

Multiple Personality Disorder, Literature and the Politics of Memory

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Introduction

The focal point of this paper is personal identity and the role memory might play in the construction and understanding of that identity. At least since Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) in the late 17th C. many have believed that our identities are intimately entwined and indeed constituted by our memories. In some recent work by Ian Hacking, particularly in *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (1995), this issue is taken up in a new form in the context of an examination of Multiple Personality Disorder and the advent of the sciences of memory in the nineteenth century. Intricately related to Hacking's position is a thesis he calls "the indeterminacy of the past" which asserts that there is no definitive truth about the past because the past is, in ways we will detail below, inherently indeterminate. We reject this position. In short, by using both theoretical arguments and examples taken from a fictional narrative — Paul Auster's recent *Leviathan* (1992) — we argue that while indeterminacy may at times be unavoidable in the complex matrices which constitute our lives, indeterminacy can at other times be overcome. This can be accomplished, however, only by accessing and evaluating information from a variety of temporal perspectives and, most importantly, by referring to information *external* to oneself. Hacking fails to see this because he focuses too heavily upon (personal) memory and as such privileges the present over the past as well as a first person perspective. If we see people's lives synoptically as a 'doing in context' of their relationships with others, then we have evidence for some sort of truth not only of the past but of people's lives generally.

I

Paul Auster's novel *Leviathan* presents us with a mystery. In the beginning, Peter Aaron, the novel's narrator, has come upon a brief newspaper story which describes an incident of a man who has, perhaps accidentally, blown himself up along the side of a road in Northern Wisconsin. Evidence regarding the man's identity is sketchy; there is a dearth of clues. The body was literally blown to bits, spread out over an area of fifty feet; fingerprints have been decimated; whatever pieces of ID that have been found turn out to be forged, the car stolen (Auster, 1992, 1-2). 'Deeper' evidence — such as dental records, and the tracking of the man's prior movements — must be uncovered and this is a time consuming, difficult task.

Aaron, however, is certain immediately that he has solved the puzzle: "Almost inevitably, I began to think of Benjamin Sachs [his best friend]. There was nothing in the

article that pointed to him in any definite way, and yet at the same time everything seemed to fit" (Auster, 1992, 3). That is Aaron has, or thinks he has been able, to read the gaps in the evidence presented. Having constructed a hypothesis, he commits himself to unveiling the evidence which will corroborate it. Interestingly, he decides to do this by writing the story of Ben Sachs's life, to tell "the truth" about his life because "once the secret" of Sachs's identity is out, "all sorts of lies are going to be told, ugly distortions will circulate in the newspapers and magazines, and within a matter of days a man's reputation will be destroyed" (Auster, 1992, 2).

The FBI, having found a slip of paper in the exploded man's wallet which contains Aaron's initials and telephone number, tracks Aaron down a few days later. Confirming his suspicion that he is right, Aaron is also lead to form a conjecture on the relation between narratives and identity. Not only will he be constructing a person through narrative so too will the police: "In other words, the whole time I'm here in Vermont writing this story, they'll be busy writing their own story. It will be my story, and once they've finished it, they'll know as much about me as I do myself" (Auster, 1992, 8). This suggests a complex relationship between narrative, self and other. In writing about Sachs, it is also his own identity that Aaron is trying to uncover and protect, an identity that is inseparable from his friend's and is in some way threatened by the police's narrative. Thus, one's identity it seems is the result of stories told about oneself — stories which, as we will see, are essentially based on memory, on reclaiming the past events of one's life.

II

In *Rewriting the Soul* (1995), Ian Hacking recounts the history of the transformation of memory from an ability to recall facts into a repository of knowledge about an individual's past. He centers his attention upon the therapeutic and historical construction of a particular psychiatric ailment: Multiple Personality Disorder. But MPD is, according to him, only one illustration among others of a more general phenomenon: the invention of the sciences of memory.¹ At some point in the second half of the nineteenth century, Hacking argues, memory became an object of scientific investigation in the sense that it came to be seen as containing facts, truths or falsehoods about an individual's past which could be discovered and used to understand that person's present. New and old disciplines, such as psychiatry, "scientific hypnotism" and psychoanalysis, were mobilized to discover and to interpret these facts. The idea of an intimate relationship between memory and identity is itself of course much more ancient since it dates at least from John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690). What the second half of the nineteenth century invented were the "sciences of memory", the belief that there is knowledge to be gained through the systematic exploration of memory. This entails, or at least suggests, that there are hidden memories, forgotten events which are not simply lost but which are, in some way, still there; bits of knowledge normally irretrievable by a person, but which can be discovered by a scientific investigation, analysis or therapy. Also, as Hacking notes, it came to be thought "that what has been forgotten is what forms our character, our personality, our soul" (Hacking, 1995, 209).

