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We are rediscovering our interest in the space in which we are situated. Though we see it only from a limited perspective – our perspective – this space is nevertheless where we reside and we relate to it through our bodies. We are rediscovering in every object a certain style of being that makes it a mirror of human modes of behaviour. So the way we relate to the things of the world is no longer as a pure intellect trying to master an object or space that stands before it. Rather, this relationship is an ambiguous one, between beings who are both embodied and limited and an enigmatic world of which we catch a glimpse (indeed which we haunt incessantly) but only ever from points of view that hide as much as they reveal, a world in which every object displays the human face it acquires in a human gaze.

Yet we are not alone in this transfigured world. In fact, this world is not just open to other human beings but also to animals, children, primitive peoples and madmen who dwell in it after their own fashion; they too coexist in this world. Today we shall see that the rediscovery of the world of perception allows us to find greater meaning and interest in these extreme or aberrant forms of life and consciousness. So much so that the whole spectacle that is the world and human life itself takes on new meaning as a result.

--Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Animal Life," The World of Perception, 69-70

Imagine, then, that I forgive on the condition that the guilty one repents, mends his ways, asks forgiveness, and thus would be changed by a new obligation, and from then on he would no longer be exactly the same as the one who was found to be culpable. In this case, can one still speak of forgiveness? This would be too simple on both sides: one forgives someone other than the guilty one. In order for there to be forgiveness, must one not on the contrary forgive both the fault and the guilty *as such*, where the one and the other remain as irreversible as the evil, as evil itself, and being capable of repeating itself, unforgivably, without transformation, without amelioration, without repentance or promise? Must one not maintain that an act of forgiveness worthy of its name, if there ever is such a thing, must forgive the unforgivable, and without condition?

--Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness" (2001), trans. Michael Hughes, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness (New York and London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 38-39.

I.

He was a large, hulking figure, god-like in demeanor, bold and proud, respectful and honest, commanding and decisive in his actions, caring and concerned about others, stubborn in his convictions, willing to suffer the consequences of his actions in support of others, in short, a rebel in the eyes of his enemies, a hero for those he defends. That he comes from a different order, not fully part of the current establishment regime makes him more inclined to object to what is done by those with whom he disagrees, and they by contrast are more inclined to make his life difficult.

Prometheus was a Titan – half god, half man – a remnant from a by-gone era. He offended the new regime – the Olympians ruled by Zeus – he gave fire, skill, craft, but also blind hope to humans. The regime that he opposed had committed some egregious transgressions. Zeus had become king of the Olympians by tricking his father Chronos, getting him to eat his own children – all except Zeus who threw a rock in the mouth of Time, stopping time, but saving himself, giving himself the power to rule the new order. By giving craft (fire) as well as blind hopes to humans, Prometheus offended the new regime, reducing some of its power and authority, delimiting its strength, testing its command and control. For once humans have the power to create as well, they are able to do many things – even things that put the gods in question. Prometheus' gift is at once an act of generosity and of defiance. He is both a villain and a hero, an unwanted rebel and a venerated savior. For his crime, Prometheus is attached to the rocky cliffs overlooking the sea. During the day, vultures eat out his liver; at night it regenerates so that he will be ready for his punishment the next day.

Io – a young, human, woman who was drawn into Zeus' fancy – is tormented by Hera's jealous response to her husband's excesses. Hera transforms Io into a heifer – an animal tortured by large stinging horseflies and other painful insects. Io runs past Prometheus as he remains firmly affixed to the stony cliff – the work of Zeus' trusty henchmen Hephaistos – the blacksmith - and Power – the force of pure might.

Aeschylus' account could have been one of responsibility. One might ask: where does the responsibility lie in each of these sites of action? Responsibility for Zeus' accession to "power." Responsibility for Prometheus' gift to humankind? Responsibility for the human capacity to create, to make, to employ craft and on the other side, the responsibility for the endless capacity to act in the face of blind hopes – the anticipation that good will come from human action? Then there is the responsibility for human suffering – the misery that Io experiences as a result of Zeus' fancy and Hera's jealousy? Things happen and they are not always pleasant. Not everyone likes to be transformed into an animal. Acting brutishly is one thing, becoming an animal is something else.

