

Flat Affects vs. Deep Emotional Experience

Introduction

A series of examples are presented in this chapter—from ordinary language, personal experience, and literary art—that contrast “flat” or superficial affect with deep emotional experiences. All examples are intended, simply or initially, to informally focus some attention on what we already implicitly seem to know about emotional depth.

That emotional and perceptual depths are interinvolved (that we do not experience deep emotions over the manifestly superficial) is a part of my thesis. Some of the following examples are illustrative of these interinvolvements in that they begin to show how the depth of an emotion appears to vary with the depth of the target of the emotion and illustrate that there is a certain appropriateness or “fit” between the two forms of depth.

Linguistic Distinctions

In our ordinary language, emotions are differentiated in depth. In some cases, we use the term *deep* explicitly and, presumably, to offset some relatively significant difference, say, between love and deep love. In other cases, particularly when we consider clusters of related kinds of emotional experience—those that bear a close family resemblance to each other—presumably significant differences in depth are implicit in the choice of word used to describe an emotion: *loving* instead of *liking*, or *rage* instead of *anger*.

Remorse, rage, and agony are (respectively) deeper than regret, anger, or pain—just as cruelty is deeper than spite, awe is deeper than admiration, sorrow is deeper than sadness, joy is deeper than gladness, reverence is deeper than respect; and so forth. Within emotion clusters, vectors of significance appear to exist so that the relation of emotional depth between them is asymmetrical. For example, irritation or

indignation may deepen into anger or into outrage; but we never speak of rage “deepening” into anger or of anger “deepening” into irritation.¹

Neither do we speak of being “deeply irritated.” If we are “deeply irritated,” we say that we are irate or angry. By the same token, if we are “deeply angry,” we say that we are enraged, or furious.

Irritation or annoyance is the relatively superficial member of this emotion cluster. Irritation just scratches our surface. If we are irritated, something is “rubbing us the wrong way” or “grating” on us. If we are annoyed, we are “bugged.” “Abrasive” personalities are, naturally, irritating. So is monotonously senseless repetition: the dripping of a leaky faucet, an attack of hiccups, the recurrent lighting of a fly, the skipping of a broken record, or nervous habits like the drumming of fingers on a table—all are irritating, annoying.

There is more (moral and cognitive) sense to anger than there is to irritation. To experience anger, I must believe that I have been, deliberately, wronged or harmed, and I will usually want, at least, to move toward the source of anger and *do* something. To experience irritation, I need not believe anything; and often I simply want to walk away from its source. Although we may, when irritation wears through our patience, become angry, it is somewhat misguided or inane to become angry at a source of irritation. For example, I may become angry at the plumber for not fixing my faucet properly, but it is ludicrous to become angry at the dripping drops of water—just as it seems to me absurd to become angry over a bout of my own hiccups, irritating though they are. In any case, the differences in depth between irritation and anger seem to be related to anger’s ability to engage us cognitively and morally in a way that irritation does not.

Rage is deeper still. We speak of being “in” a “blind” rage (“en”-raged). We never say that we are “in” an irritation. Similarly, it is appropriate to speak of being “in” love (but not “in” liking) and of love as “blind.” It is also commonly thought that the proper object of love is a person—not a superficial or “surface” trait of a person. I may love the color of your eyes, for example, but I would not say that I was “in” love with them.

By the same token, hatred or loathing is deeper than dislike; and although I may dislike your hairdo or your tie, the proper object for my hatred is you or “your guts.”

We have a complex vocabulary for sadness. We may feel glum, dismal, dissatisfied, distressed, disappointed, dejected, depressed, sorry, sorrowful, despondent, miserable, wretched, melancholy,

nostalgic, hurt, bitter, "brokenhearted," grim, distraught, grievous, mournful, tormented, in agony, anguished, or in despair. Many of these emotions may be deep, and some are deeper than others. We construe sorrow and despair, for example, as being deeper than just feeling sad or glum. If we are tormented, we are deeply distraught. We can be more or less deeply disappointed or distressed, but we cannot mean that we are anguished or in despair unless we also implicitly mean to say that we are in some way "deeply" affected. There are some "blind" aspects to grievous misery. In depression, for example, we experience a "darkening" of our world.

We also tend to regard the sadness cluster of emotions as being "heavy." Perhaps we differentiate their depths on the basis of this "weight" or "heaviness."

Honoring is a deep respect. We can respect just about anything we perceive as having value; but we customarily honor the cherished (deeply valued) shared ideals of social traditions (like "Truth, Justice and the American Way"). For example, we honor honesty and regard practices of deception and miscarriages of justice as scandalously dishonorable—not just disrespectful.

Honor has a social dimension; respect is more individual. We understand the notion of self-respect, and we may either respect or honor each other. But do we understand the notion of "self-honor"? I may be or feel "honored," it seems, only by others and "honored" only for doing, or embodying, something of social value.²

If honor has a social dimension that accounts for its depth, then reverence has a divine dimension and is in this sense deeper. Reverence is reserved for that which is held in deepest³ esteem. We may respect or even honor the Reverend, but it would be irreverent (in the same sense as the misplaced reverence of idolatry is) to revere him instead of that for which he "stands."