Although this is an idea which, he says, is “dazzling in its implausibility,” (209) he accepts that it is an idea which is inseparable from the sciences of memory. In many ways, multiple personality disorder as an object of inquiry fits that bill perfectly, as we will now see.

There are no necessary or sufficient conditions postulated for multiple personality disorder, nor has psychiatry found, unlike some forms of schizophrenia, for example, any physiological causes for the ailment. Rather, MPD has been defined by grouping prototypical symptoms. One, of course, is the presence of two or more distinct personalities, each of which is dominant at particular times. Other typical symptoms include the claim that the behaviour of the individual is determined by whatever personality or ‘alter’ (as it is called) is dominant and that the transition from one alter to another is typically sudden with the separate alters often having no knowledge of each other. Psychological stress is said to be the cause of switching from one alter to another, and alters can range over gender, age, and race. Memory too, or rather its absence, is essential as fugues are typical when alters experience lost periods of time as another alter is dominant. Finally, the etiology of multiple personality is child abuse, particularly of an acute and repeated variety and almost always sexual in some manner (See APA, *DSMIII*, 1980) Multiple personality is said to be a way in which the “self” is protected by “dissociating” from the experience (Hacking, 1994. 443-446) Clearly, then, whatever else the disorder may (or may not) turn out to be, it is about personal identity: multiple personality constitutes a way for a person to be.

At the heart of MPD psychiatrists and therapists find memories of child abuse which are generally repressed and almost always involve parents, close relatives, or care givers whom the child trusted. Therapy requires discovering these memories and slowly bringing the patient to cope with them and integrate them in a unique self. If that is not always what therapists do, since some, according to Hacking, irresponsibly tend to encourage the multiplication and permanence of alters, it is at least what he believes they should do. In the last chapter of his book Hacking puts forward strong deontological reasons why patients should be brought to deal with these repressed memories and argues that many multiple personality therapies constitute a form of false consciousness. What Hacking reproaches to these therapies is not that the memories retrieved may be false - “they may be true enough” says he - but that they tend to perpetuate the male stereotype of the “passive woman who could not hang in, who retroactively creates a story about herself in which she was the weak vessel.” (266) Hacking’s guiding principle here is the moral ideal of autonomy and what, according to him, distinguishes good from bad therapy is not whether it reveals or hides the truth about the patients past, but whether it allows her (or him) to take charge of her (his) own life.

In fact, Hacking is somewhat skeptical about the ability of the “sciences of memory” to discover the truth about the past.² This is not because of the, according to him, trivial reason that many of the memories discovered by these “sciences” may be false, imaginary, self-serving or fictional, but because of what he defines as a “deep philosophical reason”: the indeterminacy of the past. Though the name is somewhat formidable, the idea is not that difficult. Every human action, he reminds us following Anscombe (1959), is that action

under a description. Under a different description, the same event may constitute a different action. Consider a simple example, the turning on of a light switch. This simple physical event could be many different things: finding one's way to the fridge for food, signaling one's lover from across the street that the 'coast is clear', or an attempt to scare off suspected burglars. This pushing up an electrical switch, then, may be seen as one, two, or three actions depending upon the way in which the physical event is described. Consequently, according to Hacking, because past actions are open to future re-descriptions, they are to some extent indeterminate. When a person comes to reflect upon her past, if new meanings and modes of description hitherto unknown to her are now made available, the same events may gain new meanings. But, Hacking argues, we should not consider that it is only her memories or her interpretations of the past that have changed: *the past itself has changed along with the actions which constituted it*. Because every action is always action under a description, "retrospective re-descriptions" can change the past. Thus there is little chance that the sciences of memory will ever discover the past as it truly was simply because there is no such thing as a determinate past. That is why truth is not the yardstick with which to judge the findings of "memoro-politics". Autonomy, Hacking argues, constitutes a better criterion.

Be that as it may, the metaphysical doctrine on which this moral conclusion rests is nonetheless somewhat puzzling. Hacking is careful to point out that the intention appearing in an intentional description defining this or that action should not be construed as "an entity in the mind" (235). Rather, it should be seen as "the doing in context." (248) Given that acting is acting under a description, it seems a simple logical conclusion that "[i]f a description did not exist, or was not available, at an earlier time, then at that time one could not act intentionally under that description." Hacking adds "[o]nly later did it become true that, at that time, one performed an action under that description." (243) But why should we say that it became true "at that time?" Why should the future description in this case have precedence over the past? Is it not better to say simply that an agent performed one action yesterday which today can be seen as another action? And does time have anything to do with it? Imagine the following variation on Anscombe's famous example³. I am pumping water into a reservoir which supplies fresh drinking water to a house. Unbeknownst to me, I am poisoning my parents who live in that house. Because that description of my action is unavailable to me at the time of the action, Hacking is right in thinking that at that time I cannot say that I acted intentionally under that description. But does it follow that it cannot be said? Especially if the intention is not something which is in the mind of the agent, but the "doing in context". Suppose that at that same time this description of my action is available to (and actually used by) my brother Ian who poisoned the well and paid me for my work to better hide his crime. Should we say that neither description of my action is "definitely correct nor definitely incorrect" and that what I did is to a "certain extent indeterminate" (243)? Well, maybe on certain occasions it is appropriate to say that, but if we can and when we can, whatever indeterminacy there is has very little to do with time. What it has to do with is knowledge. To say that the intention is not something in the mind

