that “is the actual seat of anxiety.”¹⁴ We begin forming the ego to prevent against chaos, disintegrating in the unmitigated flow of desire. “The imaginary ego is characterized by ‘its essential resistance to the elusive process of becoming to the variance of desire.’”¹⁵

Death-work, then, does not involve any type of bodily self-mutilation. Instead it involves adjusting the “images”—the expectations, the convictions and the nostalgia—of the ego to a more realistic accounting of the real desires of the body. Put another way, the imaginary maintains itself by negating the real while nonetheless keeping the real sealed off within itself. In the process of de-objectifying and de-identifying the images of the ego through speech—the process of analysis—“the subject rediscovers the stakes of its desire” and its “otherness to itself is brought into explicit expression.”¹⁶ Such a “bringing to expression” brings into question our usual understanding of “facing death.” Often an attempt to confront death would understand death as the death of the body or, at minimum, a permanent death of a consciousness. As Heidegger famously put

it, authentic being-toward-death involves realizing the possibility of having no more possibilities.¹⁷ For Lacan, and Lacanians like Pontalis, the idea of death-work is not so simple. For one, it does not, strictly speaking, involve the visualization of the possibility of having no more possibilities. If anything, it entails the opposite: That is, by de-coupling the ego from the objects that give it “substance,” we are “freeing” up the latent possibilities of the body. If the ego aims toward constancy, consistency, and object permanence, the real of the body aims toward variation, change, becoming. As Boothby puts it, “the death at issue concerns a structural transformation of the subject’s existence.”¹⁸ It should be noted that we can take this structural transformation in two ways. The first would be some type of accomplished positive development. I think it’s fair to say that in situations of acute neuroses or psychosis such an accomplished (in Aristotle’s terms, “complete”) and hopefully curative development may be possible. But what about for the otherwise-healthy-but-nonetheless-ego-bound rest of us?

I want to argue that there is a second possibility for this structural transformation: that it is not an accomplished achievement, but instead an ongoing series of adjustments. The second option makes more sense for the average person in everyday life. If the underlying desires, and the body itself, are the cause of becoming, the type of transformation we see as a result of death-work would also have to be one of becoming. More specifically, it would have to align whatever remains of the mental schema (what remains of our ego) with the notion of change and adjustment. I, for one, believe that such an adjustment could benefit not just those of us with mental illness, but all of us. What such an adjustment requires in analysis is “the willed suspension of the will in free association.”¹⁹ In other words, we must set our ego aside and attempt to realize the Other in us. The analyst can accomplish this by throwing off the ego’s desire for control over the meaning of its own speech: “interpretation is accomplished not by explanation of the meaning of the patient’s speech, but rather marking that speech—as much by silence or by the termination of a session (abruptly) as by something said or done by the analyst—so that its own latencies and potentialities are opened.”²⁰ In other words, allow room for the patient herself to dwell on the meaning(s) of her own speech.

Imagine the last time you were in an argument with someone. Imagine that in place of responding to every verbal dagger thrown at you, you instead remained silent after the last cruel thing that your partner said. Maybe you leave, maybe not, either way the “meaning” of what your partner said can sit with them. That is, the full impact of the terrible or untrue words they were using only begin to register to them when they are left to linger. The patient’s realization of the latent meaning of her own statements could happen in the same way; the space to think demands confrontation with what was said. How many possible inter-

pretations of an email sent, but not replied to, do we spin out before a reply arrives? Could this person have taken this wrong? Did they receive it? In silence we are forced to ask the same questions to ourselves: What was I saying?

In being forced to confront strangeness and fragmentation in our own speech, we begin to realize the material strangeness of the signifiers themselves, what Lacan calls the "agency of the letter." When the patient is forced to confront the potential interpretations behind the language in fragmentation, the effect is "self-transformative."²¹ The experience of the words themselves is experienced as a horrific remainder in excess of "what we meant." That which under lies the false sense of control of the ego is always going to appear as excess, as something outstanding. For Lacan, this is precisely the role of the real: that which cannot be incorporated either through the imaginary or symbolic. In sum, the death-work that takes place in analysis demands that one use the symbolic—the realm of language—to point to the real, behind the façade of the ego which cannot itself be articulated. But once we have penetrated the armor of the ego, what remains?

What remains, from an existential point of view, is a variety of drives without purpose. We can imagine this could put a person used to order in a state of utter despair. It seems that there are two knee jerk responses possible: either we face the multiplicity of drives with other self-denial, asceticism as Schopenhauer imagines in book IV of *The World as Will and Representation*, or one could "go mad" (i.e., live in service to every drive as it appears thereby completely succumbing to a world of unreason). But there is a third way: that of measured acceptance, character building, and sublimated creativity.

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE: GETTING OVER OUR SELVES

As newborns, our caregivers respond to our every need; there is no "noticeable" separation between our pains and their satisfaction. Then the newborn begins to gain awareness of its own body in the mirror stage. When this happens two changes occur simultaneously. One, the infant now begins to imagine itself as a whole body, and it notices the mother as a separate body. One of the reasons for this is simply that the infant is awake for longer periods of time when it is not busy occupying itself, it misses the presence of its mother/caretaker even when it is not only hungry or needing to be changed. Also, at this time, under the spell of her unified body, the infant begins to explore its own body, primarily its orifices. Of course, as the parents begin scolding the child for playing with excrement, or its genitals, the separation sensed by the child widens. Even if it cannot toilet train itself, it can stop playing with itself to please its parents. This begins a process of moving from bodily exploration as

primary *jouissance* to a more transcendental *jouissance* (or substituted energy) attached to gaining control over one's body.

Every milestone in infant development has to do with increasing control over its body, with two of the largest being potty training and learning to talk. These two developments are particularly interesting vis-à-vis Ernest Becker's observation that we are "gods with anuses."²² With the development of speech we can express any number of transcendent concerns, emotions, and ideas. Speech allows to transcend the immediate, including the reach of our senses and our body. When we are potty trained, we have control over the most basic and *base* elements of our body. We may have to urinate and defecate, but we'll do it when we want to, damn it. As Freud pointed out, we are born between urine and feces. These are also many ways of convincing ourselves that our "ego," this imagined and unified entity, has control over our body, over its waste, and therefore over death.

The ego, then, is a byproduct of trying to gain control over fundamental bodily drives which need to be curbed in order to please others. Problems occur when this rather limited amount of control becomes magnified in our imagination to a real, universal, thing. Becker—and Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and others—called this belief in a real "character" a "vital" lie.²³ And yet the belief in this lie has some justification; the ego apparently can continue to repress very basic drives and information about who we "really" are—in Lacan, the *subject*—for the sake of its pride. In other words, it is only through an understanding which includes the vital lie of the ego that we can imagine "lying" to ourselves. A necessary fiction is, after all, necessary. In Lacan's language, the ego as the ego ideal is only one of the "others" against which the body competes. The body as the foundation of drives offers a rainbow of possibilities that we regularly repress.

If, on the one hand, we completely release these drives—desires as we imagine them—this can not only destroy the ego, which is not a bad thing, but others as well. On the other hand, we can actively sublimate these drives. However, the conflicting drives need to be acknowledged before they can be sublimated. On this point Nietzsche, Lacan, Becker, and many others agree: in order to use bodily drives for "good," in a *creative* way, we need to acknowledge them first, as they are, and only then attempt to "control" them. Here again, potty training may be instructive. The point is not *never* to defecate; the point is to defecate at an appropriate time, at the appropriate place, in the company of appropriate people (usually no one), and so on.

When a child is coming to be a subject in language and she is trying to express herself verbally, she may at first stumble. "Use your words." Her parents say. The frustration is obvious; she wants to express herself as an adult would and cannot do so. She screams. Boothby had it right, I think, that violence is the result of a *regression in communication*.²⁴ That is when

we're violent we are using images—which can make real in the physical realm through acting out—as opposed to symbols, words.

Now imagine your “average” adult. Such a person might rarely glimpse images, have feelings, and so on, that lay outside of the cultural norm. Undoubtedly, they repress such out-of-the-ordinary feelings and they move on with their lives. Such a person, as we will see Nietzsche suggest in the next chapter, is not capable of “greatness” because they have been domesticated out of complicated emotions or feelings. They don't have the spring of drives out of which some can be channeled into original creation. But what about the person whose inner life is such a complicated source? Such a person, without check, can become mad, violent, through living out their innermost drives. But when such a person does direct their energies toward something creative, then they cease to be the bow, and become the archer.

Without question, the ego can be the source of very bad behaviors, in the form of defense mechanism it uses to prevent itself from facing the truth: it is only marginally in charge of its world, if at all. According to our logic, a “healthy” ego is not a robust ego, quite the opposite. The stronger ego is in terms of defending itself, trying to identify with beliefs, or caring about the way others view it, the more it is inclined to react violently and create self-induced pain and discomfort.

What if we could use the ego's misguided desire to control the world to control itself instead? In other words, what if we could turn the impulse toward the mastery of others into self-mastery? In what follows, I will argue that, though it predates Lacan by some two millennia, Aristotle's virtue ethics asks us to do just this. The amount of work written on Aristotle's virtue ethics is daunting, and I am going to significantly reduce the focus of our analysis to one area: the role of the archer as a metaphor in Aristotle's doctrine of the mean.

BREAKING DOWN OUR DEFENSES THROUGH DEATH-WORK AND THE OPENING TO SELF-TRANSFORMATION

In the previous section, it was determined that the working-through that can happen in analysis is death-work. Death-work in the exchange between analyst and subject-patient situates “sharing” as “the potentiality of death as an openness to the utterly other.”²⁵ In freeing up the analyst to the free “play of signification,” the subject-patient is out of control, and thereby forcibly open to the discourse of the Other. In other words, “Death is no longer an anticipated eventuality but the ongoing effect of a symbolic process of exchange.”²⁶ The closest approximation one could imagine outside the therapy office is when one's words are taken out of context and used against one or someone else in a way they did not intend. On the one hand, I said those words; they are mine. But

they become petrified in the instance of their articulation, such that someone else's desire can take them up and give them fresh meaning. In doing so, that person has "killed" me, or I have "died" in the materialization of the letter. Again, the fact that the words are capable of *doing this to me* is precisely what Lacan means by the phrase: "The agency of the letter." That said, in being (forcibly or otherwise) opened to interpretations that I did not intend, I am now open to become a subject other than what I was. The idea of death as "freeing up" new possibilities is similar to the type of character development that happens in virtue ethics.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUE AND BEING OPEN TO CHANGE

In opening our look at virtue ethics in Aristotle, it might be instructive to think about a bad candidate for the development of virtue. Firstly, *they would not change* even when they know change is required. Their reactions would exacerbate problems. *They would not be self-reflective*, and they would more often than not *assume that it is the world, not them, who is the source of their problems*. In short, they would exhibit a stubborn defiance toward inner change.

Virtue ethics is the idea that a person can live well (and be good) through reacting appropriately to situations. Since it is usually the case that we do not do this automatically or naturally, more often than not this type of approach requires adjusting over time. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, likens the appropriate response to a given situation to hitting a target, and the person aiming toward virtue as an archer. "Missing the mark is possible in many ways," says Aristotle, "while success can be had in only one way."²⁷ What Aristotle has in mind is that the virtuous person always aims toward a mean: a range in which we are reacting to the situation appropriately.

ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF VIRTUE

Aristotle is famous in the world of virtue ethics for formulating virtue as a mean between two extremes. This explains what type of thing virtue is only in its most abstract sense; namely, it is not an extreme. But to get a sense of how virtue fully relates to desire, the bow, and the archer, we must quote Aristotle's definition of virtue in fall: "Virtue or excellence is a characteristic involving choice, and that it consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational principal, such as a man of practical wisdom would use to determine it."²⁸

Let's look at the key elements of Aristotle's definition of virtue one by one:

1. A characteristic

2. Involving choice
3. Observing a mean relative to us, defined by a rational principle
4. As a person of practical wisdom would determine it

As we do this, and to foreshadow where we are going, we should keep in mind that when acting with virtue "it is easy to miss the target but hard to hit it."²⁹

A Characteristic

A "characteristic" can also be translated as a "habitual disposition."³⁰ Aristotle outlines two types of disposition. The first he ties to the *vegetative* part of the soul: a non-habitual disposition. The non-habitual disposition includes automatic tendencies such as growing, digestion, and breathing. These are non-habitual because even though we may experience them regularly (e.g., breathing), they are below the level of conscious thought. The second he ties to the *rational* part of the soul: *hexis*, or habitual disposition. The habitual disposition is the kind formed through training. These habits can begin being formed at birth, but they are not automatic.³¹ We can further break such dispositional habits into two categories, *aretai*, virtues and *technai*, skills. One can determine the quality of a person's skills by the quality of the product they produce. But virtues must be *more* than just their *product*, since the outcome of a given situation can *appear* to be virtuous, even though such an outcome was not intended (e.g., I accidentally save a person's life), or it was not intended with the aim of being virtuous (e.g., I unknowingly help you make money while trying to enrich myself). Therefore, unlike skills, virtues are habitual dispositions that must include more than an outcome of an action. Virtuous action must also take the proper perspective or attitude in achieving such an outcome.

Dispositions can also be put in context of Aristotle's three conditions of the soul.³² Accordingly, the soul is said to have feelings, dispositions, and habits. Virtues are not virtues only because of our feeling good or bad about a situation. In fact, it may be a sign of a lack of virtue to feel good about a bad situation that we brought about. Furthermore, virtues cannot be *mere* dispositions, by which we mean the capacity to do X or Y. We are each *potentially* able to be good, without *actually* being so. So, at minimum virtues must be habits, that is, there are appropriate active responses to a given situation for the appropriate reasons. In other words, the term habitual disposition incorporates all these conditions of the soul: virtues are habitual dispositions enacted in response to situations with the appropriate concomitant feelings.³³

Involving Choice

It is helpful to understand choice here as being deliberative. Aristotle's word for it is *prohairesis*, which Hughes translates as "considered opinion." At first glance, there appears to be a lot of room between "choice" as we conventionally conceive of it, and a "considered opinion." But Hughes has good reason for translating *prohairesis* this way. There is plenty of evidence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to suggest that a person can act against *prohairesis*, their considered opinion, whereas a person cannot act "against" choice unless it is an accident (not an action) or coerced (not at issue here).³⁴

For an opinion to be considered, it needs to be reflected upon, that is, it needs to involve judgment. When we want to improve something, we recognize that the prior way of approaching a certain type of situation may not have been appropriate, or at the very least, our response could have been better. In recognizing this, one is responding to a *default* reaction and the intent of changing such a reaction must come *after* some deliberation or use of reason. In Hughes' words, "Moral virtue is a habit related to judgement and judgement is deliberated desire."³⁵

The introduction of the idea of desire to the notion of virtue helps us place it within the structure this study has so far laid out. If desire can be in or out of the line with deliberation, then it can be controlled, adjusted, and brought in line with reason. The goal of virtue, remember, is a mean between two extremes, and this mean is always determined by reason.

The Ambiguous Target: The Mean Relative to Us

We must now consider what it is we are aiming for in being virtuous. The target metaphor can be read in two ways. There is the overall goal of living well, which Aristotle says is the point of virtue; "the good of man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue."³⁶ Then there is the aim of the person who is trying to be virtuous in each case. For example, how do I appropriately respond to my roommate accusing me of something I did not do?

In both cases, the general and the specific, Aristotle uses the archer attempting to hit a target as his key metaphor. In the very beginning of his inquiry into the good he asks, "Would it not better equip us, like archers who have a target to aim at, to hit the proper mark?"³⁷ In the very idea of aiming for something exists the notion of desire. Aristotle's inquiry into the good constitutes *his* imaginary object that will settle uncertain matters. In other words, Aristotle is ultimately motivated by finding his own answer to the question: How should I live? Any obligation that we can derive from his discussion of virtue has to be framed in terms of the metonymy of desire. In answering such questions, we hope to bring unity and wholeness to our fragmented lives. Such questioning, *via nega-*

tiva, shows us that something *is missing*. Why justify the purpose of our lives if we were perfectly content living them as they are? Do we need a guide to the good life if we feel we are already living it? Aristotle has lifted his bow and fired his arrow; we are aiming for the ultimate purpose of life.

It's no coincidence that Aristotle's inquiry into the ultimate good begins by acknowledging this truism: "Now if there exists an end in the realm of action which we desire for its own sake, an end which determines all of our other desires . . . then obviously this end will be the good, that is, the highest good."³⁸ In understanding "the good" in this way, Aristotle places himself in a long line of thinkers set on identifying the one true purpose of being human. This study does not have it in its purview to make such grandiose proclamations. Instead, such aspirations—namely, finding human purpose—are themselves the product of desire. The ultimate desire is to understand the purpose of human life, as an activity of the soul conforming to virtue. We ought to desire the virtues themselves as instrumental to meeting this goal. Thus, we have a larger target—living well—and smaller targets along the way—enacting virtues.

It is these smaller targets, acting virtuously in specific situations, which become complicated to determine exactly. Aristotle says of virtue it "is a mean in the sense that it aims at the median."³⁹ How does one determine that? More importantly we are told, "This, by the way, is also the reason why the one [doing wrong] is easy and the other [doing right] is hard: it is easy to miss the target, but hard to hit."⁴⁰ And finally, "'bad men have many ways, but good men have one."⁴¹

At What Should the Archer of Virtue Aim? A Rational Principle

Two commentators, Glen Koehn and Peter Losin, defend Aristotle's vision of the archer aiming for the target of virtue as a very sophisticated one. If we imagine the mean as one small point, as *one* possible response to a situation, on either side of which we will have fallen into vice, then expectation set by our definition of virtue would be nearly impossible to hit. But as both Koehn and Losin explain, albeit in slightly different ways, the metaphor of the archer aiming for a target affords us a much richer picture of "hitting the target" than one might at first suspect.

According to Koehn, "the skills of the archer" are judged as good when they achieve their goal of hitting anywhere on the target. Such an observation makes for a nice parallel with Aristotle's argument that both skills and virtues can be habits. In other words, the hitting of the target is a direct result of the "shooting action of the archer." For instance, writes Koehn, "the drawn bow must not be too slack nor too tight, pointed neither too high nor too low and not too far to the left or right."⁴² So the accuracy with which one achieves one's objective of hitting the target is

directly related to a “*subjective range*” of possibilities: “Here a good shot will be an act of shooting which is adjusted so as to reach the goal.”⁴³ In an actual archery contest, one does not have to hit the target to win, she simply needs be closer to the target than her opponent. Of course, we could widen our focus to a broader secondary set of objectives than just hitting the target. This could include a “high score, victory, praise, esteem, and so on.” Then the firing of the arrow becomes instrumental to these objectives. In any case, the “*subject range*” becomes the position of the next arrow relative to the ones previously fired situated on the target itself. The subject’s position vis-à-vis the recognized goal can then be seen in terms of sufficiency, deficiency, and excess, wherein a whole range of possibilities and adjustments could still achieve the stated goal. Was this most recent shot as good or better than my previous shots considering the adjustments I made? Furthermore, it is also possible to go wrong in several possible ways with regard to these ranges: one could aim “both too high *and* too far to the right, for example.”⁴⁴ Or a passage from a piano piece could be played both “too quickly and too loudly.”⁴⁵ With that in mind there are multiple scales or ranges with regard to getting it right for virtually every activity or response.

What we have established in previous chapters is that the great majority of human actions and reactions issue from drives that are beyond our control. Despite that, the virtue theory of Aristotle gives us an opportunity to adjust our original responses and impulses, and, thereby, to improve. The idea that these adjustments to automatic responses would happen in ranges (as opposed to binaries) should not surprise us. Given that we are not operating in a *binary* of good versus bad action, but rather a continuum of better or worse relative to us indicates precisely a range of possibilities. It is much more productive to understand practical wisdom as growth relative to previous behavior, than simply knowing the “right” action in the abstract.

Peter Losin points out that this range of possibilities is a more accurate assessment of the target than an either/or binary. Of course, hitting the bull’s-eye is everyone’s goal; but hitting anywhere closer to the center than we already had is also an improvement. It would be absurd for a novice marathon runner to claim that if they do not break the yet unbroken two-hour mark, that they have failed at running a marathon in doing so. In fact, most first-timers have a difficult time imagining what their goal time should be for precisely the reason that they have no previous time to which to compare it. Much more reasonable for a first-time marathoner would be to extrapolate a reasonable goal time given their time during training runs or during a shorter race. This example illustrates the point that runner’s improvement is measured by a previous set point that can be established relative to them, and not on some binary of whether they are the fastest marathoner ever.

In defining what a proper possible range can be for each of us, we are enacting a rational principle. In this case the rational principle involves weighing possibilities using something more than just feelings. I should be able to use reason in a casuistic way, responding to each situation based on previous situations. Here "the rational" is not just an extraneous addition but sets apart the person who reacts to situations based upon experience and wisdom, and who can think clearly about complex situations at an emotional remove.

In one more telling passage, Aristotle points out that reason clarifies the target at which the virtuous person is shooting: "in the case of. . .all the virtues there is a certain mark to aim at, on which the person who has reason fixes his gaze, and increases or relaxes the tension accordingly."⁴⁶ This leads us to believe that, rather than finding some fixed definition of virtue to which we must always correspond, it is reason that allows to adjust to the particular situation in question to our own character.

Why We Miss

Improvement in our habitual dispositions and responses can be measured according to several scales (and for that reason become slightly more complicated than the running example). Losin gives Aristotle's discussion of *praōtes*, even-temperedness, as an example of how one virtue could be measured along several criteria at once. He points out that Aristotle identifies at least five criteria: frequency (never—always); degree (too mildly—too violently); duration (too short—too long); people (no one—everyone); provoking circumstances (none—everything).⁴⁷ As Losin points out, each of these is independent of the other four and can thus make or break a virtuous response. So, for instance, one could get angry at appropriate times to the right degree, for the appropriate amount of time, but at the *wrong* person. I could get angry at one roommate for finishing the milk without replacing it, when really it was the other roommate who was at fault. But, as Losin also points out, this picture is not yet sophisticated enough: "Getting angry at the wrong people is not primarily a matter of getting angry at too many people."⁴⁸ So not only do I have to keep in mind the correct person at whom I am supposed to get angry, to but make sure that I am not getting angry at others as well. I am sure that we have all had that experience of having one person doing something to anger us, and instead of taking it out on them, we are salty at anyone else we meet that afternoon. With the anger example, as well as the metaphor of the archer, the picture presented by Aristotle involves more than just a quantitative model in which we are mentally adjusting dials. Rather, we should see the goal as a target, a circular range, wherein a better shot would involve an archer considering multiple things at once. Here it is worth quoting Losin at length:

[The archer] must (since he cannot possibly hold his bow perfectly still) coordinate his release of the bow string with the subtle movements of the bow. If there are strong crosswinds he must aim slightly into the wind, and the wind will blow his arrow onto the part of the target he wishes to hit. If he is aiming into the wind, he must aim high to compensate for the slowing effect of the wind. If he is aiming from the crest of a hill above a target, he must adjust for the effects of gravity. And so on. Hitting the mark involves being aware of and, adjusting for, factors like these.⁴⁹

Given these points it should come as no surprise that a rather important, though perhaps overlooked, component of understanding how to hit the target is understanding why we miss. In a book about archery entitled *Why We Miss*, Milan Elott notes: "Archery does not get difficult or hard to understand until the arrow misses."⁵⁰ This is true of virtue as well: one cannot imagine how difficult it is to be virtuous until one attempts and misses. Similarly, "every time we miss the target, we reveal some type of faulty shooting."⁵¹ That is, the only agent who could possibly be held accountable for a missed shot is the archer herself. We cannot blame the arrow, the wind, the camber, or the equipment, as these are all things that we have opportunity to select and assess. If we compare the bow in this analogy to the *potential* to be virtuous—the disposition—then we find that there is a kind of "muscle memory" in which our equipment and the way we use it ought to improve with careful reflection each time we use it. After all, someone who shoots well does not need to consider carefully why they shot well. Or, if they do, it would only be because they would want to replicate that shot as closely as possible in similar circumstances.