Is it irreverent to revere Mother Teresa? My own attitude toward her borders on reverence. Those who might feel reverently toward her do so, I suspect, because they view her as a holy person, a living saint. It is then her holiness or saintliness and not she, herself, who is revered.⁴

All forms of respect suggest the keeping of a deferential *distance*—and an observance of *tact*. That is, in this value-rich and ethical cluster of emotions, we see to our touch and keep our distance in an especially thoughtful manner.

We teach children respect for life by teaching them to handle living beings (their pets, their baby brothers) in nonabusive ("make nice") ways. If we honor human rights, we do not like to see them

"tampered" with. I disrespect you "as a person" if I coerce you or treat you ("handle" or "manipulate" you) merely as an instrumental "means" to my own "ends"—instead of acknowledging that you have "ends" of your own—purposeful and personal desires, goals, or interests different or *removed* from mine, by denying you the "space" or depriving you of the "room" to carry them out.

Distance is kept and social standing is secured by setting aside "places" of honor. A respect for "ends" (purposes) in the form of a special "handling" also plays a role at the level of reverence. To use a chalice as a spittoon or a crucifix as a doorstep is as irreverent as "making ourselves at home" or "setting up shop" in a church. The pope's ring is kissed; the pope is not. In the "observance" of holy days, rituals, and decorum, there is an implicit keeping of distance—from the commonplaces of the everyday.

Awe is deeper than admiration. We can express admiration but not awe in the form of a compliment. I admire newborns; I am awed by life itself. We tend to stand back or stand apart when or as we admire something or someone. But awe, like reverence, is an experience we describe ourselves as standing "in."

We emotionally experience (some) disbelief whenever we are startled, surprised, amazed or astonished by something. To emotionally experience disbelief in the "deepest" way is to be shocked, or "in shock."

Can we be deeply curious? We usually regard curiosity as a superficial interest. Curiosity may momentarily invite or distract our attention, but interest, which is deeper, holds it. Curiosity is like glancing—sliding or skimming over a surface; interest is like peering. We peer at or into things, to try to "grasp" them. We never glance into things—we only glance onto them—and we cannot grasp very much, even in a "sweeping" glance.

If curiosity is a glance and interest a peering into or at, then fascination is somewhere in between—a sort of spellbound staring. If I find something interesting, I experience myself as motivated to take some further, more comprehensive "hold" or "handle" on it. However, if I find myself fascinated by something (say, the shimmering plays of light on a body of water or the gracefully erotic sensuality of ballet movements), then I experience the object of fascination as *spellbinding*, *transfixing me*—by catching and holding my attention, but not, as in interest, by inviting or motivating it to further "grasp." The fascinating "captures" my attention, but it does not do so in a way that invites my involvement; and, although there is something very "up front" about the fascinating, the fascinating is not superficial—in

the way that curiosity is. There is a mesmerizing sort of depth on the surface of a fascinating spectacle—a depth in which I am, so to speak, inscribed. That is, I do not experience a fascinating spectacle as a surface that I skim or slide or flit across, but as one to which I am (involuntarily) “fastened” or “glued.”

Wonder is the deepest of this cognitive emotion cluster. Wonder invokes bafflement, bewilderment—a deep feeling of confusion, of perplexity, of a pressing silence. Wonder is, I believe, the feeling sense of our epistemic limitations.

Wonder is “dumbfounding”—a stopping of our speech or comprehension. Paradoxically, however, wonder is simultaneously the source, the beginning of it—as Aristotle noted when he said, for example, “Philosophy begins in wonder.”

In wonder (again, we note that the “deeper” we go into a cluster, the more appropriate it is to use the locution “in”), the sense is of glimpsing that something is “there,” but that for the most part, most of what is “there” is closed off, hidden, occluded⁵ (again, we note that a certain deep emotion is “blind”).

As we shall see, the sense which in emotions such as wonder can be “deep” is related to the sense in which Gabriel Marcel regarded thought as “deep”: as transcending “the spatial and merely pragmatic distinction between what is here and what is somewhere else.”

I would say that a thought is felt to be deep, or a notion to be profound, if it debouches into a region beyond itself, whose whole vastness is more than the eye can grasp. . . . But what we should notice. . . is that this distant glimpsed prospect, this dazzling *yonder*, as one might call it, is not felt as being elsewhere; though we should have to describe it as a distance, yet we also feel it as intimately near to us. . . .⁶

As we shall also see, this intimately near distance is akin to Merleau-Ponty’s Flesh-ontological conception of depth: depth as distanced contact or as “proximity through distance.” The deepest of our emotional experiences participate in this depth.

Sheer Terror

In what follows, I describe, and partially analyze a felt experience of a deep emotion—terror—after describing stages of how I felt, emotionally, when I was once accosted on a street. This personal

example is intended to highlight the literally spatial connotation of the expression "sheer" as applied to the "depths" of terror.

Initially, I drafted this description on construction paper, in different colors to represent different emotional phases of the experience. This proved to be a useful tactual and visual aid in overcoming my (considerable) "resistance" to remembering the experience and to writing about it.⁷

The colors are noted in the following text,⁸ as are running notes to myself in the course of that drafting. In these "hind-sight reflections" (which are offset and bracketed out of the descriptive text), I analyzed what, in terms of lived space-time, appeared to be happening to me and I recorded several senses of "depth" as they came to me and as they seemed appropriate. The analyses anticipate themes like "clear" and "dark" space, and here-there "reversibilities," which are explained in the following chapters on Depth.