Remember how much Kafka's Gregor Samsa enjoyed his transformation into a large beetle to be rather uncomfortable. Maybe even turning into a tree (remember Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Macbeth's Burnham Wood – at one M-P Circle we were all asked to stand up and pretend we were trees swaying in the wind – or David Abrams' account of our relations with trees – might be less worrisome than being metamorphosed into an animal. But where is the responsibility for all these conditions?

Prometheus responds to Zeus' exercise of power, but also to the plight of humans. Zeus responds to Prometheus' act of defiance. Hera responds to Zeus' excesses by tormenting Io. How often does the victim suffer? How often does the perpetrator pay? But does the responsibility lie on one side or the other? Hermes travels back and forth between Zeus and Prometheus – his hermeneutic is offered to Prometheus but also to Zeus. He moves in the “between.” The ancient Greeks understood that they (whether gods, humans, or animals) are above all members of a society, a community, a polis. To be human, Aristotle thought is to be a “political animal.” So people are animals anyway – even if they are rational ones. And (as we learn from Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*) those who were outsiders in the ancient Greek polis are treated precisely as non-citizens – and this of course included women and slaves as well as the various types of barbarians. And Merleau-Ponty in 1948 recalls this less than fortunate attitude when he states: “We are not alone in this transfigured world. In fact, this world is not just open to other human beings but also to animals, children, primitive peoples and madmen who dwell in it after their own fashion; they too coexist in this world. Today we shall see that the rediscovery of the world of perception allows us to find greater meaning and interest in these extreme or aberrant forms of life and consciousness.” (WP,70). Here our hero reiterates some of these ancient attitudes of inequality and hierarchy between those whom he considers to belong to the category apart from “other human beings” and here he includes “animals, children, primitive peoples and madmen who dwell in [the world] after their own fashion.” At least he does not put “women” in this “other” category along with “animals, children, primitive peoples and madmen.” And since Merleau-Ponty constructs all of his accounts from a position of a “we,” these others fall into the realm of the “they.” Zeus treats Prometheus like an animal, having him chained to a cliff, where other animals (vultures) can come and eat away at his liver. Hephaistos and Power treat Prometheus like a captured beast whom they are ordered to bind to the cliff. Hera treats her human competitor Io like an animal – in fact, Hera transforms her into an animal to be plagued by a myriad of stinging insects. It is as if Prometheus and Io are treated as belonging to the category of “animals, children, primitive peoples and madmen.” It may well be that these actions are in response to actions taken by the other. It may well be that those in control, those in power, those who are sovereign, those who command are answering, replying, responding to actions taken by the other – even if the other is in a lesser position, an outside position, a position of lesser social and political status. After all,

Prometheus was a rebel, he disobeyed the law – in the same kind of way that Antigone disobeyed Creon’s law by burying her brother. But Aeschylus wants to make a different point that what Sophocles later offers. Aeschylus wants to show that monarchies are defective, that authority should not come from some divine command, that democracies – with the help of some divine intervention to help humans out – can solve social inequities and human failings. Sophocles by contrast wants to show that there are laws of nature that transcend the social edicts and laws set forth by kings and queens, and that those such as Antigone who disobey may indeed do so with a higher calling. The point here however is that in either case, the rebel is responding to what he or she perceives to be an unjust state of affairs. And the sovereign is responding to the disobedience with law and order. But where does the responsibility lie? Are Zeus, Hera, Prometheus, Io, Antigone responsible for their actions? Where does the responsibility lie?

II.

In a more modern context, though still imbued with medieval attitudes, Shakespeare’s King Lear – a sovereign with absolute power, unalterable right and authority, the commander-in-chief is held responsible for his kingdom. The people take him to be responsible, they assume that he will command, that he will respond to disaster, that he will act concernfully toward the people of his kingdom, that he will go to them when they suffer from great storms or acts of offense against the kingdom. They ask him to be answerable to his own position as he asks them to be answerable to his law. In this respect he is not unlike Creon, who takes it as a matter of his position to rule, to be sovereign, to provide peace, harmony, well-being to his people. From this position of control and authority, Lear like Creon, like Zeus is held answerable for his actions, but in what sense does this answerability, this responsibility belong to the sovereign? To what extent is the responding, the answering of a call a matter of responsibility?