Practical Wisdom and Practice

The analysis of virtue initially operates in a direction opposite to conventional ethical argumentation; one is not focused on what the right action is in general, but rather what went wrong with *this* action. Aristotle recognizes this need for experience in his contention that virtue is in accordance with how the person of *practical* wisdom would determine it. A person cannot have practical wisdom without practice. The person with practical wisdom has had the opportunity to have misses, assess them, reflect upon them, and determine which changes need to be made to prevent them from happening again. Improvement is repetition in which each repetitive action aims to become better than the last precisely by learning something from it.

This account has so far left out one important element: the *goal* of virtue. For Aristotle the goal of virtue is nobility, as nobility is a central element in *eudaimonia*.⁵² The mindset of aiming toward nobility prevents the lucky person from being counted among the virtuous. I may on occasion act appropriately and get things right. But if I am not operating from

a habitual disposition and toward the goal of nobility, then I am no more virtuous than the person who fails—or misses the mark—altogether.

Practice and nobility come together in the establishing of a goal of our desire—the highest good—that is outside of ourselves. Self-improvement as practice can only be valuable to us to the extent that it helps us be better people in the world. While it is not often a focus in discussions of virtue ethics, living-well must include living well with others. And, as more recent virtue ethicists have pointed out, it is equally difficult to live well for oneself without the inclusion of good friends, a point that Aristotle has also made.⁵³ Of course, a critic could argue that this goal of nobility is just as fantastic as the imaginary ego itself. Still we should think about virtue as a way to minimize pain, sorrow, hurt feelings, and so on. In that light, the fantasy of nobility can be no worse than a narcissistic ego used to justify violence and death.

VIRTUE AND DRIVE

We must now situate the idea of virtue with respect to the idea of drive(s). The first question with respect to drives is: is any control possible for the person seeking virtue? In short, is the movement toward virtue even possible? The second issue is to identify where the source of motivation lies. Can the aim of virtue originate from the drive itself? Or is there a counter pressure? Where is the aim for virtue situated with respect to the conflict between the ego ideal and the death drive of the body?

The possibility of self-control, of control over one's drives is most apparent in Aristotle's discussion of moral weakness (*akrasia*) in book 7. For example, in 1145b7-20 Aristotle enumerates several opinions about what make someone morally weak. The two that concern us most are that the morally weak man "tends to abandon [the results of his calculation]" and that a morally weak man "does . . . what he knows to be base." Whereas the morally strong man "accepts the guidance of reason," in line with the foregoing discussion.

The important similarity between the two forms of moral weakness is this: a morally weak person knows the right thing to do but does the wrong thing anyway. That is, the weak man acts in accordance with his emotions as opposed to the rational response he knows to be better. Reason provides guidance, we abandon it. Furthermore, at 1146b23-25, Aristotle draws a distinction between the self-indulgent person and a morally weak person. "A self-indulgent person is led by his own choice, since he believes that he should always pursue the pleasure of the moment. A morally weak person, on the other hand, does not think he should, but pursues it nonetheless." In other words, the morally weak person "knows better" but pursues what is wrong, but more pleasurable.

The distinction between the self-indulgent and the akratic, or morally weak, person can be further illustrated with the following example about sweet things. See the two lines of argument in Figure 5.0 below.⁵⁴

There are a couple of things to be noted about these two juxtaposed arguments: both are valid, and, in the opinion of most, sound. Secondly, what we conclude one ought to do will most likely vary dependent upon whether *desire* to eat the sweet thing is present. As Aristotle notes: “the result of that one opinion tells us to avoid the thing, while appetite (*hedone*), capable as it is of setting in motion each part of body, drives us into it.”⁵⁵ Importantly, *hedone* (“appetite”) can also be translated as desire. The self-indulgent person never has argument A occur to them. Rather, they are just driven by the argument from desire without any inner conflict.

According to this logic desire *drives us* into eating the sweet thing in argument B. It is not as simple as one argument being “rational,” and the other argument being “irrational.” Rather the while both arguments use logic, the second is hijacked by desire. But even Aristotle acknowledges that this muscle of reason needs to be exercised, and even then, it will never be perfect. While it is not easy to overcome the drive of appetite, it can be done.

The Tale of Two Desires and Sublimation

What the two syllogisms in the sugar example show us is the dual nature of desire. When left on its own, bodily desire, *hedone*, or pleasure, drives us to move the body to accomplish its goals. It is thoroughly Other, the alien within. However, when bodily desire and drives are controlled by a considered opinion and *deliberated* desire, *prohairesis*, they can be harnessed by reason toward a symbolic and therefore sublimated goal: self-control aimed toward some more important but less immediate goal, in this case, health.

The conflict of the two desires allows us to discuss two themes that were illuminated in the first part of this chapter, and earlier in the book: death-work and sublimation. These two forms of desire are themselves

Argument A: Directed by Reason	Argument B: Directed by Appetite
A1) what contains sugar is bad for me	B1) What contains sugar is pleasant
A2) this contains sugar	B2) this contains sugar
A3) I ought not eat this	B3) this would be pleasant to eat

Figure 5.0 **Two Arguments Regarding Sweet Things in Aristotle.** In the left column, we have an argument against eating sweet things that is controlled by *deliberated desire*, or *prohairesis*. In the right column, we have an argument for eating sweet things directed by appetite, desire, which Aristotle says “drives” the movements of the body.

part of the dialectic of the drive, as we move from bodily need, to bodily want (desire), to sublimation (a form of symbolic demand). Concerning death-work, the deliberate desire/choice of the rational part of the soul must override and “kill” the bodily desire, which is dead set on immediate gratification. In fact, virtue demands that we do this again and again. The repetition embedded in habitual disposition allows each subsequent decision to become easier as our moral muscle gets stronger.⁵⁶ That said, we must acknowledge that we always remain at risk of regression. Such an understanding becomes obvious when we consider how easily it is to give up new hobbies, New Year’s resolutions, diet and exercise, and so on.

The attempt to override bodily desires for deliberate choice is a form of sublimation. The morally strong person can channel the energy attached to bodily desires to objects of deliberate choice. The potential benefit of the virtuous life notwithstanding, the life of sublimation involves the tacit acknowledgment of our fragility. That is, one must work against the tendency toward dispersion in the multitude of bodily drives. But—here is where the mean or moderation really comes to the fore—one must also not make the repression of one’s ego central to the project of virtue. After all, replacing one form of narcissism—hedonistic egoism—for another—asceticism, in which the focus on repressing our desires becomes a fetish object in itself—will not help us at all. For that the reason, the mode of sublimation in which we take the power gained from self-control to create art or help others is still superior to the suppression of all desires for its own sake. As I will show in the next chapter, I agree with Nietzsche who acknowledges that there will always be forces “within” the “self” that are chaotic. The goal is not to rid ourselves of these forces, but rather to channel them toward overcoming ourselves.

Let’s return to the archer for a moment. We already know that reacting in a virtuous way requires focusing on a limited area on the target. Notably, it is not just the bull’s-eye, but anywhere closer to the bull’s-eye than we had been shooting earlier. Is the continuous improvement possible given the limitations of the appetite and the omnipresence of opportunities to miss? Yes. One can see any number of people improving themselves, setting goals and meeting them, everywhere around them. To adapt J.S. Mill’s famous argument for what is desirable, namely, what everyone desires, people can improve because we see them improve. This is different than saying that everyone is improving all the time, of course. Nor is it true that all these improvements are accomplished in the spirit of “becoming a better person.” Instead they might have to do with “making more money,” or “finding a partner,” or “running a marathon.” But the goals themselves are neither here nor there, really. What matters is that a lot of people set out to change themselves, and many succeed.

At the risk of undermining the ethical or even metaphysical aspect of Aristotle’s argument, it is worth noting that even one’s character can

become a fetish object of sorts; it can become a defense mechanism against chaos and can try to control things that it cannot possibly have absolute control over. Let me repeat that: it tries to control things that one cannot have “absolute” control over. But the qualification “absolute” need not be met in order to make our argument. A modicum of control is enough.

In the final chapter we will focus on forms of control over the “uncontrollable.” We will explore two more theories that use archery as a metaphor for what this control might look like. I will conclude by suggesting that any control we might have needs to be focused inward as opposed to outward.

NOTES

1. Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 168.
2. *Ibid.*, 169.
3. Jacques Lacan, *Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. (Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 10 as quoted in Boothby, 171.
4. Jacques Lacan, *Book I: The Ego In Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955* (Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 102.
5. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (Trans. By Denis Savage, Yale University Press, 1970), 497.
6. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 172.
7. *Op. Cit.*
8. *Ibid.*, 177.
9. *Ibid.*, 182.
10. *Ibid.*, 217.
11. Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) Fr. LXXVIII, 65.
12. Heraclitus, *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus* (Trans. By Brooks Haxton, Viking Press, 2001) Fr. 66, 31.
13. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 119.
14. Quoted in Boothby, 143.
15. *Ibid.*, 57.
16. *Ibid.*, 190.
17. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Suny Press, 1995). Sec. 50.
18. *Ibid.*, 210.
19. *Ibid.*, 218.
20. *Op. cit.*
21. *Ibid.*, 219.
22. Cf. Chapter 2 of Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).
23. Cf. Chapter 7 of Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*.
24. Boothby, cite.
25. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, 218.
26. *Op. cit.*
27. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Translated by Martin Oswald. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1999), 1106b.29-33. Henceforth NE.
28. NE 1106b36-1107a.