of the agent is a writ against the first person's point of view. The indeterminacy corresponds to our uncertainty. Was I really unaware that the well was poisoned or was I to some extent a willing accomplice to the crime? If there is no answer to these questions, if there is no fact of the matter, then what I did is indeterminate.

Some may want to argue that this has to do with power. Maybe Ian wants to convince me that I did it, that I pumped the water, that it is my fault if our parents died, that I am as guilty as him. Maybe, but if such is the case, it only seems right to say that to believe him would constitute a form of false consciousness, a failure of autonomy, a sign of my incapacity to come to terms with the part I played in my own history, if I truly did not poison them intentionally. The political or moral judgement does not presuppose the indeterminacy of what I did. To the contrary, it rests on the determinacy of my action. It presupposes knowledge. For what if Ian's accusation were true? What if I did know that the well was poisoned? Should I still proclaim my innocence? Or is it irrelevant which action I performed?

Hacking's indeterminacy of the past is a puzzling doctrine in that it presupposes a strange advantage of the present over the past. According to him it is "retrospective redescriptions" which make the past indeterminate. But if our past actions are indeterminate because every action is an action under a description then that same indetermination clearly applies to our present actions. Our present descriptions are subject to similar uncertainties. There is a symmetry between the present and the past concerning determinacy which in both cases reflects the limits of our knowledge. What prevents Hacking from seeing this rather obvious point is, we believe, his excessive reliance on the value of memory. This may seem surprising. The sciences of memory aimed at using memory to discover the truth about one's past. Is not the idea of the indeterminacy of the past the deconstruction of that myth? To some extent it is, but notice how limited and incomplete this deconstruction is. According to Hacking, there is no absolute truth about a person's past that those sciences could discover: nonetheless he still believes that "memoro politics", the politics of memory, what is left of the sciences of memory once their epistemic value has been removed, yield a form of "knowledge" which can be useful in some way. That judgment has an essentially moral basis. Therapies which rest on the "retrospective redescription" of an indeterminate past are justified if they favor the agent's autonomy and allow her to live a fuller, more responsible life. But why on average favor later descriptions of person's actions over earlier ones? Because Hacking retains the idea that identity is forged through memory. Though memory is unlikely to yield truth, its productions, according to him, are nonetheless indispensable for the construction of our identity.

The thesis of the indeterminacy of the past conflates the idea that the sciences of memory cannot discover the truth about a person's past with the idea that there is no truth to be discovered. That is a bizarre confusion. Surely the failure of the sciences of memory cannot be equated with the impossibility of true knowledge concerning an individual's past; or rather, it can only be if one believes that memory gives her the only or her best access to her past. That is to say, it is only if one accepts that there is a first person's privilege that the failure of the sciences of memory can be seen as the impossibility of true knowledge

concerning a person's past. Further, the indeterminate character of actions, past or present, does not preclude the existence of truth about those actions. Resorting once again to the fictional example of my evil brother Ian, maybe it is indeterminate whether or not I poisoned my parents. It may be that I even don't know myself, but that indeterminacy does not have anything to do with the past.

III

Auster's *Leviathan* concerns itself with issues such as these. As Aaron expresses it mid-way through the novel: "Can a man fall asleep as one person and then wake up as another?... [I]f that's true, it would mean that human behavior makes no sense. It would mean that nothing can ever be understood about anything" (Auster, 1992. 118-119). Aaron has to this point failed in his attempt to ascertain any unity or reason to Sach's life because that life appears to be radically bifurcated and dissociated from a peaceful and successful writer with a stable family life at the beginning of the novel to a violent terrorist who travels the country under assumed names and false identities blowing up scale model replicas of the Statue of Liberty at the end. Our interest in this novel concerns the way(s) in which Aaron seeks to construct the existence of his friend Sachs through personal memory. In particular, we are interested in contrasting this approach with the (or a) reader's point of view regarding Sach's character in order to demonstrate that just because Aaron fails in *his* attempt to determine the truth about Sachs does not mean that everyone else will fail. That is, the fact that personal memory fails to be a reliable guide to the past does not, we shall argue, mean that there is no determinate truth about the past at all.