Slate Blue

I notice him walking toward me, at a short distance and from across the street. He had turned around as though he had forgotten something and was heading back toward the main street. I don't pay much attention.

I'm in a "good" mood—taking in the transitional Marchy-April air and returning from a trip to the store, right around the block, from a house I had recently rented and into which I was settling. It is dusk; a lovely evening. I am feeling serene as I meander back, on the gravelly shoulder of a side street. In another few steps, I will cross the open field to my left that extends to my new front yard.

And there he was, walking toward me. I notice that he is black and college-student-age young. I remember a corner group of teenagers with bicycles on my way to the store—"hanging there." It flits through my mind that he might have belonged to this group of my new neighbors, which had, by now, dispersed.

[My spatial occupation in relation to him is that we are both in the "free play" of a "clear" or an "indifferent" space. That is, I interpret his actions in terms of goals-destinations that are detached-removed from mine, as having nothing to do with me or my own.]

He keeps walking toward me; I keep meandering in my mellow mood. When he is within earshot, I say, "Hi!" in greeting (I feel friendly). He is pretty close, and I am about to step off to the left, onto the open field. He sidesteps me; blocking my path. Intentionally.

Orange

By the firmly intentional way that he blocked my path, I begin to sense in a fuzzy, inchoate way that something is “wrong.” I feel vaguely threatened—like “something funny is going on.”

[Hindsight reflections: My “situation” is beginning to alter itself. There are differences in my spatial orientation: in what I perceive as being “there” in relation to my “here” and in what I perceive as being near and far. My house, at the same “objective” distance is not my primary focus (it is not “there”) any more—this man is. Although he was nearer to me (in “objective” space) than it, he was further away from me (in “lived” space) before he started blocking my path. He and the house “reverse” with respect to how my heres and theres are unified. Also, his crossing the street (from there to here) is now a unified stretch of time-space (with a different *sens* or meaning) which is beginning to intermingle with my own time-space, as I live and experience them. (In Minkowskian terms, there is a clear space/dark space dynamic at play. I am (just) beginning to “slip” from “clear” or indifferent space into “dark space.”)

Another depth—where am I? I am somewhere in-between the dissipation of the pleasure of walking in the dusky air and the nightmare that is about to begin. This breach, this break—this “inter-ruption” in the continuity of our activities—this is that sense of a “felt hiatus” that is crucial to an understanding of emotional depth. It can be linked to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the ‘chiasm’ and to Gibson’s notion of the ‘occluding edge’. (I am averse to using the expression *readjusting* to describe this experience. For one thing, it is too mechanical. For another, it is too “active.” It is not what is felt. Immediately or directly. I prefer de-adjusting; or de-situating because what one immediately or directly feels is “un-hinged.” That is, one feels “at a loss” with respect to a prior ground of support; to the “hold” one had on one’s ecological space. We can feel this “grip” slipping away sometimes; feel like we are losing ground—and it seems to happen *before* anything like “readjustment” takes place.)

As I now *think* back on it, I think of other path-blocking experiences with people. These may occur in a fooling-around, teasing way that can be comical (Marx Brothers) or as sport (“blocking” in basketball) or spontaneously and inadvertently—when, for example, one has that silly little dance with a stranger on a street as you both take a couple of stabs at trying to walk

around each other. In this case, neither person is maliciously meaning to block the other's path. In the situation I am describing, my movements were being anticipated in order to prevent them; and his "blocking" them was not—in the least—funny. I perceive that there is a "motive" behind his actions. It has something to do with me. What it is I do not yet know. But I am picking up on there being something "behind" what he is doing. (The perceiving of something "behind" something else is a perception of depth.) In thinking back on it, I can say that I did experience an incipient real-eye-zation (cf. Daly) that he was not out for a stroll. I sensed a danger or threat in his movements. I sensed that he was not "fooling around."]

I still feel confused about being so abruptly "thrown off track"; but my sense that I am in danger becomes more keen, as he taunts me for a time or two more by continuing to block my movements. He is stalky/stocky. The wool of a ski mask pulls over my eyes; and I see that I can't walk through him, and I can't walk around him. ("This is real; really happening," I think.)

[The thought that this was real or "really" happening was a part of this experience; usually we do not explicitly notice to ourselves that things are real or that things are really happening. James and Husserl talked about "the feeling of the depth of reality." This was a part of what I felt—this is another depth.] I feel *sealed* into the "situation." Scared.

[I never think of walking backward. The space behind us is "dark space" it is not space we move around in.] He has my attention. I am "set"—"set up." Cornered. Then, he says, very thick black magic marker: **Give me your purse.**

Ordinary Paper

I think: ("What?")

[Hindsight Reflections: I am momentarily dumb-founded, as though I do not understand what he is saying; and I have no inclination whatsoever to give him my purse.

I continue to marvel at this—at why I felt no inclination to simply hand over my purse. I never even considered it. Apart from the fact that I am not in the habit of handing my purse over to strangers on the street (any more than I am accustomed to walking backward) and the fact that I had no *time* to think about what was going on or what might happen, perhaps what is also true is that my purse is usually not experienced as an "object"

apart from my body. It is in some sense a bodily belonging—not just an object, separate from me that I “have” or “possess.” Or, if it is, then it is one to which I am (in a meaningful sense) “attached.” Because]

Red

In a flash, I become FURIOUS as he tries to yank its strap from my shoulder. (Thinking something like “How DARE this punk.”)