29. NE 1106b31-32.
30. Gerald Hughes, *The Routledge Guidebook to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 53.
31. *Ibid.*, 54.
32. Cf. NE II.5.
33. Hughes, *Guidebook to Aristotle*, 55.
34. *Ibid.*, 64.
35. *Op. cit.*
36. NE 1098a16.
37. NE 1094a22-24.
38. NE 1094a18-22.
39. NE 1106b28-29.
40. NE 1106b30-32.
41. NE 1106b34.
42. Glen Koehn, "The Archer and Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean." (*Peitho/Examina Antiqua* 1 (3):2012, 155-167), 160.
43. *Op. Cit.*
44. *Op. Cit.*
45. *Op. cit.*
46. NE 1138b21-23 as quoted in Peter Losin, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," (*History of Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (3):1987, 1-14) 11.
47. Losin, "Aristotle's Doctrine," 7. For another interesting discussion of what's meant by the "mean," as well as a fruitful comparison to Confucius notion of the "right" see Yu Jiyuan, "The Mean The Right and Archery." *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2010:2): 6798-6804.
48. *Op. cit.*, referencing NE 1126a14.
49. *Ibid.*, 8-9.
50. Milan, Elott. *Why We Miss and Other Writings*. (College Park, MD: Self-Published, 1966), 30.
51. *Op. cit.*
52. Losin, "Aristotle's Doctrine," 6, referring to NE 1115b12-13 and 1117b31.
53. See for example Valerie Tiberius, *The Reflective Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially chapters 2, 7, and 8.
54. This example used by Aristotle at (1147a240-b2) was made clear by Hughes, *Guidebook to Aristotle*, 182. I have, however, organized it to this table for the sake of clarity regarding the overlapping minor premise.
55. NE 1147a34-36.
56. Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 108. It is worth noting that Broadie does give the following cautions: one, virtue will not automatically come from repeating the same action, as it must always be done with the right disposition; secondly, the action must be done toward the goal of nobility.

Conclusion

Nietzsche's Bow with the Greatest Tension

Our look at Greek literature dealing with the bow has given us insight into the three parts of drive in Lacan: need, Desire, and demand. The metaphor of the subject as bow has led us to understand the subject as tensile structure, stretched between the “external” conditions of our being, and the “internal” desire to overcome them. The image of Aristotle’s archer as the one who adjusts and responds to external forces, and some cases battles against them, put us back, to some extent “in charge” of our drives. According to this model, psychic health would involve two overall factors. One, we must recognize those objects of fixation in our drives that prevent us from fluid growth. Two, if we properly focus on adjusting our future desires based on past (failed) ones we can make “progress” relative to our beginning position. In many cases it turns out that the “correct” focus or target has more to do with self-improvement and less to do with object fixation. In short, we can achieve a kind of non-attachment, combined with an acknowledgment and appreciation of what we “have,” as a ground of adjusting future expectations. The metaphor of archer works perfectly for this idea since it is of course necessary to *respond* to both internal and external forces that *already exist* in order to hit our mark—an expression of our aims. Thus, this theory—once fully explicated—ought to account for both selecting the best target and giving us the tools to best accomplish hitting it, all the while acknowledging the tentative and fleeting “nature” of the archer which is doing the shooting.

We saw in the previous chapter that one way of attempting to build up or improve one’s being as an archer is through the subject-relative concept of virtue. In this chapter we will look at two more concise formulations of how to attempt to re-establish control over one’s being; both fit into the archery metaphor. The first—offered by Awa Kenzo—is to see archery as a way of life; one in which we aim to Shoot the big Bow, where Shooting takes the meaning of giving oneself up to the Universal Self, or Bow.¹ The second way offered is by Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s conception of the greatest “[hu]man as the bow with the greatest tension” will be instructive for a concept of the self that doesn’t require completely abandoning the ego.

Awa Kenzo: No-Bow, or Repressing the Drives

Awa Kenzo offers a different model of the archer and self-control than Aristotle. Before we elaborate upon Kenzo's teachings of *Daishido-kyo*, "The Great Shooting Way Teaching," I want to take one moment to focus on the interesting contradictions in his own character.

Lest we think Kenzo was a timid soul, as a child he was called "Little Demon."² At nineteen, he became interested in archery, after reading Confucius. At thirty, Kenzo was reflective enough to write the following about his own personal struggles: "There must be a way for human beings to transform the worst suffering into bliss; then there is no more suffering. There must be a way for human beings to transform poverty into pleasure; then there is no more poverty."³ At thirty-nine he had an epiphany into the value of archery as an art of Zen and had what amounted to a moment of enlightenment. He wrote: "For twenty years I have been shooting with the bow, but recently I have begun to Shoot."⁴ This marks the first time Kenzo moves the physical practice of the bow to another plane—the plane of the symbolic. His peers immediately noticed a difference in Kenzo, and he took on the names *Musen* ("no-arrow"), *Mugen* ("no-bowstring"), and *Muyuku* ("no-bow").

That said, as a Sensei he had an extraordinarily domineering personality that grated on his peers and his students alike; he demanded much of them. He had a *katsu*, or shout, that could even drive away hardened criminals.⁵ In the throes of a kidney disease that would finally kill him, Kenzo ran into two students (who happened also to be medical students); he was urinating blood. When they asked him about it, he said: "This too is practice."⁶ This is reminiscent of a story told about Heraclitus. Heraclitus at one point turned down the offer to take a respectable political post and instead became a hermit in old age. At one point Heraclitus had two students visit him, and they were appalled at the conditions of his simple mountain abode. Heraclitus' response to his students is eerily like Kenzo's: "The gods are here too."

We cannot go into depth regarding Kenzo's teachings for two reasons. First, his teachings also incorporate the practices of shooting, which I will not describe. Secondly, the purview of this project is not to describe Zen archery practice but rather to show its potential place in understanding archery as a metaphor for the human condition. That said, I highlight some aphorisms of Kenzo's that directly relate.

First, we should note that in both Confucian and Buddhist traditions archery occupies an important place, if not a prominent one. For instance, Confucius says in the *Analects* at 3:16 "When an archer misses the target, he reflects and seeks the cause of failure within himself."⁷ Similarly, the name of the great prince and founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha, actually translates to "the one who accomplishes his aim," an archery reference.⁸

One of Kenzo's longer aphorisms is indicative of his view on the connection between Zen and archery: "As you draw the Bow, let go of your desires and manifest your inner nature . . . When the bow is fully drawn, you and the bow should be one. You and your spirit should be one as you face the target. This is the state of 'with each shot see your nature.'"⁹

To that we can add the following: "The Bow becomes oneself. To learn about the Bow is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget the self. To forget the self is to realize that all things in the universe are you, from start to finish."¹⁰

In the first aphorism we see the key Buddhist ideas: let go of desires, become one with the moment. In the second this morphs into becoming one with everything in the universe. While both Lacan and Heraclitus acknowledge the intermingling and interdependent nature of things, both seem focused on disintegration, de-centering, and fragmentation. In "reality" both sides of this view are correct: interdependence requires the disintegration of unique beings as entities that appear separate from one another; but interdependence also requires that the interconnectedness and unity of all things. From a psychological point of view, one thing is certain: the shooting of the big Bow requires the dissolution—but more likely repression—of the ego.

One criticism of this type, ego-dissolving activity is that it is almost always (in reality) situated in an apprentice-master relationship of learning techniques. As Becker points out in his analysis of the fusion of psychology and religion, it is not usually the case that the "ego" of disciple dissolves so much as gets transferred to that of the technique, and by proxy, the master. Becker says of the techniques in Zen archery and Hindu yoga: "These [techniques] become the fetishized, magical means of recapturing the power of the transference figure [i.e., the master], so that when one does them, all is well. The disciple can now stand on 'his own' feet, be 'his own' person."¹¹ What Becker is driving at here is that what first appears to be the dissolution of self is not much more than the same fetishization that happens when a person fixates too strongly on a particular idea, object, or person. In other words, self-denying techniques amount to an inverted form of narcissism via wanting to 'become' the master.

But more to the point: how does the dissolution of self square with other Kenzo aphorisms? Take for instance: "Shoot with your character."¹² Kenzo is aware that practice requires dedication. Dedication requires some level of character—that is, an inner self that can make choices, and has some modicum of consistency from one moment to the next. Still one must fight against *desire*, or as Heraclitus put, passion. As it turns out, it is passion that prevents the true self from taking control of itself. John Stevens relays the story of Kenzo's encounter with an arrogant student:

A conceited student named Takeda was proudly demonstrating his prowess for Kenzo. Takeda expertly shot an arrow right through the center of the target. Instead of praising him, Kenzo took Takeda's bow and said, "You had better stop practicing archery." Takeda was dumbstruck for several weeks, but then he went to apologize to Kenzo. "You have great potential," Kenzo told Takeda, "but the way in which you draw your bow reveals your character, and you must not show off. Using the bow and arrow simply to hit your target is no big deal. *You must hit the center of yourself.* That is the reason I took away the bow." After being chastened like this by Kenzo, Takeda came to the dojo every morning at 5:00 just to shoot, persisting like this for several years until he graduated.¹³

To shoot well we must relinquish our egos and let go of the future and the past. We must "Make every shot anew," and "Shoot for the center of ourselves." It still seems like a tall order to completely devote one's life to one practice. Furthermore, as Becker's critique about the fetishization of technique, and of the master, showed above, to completely devote "one-self" to practice seems like a contradiction in terms. Let's now look at Nietzsche for an alternative approach to think about life as a bow.

NIETZSCHE: THE BOW WITH THE GREATEST TENSION

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche points out that it is absurd to consider someone who has *strong* impulses (presumably ones that he does not control) *less* psychologically healthy than someone who has *no* impulses, or, as he would put it, someone who is *emasculated*.¹⁴ Contra Kenzo, from Nietzsche's perspective repressing desires works against overcoming oneself. What's more, Nietzsche wonders whether our current state of morality is really something to be praised, if in fact we have lost all instincts to do so-called "immoral" things. For example, should I be praised for abstaining from alcohol if I have no interest in it whatsoever? Should I be praised for being celibate if I am asexual, or have no interest in sex?

Like Plants in Manure

While Nietzsche could not have imagined the richness of the theories of Freud and Lacan, he was aware of the problem of drives. First, let us acknowledge that for the mature Nietzsche avarice and hardship were necessary ingredients to greatness and fulfillment. He uses the metaphor of the strongest tree by the one which survives the harshest storms:

Examine the lives of the best and most fruitful people and peoples and ask yourselves whether a tree that is supposed to grow to a proud height can dispense with bad weather and storms; whether misfortune and external resistance, some kinds of hatred, jealousy, stubbornness,

mistrust, hardness, avarice, and violence do not belong among the *favorable* conditions without which any great growth even of virtue is scarcely possible.¹⁵

The strength of the oldest trees comes from being tested. It is in that context of surviving the chaos that Nietzsche discusses the “plant” man: “The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, where the ‘plant’ man shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (i.e., in Shakespeare), *but are controlled.*”¹⁶

Let’s work through the rich ideas Nietzsche presents here. Firstly, if Lacan is right, that below the ego lies a multitude of (usually anti-social) desires, then greatness for Nietzsche requires recognition of the existence of those drives—as a yogi might say: we must *honor* those drives. According to Lacan’s theory of the ego, the ego is intended to unify and regulate the drives, suppressing the ones that are counter to its unified vision of self. Those aspects of itself that are out of control are overlooked and imaginary structures erected in its place. The classic reaction formations of Freud belong here: the secret homosexual who is anti-gay publicly, or the person who hates women because he loves his mother too much, and so on. In other words, the ego appears to have two choices: to deny drives by imagining something else in their place (which can lead to violence), or to use the drive which happens to serve its image of consistency.