At mid-point through *Leviathan* Peter Aaron gives us a criterion of what constitutes, according to him, a good interpretation or correct understanding of Benjamin Sachs's existence. It is a requirement, it seems, for unity and identity. As we have said, Sach's life is apparently split in two which we as readers begin to see only after a particular event, a near death from falling off an apartment balcony. Although we never know for certain whether his falling was an accident or an attempted suicide, we do know that Sachs, who was a writer, novelist and essayist but who, lately, is having difficulty writing, now abandons his wife and disappears. A short time later he kills a man whom he then sets out, so to say, to replace. Sachs impersonates his victim, but not by adopting his legal identity, Reed Dimmagio. Rather, he goes to his victim's house and insidiously, progressively succeeds in becoming a father to the child and a husband to the wife of the man he has killed (and perhaps murdered). Sachs pushes the imitation of Dimmagio even farther. Rapidly dissatisfied with his new life as a family man, he retires to Dimmagio's office, an encumbered den where he discovers, reads and ponders over his victim's Ph.D. dissertation on the life of an early twentieth century anarchist. This constitutes a revelation for Sachs. He embraces Dimmagio's ideal of violent social criticism and, just as his victim had done before him, he abandons his wife and child and sets out on a crusade of terrorist attacks which ends with his violent death.

How are we to make sense of this bifurcated existence? How are we to explain the transformation of the peaceful writer into the violent terrorist? Is the public figure of the

first half of the novel, the respected author who signs articles in well-known journals, the same person as the underground social activist of no known address, who travels in stolen vehicles carrying false papers? They are the same individual, but are they the same person? How does one become the other? Where is the unity of this strange, dissociated life? What is Ben Sachs's identity?

Peter Aaron believes that there are answers to these questions and expects that only some answers will make sense and will provide an understanding of Sach's torn and dramatic existence. He searches his memory in an attempt to discover in Sach's life and in their past relationship an answer which will end his doubts and ease the pain he feels for his friend. Aaron strives to be truthful and candid about his past relationship with Benjamin Sachs and he reports Sach's words as faithfully as he can when dealing with those aspects of the story which he learned only through him. His memory is probably not to be faulted. Yet the answer he comes up with is neither very convincing nor very clear. The only explicit solution contained in the novel concerning the unity of Sach's life is Sachs's own explanation of his behaviour towards the end of the book. Before broaching that topic, however, we want to concentrate our attention on the relationship between Sachs and Aaron. In explaining that relationship, and others which flow out of it — in particular an affair between Aaron and Sach's wife, Fanny — we hope to demonstrate why Aaron fails in his attempts to construct a unified Sachs. Aaron, we argue, simply misunderstands his relationship with Sachs: as a result, he cannot successfully write Sachs narrative history because his memories of Sach's life are based upon false beliefs.

IV

Aaron and Sachs first met in an empty bar room where a scheduled public reading had been canceled because of bad weather. In spite of its somewhat accidental character, this meeting was not entirely fortuitous. As Sachs tells Aaron, it was Sachs who, after having read some of the latter's work, recommended Aaron to the organizers. During that first encounter, which lasted one afternoon and involved a large quantity of bourbon, Sachs generously compliments Aaron on his writing. The next day Aaron literally devours Sachs's novel and writes him a letter which conveys his admiration for the book and its author. The two rapidly become inseparable friends. Aaron is at first clearly infatuated with Sachs, seeing him as a model of what he would like to become. He notes, for example, that while he himself is a 'plodder' when writing, Sachs is capable of a "productivity [which] awed him.... The smallest word is surrounded by acres of silence for me, and even after I manage to get a word down on the page, it seems to sit there like a mirage, a speck of doubt glimmering in the sand... Sachs never had any of these difficulties. Words and things matched up for him, whereas for me they are constantly breaking apart, flying off in a hundred different directions" (Auster, 1992, 55). Sachs was a more successful author; indeed, "some publications paid large sums of money for his articles" (Auster, 1992, 54). And being well connected as a result of his success, Sachs generously introduced his friend to his many acquaintances. As Aaron tells us, Sachs and his wife Fanny "knew an astounding number of

people, and at some time or another it seemed that half of New York wound up sitting at the large oval table in their dining room" (Auster, 1992, 64). During that time Aaron was poor. He was an unknown author doing translations to make ends meet. His first son was born, but his marriage fell apart.