Before I “know” what I am doing, I’m beating him back with all my might, tearing at wool and wildly vacuous (drugged?) eyes. The ‘strongest’ obscenities I know are hurling from my mouth. I hear myself calling him a motherfucker. I cannot believe my mouth, his mouth. All I see are teeth: squared, spaced.

[Gray Dull Cardboard: There is no color for this experience; I use gray, dull cardboard; this seems right. Dulling the pain?]

I only realize that I am no match (and that he is no “punk”) when I feel the blunt of a blow coming down hard on my head. It felt like a rock in a fist. He steps back and shows me a skinny silver knife. He twists it. Focusing on the knife and stunned by the blow to my head, I am slackened out of my righteous rage and in the next sliver of a second, skewered to the ground beneath my feet by a profound feeling lasering its way down the length of my body. A living steel beam thread spliced right in the middle of my slackening movements, and sheared them, stopped them, short. [A flurry of “close” expressions come to my mind here; like close shave, close call, too close for comfort.] I am stayed, still, standing on end. I experience this crystalized hair’s breadth of a feeling as a ridge-id (l)edge of sheer terror.

Sheer terror. As in, I felt “nothing but” (this feeling of terror and myself to hang onto); as in, the opaque weight of the blow and the blade of the knife making it *transparently* “clear” (to my body) that my very life was “at stake.” I must emphasize, ‘I’ did not tell my body what to do. Through the way this feeling felt, she told me: Don’t move; stop moving; you are overpowered; this man might kill you. This experience of terror was also sheer in the sense that I was standing on the only safe ground to be had—that between my feet. All of the rest, for all practical purposes, had (simply?) steeped into space.

On the basis of this felt feeling,⁹ I believe that the same sense of “sheer” as is applied to cliffs or (l)edges can be applied to (the depth of) the emotion of terror.

The sense of “sheer” I am relating to terror in this example is also and obviously related to the “shearing” of my movements: to my “staying still” and to my “standing on end.” This is apparently as

it should be. Terror is, after all, an emotion we also describe ourselves as “freezing in.”

We will review this example and analyze the sense of this “freezing” and the sense of this “in” later, in the context of the Flesh ontology and its conceptions of “Depth.”

Literary Depictions

The Stranger

He went on to ask if I had felt grief on that ‘sad occasion.’ The question struck me as an odd one; . . .

I answered that, of recent years, I’d rather lost the habit of noting my feelings, and hardly knew what to answer. . . . Anyhow, I could assure him of one thing: that I’d rather Mother hadn’t died.

The lawyer, however, looked displeased. ‘That’s not enough,’ he said curtly.

We expect people to be deeply emotionally affected when their mothers die. This is one reason why, from the very first page of Camus’s novel, we disconcertingly detect that something is very “wrong” with its protagonist, Meursault. He is not deeply emotionally affected by his own mother’s death. Or, seemingly, by anything else. To Meursault, everything is “all one” or “all the same.” Nothing matters or “makes a difference.” He says, for example, that he loved his mother and loves his lover, Marie, “like everybody else.”

Meursault’s is a model flat or “cardboard” affect. His evocative landscape is not differentiated into levels of depth; and he is “strange” or a “stranger” to us because of it.

Meursault’s appearing “devoid of the least spark of human feeling”¹⁰ is related to his appearance of being wholly without a moral sense¹¹—another “strange” aspect of this character. For much of the novel, he refrains from making moral or value judgments¹²—especially with respect to his own complicity in morally reprehensible situations. He never assumes anything more than a “legal” responsibility for the murder he commits, for instance.¹³

Meursault recovers the habit of noting his feelings and begins to develop in emotional and moral depth only after he is imprisoned for murder and placed on trial for his life. Until he is fleshed out in emotional depth in the second part of the novel—a development that

coincides with alterations in his experiencing of space and time—deep emotional experiences “do not mean anything” to Meursault.

For example, when the emotionally flat Meursault is asked if he regrets killing a man, he says: “that what I felt was less regret than a kind of vexation—I couldn’t find a better word for it.”¹⁴ During his trial, though, his lack of remorse is explained by his wishing to explain “in a quite friendly, almost affectionate way, that I have never been able really to regret anything in all my life. I’ve always been far too much absorbed in the present moment, or the immediate future, to think back.”¹⁵

The shallow present in which he lives, his unremitting *absorption* in the present *moment*—that is, the way in which he experiences his space and his time—is an important aspect of what else is “wrong” or “strange” about Meursault. His temporal structure is not three dimensional. He simply “is where he is”—at the moment. He does not think back or look ahead. His “here and nows” are isolated from each other and from his “there and thens.” Because these punctiform presents are not lived as having future and past horizons, his life, composed of his “fusion” with or absorption in them, appears “all the same” to him.

Meursault’s all-the-same here-and-now spatiotemporality is related to the leveling of his evocative landscape and the flattening of his emotional character. The emotional responses we expect from him cannot take root. There is no room for them—no room for grief or remorse or guilt in a time that does not retain the past in the present.

Meursault does not appear to be living in a “living present”—one that “holds the past and future within its thickness.”¹⁶ When he does begin to live in this living present though, he does begin to experience “deep” emotions.