But Nietzsche’s conception of the highest human does neither of these. They do not only accept those drives which serve toward an acceptable “self,” and yet false ego. Nor do they deny all their drives and become an ascetic, or worse yet, exploding in violence. Rather Nietzsche’s highest human has drives that “conflict powerfully” and yet can be “controlled.” These drives are not univocal or unidirectional, they do not only promote unity of the ego or sociality. The “‘plant’ man” is a fruitful field: “If only we were fruitful fields, we would at bottom let nothing perish unused and see in every event, thing, and man welcome manure.”¹⁷ There are really two steps necessary to understanding the best way to turn ourselves in fruitful fields. The first, as we have been describing, is to honor and acknowledge—to *take responsibility for*—all the parts of ourselves, including the ugly ones. This requires us to acknowledge and even *foster* a great tension between what we are and our ideal egos. But this tension can be creative and productive. Which brings us to our second step: sublimating the ugly drives into good ones: “Once can dispose of one’s drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis.”¹⁸ We will now look at these steps in order—developing the tension followed by sublimating the drives.

DEVELOPING A FRUITFUL TENSION

Here Nietzsche gives his formula hinted at earlier, one that brings together the many themes we've discussed so far: "The essential point is: the greatest perhaps also possesses great virtues, but in that case also their opposites. I believe that is precisely through the presence of opposites and the feelings they occasion that the great man, *the bow with the greatest tension*, develops."¹⁹ The tension is the cause of the development of the higher types.

Another one of Nietzsche's "formula(s) for the greatness of a human being" is "that one wants nothing to be different—not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it . . . *but love it.*"²⁰ In loving what is necessary, we are embracing not just the positive parts of ourselves and the world, but all of it. "*What is the seal of attained freedom?*—No longer being ashamed in front of oneself."²¹ There is not part of ourselves that we should not face. Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return can also fit in this reading. It is best understood not as a cosmology but as a thought experiment about affirmation:

If this thought were to gain possession of you, it would change you, as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and everything, "Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?" would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress. Or how well disposed would you have become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?²²

For one more look at affirmation consider this passage from *Twilight of the Idols*:

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of the highest types—that is what I called the Dionysian. . . . to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—the joy which included even joy in destroying.²³

Importantly, then, the affirmation of life involves embracing the contradictions in life and our selves. Those contradictions *create* the tension, affirmation and sublimation then use this same tension in the process of overcoming oneself.

The Gentle Overman

For Nietzsche, being *moral* demands self-overcoming.²⁴ It demands controlling our instincts and drives until the point that the new, considered, position on something *becomes* our *instinct*. Think of a neophyte's relationship to exercise. At first, his instinct is to ignore the rowing machine, to think it ridiculous. His instinct might instead be to play video

games. But then he *overcomes* that undesirable instinct to play games and *creates* the instinct (now a habit) to row, for example.

Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* when we are looking for the overman we should look “*even* for a Caesar Borgia rather than a Parsifal.”²⁵ Parsifal was the simple natured “beautiful soul” and saint of Wagner’s opera. Caesar Borgia, on the other hand, was a Machiavellian and ruthless politician, who may have even killed his own brother. It turns out the latter is most likely *not* an example of the overman either, and Nietzsche was using the comparison for emphasis. Nietzsche’s point about Caesar Borgia is that in him, at least we have an interesting model, a person full of passionate drives—even deadly ones. If a person has no instinct or impulses to overcome, then they can never go beyond what they already are. But Borgia would be a much better *starting point* for one than an optimistic simpleton.

Is the overman one who controls others, or one who controls herself? Consider the following point Nietzsche makes about the nature of the truly strong:

I have found strength where one does not look it for it: in simple, mild, and pleasant people, without the least desire to rule—and conversely, the desire to rule has often appeared to me as a sign of inward weakness: they fear their own slave soul and shroud it in a royal cloak (in the end, they still become the slaves of their followers, their fame, etc.). The powerful natures *dominate*, it is a necessity, they need not lift one finger. Even if, during their life time, they bury themselves in a garden house.²⁶

One who has reached the status of overman (if anyone ever has) need not be ambitious, need not rule. They only need to have a strong ability to mold themselves. They are driven by the desire to say yes to life and to create. Seen this way, the overman is a synthesis. In fact, it is not so much a person as it is a worldview. It is a world-affirming view that begins with a combination of the “Yea-saying” of the master, with the rich inner life of drives, some ugly, of the slave. But the overman does not negate, kill, or domesticate his drives: he sublimates them. This word “sublimates” is a difficult one to define. As we will see below, in Nietzsche it can take on the technical meaning of subordinating lesser drives toward one master drive. But in its simplest form, sublimation means to take something ugly—like manure—and turn it into something beautiful—like a garden. Take anger and make grunge music. Take frustration and turn it into the drive to work out. In other words, the person in control of herself can take ugly drives and emotions and turn them into beautiful things. Another possibility for the overman given by Nietzsche is Napoleon. Napoleon is to be admired because he offers great promise for uniting Europe. Ultimately though he is too much animal for Nietzsche; he was “corrupted by the means he had to employ,” suggesting that the

release of ugly drives in the violence toward others should not be the goal of the highest types.²⁷

The overman is the one who is so strong, so disciplined and so in tune with her surroundings that she need not go out of her way to manipulate others. Consider what John Richardson says about the difference between the master and the overman: "Whereas the master affirms other wills as a means appropriated to his own end, the overman more nearly affirms them in themselves, as contributing to an overall process made not more efficient but richer for their distinctive presence."²⁸ There are two key points here. First, the overman demands richness over efficiency. Second, the overman affirms wills in themselves not just for his own purposes.

Contrast this with Nietzsche's description of the great German artist Goethe: "what he wanted was totality . . . he disciplined himself into wholeness . . . the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength, because he knows how to use to his advantage even that from which the average nature would perish. . . . he does not negate anymore. . . ."²⁹ Nietzsche's ideal overman was an artist who took everything in stride and was constantly committed to creating himself, his own style, his own vision, and his own world. The rules that the artist breaks are not morals or laws, but standards of creation. Walter Kaufmann stated this point well:

The powerful man is the creative man; but the creator is not likely to abide by previously established laws. A genuinely creative act contains its own norms, and every creation is a creation of new norms. The great artist does not stick to the established code; yet his work is not lawless but has structure and form. Beethoven did not conform to the rules of Haydn or Mozart; yet his symphonies have form throughout: the form and law Beethoven created with them.³⁰

Sublimation, Repression, Violence

Aristotle, Kenzo, and Nietzsche have shed, on the issue of drives and their discharge. If we imagine ourselves as bows, we can imagine the various degrees to which we can be can "high strung" or "too loosely strung." If we completely negate the side of the conscious, willing self, we lose the tension of the bow string, or perhaps, as in repression, that looseness is just a ruse for a different amount of tension at a later time, as we'll see in the case of *ressentiment*. If on the other hand, we are too highly strung, we risk snapping as did Odysseus on the suitors. What we are looking for is not quite Goldilocks' solution, however. Instead, we want the maximum amount of tension between the force of drives and controlling them.

Ken Gemes has shed a significant amount of light on Nietzsche's ideas regarding sublimation and repression. Looking at his analysis will allow

us to place Nietzsche's bow metaphor within the context of the three possible responses to adversity that we have been exploring throughout this work: repression, violence, and sublimation.

As we saw above, Nietzsche argued that we are each a multiplicity of drives. The fundamental question asked by the healthy individual is: are my drives organized and working toward a common goal, or are they disorganized and competing against one another?³¹

Importantly according to Nietzsche, Lacan, and Freud, all drives need to be discharged one way or another. Those that are not released outward will be aimed inward.³² This inward turning of drives is tantamount to repression and it is the origin of *ressentiment*, a sickness born from an inability to express negative drives outward (usually due to weakness and powerlessness relative to someone else). These drives then fester and change substantially from the way they looked initially. Nietzsche's classic, albeit controversial, example of *ressentiment* is when the slaves' hatred of their masters' mistreating them gives birth to "Christian" values. The slaves "win" when the masters internal these values and begin to question their own behavior.³³

On the other hand, the answer to the problem of where to discharge drives is not to give them absolute free expression either. For Nietzsche, this amounts to a disorganized and even "weak will": "the multitude and disintegration of impulses and lack of any systematic order among them results in a 'weak will'; their coordination under a single predominant impulse results in a 'strong will': in the first case it is the oscillation and lack of gravity; in the latter, the precision and clarity of direction."³⁴ Gemes ties this nicely to the idea of saying Yes to life: "to affirm all of one's life, to overcome *ressentiment* is to affirm all of one's drives—life, for Nietzsche, being nothing but a collection of drives. This does not mean to simply let all of one's drives have free expression. That would involve conflict, chaos, and, inevitably, disintegration. It means harnessing one's drives to allow them a form of *concerted* expression."³⁵

Just as there are master and slave "types" as in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, there are master and slave "drives" as well.³⁶ The master drive is equivalent to an "organizing idea" that: "prepares single qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as a means towards the whole—one by one, it trains all subservient capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, 'goal,' 'aim,' or 'meaning.'"³⁷ Again, Gemes, explains this well: "This notion of training subservient drives is to be explicated in terms of the redirection of those drives away from their initial, primary goal toward a secondary goal that is more in line with the master drive."³⁸ This seems not unlike Lacan's position that primary libidinal energy can be transformed into symbolic creations with the proper effort.

The beauty of this model is that it dispenses with an ego, or any need for a permanent, unified self. The organizing drive can change from time

to time, and need not be anything like a “self,” or entity behind the scenes. This is because “the will to overcome an affect is, in the end, itself only the will of another, or several other, affects.”³⁹ Notably, the master drive does not obliterate the lesser drives, but rather harnesses their energies to use toward a different purpose. However, it is not a complete subservience as the lesser drive holds some of its original direction.⁴⁰ Gemes give the example of Freud’s exploration of Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo’s “master drive” was scientific discovery and artistic creativity. His lesser (note: this is not meant in a morally judgmental way; Nietzsche does not hold any one set of values as higher than another) drives took the form of homosexual feelings for young males. On Nietzsche’s model, and in Freud’s analysis, we can say that da Vinci took his master drive and sublimated his lesser drives to it: he created beautiful anatomical renderings of the male form. Rather than repress his homosexual desires altogether, which could lead to feels of solitude, anger, and so on, da Vinci was able to harness them and take them up toward his larger goal. Notably, the lesser drives then never really disappear. As Nietzsche observes out in his notebooks, “Every drive is a kind of attempt to dominate; each has its own perspective, which it wants to force as a norm on the other drives.”⁴¹ Allowing the drives to maintain some of their original direction is an important aspect of sublimation, because repression attempts to do just the opposite. That is, it attempts to nullify the drives its dominating altogether. Often these repressed drives then fester and come back in a “disguised” form like what happens in Nietzsche’s famous “slave revolt” in *The Genealogy of Morality*.

While it’s true that we have barely scratched the surface of what could be said about Nietzsche and drives, we do have enough to connect this theory to the metaphor of the bow with the greatest tension, and our work on the bow and the human condition more generally. The tension of the bow is created by the initial chaos of a multiplicity of drives. However, the tension is maintained by the bow holding them together in concert toward an organizing idea, which we can see as the target. It’s remarkable that what is used as a symbol for the master drive in Nietzsche, is used as a symbol of the Phallus in ancient literature and holds the place of “master signifier” in Lacan’s analysis of Heraclitus’ fragment and elsewhere. Furthermore, the organization of lesser drives by a master drive suggests the dynamic energy that is latent in the undrawn bow. Another beautiful outcome of this “greatest tension” model is that the tension of the bow can be seen as a kind of agonistic set of nested dolls: forces are harnessed by atoms, atoms are sublimated by molecules, molecules by things and living organisms; on a different path, we can see words as sublimated by sentences; at the human level, lesser humans can be sublimated by stronger ones. Again, this does not mean dominating them into submission, as in the case of chattel slavery. Instead it means harnessing unused potential toward some greater goal. One could ima-

gine the architect of Notre Dame harnessing the skills of masons and carpenters who never could have imagined such a structure on their own. Lastly—and perhaps the most prescient in the Germany that Nietzsche despised—one can imagine individuals being willingly harnessed toward a cultural master force, which of course can have grave consequences (but this fact alone doesn't make it any less *accurate*.) Still, there is an interesting crossover with Beauvoir's ethics, which we will look at below. Beauvoir argues that, like all meaning, values must be "won"; however, when she makes this point, one gets the sense that she is being overly optimistic about the majority of people being rationally convinced of the "best" position.