Shortly after he broke up with his first wife, Delia, Aaron's luck changed, and so did his relationship with Sachs and his wife. Through them he first met Maria Turner, who became his lover and was later to play an important role in Sachs's life. Then money started coming in. Around that same period Sachs went to Hollywood to work on the script of a movie based on his novel, *The New Colossus*. During his absence from New York, Fanny seduced Aaron, or that at least is the way Aaron presents the incident. There are reasons nonetheless to suspect that the events might not have been quite that simple. When Sachs first introduced his wife to Aaron, they immediately recognized each other. Not that Fanny was someone Aaron had known particularly well. In fact, he had seen her in his neighborhood a few times when he was a student at the university and they happened to be enrolled in the same philosophy course, but he had never spoken with her and says that "There was something intimidating about her elegance, a walled-off quality that seemed to discourage strangers approaching her. The wedding ring on her left hand was partly responsible, I suppose, but even if she hadn't been married, I'm not sure it would have made any difference" (Auster, 1992, 48). This first relationship blossomed into nothing more than the occasional exchanged smile and Aaron making conscious efforts to sit behind her in their joint class. Hardly the stuff of torrid romance. Aaron nonetheless found his chance reencounter with the unknown woman behind whom he used to sit as the wife of his friend "unsettling" (Auster, 1992, 48). "Fanny was an ancient daydream, a phantom of sexual desire buried in my past, and now she had unexpectedly materialized in a new role — as flesh-and-blood woman, *as wife of my friend* — I admit I was thrown off balance" (Auster, 1992, 51 — emphasis added). So off balance in fact, that he immediately thinks of Fanny and Sachs as a "strange match" and speaks of them in comparative terms in which Fanny invariably comes out on top: she's better looking, more intelligent, more articulate, and so on (Auster, 1992, 48, 49). Aaron recognizes his desire for her, but he also recognizes that it is unacceptable. Strangely enough, however, he projects his desire into his past: "As long as I behaved myself, she wouldn't hold my past sins against me" (Auster, 1992, 52). Sitting behind a (then unknown) woman in philosophy class, and occasionally smiling at her is hardly a "sin," however. Clearly, the sin is present, not past: the sin is his current sexual desire for the "wife of my friend."

But Aaron did not succeed in behaving himself forever. One evening during Sach's absence, Fanny invites Aaron to dinner. In itself this was not atypical except for the fact that Sachs wasn't there: "In all the years we had known each other, Fanny and I had never spent any time by ourselves" (Auster, 1992, 88). Although Aaron begins the evening with thoughts of returning to his wife, he ends by beginning an affair with Fanny. Although it's plain to Fanny (and the reader) that Aaron is in love with her, Aaron can only agree to the affair by externalizing responsibility for the event, first by convincing himself that Fanny was persistent, and second, by his learning, through Fanny, of all the affairs Sachs has had. That

is. by having sex with Fanny, Aaron can be just like Sachs, both in the sense of having affairs and more particularly in the sense of screwing Sachs' wife and thereby taking his place. This desire proved impossible for him to deny: "Ben was still out of town, and ... I slept every night at *his* house, sleeping in *his* bed, and making love to *his* wife" (Auster, 1992 — emphasis added).

Eventually Sachs returned, and though Aaron begged Fanny to leave Sachs and to marry him, it was to no avail. Fanny had never dreamed of leaving her husband. Aaron soon faced the prospect of having to explain his behaviour to his friend. When Sachs and Aaron finally met, however, Sachs's determination to ensure that their friendship continue offers Aaron a very different construction of Fanny's behaviour. It is not his numerous affairs that pushed her into Aaron's arms. She is, Sachs claims, an inveterately jealous woman, and as a result he has had, over time, to "play along" with this; indeed, to actively participate in the deception: "I tell her stories. It's part of the game we play. I make up stories about my imaginary conquests and Fanny listens. It excites her. Words have power, after all. For some women, there's no stronger aphrodisiac" (Auster, 1992, 105). Nor has Fanny always been jealous, but since she has learned that she cannot have any children she is convinced that no man can love her. By loving her, Peter has given her back some confidence: "that's why," Sachs concludes, "I think what happened is a good thing. You've helped her, Peter. You've done more for her than anyone else." (Auster, 1992, 108)