These are precipitated by his becoming less “absorbed” in his surroundings and by his grasping “how days could be at once long and short . . . so distended that they ended up by overlapping on each other.” Eventually, Meursault “learned the trick of remembering things,”¹⁷ and he stopped thinking in terms of punctiformly present “days”: “only the words ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’ still kept some meaning.”¹⁸

The only incident that later “stands out” in Meursault’s recollection of his trial is a deeply emotional one, evoked by the memory of his memories and their overlapping on his present situation.

toward the end, while my counsel rambled on, I heard the tin trumpet of an ice-cream vendor in the street, a small shrill sound cutting across the flow of words. And then a rush of memories

went through my mind—memories of a life which was mine no longer and had once provided me with the surest, humblest pleasures: warm smells of summer, my favorite streets, the sky at evening, Marie's dresses and her laugh. The futility of what was happening here seemed to take me by the throat, I felt like vomiting, . . .¹⁹

Meursault's development in emotional depth also coincides with a growing awareness of his interinvolvement with others—of the social dimensions of his own identity—a dimension that is revealed as Meursault is exposed to “significant” others who are, from a distance, directing or expressing deep emotional feelings toward him. Meursault, eventually, “gets the message”; that is, emotions begin to take or have a depthful “affect” on him. Things begin to “matter” to him, they do begin to “make a difference.” At the trial, for example,

- When, “for the first time,” he realizes “how all these people loathed” him, it matters. “I felt as I hadn't felt in years. I had a foolish desire to burst into tears”;²⁰
- When, feeling “a sort of wave of indignation spreading through the courtroom” at hearing of the sort of vigil he kept beside his mother's body, it matters: “for the first time, I understood that I was guilty”;²¹
- When, reading the moist eyes and trembling lips of a person who has taken the witness stand in his defense as saying “Well, I've done my best for you, old man. I'm afraid it hasn't helped much. I'm sorry.” It matters. It makes a difference: “I didn't say anything, or make any movement, but for the first time in my life I wanted to kiss a man.”²²

It is as though Meursault is learning, for the first time, the ways in which people do “matter” or “make a difference” to each other; and learning, through the emotional expressions of people who matter to his fate, how, himself, to respond with a measure of emotional depth. He “catches on” to their meanings; and he responds to them, emotionally and appropriately.

After being sentenced to public decapitation, “the Stranger” is no longer emotionally “strange” to us. He has precisely the sorts of deep emotional responses we would expect (and some which we would not) from a person sentenced to death and waiting for the sentence to be carried out. His incarceration, his own impending death, the time he has left to live—these matters are eventually and emphatically *not* “all the same” to Meursault. The sealing of his fate makes, in Meursault,

an emotional difference: "Try as I might, I couldn't stomach this brutal certitude."²³ At the thought of a future possibility, when he dares to hope that his appeal will be successful, he finds that "the trouble was to calm down that sudden rush of joy racing through my body and even bringing tears to my eyes."²⁴

On the eve of his execution, Meursault is "emptied of hope" but he does not despair. He is calm. He is so calm that he appears to be returning to the indifference of a "flat affect." However, this later calm is another "first" for Meursault; and it is deep:²⁵ "gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still."

Through the stars and in the mournful solace of the dusk, Meursault even begins to identify with his mother—with what she must have felt "in that home where lives were flickering out."

Through the course of this novel, Meursault—who appears initially as a model "flattened affect"—develops an emotional character. As he develops in emotional depth—a development that appears to be related to Camus's fleshing him out spatiotemporally into a living presence and interpersonally into an acknowledgement of his social dimensions—the Stranger becomes more familiar.

Other instances and attributing factors of flat affects can be found in "negative utopian" literature.

Brave New World

Despite their being conditioned to the belief that "Everybody's Happy Nowadays," the emotionally infantile members of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* seem to have no deep or genuine emotional experiences. Such experiences appear either to have been trained out of them or artificially induced into them.

For their all-the-same "happiness," they depend on habitually frequent ingestions of "soma," an ideal tranquilizing stimulant, which instantly raises "a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds"²⁶ and produces a refreshing sense of euphoric well-being. Soma takes them "away from it all"—away from their own spatiotemporal existence. However, the planners of this society recognize that these excursions into "happiness" are insufficient. So, for "perfect health," they supplement the soma rations with a chemically simulated form of "emotional depth" on a routine, compulsory basis. "Violent Passion Surrogate. Regularly once a month. We flood the whole system with adrenin. It's the complete physiological equivalent of fear

and rage. All the tonic effects of murdering Desdemona and being murdered by Othello, without any of the inconveniences."²⁷

All the same, we get the feeling that they are not really emotionally feeling. What they are feeling is either "all in their minds" or "all in their bodies" and not related to emotionally evocative situations—and there seems, to us, to be something "wrong" with these chemically induced short circuits. When emotions are unhinged from the "inconveniences" and depths of an actual situation, the important sense of emotions as responses—as a form of communication, as a contact, between us and the (actual) world—is lost. Furthermore, our ability to behave responsibly and maturely in that world is radically undermined.

Bernard Marx and the Savage are the "strangers" in this society. Unlike Meursault, though, the Savage is deeply distressed and grieved by his mother's death.²⁸ But the society (which decants or man-ufactures babies—"Mother" is apparently the only obscenity in this womb-vious fantasy) is "not accustomed to this kind of thing."