As we know, Lear proposes to surrender his command, he decides to cede his power, to give up his sovereignty. Lear proposes to make himself no longer answerable to the kingdom. Like Charlemagne, he proposes to divide his kingdom among his three children. And his three children, unlike those of Charlemagne or in Kurasawa’s version in the film *Ran*, are all women. Two of his children are married. They have partners who participate in the response to the daughters’ father. The third is unmarried. Lear proposes to give up his kingdom, his position as sovereign to his three daughters. He offers that the rule of the kingdom shall take place *between the three* of them – as if a single position of authority and rule could come from a place between, as if a place between three could be a source, origin, position of authority. But authority, like the author, king, subject, ego, self, sovereign from which responses come or may come, must be singular, unitary, thetic. If the responsibility is shared between the three can it still be

sovereign? Or to put it in another way, can responsibility be shared? Each daughter who would be asked to rule the kingdom would operate from a singular position of authority. But with three positions of authority, there would always be three separate responses to any question. Even if there were to be agreement, accord, common response, acting in concern, reacting in harmony, they would be three responses that are in some sense shared, rather than held in common. The “common” – as in common sense – suggests that there can be a unity that stands above each particularity, each singularity, each identity, each authority, each person. But sharing will never be the same as holding in common, for sharing means dividing at the same time as bringing together. With any shared position, there will be division at the same time as there is agreement from each side.

Lear proposes to divide his kingdom into three parts – *omnia Gallia divisa est* – the great Julius Caesar once wrote. So Lear proposes to make his kingdom into three parts. But what is to happen between the parts? Where would the responsibility lie in such a division? Or to put it another way, what would happen to responsibility if it were to be located elsewhere than in a singular position of sovereignty? Indeed, is it even possible to think about responsibility as coming from such a singular position of sovereignty?

Lear is responding to a situation. He is old, frail, unsure of his abilities to continue in his role as sovereign. And yet, he has gathered together years of wisdom that should allow him to continue in his role. He has good advisors and bad ones. He has three daughters whom he trusts. The kingdom depends on him. He attempts to respond to their needs, and they attempt to respond to his call. Those who trust him, work with him, support him, encourage him, seek to help him, accomplish his goals, aims, ends, for them, his success is their own as well. He responds to them. They respond to him. The kingdom thrives. But the situation has come to a point where, Lear, the man, the father, the person, asks whether he is able to continue to preserve the kingdom as its sovereign authority. Indeed, to what extent is he responsible to the others, to the members of his society, his kingdom? After all, he is commander-in-chief, and yet he feels his human weakness, his infirmity, his inabilities as a person. As a sovereign, he proposes to divide his kingdom and surrender his position of authority. He proposes to give up his control as a leader, as a ruler, as a sovereign.

As Lear offers to surrender his kingdom to his three daughters. Yet he asks of them something that has no place in the singularity of authority, that does not depend just on him, his choice, his decision, his application of reason and judgment. He asks his daughters for their expression of love. That’s all. This was the condition that he set for surrendering his kingdom to them. If they would “say” they love him, he would give them everything. But as the song goes, “what’s love got to do with it?” What has love

got to do with the work of the sovereign, the rule, the authority, the singular position of control and command? Lear can ask his daughters whether they love him or not.. They can respond. And he can respond to them. But is the expression of affect, the same kind of responding as a request for leniency, or a request for aid following a disaster, or a request for support of another kingdom in trouble? Not all requests are the same. Not all responding is the same. But where does the responsibility lie? And what if the other cannot respond at all? Or what if the other's response is misinterpreted, misjudged, misunderstood? What if the responding is a deceit, a device, a stratagem and not a genuine response at all? Which responses can be trusted and which ones must be questioned?

Two of Lear's daughters – Regan and Goneril – responded to Lear's request for an expression of love with a deceit, a device, a reply that simply repeated what was called for. They responded with an attempt to match the request, with a demonstration of harmony in order to achieve their own end – namely the control and command of the kingdom. And they each pretended to share a common response – as if they were one, as if a univocal unity could fully subsume the duality, as if there were no longer the possibility of ambiguity between. The third daughter Cordelia who wanted to show her genuine love for her father, the debt of the child for her parent, attempted to do so with an honest response that would demonstrate that affect cannot be reduced to words, to language, to an official expression of “love.” His request was for words of love, an expression of fidelity, a language of affect. He did not ask for them to be responsible for their expression, to be responsible for their honesty, to be responsible for their actions. He requested; they each responded. But were they responsible for their responses? Wherein did the responsibility lie?