This explanation, in combination with the one provided by Fanny, presents Aaron with two different and mutually exclusive interpretations of events, and as a result, he is uncertain what to believe: "[A]s soon as I accepted one story, I would have to reject the other. There wasn't any alternative. They had presented me with two versions of the truth, two separate and distinct realities, and no amount of pushing and shoving could ever bring them together. I understood that, and yet at the same time I realized that both stories had convinced me" (Auster, 1992, 109). Aaron echoes Hacking's sentiment concerning the past and that of many relativists⁵ in his final reflections on these two different accounts provided respectively by Fanny and Sachs: "[I] hesitated to choose between them. I don't think it was a case of divided loyalties, ... but a certainty that both Fanny and Ben had been telling the truth. The truth as they saw it, perhaps, but nevertheless the truth. Neither one of them had been out to deceive me; neither one had intentionally lied. In other words, there was no universal truth. Not for them, not for anyone else" (Auster, 1992, 109). Finally, unable to decide what is *the Truth*, Aaron comes up with an explanation of his own. Fanny "did what she did to prevent me from going back to Delia [his ex-wife] If so, then Fanny's actions become nothing less than extraordinary, a pure and luminous gesture of self-sacrifice." And he adds "Of all the interpretations I've considered over the years, this is the one I like best. That doesn't mean it's true, but as long as it could be true, it pleases me to think it is." He concludes with the claim that "After eleven years, it's the only answer that makes any sense" (Auster, 1992, 99). Like Hacking it is for 'moral' reasons that Aaron finally settles for one "retrospective reinterpretation" over another.

It may be true that neither Sachs nor Fanny had been out to deceive Peter, in the sense of wilfully lying to him, but it is hard to escape the feeling that all three characters are deceiving themselves. No matter what may be the explanations for their actions it most probably is not what they pretend. Clearly, Sachs is saying less than the whole truth to his friend (just as he has with his wife), and Aaron is more than willing to accept Sach's implausible explanation since it relieves both he and his friend of all guilt. Then he presents his adventure with Fanny as the result of her sole initiative and projects his own desire for her into the past. Finally, after having put the whole responsibility for their affair on her shoulders, he transforms her "sin" into a "luminous act of self-sacrifice." These interpretations of the past may be more comforting to Aaron, but they are likely to be false consciousness.

Peter Aaron wants what Benjamin Sachs has: literary success, his facility with language, money, notoriety, and his wife. This 'desire' for what his friend possesses is not "something in the mind," it is his "doing in context." For this reason, it cannot be retrieved directly from memory, though it can be 'seen' by looking both at his memory and at his retrospective re-description of his past. In many ways Aaron and Sachs are rivals, but not in the ordinary sense of an open competition between them. Their rivalry is more hidden and perverse — an unacknowledged rivalry which cannot be confessed by either of them because it goes too much against their friendship, which is real. Aaron does admire Sachs and Sachs needs Aaron's admiration. Their rivalry is inseparable from their mutual admiration. It is another aspect of it. Until now, until Aaron's recent affair with Fanny, Sachs always won this game of competition and success⁶. Slowly things begin to change.

Over the next few years, Aaron's literary success confirms itself and he remarries. Sachs, on the other hand, suffers from a reversal of fortune. The project to make a film out of *The New Colossus* comes to nothing and, due to a change in the political climate, his work becomes less in demand. More and more, in the eyes of many "Sachs came to be seen as a throwback, as someone out of step with the spirit of the time" (Auster, 1992,116). His outward behaviour did not change. "He pretended not to care, but I could see that the battle was wearing him down.... he was gradually losing faith in himself" (Auster, 1992,117). Then came the accident. It occurred at a party thrown on the one hundredth anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. Too much alcohol and drugs mixed with too many people trying to see the fireworks from any vantage proved a dangerous concoction as Sachs ended up being (accidentally?) pushed over the balcony railing. Although Sachs could have been killed, since he was on the fourth floor, he survived the fall relatively unscathed physically. And yet, he has been radically altered nonetheless: when he awoke in the hospital he remained for days without talking. He stopped writing, shaved off the beard he had worn since he was young, left his wife and went off to his country house to work on a new novel, even though six years earlier, soon after meeting Aaron, he had decided to abandon fiction forever. Then one day he mysteriously disappeared.

As mentioned previously, the only explicit explanation of any unity in Sach's life comes from Sachs himself, as related through Aaron. As he sees it, the incident which lead him to embark upon a career as a terrorist was the rediscovery by Sachs of his first novel,

The New Colossus, on the shelf of a second hand bookstore, when he was already infatuated by Dimmagio's ideal of violent social criticism. On the front cover of that book is a distorted picture of the statue of liberty which suggested to Sachs the target of his attacks: small-scale replicas of the statue that are found in many towns throughout the United States. Through this action, Sachs thought he would carry out his victim's work while simultaneously expressing his own convictions. As he tells Aaron, Sachs saw it as an opportunity,

to make the kind of difference I have never been able to make before.

All of a sudden, my life seemed to make sense to me. Not just the past few months, but my whole life, all the way back to the beginning. It was a miraculous confluence, a startling conjunction of motives and ambitions. I had found the unifying principle, and this one idea would bring all the broken pieces of my life together. For the first time of my life I would be whole (Auster, 1992, 256).