Nietzsche and Lacan

There is one more point I would like to emphasize here. The three potential outcomes of drive forces are the same ones I have identified throughout this study: repression, violence, and sublimation. Furthermore, whether we see these in Nietzsche or elsewhere, these can be mapped on to Lacan's three registers of human existence: The Real (tied to repression), the Imaginary (tied to violence), and the Symbolic (tied to sublimation). The Real is tied to repression in two ways. One, what repression wants to annihilate are actual drive energies that exist "in reality." We may never know what are behind these energies, and if repressed, we may never know they exist at all. Which is the second similarity: both repressed drives and the real are closed off and impossible to articulate as themselves. Any attempt to discharge them happens either in the form of violence (the imaginary) or language and creation (the symbolic). As we have seen, something repressed at the level of the Real can seek its way back into the imaginary, which becomes a repository for disillusionment and violence. On the other hand, drives completely expressed belong to the imaginary, as there is always a need to make visible the invisible. The drives that are destructive and fragmented can only be satisfied at the level of imaginary by bringing into the realm of the visible images of destruction and fragmentation. Sublimation is so effective because it transforms energy at the level of the real and the imaginary and moves them into the symbolic—the realm of language and artistic creation. As Ricoeur put it: "Sublimation is the symbolic function itself."⁴²

While, *ressentiment* always entails the censorship of drives by a more powerful drive, and therefore repression, sublimation harnesses the power of the lesser drives and unites them toward a more powerful one. Because it does so by moving from the imaginary to the symbolic it "is attributable to the work of the death drive."⁴³ The death drive is present here because the egoistic tendency to bring about the imaginary which usually involves whole, permanent objects, is usurped by the redemptive force of the symbolic. So, paradoxically, a strong "ego"—one which at-

tempts to be a unifying force even if it means censoring others—tends toward a chaotic and disorganized self that splits off parts of itself for which it is not willing to take responsibility. On the other hand, it is in the free-play of the symbolic—of language—that we can recapture the unity of purpose organized under the heading of a master drive or master signifier.

Like the bow with the greatest tension, the best and most healthy human beings will recognize all their drives; they will recognize the frail nature of an organizing idea and not attempt to feign a strong “front” like the ego does. Like the great Walt Whitman wrote in *Song of Myself*: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.” Like Whitman, stronger types can realize their internal contradictions and put them to work. They do not try to split off part of themselves and imprison or censor them. They are willing to take risks and say yes to everything. Or as Nietzsche wrote in *The Joyful Wisdom*, 297:

Ability to Contradict. Everyone knows at present that the ability to endure contradiction is a good indication of culture. Some people even know that the higher man courts opposition, and provokes it, so as to get a cue to his hitherto unknown partiality. But the ability to contradict, the attainment of a good conscience in hostility to the accustomed, the traditional and the hallowed, that is more than both the above-named abilities, and is the really great, new and astonishing thing in our culture, the step of all steps of the emancipated intellect: who knows that?

Elsewhere in *The Antichrist*, chapter 55, he writes: “Is there any difference between a conviction and a lie?” In other words, convictions are counter-productive to embracing the productive contrast within “our selves” that is the source of change and creation. Conversely, the embrace of convictions leads to frustration (at the reality principle) and stagnation (in terms of overcoming and growth). In the final analysis, the shortest answer to how we ought to live according to Nietzsche can be brought back to the image of the bow: like a taut bow, we ought to organize extreme forces/drives within ourselves around the single purpose of “firing the arrow.”

Now that we have a sense of the different ways drives can be resolved—namely acting out, repression, and sublimation—we are able to make a final assessment of how we ought to live as archers of the human condition. In most cases we will be better off accepting change as it occurs around us. The one major exception to this is the “ethical” one, namely, how does my acknowledgment of my freedom translate to my acknowledgment of yours? Furthermore, how does my understanding of my lack of freedom translate to understanding the lack of yours? We will now propose some answers to these questions.

ONE LAST SHOT: AIMING AT THE OTHER IS AIMING AT OURSELVES

Like the bow, the human being is held in tension between two opposing forces. As we saw in chapter 1, on the one side we have what might be called the “subject” or “subject position,” which is to say the set of conditions we are thrown into at birth. These conditions amount to the starting point of drives and desires. For one, we are born with a body, which is the source of our organic need. Our mental schema emanates from perceptions, misperceptions, and substitutions for these organic drives. On the other hand, we have our desire for control.

Like the “prison” of the body, the archer is presented with physical conditions that she must incorporate and consider in order to excel. We saw in Philoctetes the example of the person whose body and external conditions—except for the magical bow of course—were working against him. Because of his survival need, he identified the possession of the bow with his entire existence. His only hope of escaping this identification was through healing offered by Heracles. This divine intervention should give us pause, because even if one believes in god(s) nowadays, they are not talking as much as they used to.

Another condition we face is being born into a world that is constituted by the desire of others (e.g., first our parents, then society more generally). This desire is coded into language and has meaning that extends beyond the conscious intention of any individual. In addition, we cannot choose which language is our (m)Other tongue.

We encountered this desire of the other in the form of Odysseus coveting Philoctetes’ bow, as well as his concern over his own estate in the Odyssey. But the fact that the Other’s desire is coded in language can be seen in the Greek for bow/life: *bios*. In this way even the most basic drive does not fully escape the reach of the symbolic (language) in adult life. The way to escape this pull—to the extent that one can is to assume responsibility for the contingency of her own position. The archer may get to choose certain external elements—perhaps her bow, her arrows, and so on, but she most certainly does not choose others—the wind elevation, distance to the target, and so forth. As any subject encounters the influence of her Others, the temptation might be to dominate them or get rid of them or otherwise deny their existence. But as we saw in chapter 4 in looking at Odysseus, domination inevitably leads to violence, which we want to avoid, hopefully. In place of mastering the other, what is required is a certain kind of self-mastery. This self-mastery has two components. The first component, as we hinted at above, is acceptance of responsibility for the various others that make up the subject that I am: the body, language, the network of desire and social behavior into which I am born, as well as demands that my society places on me, and the ones that I place on myself by virtue of this pressure.

We have also seen that there are three ways to respond to such demands; each is tied to a register of experience. If we attempt to focus in on the Real, as it is separated out as Need from desire and Demand, we respond by practicing the asceticism of Awa Kenzo and the Zen archers. But even as Ernest Becker noted, this level of control of the self is life denying. The question becomes, how can we live life *and* not deny most of its aspects?

Aristotle's answer for the good life, what he called *eudaimonia* was virtue, particularly virtue as conceived of as a mean between two extremes, one that is relative to our past reactions. In this conception, there are many ways to miss the target and one way to hit it. Even with an in-depth analysis of Aristotle's theory we are still left with a vague notion of where to aim. We did get a sense that such a notion of virtue is always "backward-turning" like the bow, to the extent that aiming toward virtue requires us to look back at our previous selves. We also gave this the name death-work to the extent that what is involved requires an active disintegration of the ego for a freeing up of underlying possibilities. This all involves a "re-interpretation" of ourselves in terms of locating a "master signifier" which will almost always remain unnamable. All of that is just to say that a virtue-conception of self is a process-conception of self; there is no binary in which we are or are not virtuous in a permanent or absolute sense. Heraclitus said, "I am, and I am not," precisely because the "I" that can change (he also says, "It rests by changing") is the "I" that both is and is not one thing. As soon as we begin to fixate and maintain a certain conception of self, we have already begun to forfeit what makes us human.

However, even if Aristotle's model is valuable and "a safe bet," Nietzsche's model makes for a more *interesting* person. With Nietzsche we move away from a human as archer—at least initially—and return to talking about the human as bow. But this time the dialectic has moved us beyond our earlier metaphor of human as bow—as a static string caught between two opposing forces—and into a dynamic one. In the earlier model of the bow the emphasis was on its static nature, as a given set of conditions over which we had a varying amount of control. In Nietzsche's version we understand the bow as pure potential in an intentional but delicate control over opposing tensions. With Aristotle the emphasis was on the mean; with Nietzsche it's on carefully harnessing the extremes. We must say yes to everything on the road to self-mastery. Saying yes becomes an act of creation that incorporates the other into the self and takes responsibility for it. Any misrepresentation of Nietzsche's overman as a power hungry or violent madman goes out the window here. Such madmen cannot "deal," they are too obsessed with their own image. They are lacking in the creative tension and humility of a Montaigne. The person pursuing virtue with a sense of irony, however, is a lost cause in the same way that Narcissus was a lost cause.

Nietzsche and Beauvoir

While it is always dangerous to introduce new ideas this late in the text, it is worth mentioning a fruitful crossover between Nietzsche's personal ethics, and Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics—particularly as it pertains to creating a fruitful tension not only with in the self, but between the self and the other. This will also give us the rare opportunity to apply our beloved bow metaphor outside of just the development of the self, and how the implications of a healthy psyche would apply outward. For Beauvoir, we should always avoid what she calls *the spirit of seriousness*.⁴⁴ The spirit of seriousness refers to the misguided belief that values exist in the world, independent of human thought and judgment. In Lacan's language, it would entail the mistaken belief that we can access, and articulate, the Real. In truth, all discussions of ethics require the symbolic, and ethical considerations and judgments demand thought, language, and interpretation. To see the world in the guise of *seriousness* has deleterious effects. Even if one had a good "cause" or purpose, the spirit of seriousness might lead one to believe that her cause was worthwhile at *any* cost. Instead, the consideration that our own belief or sense of purpose could be one of many approaches demands humility, and the exercise of *self-control*—as opposed other-control. In the spirit of seriousness, it is not the subject or the ego that determines the worth or desirability of an object, but supposedly the object itself. Recall in Heraclitus' fragments on perspective the ridiculousness of favoring the perspective of the human animal over other animals, or even over the perspective of the gods. And yet, the description of the spirit of seriousness above sounds dangerously close to Lacan's idea that the subject is determined by language and the agency of the letter. Two points here. One, to reject the spirit of seriousness does not entail rejecting the belief that there are external factors that limit our possibilities in our lives. Instead, to reject the spirit of seriousness demands that we acknowledge that human freedom allows us to respond to those conditions in any number of ways, and that we can see the conditions themselves from multiple perspectives. Consider here Nietzsche's demand of us: "You shall learn to the grasp the *necessary* injustice in every For and Against, injustice as inseparable from life, life itself as *conditioned* by the sense of perspective and its injustice."⁴⁵ Even if we do grant the agency of the letter as a starting position for increased awareness of our conditions, the whole point of therapy is to move beyond giving those external conditions control and make them our own. The spirit of seriousness does not allow the subject to gain this distance from objects, as it holds that values are in the objects themselves and not a matter of choice. But more to the point, the spirit of seriousness mistakenly encourages one to use any means necessary to enact and uphold values that she sees as permanent, unchanging, and absolute. Instead we should be asking: if I am killing others for my be-

liefs, are those beliefs that I ought to be holding? Nietzsche notes that this problem when he says that convictions are no better than lies. In the spirit of Heraclitus, everything flows and changes, or as Lacan put it: repetition demands the new.

