

## Projection, Identification, and Altruism (in relation to Anna Freud, "A Form of Altruism")

In A. Freud, "**projection**" seems to have the following features: (a) The subject possesses desires and feelings that she can not acknowledge having. (b) She makes herself believe that someone other than herself has these desires or feelings.

What Freud calls "**altruistic surrender**" adds to these a 3<sup>rd</sup> feature: (c) the subject helps the someone else to satisfy those desires. [Other forms of projection involve projecting negative emotions on to the other, such as jealousy or anger, emotions it would not be appropriate to support.]

I think AF includes two morally and psychically distinct phenomena as meeting these criteria for projection and altruistic surrender:

- (1) The someone else actually possesses the desires that the subject cannot acknowledge having herself, and that is why that particular person is "selected" for altruistic surrender.
- (2) The someone else does *not* possess those desires.

These two are distinct because, among other things, in case (1) when the subject helps the other to satisfy the desires, she is actually helping the other person by helping her satisfy her desires. But in case (2), she is pushing the other to satisfy desires that the other does not actually have, and so this is not helping the other. AF describes the governess and some of her other examples in both of these ways.

Both (1) and (2) do involve what we have up to now defined as "altruism" since the subject is supporting desires that she *believes* the other person to have. (Altruism is "subjective.") What this shows is that we care not only about altruistic motivation but also about whether the agent *actually* helps the other person. This seems to matter morally. If that is correct, then we might think that knowing the other person's desires (or, more generally, what would serve her well-being) is itself morally significant, beyond whether the person is motivated to promote (what she takes to be) the other's well-being. This issue of knowing the other's well-being is part of what Spelman is exploring in "Changing the Subject," specifically the issue of recognize that the other may have different desires or experiences than oneself.

My discussion so far has not dealt with the impact of the projection itself on the altruism (as motive). I suggested in class that case (1) (though not (2)) does involve at least a surface type of altruism, since the agent does seem to get real pleasure from the satisfaction of the other's actual desires, and genuinely enjoys helping her. Roseannah took issue with this view, suggesting that because the subject (the governess)'s satisfaction and pleasure is not a very deep part of her own psychology, we should not count it as "altruistic." This may be correct. But I wonder if we could preserve some altruism even in this case by using our distinction between the *person* being altruistic and a *single act* being altruistic. Perhaps we are willing to say that one single act is altruistic even if the altruistic motive is fairly superficial or even fleeting; whereas our standards for saying that a person is altruistic requires a more robust standard of depth in the altruistic motivation.

### Identification

Freud's idea of altruistic surrender involves something beyond the 3 criteria mentioned above. It involves "identification" of the subject with the other. It is this identification that allows the unconscious satisfaction of the agent's unacknowledged desires through helping the other. If she just helped the other person without identifying with her, she would not get the egoistic gratification that Freud says she gets. But I think her idea of identification is not entirely consistent. There are 3 possibilities.

- (1) The subject (temporarily) believes she is the other person. (example of governess as a child re her older sister [126-7]).
- (2) The subject is perfectly aware that the other person is a different person than herself, but she believes her own situation is exactly the same as the other person. (Spelman's discussion can be seen in this way.)
- (3) The subject is aware of the other's "otherness" from herself, but with respect to a particular desire or experience she sees the other as the same as herself. [I am not sure I have described this adequately.]