As long as Lear was still King, there was an unequal relation between him and his daughters, his citizens, his subjects. He could respond to the needs, the requests, the conditions of his people. They could respond to him. He was responsible to them. They were responsible to him. But at the margin, at the point of surrender of his kingdom, Lear asked for a response that was outside the limits of his sovereignty. He asked for an expression of love. He asked for a gesture of love. He asked for a response that would tell him that they loved him. As king, he was responsible. As daughters, they were responsible. But where did the responsibility lie?

The king is an agent, a position of authority, a sovereign subject. Each member of the kingdom is also an agent in the modern sense of the term. Each member of the society must respond to whatever situation, condition, event presents itself for a response. Responding means giving a response. Lear's daughters responded. And on the basis of their different responses, he gave his kingdom up to two of them and not to the third – the

one who sought no advantage, no gain, no position of authority. The two who gave the desired response were rewarded with the divided kingdom. But once Lear gave up his sovereignty, his authority, his position of command, all he had left were the multiple expressions of affect. Of course, he could continue to respond, but it would have no effect. Dispossessed, disowned, disheartened, despairing, he wandered through the forest with only those who chose to stay with him, his friends. Although he could still respond – respond with despair and sadness if not madness – was he similarly dispossessed of responsibility? Does one possess responsibility? Can a subject own responsibility? Can a subject be responsible for his or her responsibility? Was Lear responsible for his surrendering of his kingdom? Were Regan and Goneril responsible for their deception? Was Cordelia responsible for her honest response? Were Lear's trusted advisors responsible for staying with him even after he gave up his authority? And was there any responsibility for any of their actions and choices and responses? Would it make any difference if Lear were to forgive any of his three daughters for their responses to him?

III.

Clint Eastwood's Million Dollar Baby is a wrenching film about responsibility. But in what way? On the surface, it concerns a young woman who has nothing but her job as waitress at a diner and a passionate desire to become a boxer. Does she want to command, to become the world champion in her weight class, to defeat all oncomers? Probably not. She is responding to a situation of poverty, of an uncaring mother, of siblings who only want to take advantage of whatever lies before them. She goes to the boxing gym owned by Scrap (the Morgan Freeman character) with a request that Frankie Dunn (the role played by Clint Eastwood) serve as her trainer. Maggie (played by Hilary Swank, who will be remembered for her stellar performance in *Boys Don't Cry*) is the story of a young woman who is committed to her passion to box, not to be a boxer, but to be able to box to the best of her ability, to fulfill her dream. She persists in her request that Clint Eastwood train her, teach her, guide her, show her the way. She asks him to be responsible for her boxing education, for her development, for her success (or failure).

Maggie presses ahead in her commitment, to fulfill her dream. She persists every night – all night in many cases to work at it, to train, to demonstrate that she is serious. Finally Scrap – who sleeps in his office at the gym – notices her and offers to help. But it is the support of Frankie – the older trainer who has practically given up on training boxers, after all Scrap himself nearly made it, but was brought down as he approached the ultimate success. Frankie did not want to see this happen again, but when it was clear that Maggie would persist, he eventually agreed to train her as long as she would accept two conditions: that she would not ask any questions and never cry (perhaps a reference to Hilary Swank's earlier role).

Eventually rising to higher and higher levels of success, greater and greater fame, until she came to the final fight for the world championship in her class, she remained undefeated. But the one thing she was always to do was to watch her back, to watch out for herself. And at this final battle when she was clearly winning, indeed had effectively won, her opponent – a ruthless former prostitute – turned on her after the concluding bell had rung, sending her crashing down onto a mysteriously misplaced stool causing her to become paralyzed from the neck down. Deeply affected, but with the money from all her successful fights, Frankie was able to find the best hospital and medical care available, but as time went by, unable to move, her body paralyzed and immobile began to disintegrate, to decay, resulting in the amputation of her leg. She could still speak, but only with the life support that kept her alive. Bold, brave, self-reliant and resilient, she asked of Frankie something that he could not give. She asked him to cut off her life-support so that she could die in dignity – now that all that she had aspired to could no longer be fulfilled. Frankie agonized over the request, he went asked the advice of his priest, of Scrap, of his conscience, but he could not accede to her request. But then so as to demonstrate that she was in earnest, Maggie bit off her own tongue, thereby cutting off the last avenue of everyday communication and signs of a shared life with those around her, most notably Frankie. For him, she had become a substitute for the daughter who never replied to his letters. She showed him her affection through her confidence, her respect, and her devotion. And when he finally accepted his own damnation – beyond forgiveness, his own exile from all that mattered to him, his choice of despair (as Kierkegaard would call it), he did the unthinkable and gave her a heavy dose of morphine as he disconnected the life support. Before he did so, he told her the meaning of the Gaelic name that he had imprinted on her fight day boxing robe. He told her that it meant “my darling,” and with that knowledge, unable to speak, limited only to facial expression and gesture, tears could be seen from the corners of her eyes. Somewhere, after she was gone, he might be seen sitting in a diner perhaps the one that he wanted to buy for her – his substitute child, his protégé, his future.