What is the alternative and how does it map on to our metaphor of the bow with the greatest tension? For Beauvoir, the alternative is practicing an ethics of ambiguity, and ultimately an ethics of freedom. Ambiguity here does not mean admitting that the world is devoid of meaning, but rather there is an absence of fixed meaning. Valuation, like the self, and like the world, is fluid: it too rests as it changes. In other words, we must always recognize a distance between the way we see things and the way that they "could be" in themselves. Importantly, the fact that values are fluid doesn't mean that they are meaningless or absurd. Instead the best values must be "won": "The characteristic feature of all ethics is to consider human life as a game that can be won or lost and to teach man the means of winning."⁴⁶ Here we have moved the metaphor of aiming for the target for oneself, to the whole of human kind. Rationality and the good can prevail. We can "overpower" another position using logic, just as we can through force, or deceit. Here too we return to the debate central to Philoctetes: can Neoptolemus convince Philoctetes to come with him without resorting to violence or using deceit?⁴⁷ The best values can be appealed to collectively, even if they do change over time. But why be reasonable at all? Because to appeal to reasonableness in ourselves and others is to encourage reasonableness in others. To appeal to reason in others is to grant them their freedom to take on their own world of responsibility and choice.

If Nietzsche's imperative is *amor fati*, and Beauvoir's is to will yourself to be free, then Lacan's imperative is to assume responsibility for the Other that we are. The thing is, this Other that we are is simply a turning inward and a backward-bending of the uncertainty in the world itself. Lacan famously interprets Freud's "*wo es war, ich soll werden*," in just this way. Where it [the Other] was, there I should place myself. This is symbolic in every sense of the word. But here is where things get interesting from an ethical perspective: To assume the Other in myself entails allowing the other to do the same. In other words, my freedom entails the freedom of the other. To not allow the other is to succumb to the spirit of seriousness, or the dark side of identificatory mergers, in which my narcissistic tendency weaves a solipsistic universe out of my imaginary ego. The static value object is the inverse of a narcissistic ego.

CONCLUSION

We have now had an opportunity to assess both sides of the tense bow that is the human condition. On the one side, we had the drives funda-

mental to all human beings: the physical need tantamount to survival instincts that we saw in Philoctetes, the misplaced substitute energy of desire which Heraclitus recognized, and which turns our focus to objects, and the dialectical drive of demand, desiring that the other desire us that we saw in book 21 of *The Odyssey*. Of course, each of these expresses itself in a litany of smaller drives.

On the other side we imagine stepping up as the archer—the one has some modicum of control, which is expressed through self-effacement and self-improvement. We saw that, first, Aristotle understood virtue as aiming for the appropriate response to the situation through modification of our initial position toward a mean. This was compared to shooting at a target and adjusting our next shot along a myriad of continua. In contrast, we saw Awa Kenzo use archery to completely diffuse the ego. But our concern with that method was that simply shifts the ego to a fixation on one's practice and one's master. The solution, I argued, was offered by Nietzsche's idea of the bow with the greatest tension. In this model, we acknowledge and even encourage extremes within our "selves." As opposed to repressing some lesser drives altogether, we embrace them and harness their energy toward a higher goal: we grow gardens out of manure.

From a remove, we can see that all along what had been at stake in our discussion is a certain irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the human condition: that we are always ourselves and others, that there are as many "internal" forces outside of our control as there are "external" forces. This tension begins to make sense only when we realize that our own questions—excesses as Lacan would call them—are themselves a result of a "backward-turning" in the language of Heraclitus. That is to say that the "deliberated desire" we discussed in Aristotle always only occurs *after*, but with the proper self-reflection can also be situated as a *before*. It would be absurd to propose that humans are incapable of learning. That being the case the models of learning from past results and others as examples—both features of virtue ethics—become ways of internalizing and appropriating the "past." Perhaps, then, the fact that both *skills* and *virtues* are habitual dispositions is also instructive. Skills can be honed by turning backward toward the past, and in so doing constituting an elevated level of control *for the first time*. Similarly, virtues, and, as I argue, sublimation of lesser drives, also become aspects of our "character"—one that is not initially there *prior* to reflection—only through *practice*. Indeed, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and even Kenzo, have one aspect of their disparate theories in common: we can learn to be different than we were, even if we "were" never in the first place. Even though I argue above that Kenzo's Zen archery model is not a realistic "solution" for everyone, it provides interesting guidance in one way: it combines a practice of the body and a practice of the mind. Kenzo also offers us another insight, that is only in the background of the other thinkers:

while we must ultimately “control” the self in order to Shoot with the Big Bow, we must at some point—as archers—*let go*. Activity involves an active relinquishment. Activity punctuated with thought and punctuated with release. Both Aristotle and Nietzsche—as well as many philosophers and cultural figures—were avid walkers—Aristotle during his lectures, and Nietzsche while he wrote his ideas in notebooks. The physical energy gets released and transferred into the realm of the symbolic. But this observation, hopefully, has not led us too far astray from a conclusion. In fact, only now can one see that the foregoing observations only make even more poignant the realization that the *activity* of archery, and all its cultural-symbolic meaning, can serve as an interesting prism to the activity in physical and mental life. In the final analysis, the model of archery and its importance to Greek life, reminds us of the necessary fluidity between the drives of the individual, the physical and mental attempts to control them, and the way they ebb and flow through the broader community. While from a static point of view, this appears to be a matrix of contradictions, from a dynamic point of view it does not. The “self”—even one inclusive of drive forces and social construction—is not a “product” but a “process.” Therefore, like improving at a skill, it is a process so long as one attempts to maintain control over its development. Importantly, we cannot *first* control the community or the Others; indeed, we must begin by attempting to control our selves. Like archery, the proper approach to our human condition, and to some level of self-mastery, makes use of intervals of aiming, grasping, and . . . *letting go*.

NOTES

1. John Stevens, *Zen Bow, Zen Arrow* (Boston: Shambala Press, 2007), 77.
2. *Ibid.*, 5.
3. *Ibid.*, 9.
4. *Ibid.*, 11.
5. *Ibid.*, 16.
6. *Ibid.*, 26-27.
7. As quoted in Stevens, 29.
8. *Ibid.*, 30.
9. *Ibid.*, 73.
10. *Ibid.*, 42.
11. Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 275.
12. Stevens, *Zen Bow, Zen Arrow*, 38.
13. *Ibid.*, 23-24.
14. This account of Nietzsche’s use of Caesar Borgia is taken from Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) chapter 7, “Morality and Sublimation,” especially pages 224-227. Here he is referencing *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 197.
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974), 283. (Henceforth GS)
16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter and R.J. Hollingdale Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967.), sec. 966, 506. (Henceforth WP) Emphasis mine.

17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (Trans. R.J. Hollingdale, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996) sec. 11.332. (Henceforth HAH)
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* (Trans. R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 560.
19. Nietzsche, WP, sec. 967, 507.
20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann New York: Random House Books, 2000), II.10. (Henceforth EH.)
21. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* in *The Portable Nietzsche* (ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), aphorism 275. (Henceforth BGE.)
22. Nietzsche, GS, 341, "The Greatest Stress."
23. Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Duncan Large. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), "What I owe to the ancients," 5.
24. Parts of this section are revised from my article on Nietzsche and House of Cards . . .
25. Again, I owe this point to Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 224. Taken from *Ecce Homo*, III.1.
26. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 252, taken from *The Dawn*, sec. 412.
27. Nietzsche, WP, 1026.
28. John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 70.
29. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 281, taken from *The Twilight of the Idols*, sec. IX.
30. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 250.
31. Ken Gemes, "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (2009) 38-59 at 46. See also BGE 200.
32. *Ibid.*, see also *Genealogy of Morality* II.16, in *The Portable Nietzsche*.
33. Cf. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 437-600.
34. From Nietzsche's notebooks, KSA 13:14 [219] as quoted in Gemes, "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation," 49.
35. *Ibid.*, 49. Emphasis mine.
36. This would also be a way of reading Gilles Deleuze's idea of "active" and "reactive" forces. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. (New York: Athlone Press, 1983), especially chapter 2.
37. EH, "Clever," 9 as quoted in Gemes, 47.
38. Gemes, "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation," 47.
39. Nietzsche, BGE 117.
40. Gemes, "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation," 52.
41. *Ibid.*, 52, quoting from KSA 12:7[60].
42. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, Trans. by Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 497.
43. Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 172.
44. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (trans. by Bernard Fretchman, Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1948), 35.
45. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Preface, Sec. 6.
46. Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 18.
47. James Boyd White, "Persuasion and Community in Philoctetes." In *Heracles' Bow* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 7.

Epilogue

THE HUMAN CONDITION AND TEN RULES OF ARCHERY

The preceding study made the case that archery is an apt metaphor for the human condition. The human being is held in tension between drives it cannot control, and the deliberative desire to control these drives. In this epilogue I offer some practical lessons we can gather from what we have said about drives, agency, and virtue, having used the bow and archery as a metaphor for the human condition.

Rule One: Factor in Conditions

No good archer will show up to a range, pull an arrow from her quiver, and fire a shot without first assessing conditions: distance to the target, wind, and so on. Like archers, we are all thrown in to a situation without prior knowledge of its conditions. Accordingly, we must not assume that one situation will be just as the next. But we can, over time, begin to master those conditions through experience and repetition. If we apply Lacan's terms, these conditions are equivalent to the Other. We identified some of these as the body, the language we speak, the desires of others, and so on. The point being, the subject that does not consider the internal and external Others that occupy its being (as the narcissistic ego is wont to do), will not have a very healthy psyche.

Rule Two: Aim High, but Not Too High

Admittedly, this may not always make the best advice for actual archers. That said, both in terms of Aristotle's idea of virtue and Nietzsche's idea of organizing lesser drives toward a larger one, it behooves us to think big, but not too big. True, Aristotle warns us that extremes are to be avoided. However, in the process of attempting to reach the mean relative to us we, on occasion, need to overshoot. For example, if I am usually timid to the point of being a pushover, it might behoove me to be angrier than I would want to be the next time someone butts in line in front of me. If my impulse is to do nothing, I must fight that impulse with a more extreme reaction than I am comfortable with (within reason), and then moderate. As for Nietzsche, in several places he suggests we get out of our comfort zone: "The secret to harnessing from existence the greatest

fruitfulness and the greatest in enjoyment is—to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius!”¹

Recall that we are better off cultivating passions and then keeping in them in check, as opposed to annihilating them altogether, or to prevent them growing in the first place. In thinking about our two heroes, Odysseus and Philoctetes, neither’s extreme reaction would have served him well but for the intervention of the gods. What’s more, the Mt. Vesuvius example works extraordinarily well with Nietzsche’s—and our—conception of the self is always changing. The point is to make beautiful city, *not a permanent one*.