Sachs believes that, for the first time, he will be whole by being both himself and another person, his victim. He forgets that this is something he has already attempted by replacing Dimmagio beside his wife and child and that it failed to bring him peace. Nonetheless, he will pursue the same goal, only this time he will make it more difficult. This time he will become Dimmagio the terrorist, rather than the father and husband (a career that is potentially open to every man). By adopting the underground life and activity of his victim, Sachs hoped that he would "bring all the broken pieces of [his] life together." He also thought that he was aiming at the same objectives of social criticism as when he wrote *The New Colossus*.

Sachs the terrorist, who signs his bombing "the phantom of liberty", is not simply torn between his self and the image of his victim: he permanently invents false identities, new lives and characters for himself. Innumerable roles which, as he informs Aaron, he must act out in order to successfully execute his bombing attacks. During that same conversation, Sachs claimed that there was a strong unity in his life between then and now, i.e., between his early writing and his present bombings. Sachs spoke like a fanatic, Aaron tells us, and he realized later that it was "an admission that he didn't need a life of his own anymore, but he spoke with such happiness, such enthusiasm and lack of doubt, that I scarcely understood the implications of those words at the time" (Auster, 1992, 263). What were these implications? That Sachs expected or intended to die soon, most probably, but perhaps also that in a way he was already dead, that he no longer had any identity, no life of his own anymore. "In fifteen years, Sachs traveled from one end of himself to the other, and by the time he came to that last place, I doubt he even knew who he was anymore. So much distance had been covered by then, it wouldn't have been possible for him to remember where he had begun" (Auster, 1992, 15).

The novel ends with Aaron giving an FBI agent named Harris, who has just informed him he has discovered the identity of the man who "blew himself up by the side of a road in northern Wisconsin" (1), the manuscript of the book we have just read. What led Harris to his discovery was that Sachs had also been impersonating Aaron, going to bookstores where he autographed Aaron's novel as if he were their author. Aaron, we will remember, at the time of the first visit by FBI agents, told them the story of how someone had been

impersonating him, answering letters in his name, walking into bookstores and autographing his books. This was in order to convince the agents that the presence of his telephone number in the pocket of the victim of the Wisconsin explosion did not prove he knew him. Authors, he argued, were often the targets of bizarre and unhealthy attention on the part of readers whom they did not know. He knew he was only buying time. He knew that the dead man was his friend, but he did not know, until Harris told him, that Sachs was his anonymous double just as he was also Reed Dimmagio's double.

There is, then, a strange continuity present in Benjamin Sachs's life, which Harris's revelation suggests. This continuity, paradoxically, destroys rather than constructs Sach's identity. It does not rest on something remembered or forgotten, or even that could be known directly from memory. Rather it is out there to be seen by everyone. That is why Harris found it out. It cannot be told as a story, but a narrative can make it visible, a tale may illustrate it. It is a pattern of behaviour.

As we know, the second 'half' of Benjamin Sach's life is his desperate attempt to become the man he killed by incessantly striving to supplant him as a father, a husband, and terrorist. By trying to be (or become) himself by being (becoming) someone else, he hoped to become whole; to bring together all the pieces of his broken life. But he fails to realize that this division between himself and his model was precisely what broke his life in pieces to begin with. This imitation of others' desires forms a constant thread through Benjamin Sachs's life, a pattern of behaviour which is clearly revealed at the end of the novel when we learn that Sachs was also impersonating Aaron by appropriating his life, autographing his books, and signing letters in his name. Benjamin Sachs did not fall off the fire escape as one person and wake up another. His life after his accident exaggerates and caricatures a pattern of behaviour which was already there. He now imitates every aspect of the life of his rivals.

In a series of literary (Girard, 1966; 1978; 1991) and anthropological (Girard, 1977; 1986; 1987) studies, René Girard has documented and analyzed this phenomenon which he terms 'mimetic desire'. This desire should not be seen as something in the head of the agent, either conscious or unconscious, but rather as his doing in context. It is mimetic because the agents' action reveals a strange effort towards the same or similar objects: 'literary recognition, money, notoriety, his facility with language, his wife'. And because they strive for the same objects, this rivalry often leads to conflict.

I imagined storms, dramatic scenes, immense shouting matches with Sachs before any of this [marrying Fanny] could happen. Perhaps it would finally come to blows, I thought. I found myself ready for anything, even the idea of squaring off against my friend failed to shock me.