Where did the responsibility lie for her success as a boxer, for her opponent’s fateful blow that led to her paralysis, for her request to end her life support, for his eventual acceptance of her wishes, for his ultimate unforgiveable act – one that clearly went against his faith as a Catholic. There would be no forgiveness. There would be no blind hope. There would be no room for doubt. He eventually took her on as his trainee. She trained and fought with every ounce of passion and commitment. She won fight after fight, demonstrating her success, her fulfilled dream. She made one mistake, she turned away and did not watch out for herself. This was her *harmatia*, her tragic flaw. But where did the responsibility lie? Maggie’s request that her life be ended was her request, her asking of Frankie to do something for her – breaking one of the two rules imposed

upon her by Frankie – not to make any requests. But this was her request. And yet, where did the responsibility lie?

IV

In *The World of Perception* 1948 radio program series, Merleau-Ponty comments: “the way we relate to the things of the world is no longer as a pure intellect trying to master an object or space that stands before it. Rather, this relationship is an ambiguous one, between beings who are both embodied and limited and an enigmatic world of which we catch a glimpse (indeed which we haunt incessantly) but only ever from points of view that hide as much as they reveal, a world in which every object displays the human face it acquires in a human gaze.” (WP, 69-70). “We” – and whoever falls under the rubric of this “we” – can no longer take a transcendental, intellectualist view of the world and the things in it. Embodied beings are ambiguously related to one another. Prometheus is ambiguously related to Zeus, Hera is ambiguously related to Io, humans are ambiguously related to Prometheus. Similarly, Lear is ambiguously related to each of his three daughters, and they are ambiguously related to him. Frankie is ambiguously related to Maggie, Maggie is ambiguously related to those opponents whom she defeated, Scrap is ambiguously related to Maggie, and Maggie is ambiguously related to Frankie. None of these ambiguous relations, as Merleau-Ponty would call them, come from one side or the other. Although Merleau-Ponty continues to insist on the position of the embodied perceiving subject, he, at the same time, argues for an “entre-monde” or an “inter-subjectivity” that links persons who stand in relation to one another. The problem is that the language of “inter-subjectivity” has the remnants of the subjective, the positionality from one subject in relation to others, the first person – third person relation. The second person relationality is only one of the ways in which persons relate to one another, respond to one another, are affected by one another, answer one another, call out to one another, depend on one another, seek the advice or help of one another. But always, as a perceiving incarnate subject, one or another of them takes control, one or another takes the position of the sovereign, one or another perceives the other, is affected by the other, touches the other or is touched by the other.

And when one or the other belongs to those categories that does not come under the “we” – children, primitive people, the sick, or animals – the world in which they occupy, he says, “is certainly not a coherent system.” “By contrast,” he announces, “that of the healthy, civilized, adult human being strives for such coherence” (WP, 72). This exclusion of children, primitive people, the sick, and animals would certainly surprise many today – as it would have surprised his friend and colleague Claude Levi-Strauss, who published *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* in the very next year (1949). From the position of the phenomenological “first person singular” or “first person plural” as a

substitute for the singular, the placement of children outside the realm of the “we,” of course meant young children, not those of Lear’s daughter’s ages. But even then, the child viewed by the adult, as Merleau-Ponty would put it, makes it difficult to see the child as responding – except through imitation or gesture – to the adult. The adult, by contrast, responds to the infant or child when called upon by duty, obligation, necessity, or even the child’s crying.