The Savage also argues with the director of this society, which rules by providing constant and dubious forms of diverting pleasures, for the right to be *unhappy*; and Bernard Marx longs "to know what passion is." He wants "to feel something strongly"—"all the emotions one might be feeling if things were different."²⁹

If things *were* different in this society, its members would not be so stunted in their growth—physically and psychologically. As it is, they do not age or mature.

What is also missing in this society is privacy—the space and the time alone to develop and enjoy intimacy with oneself and with "significant" others. Solitude is suspect; and emotionally "long-drawn" relations, the growth or maturing of emotional feelings between members, is considered "indecorous."

Except for those experienced by the nonconforming characters, emotions in the *Brave New World* are like their tactually titillating movies—"feelies." The (all-male) "Alphas," who "are so conditioned that they do not *have* to be infantile in their emotional behavior" must make "a special effort to conform."³⁰ Emotional depth is arrested. Refusing to be emotionally infantile is a crime. Those (few) who are incorrigible in this regard are sent, as though they are children being sent to their room, to an "island."

That the depth of an emotion depends on its maturity—its growth over time—and that the unfolding of this depth depends for its existence on the (spatial) allowance or accordance of privacy (which is a form of distance from others) *and* intimacy (which is a form of closeness with others) is what we learn, at least, from the *Brave New World*.

Nineteen Eighty-Four

George Orwell also depicts a society ruled by privacy deprivation. However, the members of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are not, even superficially, “happy nowadays.” Under the constant surveillance of Big Brother, they know that persons who were caught behaving in any unorthodox manner “simply disappeared and were never heard of again.”³¹

Unorthodox behavior included “thought-crime”—thinking for oneself. This was detectable through “face crime”: “It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander. . . . The smallest thing could give you away. . . . to wear an improper expression on your face. . . . was itself a punishable offense.”³²

A substitute form of emotional depth is also dispensed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The Orwellian analogue to the *Brave New World*'s Violent Passion Surrogate is a daily “social” ritual called “Two Minute Hate”:

The horrible thing about the Two Minute Hate was not that one was obliged to act as a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within 30 seconds, any pretense was always unnecessary. A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces with a sledge hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. And yet the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp.³³

Ostensibly, the contagious two-minute experience of expressed “hatred” is directed toward the poster face of Big Brother's enemy. However, as Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, realizes: “Your worst enemy. . . . was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate into some visible symptom.”³⁴

Orwell highlights the perverse state of emotional affairs in this society by focusing on Winston's remembrance of his mother's death:

The thing that now suddenly struck Winston was that his mother's death, nearly 30 years ago, had been tragic and sorrowful in a way that was no longer possible. Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the ancient time, to a time when there were still privacy, love, friendship. . . . His mother's memory tore at his heart because she had died loving him. . . . and because somehow, he did not

remember how, she had sacrificed herself to a conception of loyalty that was private and unalterable. Such things, he saw, could not happen today. Today, there were fear, hatred, and pain, but no dignity of emotion, no deep or complex sorrows.³⁵

We later see how true these reflections of Winston's are. We see, after he betrays his lover, Julia, that it is impossible for him to die loving either Julia or his mother and that his conception of loyalty—to them and to himself—is neither private nor unalterable. We also see that his torturers have a certain understanding of emotional depth.

Caught in the act of criminal behavior (making love and enjoying it), Winston and Julia are separated from each other and taken to be tortured in the "Ministry of Love." Nevertheless, and for some time, Winston manages to sustain a deep feeling of love and loyalty towards Julia:

he had not stopped loving her; his feeling for her had remained the same. . .³⁶

For a moment he had had an overwhelming hallucination of her presence. She had seemed to be not merely with him, but inside him. It was as though she had got into the texture of his skin. In that moment he had loved her far more than he had ever done when they were together and free.³⁷

As a last resort and to "minister" to these deep feelings of love, Winston is taken "many meters underground, as deep down as it was possible to go"—to the dreaded Room 101—where the "worst thing in the world" is waiting.³⁸ There, Winston is exposed to his deepest fear: of rats. He is strapped to a chair, helplessly vulnerable as a cage of them is brought nearer and nearer to his face and is told:

You understand the construction of this cage. The mask will fit over your head, leaving no exit. When I press this other lever, the door of the cage will slide up. These starving rats will shoot out of it like bullets. Have you ever seen a rat shoot through the air? They will leap onto your face and bore straight through it. Sometimes they attack the eyes first. Sometimes they burrow through the cheeks and devour the tongue.³⁹

During this dreadful emotional ordeal, face to face with his deepest fear, Winston understands that the only "tiny fragment of hope"

of saving his own skin is to interpose Julia's body between himself and the rats. He betrays her. ("Do it to Julia. . . I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!"⁴⁰) After he peels this layer of himself-herself off, he experiences himself

falling backwards, into enormous depths, away from the rats. He was still strapped in his chair, but he had fallen through the floor, through the walls of the building, through the earth, through the oceans, through the atmosphere, through outer space, into the gulfs between the stars—always away, away, away from the rats.⁵¹

We would say that Winston underwent a "deep emotional experience" during his dreadful ordeal with the rats. Why?

One obvious reason is that he is confronting some of his deepest, in the sense of undermost or underlying, emotions—his love and loyalty for Julia and his fear, presumably, of rats. Orwell emphasizes this sense of emotional depth by situating Room 101 "as deep down as it is possible to go."