It is also mimetic because as it intensifies what was originally a tendency to choose and value the objects of one's desire through others progressively invades all of the agent's existence. It creates, as a consequence, remarkable patterns of differences and resemblances. Sachs both renounces writing fiction soon after discovering Aaron's work and goes around impersonating him, pretending to be the famous author his friend has become and that

Sachs once was to Aaron's eyes. Mimetic desire is neither a motive of an agent's actions, nor his intent or an unconscious drive, it is more of a regularity that his behaviour reveals, or rather that their behaviours reveal. For by its very nature it relates agents to each other and can be perceived only when the actions of more than one person are seen synoptically. Because it is such a regularity, a pattern, visible in both what agents do and what they have to say about it⁷, the indeterminacy of certain actions, our inability to ever know the 'whole truth' about them is not an obstacle. To the contrary, when it is seen as a characteristic of certain behaviours, an uncertainty about their status as intentional actions, rather than as a blanket claim about the past, this indeterminacy is an important fact about these behaviours. Aaron's confused account of his affair with Sachs's wife does not preclude us from suspecting that his desire for her was driven by his admiration for him. His confused interpretation of what happens constitutes, to the opposite, part of the evidence which leads us to that conclusion.

Conclusion

The sciences of memory, Hacking argues, fail to discover the truth about the past because often there is no such truth to be discovered: the past is to some extent indeterminate. We should therefore be prudent concerning the claims of such sciences and judge them by their moral import rather than their epistemic value. But can we do as he invites us to do and divide ethics from knowledge? Is the truth value of a "retrospective recollection" indifferent to its moral consequences? Is a false recollection conducive to autonomy? A step away from bad faith? But what is a false recollection if the past is indeterminate?

The indeterminacy of the past is an artifice of recollection, an illusion of the first person's point of view, the result of a person's natural preference for herself. When one reviews his past, one can always fear that the present explanation of what happened is preferred to the past explanation simply because it is now one's own. The only way to protect oneself against such danger is to take account of interpretations of our past which are not our own. This is usually done by accessing sources of information exterior to memory. Once that is done it rapidly becomes clear that present action may be just as indeterminate. When there is such indeterminacy, it constitutes important information about the agent's behaviour. Replacing it by a definite "retrospective re-description" for moral reasons to enhance the autonomy of the agent is both a sham and an extreme form of the consequentialism Hackings rejects. To conclude, like Aaron, that Fanny's seduction of him and her unfaithfulness to Sachs was a "luminous gesture of self-sacrifice" is bad faith. It constitutes a refusal to face the indeterminacy of what happened. What Aaron does not want to accept is that Fanny's actions are to some extent indeterminate, that up to a point there is no fact of the matter as to what intentional action she did, for that also applies to him, to his past and his present. Benjamin Sachs's loss of identity does not come from a failure of memory. It comes from his progressive entrance into a world where there is no fact of the matter about the actions he performed. Did he want to seduce Maria Turner, the ex-lover of Aaron? Did he fall off that railing or did he try to commit suicide? Why did he

kill Reed Dimagio? Why did he then become a husband to Dimagio's wife and a father to his child? Why did he turn to violent action? Why did he blow up scale-model replicas of the statute of liberty? Why did he impersonate Peter Aaron? After a while there are no more satisfactory answers to these questions. Or, if there are any, they will not be in terms of intentional action. If autonomy is our moral ideal then it may be important for us to know when we may claim that our behaviour constitutes intentional action and when it does not.

Notes and References

¹ We do not mean to imply in saying this that the sciences of memory, nor the indeterminacy of the past, are the sole concerns of Hacking. *Rewriting the Soul* is a complex work which tackles many of the topics Hacking has addressed for several years such as "looping effects" and "the construction of human kinds." With much of Hacking's interesting work, we have no particular quarrel. See Hacking, 1986, 1991, and 1999.

² It is unclear whether Hacking believes this is true only of 'personal' histories or of history in general. In *Rewriting the Soul*, he carefully avoids discussion of revisionist history as applied to periods such as Nazi Germany. See, *Rewriting the Soul*, Ch. 15, pp.210-220.

³ G. E. M. Anscombe *Intention* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957, pp. 34-49.

⁴ If it is irrelevant, then it seems that Hacking in spite of all his oratory precautions and his high standing moral ground comes dangerously close to saying that there is no fact of the matter concerning child abuse, but that it does not matter, as long as such accusations can help some young women to achieve autonomy in their life. Consequentialism with a vengeance!

⁵ Hacking is not a relativist about what he calls "natural" or "indifferent" kinds (Hacking, 1999), but these are not directly at issue here.

⁶ In a sense, we can say that Benjamin has even won in the case of Aaron and Fanny's romantic episode. For there never was any question of Fanny leaving Sachs in her mind. What she wanted was a form of 'ménage à trois' where she would retain both her lover and her husband. It is Aaron who forces her to choose between Sachs and him.

⁷ What an agent has to say about his behaviour is clearly part of his action. Whether it is self-deceptive or guided by a desire for truth may be beside the point, in any case it remains part of what he or she does.

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