Primitive people – uncivilized, as Merleau-Ponty would put it – excludes them from the realm of those who are capable of responding, in his view. But this Eurocentrism, this cultural prejudice devalues the opportunity to respond. Similarly, the infirm or sick cannot be asked to respond in the same way as other embodied persons, but this difference in embodiment nevertheless creates a dyssymmetry between the “we” and those more limited in their handicapped condition. But Merleau-Ponty continues: “the ‘normal’ person must remain open to these abnormalities of which he is never entirely exempt himself; he must take the trouble to understand them. He is invited to look at himself without indulgence, to rediscover within himself the whole host of fantasies, dreams, patterns of magical behaviour and obscure phenomena which remain all-powerful in shaping both his private and public life and his relationships with other people. These leave his knowledge of the natural world riddled with gaps, which is how poetry creeps in...” (WP, 73). Maggie’s infirmity is one that was sudden and radical. She went from the top of her level of achievement as the next world champion boxer in her weight class to an invalid, who could no longer move, no longer gesture – other than facial gestures – no longer move about the world in those “normal” ways of which Merleau-Ponty speaks. When she submitted herself to Frankie’s training, Maggie was not permitted to ask any questions. This limitation was a limitation on her speech, a limitation on her ability to inquire, to question, to interrogate. Yet she willingly submitted to this limitation so that she could achieve her goal. As an invalid, she was also limited, but in the context of this new limitation, she pressed her choice of action and decision to its limits as well. Her private life became the realm of her ability to respond. But even here, when asked by her mother’s lawyer to sign over all the funds that she had acquired as a champion, limited only to signing by holding a pen between her teeth, she was able to refuse, to respond negatively to the pernicious request of her poverty-stricken self-serving mother.

“Imagine, then,” Derrida writes, “that I forgive on the condition that the guilty one repents, mends his ways, asks forgiveness, and thus would be changed by a new obligation, and from then on he would no longer be exactly the same as the one who was found to be culpable. In this case, can one still speak of forgiveness? This would be too simple on both sides: one forgives someone other than the guilty one. In order for there to be forgiveness, must one not on the contrary forgive both the fault and the guilty *as such*,

where the one and the other remain as irreversible as the evil, as evil itself, and being capable of repeating itself, unforgivably, without transformation, without amelioration, without repentance or promise? Must one not maintain that an act of forgiveness worthy of its name, if there ever is such a thing, must forgive the unforgivable, and without condition?” (OF, 38). One would forgive the other only if the other is capable of being responsible for the act. Can Frankie be forgiven for his euthanasia, for his acceding to Maggie’s wish to die with dignity, to avoid any further protracted suffering, degeneration, disintegration of her bodily being-in-the-world? Frankie struggled with Maggie’s request. He was tortured by the significance of her sole and final request. He responded to her call – albeit against all legal and religious principles to which he himself adhered. Of course, in the boxing business, the risk of significant injury, maiming, paralysis is paramount. And yet, willfully aiding in the removal of life-support goes beyond the limits of what can be forgiven. But Frankie does not ask for forgiveness. To forgive him would be to forgive the unforgivable. But then where does the responsibility lie?

Derrida recalls those transactions carried out by political leaders “in the name of ‘national reconciliation,’ the expression to which de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Mitterand, all three, returned at the moment when they believed it necessary to take responsibility in order to efface the debts and crimes of the past, under the Occupation or during the Algerian war. In France,” Derrida affirms, “the highest political officials have regularly used the same language: it is necessary to proceed to reconciliation by amnesty, and thus to reconstitute the national unity” (OF, 40). Would Zeus want to take responsibility for punishing Prometheus in order to propagate his need to place limitations on human action and choice? It certainly would afford him well to do so, since that is the only way in which he would be able to proceed as the great leader of the Olympian gods. Forgiveness was obviously not an ancient Greek category. And yet, Zeus could be held responsible just as he held Prometheus responsible. But the responsibility was not his, nor did the responsibility belong to Prometheus.

V.