Another reason is the way in which Winston's emotional experience, of fear, is intertwined with a spatial one, of distance. This is as it should be, for deep fear or dread is not just a "feeling" about some dangerous or threatening "object"—it is as much a longing to be spatially-distanced from that object: a desire to keep some dreadful happening in the future from "closing in." Because Winston cannot physically flee the situation, his only recourse is to his imagination or to "blacking out," to insert distance between himself and that which he fears.

However, there are paradoxical interplays of distance and proximity (what we will later analyze as "reversibilities") to be noted here, for Winston has not really gotten himself "away, away, away" from the rats. After this experience, he is "closer" to the "rats" than he ever was (and further away from Julia). That is, Winston has only gotten "away" from the rats, is no longer plagued with the fear of them, by *identifying* with them, by becoming one himself—by "ratting" on Julia.

In Room 101, the worst thing in the world happens. One's deepest fears are realized. Winston's *deepest* fear, we later realize, was not "of rats." His deepest fear was of becoming one himself, which he does.

So, the enormous distance is not a distance between Winston and the rats. The depths are really between who, before this experience, Winston *was* and who, after this experience, he later *is* or *becomes*.

After undergoing this experience, Winston *has* "lost face"—his capacity for face crime. He no longer appears to be the person he was,

and there is no longer a “mask” between him and “the rats”—a mask that he must struggle with to “keep up the appearance” that he is “one of them.” After he betrays Julia, he becomes “one of them.” He knows it and so do others. The knowledge seems to vaguely “gnaw at him”—“hovering close to his face” and in “a smell that clung to his nostrils.” Other members of the society (who are still deeply fearful of “rats”) do not care “to be seen sitting too close to him”;⁴² and the “thought police” no longer bothers to “watch” him.

After their respective betrayals, Winston and Julia admit to each other that it is impossible to feel the same way. No longer “under his skin,” Julia’s body appears to Winston to have been changed into something “corpse-like,” rigid and awkward to handle: “more like stone than flesh.”⁴³ At the thought of sexual intimacy with her *now*, Winston’s own flesh freezes “with horror.”

Winston’s face is bloated and colored by the effects of an alcohol addiction that also blocks his capacity to “fix his mind on any one subject for more than a few moments at a time” so that he cannot sustain, differentiate between or even understand the emotions that simply “flare up and fade” within him.⁴⁴ And he can no longer tell, when he experiences “successive layers of feelings” which layer was “undermost,” struggling inside him.⁴⁵

The cessation of Winston’s emotional struggles is precipitated by his gazing up at the “enormous face” of Big Brother at the very end of the novel. The “long hoped-for bullet” deadens his brain; and as Winston finally stops “thinking for himself” a new “undermost” or deepest emotional layer—a *love* of Big Brother—surfaces.

What we cannot help but notice in this text is that the emergence of this emotional depth coincides with the coming to the fore of a perceptual depth: the seeing of his malefactor in a new and benevolent light. Winston says that it has taken him forty years to see “the loving breast” and “what kind of smile” was “there” all along, hidden *beneath* Big Brother’s moustache.

The “final, indispensable, healing change” in Winston is his betrayal of (which is described as a “victory over”) himself. In a tragically dramatic act of self-deception, he participates in his own destruction. Ultimately, he loves Big Brother—and—as the novel comes to a close, Winston Smith, as the character that we knew him to be “simply disappears and is never heard from again.”

We commonly use the expression *deeply emotionally affected* to connote some perceptible and relatively longstanding transformation in identity. Any emotional experience about which it seems appropriate to say that the emotional experiencer is “not entirely the same person”

afterward is a "deep emotional experience." Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has a "deep emotional experience" in this important sense.

Sophie's Choice

The deepest emotional experience in *Sophie's Choice* is her being forced, against her will, to "choose" (quickly and before they both are) which one of her two children will be sent to a Nazi crematorium in order to spare the life of the other. The situation is anguishing and unbearably "heavy"; Sophie is "crushed": "Her thought processes dwindled, ceased. Then she felt her legs crumple." She screams that she "cannot choose" and "She could not believe any of this. She could not believe that she was now kneeling on the hurtful, abrading concrete, drawing her children toward her so smotheringly tight that she felt that their flesh might be engrafted to hers even through layers of clothes. Her disbelief was total, deranged."

But she does "choose." She wrenches her daughter's body away from her own in order to save the life of her son.

She would forever retain a dim impression that the child had continued to look back, beseeching. But because she was now almost completely blinded by salty, thick, copious tears she was spared whatever expression Eva wore, and she was always grateful for that. For in the bleakest honesty of her heart she knew that she would never have been able to tolerate it, driven nearly mad as she was by her last glimpse of that vanishing small form.⁴⁶

Sophie's (lifelong) gratitude over being blinded by tears and consequentially spared the articulation of expression on her daughter's face reminds us (as the notion of "face crime" does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) how visibly apparent emotional expression can be and how painfully a sight can "tear at our hearts."

Sophie's choice torments her for the rest of her life, and she is altered by the experience. No longer "the woman she was," she eventually becomes, as an emotionally feeling person, numbed. Her heart—"outraged as desperately as the mind can conceive"—is hardened: "It has been hurt so much, it has turned to stone."⁴⁷ Years later, in remorseful despair, she commits suicide.