Rule Three: Focus on the (Real) Target

It is very easy to get distracted by beliefs, material things, and even our own image—even to get obsessed over them. But remember, the desire for these things and the ego are just *imaginary*, they are responses to an excess of primary energy that cannot be properly discharged because its goal—of becoming permanent and whole—is impossible. Nonetheless, even the healthy person has drives that need to be addressed—bodily drives, social drives, and desires. Many thinkers we encountered remind us to separate our aim—what we want with this shot with the bow—from our goal, which has more to do with self-realization and self-control. Recall that for Cicero, our aim might be to hit the bull’s-eye, but our goal should be to do everything we can to make that happen, regardless of whether it hits the target or not. For Aristotle’s archer of virtue, our aim might be to respond more calmly to our crying infant, but our goal is eudaimonia aimed at nobility. Virtue is essentially defined by doing what we can. For Nietzsche, we should recognize the difference between aims and goals as hidden ulterior motives and be more honest with ourselves. Am I happy that my coworker receives a promotion over me? Or is that just a rationalization in response to my powerlessness over the situation? Do I respond by seething and being jealous? Or do I respond by taking stock of my own abilities and seeing what I can do better next time? For Lacan, the aim might be this object of desire—even a desire for recognition—when what I really want is impossible—to return to a state in which all my needs are met and I am constantly loved.

While there are, of course, differences as to how we are to respond to this split human condition for each one of these thinkers they do share one commonality: we are always better directing our energies in a concerted fashion. Even the thinkers of forces and drives, like Nietzsche and Lacan, point to master drives and master signifiers. Even if it is ultimately a ruse or illusion, it appears to be better to focus one’s energies on giving oneself purpose, as opposed to “finding” it amongst the passions, desires, objects, and people we encounter. It turns out that the real target in every case is a moving one: self-overcoming, even where such a notion becomes

paradoxical in a theory that lacks the idea of a permanent self. As archers we must focus our energies on the target of self-overcoming and accept whatever else we cannot change.

Rule Four: Archery Involves Self-Mastery and Not Other-Mastery

As we saw first in the chapter on Odysseus, it is very possible to allow one's ego to take over completely. When this happens the maintenance of that ego works toward a false permanence, such that every offense against it is seen as earth-shattering. Or consider the way that—at least according to Neoptolemus' interpretation—Philoctetes almost missed an opportunity to be healed over his stubbornness and self-pity.

The answer, as we saw in Aristotle and Cicero, is that one can only control certain aspects of one's own being, which, in scheme of things, are quite limited. It's important to note that each thinker we discussed emphasizes the limited nature of human control. When we try to control factors outside of our control this leads to frustration, aggressivity, and violence. Consider the archer who attempts not to adjust her shot to the blowing wind, but to stop the wind itself. Here too, Nietzsche provides a helpful metaphor concerning weather: "To regard states of distress in general as an objection, as something that must be abolished, is the [supreme idiocy], in general a real disaster in its consequences. . .almost as stupid as the will to abolish bad weather."² Or to use an example from a favorite event of mine: take the pro-cyclists in the Tour de France. Every year there is some level of interference by rowdy fans, especially on the slow and narrow mountain climbs. Here the riders are going so slow (which is a rarity for them, to be sure) because of the ascent that a person on foot can keep up with them, touch them, attempt to take selfies, and occasionally even knock them over (usually unintentionally). Now a rider could react in two ways. He could just understand that this is part of the course and understand that every rider has an equal chance of his time being ruined by fan interference. Or he could lash out and demand that all fans be removed from the course. Luckily, most riders react in the former way; after all, who is it they are riding for if not the fans?

We saw in Nietzsche—as was implied in Aristotle and Lacan—that the healthy, more powerful types have two goals. One is to overcome any sense of denial about who they are and the origin of their drives; what Lacan would call putting the "I" where the "id/it" was. The second is to accept those aspects of their lives that are not of their own making—even to *love* them as Nietzsche's implores with his imperative: *amor fati*.

We also saw in each of those thinkers that real power is over oneself and not others. Nietzsche imagines the peaceful person who tends to her own garden as more powerful than the ruthless tyrant who only exhibits power over others because he has so little over himself. Likewise, in Lacan we saw that striking another is just a substitute for striking oneself.

Rule Five: Keep the Bow Tense but Not Too Tense

As I mentioned in chapter 1, if a bow is strung too loosely it can snap on recoil. But a bow that is strung too tightly can also snap at the handle or the string. The point is that there must be the appropriate amount of tension in the bow. When we liken this to the human condition two points become clear. One, we must not be too loose in our constitution, that is, we cannot dissolve ourselves to the point of non-existence, or allow others to completely dominate us, and so on. As Nietzsche points out, and Aristotle implies, we are better beginning with extremes and moderating toward the middle than to be too tame to begin with.

So, what does it mean to keep the bow tense? It means to not repress any of the drives, but rather to redirect them appropriately. If Nietzsche, Freud, and Lacan are correct, some of the greatest artifacts of culture arose out of a redirection—sublimation—of drives toward a master drive, or master signifier. Of course, as we've already suggested, we do not want to lose control over our drives altogether. When we become too tense, that is when we allow our drives to pull us too strongly in opposing directions—that is when we “snap” by resorting to violence or acting out against ourselves or others.

Rule Six: Allow Others the Space to Shoot

We have seen that we should be focusing on self-mastery and not other mastery. But as Beauvoir pointed out, part of our responsibility toward the other is to allow them to have their own responsibility. Imagine the archery competition in which we demand that the other not shoot at all (as perhaps a tyrant or king could demand). How do we better ourselves if others are not also challenging us? Of course, there is a lot of risk in allowing the other to develop her own freedom, but freedom demands reciprocity. Of course, here we could have in mind the problem of enslavement, coercion, or deception, but this idea applies with teaching and learning as well.

An archer who only instructs her pupil without allowing the pupil to practice is not a good instructor. As we saw in the case of Awa Kenzo, a good sensei responds to the needs and situation of each student—even the student who might be an excellent archer but not a very good person. In allowing others space to shoot, we are living consistently with our desire for freedom, with the obligations of responsibility that come with it.

There are two other considerations about freedom for others. One, if Lacan is correct, and Freud and Schopenhauer before him were as well, then we all fundamentally want the same thing: wholeness, whether it be cast as dissolution into the whole or the assertion of some life force. Our individualizing egos get in the way of allowing us to see that. Secondly,

put in a slightly different way, our desire is always the desire of the other. Where the individualistic libertarians have it wrong is that we only have our lives, our meaning, our language, and our possibilities in virtue of living in a world whose way has been paved by others. At a larger remove, this is another “splitting” problem as was the problem of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche. In other words, if individuals split themselves off from one another we have the same chaos and disorder at a cultural level as we do at the level of the individual. That is too large of an issue to flesh out here. Suffice it to say that as archers we only become better when challenged and encouraged by others and that we ought to recognize their freedom and potential as fellow archers, even if they are ostensibly aiming at different targets.

Rule Seven: Shooting the Bow Involves Death(work)

Even if we are not hunting or at war, there is a more abstract sense in which shooting the bow involves death. As Heraclitus reminds us, even though the name of the bow is life, its work is death. In Lacan’s terms archery involves death-work because it involves forfeiting the ego. Recall that the ego is only part of the subject, and a false and imaginary part at that. The other parts involve a multiplicity of drives and desires, most of which get covered over, thwarted and repressed by the ego. In order to improve, we need to set aside the easily bruised ego and allow other forces to reemerge. If we use Nietzsche’s model, we must allow those latent forces to come forward for two reasons: one, as repressed forces they can fester and form *ressentiment* and reemerge in an altered and more dangerous form. Second, if we harness their energy they can be sublimated into productive and creative forces.

As archers, to harness all our potential we need to face when our previous shots failed. We need to acknowledge that we might have been able to have made adjustments that could have led to an improved outcome. This involves killing the ego. The virtuous person must be humble. Only with humility can the archer, or anyone, adjust themselves toward improvement.

Rule Eight: Improvements Happen as Adjustments on a Continuum, Not as Binary

To improve in archery, or anything, we cannot think in terms of binaries but rather continua. If I think in terms of binaries, say, either we hit the bull’s-eye or not, then I could have a better shot over the last one and still not count it as a success if it didn’t hit the bull’s-eye. By setting up improvement as an either/or I am bound to fail most of the time. Instead, I should be asking myself: did this shot get closer to the bull’s-eye than the last one? Or, per our earlier point about focusing on what we can

control: did I do everything I could to try to get this shot closer to the bull's-eye than the last one?

Frequently we are in the business of saying: "I will never be X," or "I can never do X." Even though such language is defeating, it is nonetheless narcissistic: It paints our selves as permanent unchanging things. Instead, we should think of ourselves in terms of realistic potentialities, and what it would take to realize those. Consider Nietzsche's view about the great novelist:

The recipe for a great novelist . . . is easy to give, but to carry it out presupposes qualities one is accustomed to overlook when one says, "I do not have enough talent [to be a novelist]." One only has to make a hundred or so sketches for novels, none longer than two pages but of such distinctness that every word in them is necessary; one should write down anecdotes every day until one has learnt how to give them the most pregnant and effective form; one should be tireless in collecting and describing human types and characters; one should above all relate things to others and this to others relate, keeping one's eyes and ears open for the effect produced on those present, one should travel like a landscape painter or costume designer . . . one should, finally, reflect on the motives of human actions, disdain no signpost for instruction about them and be a collector of these things by day and night. One should continue this many-sided exercise for some ten years; what is then created in the workshop . . . will be fit to go out into the world.³

It is only after these long processes of development that one can seem like a "natural" or that they were "born that way." In archery, as in everything we do, improvement is a matter of making adjustments that become increasingly capable of responding to external forces and mastering internal ones. This can only be seen on a continuum and not as an either/or proposition.

Rule Nine: Archers Learn from Their Misses

It has become a common refrain, nonetheless we should remind ourselves that we learn more from our failures than our successes. As Milon Elott reminds us: "Archery does not get difficult or hard to understand until the arrow misses."⁴ The person who is naturally inclined to respond well in all situations (though no such person exists) would be less virtuous than one who fails, but nevertheless learns from those mistakes and improves the next time. Why? Because real virtue involves knowledge of what one is doing and is performed based on a considered judgment—*prohairesis*. Secondly, if our fictional "natural" were to ever to shoot crooked, she would not be able to correct course because she would not know what she did wrong or how to adjust. She might even give up altogether.

For Lacan, and most likely for Nietzsche as well, we all begin at a disadvantage—maladjusted, alienated, at the mercy of chaotic and disorganized forces that only have a delicate illusion of unity. In the spirit of death-work, we must admit our disunity, our failures, and our inner chaos in order to come out stronger. However, we must not dwell on our failures exclusively either.

Rule Ten: "Make Every Shot Anew"

I borrow our last rule from Awa Kenzo. As archers, we must not dwell on the mistakes of the previous shot. We must acknowledge them to move beyond them. Like I suggested above, even this *dwelling* on mistakes is a form of narcissistic fixation. To some extent the rule of fixation is repetition: turning the different into the same via the imaginary. The use of the creative/symbolic allows us to envision new possibilities—to break out of the plane of metonymy and work toward the new.

Now how does such a rule square with the previous advice to adjust and learn from our mistakes? We must hold in tension the two extreme possibilities of not being able to change at all and being completely uncertain of "who we are" and what we should become. Part of the process of *amor fati* or, "*Wo Es war, soll ich Werden,*" is the idea of assuming responsibility for the unknown. Recognize and honor the past but only as much as is necessary to move forward—dwelling on the past is the stuff of *ressentiment*. If the archer were to only focus, or, rather, focus only on her last missed shot, then this would most certainly impede improvement and self-overcoming.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, sec. 283, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, Edited and Translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968), 97.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 14.4 in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche, The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Edited and Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000), 785.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), sec. 163.

4. Milan, Elot, *Why We Miss and Other Writings* (College Park, MD: Self-Published, 1966), 30.

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