Responsibility cannot belong to a subject, to a sovereign, to a single position of authority. Responsibility requires a responding, an event of responding, the happening of responding, which cannot come from one side or the other. This is the limitation of the Merleau-Ponty formulation from the very beginning. He assumes the phenomenological stance that comes from the position of as single subject. He assumes that the relations are unequal, that a dyssymetry prevails in all interpersonal relations. One takes the stance of responding to the other. The one calls upon the other to answer. The one requires a response of the other. And when the other does not respond, then the other is held for the

absence of a response. Or when the other responds in the negative, or as a rebel, as Prometheus did in his act of disobedience, or as Regan and Goneril did in their deception, or Cordelia did in her honesty, or Maggie in her request that Frankie end her life – in each of these cases, the responding is something other than the responsibility. For in each case, as we learn from Merleau-Ponty, the texture of the inter-world is a lived world of relations in which the interpersonal relation is already there. And the responsibility for the relation resides in the relation itself. One person cannot be responsible for another without subjecting the other to a condition of servitude. And that condition of servitude, of reducing the other to an object, is beyond possibility.

Prometheus cannot reduce human beings to a condition of servitude because he gave them fire, craft, and blind hope. Quite the contrary, his act was one of liberation, but not one of responsibility, for the responsibility is already between them. The responsibility is not in Prometheus' defiant act, but in his relation to the humans whom he sought to help. Zeus cannot reduce Prometheus to an object, to a condition of servitude by binding him to the rock. Zeus can send his blacksmith (Hephaistos) and Power to limit Prometheus' actions, and although this act is in response to Prometheus' rebellion, the responsibility belongs as much to Prometheus as it does to Zeus. The responsibility lies between them, they share the responsibility and neither of them possesses it.

The responsibility for Lear's folly and blindness cannot reside with him alone. Indeed, it does not belong to him, for the act derives from his relation to each of his three daughters, and to the people of his kingdom. He cannot be forgiven for his surrender of his kingdom to his unworthy children. They share the responsibility. Indeed, the responsibility is between them, dividing them, and shared between them. Had Lear not decided to divide his kingdom, there would be no responsibility for the deception. His choice opened up a new space of responsibility between himself and his daughters. Their unworthiness – differently expressed – was already situated in the place between them. Responsibility cannot be forgiven because it does not belong to anyone. Responsibility does not take one outside of oneself since it is already in the place of relation – that ambiguous zone (as Merleau-Ponty would have called it) – that place of indecidability as Derrida would have shown by demonstrating that what Lear and his daughters had between them was a space of difference that they both shared and that divided them at the same time. This sharing and dividing is where the responsibility takes place, happens, calls upon the partners of the relation to respond, to answer the call of each other, to mark out their differences. There is no responsibility if there is no difference. When there is agreement, there is no need for responsibility.

When Maggie asks Frankie to remove her life-support, is she responsible for the request, is he responsible for carrying it out, is there a responsibility for which she or he could be

held answerable by the courts, by the church, or even by a personal conscience? Yes, Maggie calls out, Frankie responds to the call, he answers her request, he responds but the responsibility is not his, nor hers. He has answered her request. There was no difference, and hence no responsibility. The call and the responding took place, but the responsibility was displaced to another court of evaluation. The courts might respond, the church might respond, the medical profession at the convalescent hospital might respond, but these responses enact a different responsibility – one that marks them off from Frankie and his act. They may affirm a responsibility in relation to him, but they will not take the responsibility away from him, since he does not possess it. He responded to the call, just as Prometheus responded to the call, Zeus responded to the defiance, Lear responded to the deceptions of his two daughters and the sincerity of the third. The responsibility for these various responses was situated between them.

Responsibility does not happen apart from a relation, a relation of difference. There is no responsibility if there is no difference. But the event of responsibility is an event of significance since it links two or more persons, two or more institutions, two or more positions of response. Responsibility cannot happen where there is an imbalance between, where one side commands and the other is subjugated. Responsibility is a place of equality in the between. Civilized peoples, as Merleau-Ponty calls them, are not responsible for primitive peoples. Primitive peoples are not responsible for civilized peoples, but the responsibility of the constitution of the difference happens between them. Responsibility, in this postmodern sense, cannot come from a subject, cannot constitute an object. Only the responding can create this imbalance or dyssymmetry. Responsibility is always already shared responsibility – just as Merleau-Ponty is responsible for Derrida, Derrida, on the other hand, is responsible for Merleau-Ponty. The responsibility takes place between them, the responsibility for the differences and the places of agreement between them will have taken place elsewhere than where they individually may or may not have responded to each other. And even though they will surely have had their differences, sadly, neither is here any longer to defend himself... so the responsibility will have shifted to another place – such as this one...