It is also noteworthy that Sophie's first response to the "choice" she is compelled to make is that of a total disbelief. ("She could not believe any of this.") This shock to the system of our beliefs—to the extent that one questions the reality "behind" them—appears to me to be another characteristic of deep emotional experience. Sometimes, it is

as though sleep and waking space are intermingled. A particularly unpleasant experience is "like a nightmare"; a particularly pleasant one is like a "dream come true."

Another typical response to the emotionally overwhelming situation is to faint or "pass out." This caving-in of perceptual experience serves the same purpose, in cases of extreme emotional distress, as the hardening or numbing of Sophie's heart does. It prevents us from thinking or feeling at all. Just as there are limits to physical pain, there are limits to our perceptual capacities and our emotional endurance. If one experiences too much, one winds up or "crosses over" into not perceiving, not feeling anything at all.

Depth carries the meaning not only of distance, but also of an occlusive or obstructive thickness—a "stopping" of sight or touch. Emotional experiences in which we are feeling so much that we cannot feel at all are "deep" in this sense. They return us, perceptually and spatially, to the realm of a tangibly "dark" space—a space in which we "black out" and in which we are, so to speak, "beyond feeling."⁴⁸

At its most glaring, reality can blind us and erode our sensitivities. This "dark" dimension of emotional experience is epitomized by Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*.

Oedipus Rex

Oedipus, discovering that he has, in truth though in ignorance, murdered his father and married his mother, experiences deep remorse or sorrow. He does not just feel his past actions to be superficially embarrassing. He experiences his own identity, in the light of his sexual intimacies with his mother, to be deeply shameful.

The first move that he makes to "do" something about it, is to violently blind himself. Oedipus never regrets this move. He contends that it was a "good design," that it is better, as he says, "to stuff the senses of my carcass dumb."⁴⁹

It is unbearable or "too much" for Oedipus to see his wife as his mother, his mother as his wife, just as it was "too much" for Sophie to be forced to choose between her children. Both are "torn." Like Sophie's heart, which has "turned to stone" and "crosses over" into feeling nothing at all, Oedipus stops up his sight and "crosses over" into seeing nothing at all.

In dashing out his eyes, Oedipus makes a sight, a *spectacle* of himself. His (simultaneously) seeing *and* not seeing becomes what is seen. Blind, Oedipus is a spectacular reminder that there are invisible, hidden dimensions to everything we see and all we claim to clearly

"know," and that the ex-posures of some of reality's hidden dimensions are frequently evocative of deep emotional experiences.

We shall return to this "dark" dimension of lived obscurity, and we shall analyze the emotionally depthful significances of Oedipus blinding himself in more detail later. We can mention here, however, that sight is connected, to and through our visibility, to shame⁵⁰ and that eyes are thought to be revealing of who we are. In the course of blinding himself, Oedipus undergoes an alteration in identity, a change in his sense of self.

It is also noteworthy that sight is the mode of perception most related to distance, and the transgression of incest is precisely a violation of distance. In blinding himself, "all incest sealed" in Jocasta's womb, Oedipus "reflects" this breach of intimacy: his failure to maintain a proper or socially prescribed distance between himself and his mother.

Summary

In contrasting flat affects with deep emotional experiences, we find that we already seem to know quite a bit about "emotional depth."

From the analysis of experienced terror (and of reverential "observance" and Winston's dread of the rats in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), we have seen that literal senses of "depth"—real "distances" can be attached to certain emotions and emotional experiences. There are, in lived space-time, literally "depthful" aspects to emotions.

We have noted some "dark" dimensions to emotional experience—some space of nonfeeling; and we have seen that certain emotions (like shock, love and rage) are regarded as "blind." We have also seen that "deeper" emotions (wonder and anger vs. curiosity and irritation) engage us cognitively and morally in a way that the more superficial ones do not.

From our ordinary speech, we have discovered that the "deeper" the emotion, the more appropriate it is to apply the locution *in* to it. We say, for example, that we are "in love" or "in mourning," "enraged," "in wonder," or "in terror."

In later chapters, I distinguish this sense of *in* from the *in* of a "container" view of space by calling it "the in of in-mergion." I do this in an attempt to identify this sense of *in* with the sense of *en* in Merleau-Ponty's "en-être" (being-of) thesis and to connect it to what I will be calling "e-mergions" of perceived or evocative depths.

The "dark" aspects of emotional experiences will eventually be connected to the Flesh ontology's thesis of the invisible ground of

visibility and its notion that all feeling takes place through what is, on principle, unfeeling.

As we shall see, the maintenance of distance is a crucial element of the Flesh ontology. That differentiations in emotions and emotional “depths” are related to divergencies in distance (and to the maintenance of some happy “medium”)—between our selves and the world and between our selves and others—is a recurrent theme in several of the examples. It appears that there can be too much of this lived distance, and there can be too little.

Phenomenologically, our sense of “self” is that we are *simultaneously* open to and closed off from others; *simultaneously* intermingled with *and* distanced from them. Similarly, our “lived” experience of the world is that we belong to it or are of it, but are not it.

With his ontology of “Flesh” and its conception of depth as a distanced contact, Merleau-Ponty tried to make some philosophical sense of this. After discussing the ways in which it does, we will return, in Part II, to the task of analyzing what is meant by emotional depth.