

## THINKING ABOUT HOME: AN OPENING FOR DISCOVERY IN PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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Is there an existential-philosophical dimension to the problem of defining, conceptualizing, and instantiating our phenomenological sense of home? Is there a philosophical dimension to the challenge of relating our sense of personal identity to a sense of what it means to be “at home” in a human life? If the question of home poses philosophical challenges to human existence, can philosophical thinking bring this problem into focus within the practical dynamics of a human life? Are there lessons to discover from thinking about home in a philosophical way, lessons we can apply to everyday life?

Exploring the operative concepts of home in a person's life can reveal deeply ambiguous phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Reflection on these ambiguities can open a philosophical space for discussion of a complex array of topics concerning the subject of home: what is the connection of home to personal identity, growth, and development? What is the connection to issues of security, openness and letting be? Or to problems of inclusion/exclusion, displacement and being/belonging with alterity? Being “at home” or “not at home” has become a stock measure of our existential health. “Homelessness” has long been a central philosophical motif in the writings of seminal philosophical thinkers and novelists and plays a central role in the writings of Novalis, Thoreau, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.<sup>2</sup> We can detect growth in the amplitude of this theme through encounters with Freud, Heidegger and Kafka,<sup>3</sup> until at last the problematics of “home” and “homelessness” start to foreshadow the scene of intellectual debate in late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Critical Studies movements.<sup>4</sup> Exploration of this theme can help us take stock of who we are, how we relate to others, and where we are headed in our life. It can help us understand the environment in which we live.

Reflecting on concepts of home can lead to questions about the meaning of home not simply in relation to our personal center of reference, but also with respect to our investments in family, community, work, and politics. Many people conceptualize home as a place of safety and security. In some cases, this sense of home is identified with a physical place (e.g., a house, a room, or the land of our birthright). In other cases, it is identified with a state of mind into which we can withdraw to escape a troubling world around us. In this sense it might represent a space of writing, or a

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<sup>1</sup> In framing my discussion of home, I am deeply indebted to Irene Klaver for drawing out the complexities of the theme and opening my eyes to so many different levels of the problematic.

<sup>2</sup> Novalis on longing to arrive home (“The last hope” of a promised/deferred arrival at home); Thoreau (sauntering; exposure to the wild); Marx (alienation as a condition of life); Nietzsche (“we homeless ones”); Kierkegaard (dreadful subjectivity); Ortega y Gasset (historical reason)

<sup>3</sup> Freud (unheimlichkeit); Heidegger (thrownness; mood; Dasein’s uncanny being-in-the-world); Kafka (the Trial; at home/not at home in existential guilt)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. George (1996) for a broad range of literary sources; cf. Rouner (1996) for a broad range of philosophical sources; for relevant sources in the context of cultural critique, consider the following: Nussbaum (1996), Ignatieff (1993), Casey (1993) and (1997), and the writings of Salman Rushdie (1991), Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and bell hooks (1990).

memory, feeling or emotion we once experienced, or one we can imagine experiencing if things were to fall into place for us).

What else is home, if not a safe and secure place to seek shelter from the storms of life? How spontaneously we factor these calming contours into our image of home, as if these were essential, irreducible components of any home-experience!

But what are the consequences of making security and comfort integral elements of our concept of home-life? What is the meaning of our longing to be at home in the world, or to be at home in our subjective experiences, when our overarching sense of "home" is framed in the image of safety and security? Why are these intuitions about safety and security so engrained in our concepts of home?

Safety and security are "vested" components, central to the latent or projected meaning of our most commonly taken for granted concepts of home. But if we were to question the implicit meaning in these concepts of home, we might be tempted to inquire into the *value* of our belief in safety and security (which in turn might reveal broader questions concerning the *nurturing value*, the *preservational value*, the *recuperative value*, and the *transformational value* of home). We might wonder why people invest in (or why people long for) the safety and security we so easily identify with home. We might begin to ponder what it means to make these investments, or what it means to want to preserve the safety and security of home. Have we not all yearned for the "safe harbor" of home in reflective or nostalgic moments of our lives?

But how healthy is it to think about home in this way? How healthy is this sense of home when so many people live in a world increasingly defined through myriad "decentering expropriations" of human subjects as replaceable labor?<sup>5</sup> What is this concept of home to people who are reduced to instrumental roles or otherwise sucked through the cracks of exile, homelessness, or despair in the wake of a groundbreaking "rupture" or broken promise? From a place they can hardly fathom, what are they to make of this sudden awakening to the slippage of home, all the more so if in this awakening they find ourselves suspended over an abyss of hallowed ground?

How do concepts of home relate to a person's identity? How do they shape our sense of place? How do concepts of home influence our expectations in life? How might different concepts of home reflect different mindsets toward the alienating dynamics of an increasingly decentering world?

Is it conceivable that a renewed conceptual geography of home might reveal cracks and fissures in the ethical, metaphysical, epistemological and aesthetic sensitivities of an entire cultural way of being? We have grown comfortable conceiving home in the insular image of the hearth. But perhaps the focal point of this cozy image of home lies in the flickering flames of the fire. Why not think of home as a cradle of change and transformation?

Different concepts of home will constrain or nourish the scope and promise of a person's unfolding life. Should philosophers try to encourage consideration of different points of view? Should they strive to reveal contested facets of a "healthier" concept of home? When the hearth of our soul flickers with an emerging or pervasive sense of uneasiness in life, is it possible this sense of unease is our hunger for a new conceptual terrain of home?

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<sup>5</sup> A forceful description of this can be found in a striking essay by Nietzsche on "Schopenhauer as Educator," in Nietzsche (1995). For a more subtle narrative, see Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych" and Nietzsche's "Preface" to the second edition of Human, All Too Human (1986).

What is home? What kind of "place" is it? Is there a healthier signification of home for those who experience "dis-ease" in their life? If the specter of existential uneasiness harbors a general problematic of home, then "problematizing" someone's operative concepts of home could prove to be a decisive philosophical exercise.

### **Some Conceptual Geographies of Home**

Concepts of home grow out of different contours of our life. The material of home constitutes an investment in our identity. Our identity in turn "territorializes" this investment.<sup>6</sup> In the classic instance we aim to translate our sense of home from heart to hearth. If feelings of warmth and security set the context for building a home in the space between determinacy and innovation, the ultimate challenge may be to feel at home in change while making a home of our fate. Our efforts to give style and texture to the circumstances of our life reveal exciting prospects for adventure, growth, and self-fulfillment; they also reveal the facticity of living with constraints and necessities. We strive to negotiate this facticity in ways that will preserve our health and well-being.

If we think of home as a place of safety, security, comfort and belonging, the loss of these factors (or perceived threats to them) will reflect a disruption of home and a rupture of trust that strikes like an earthquake to unsettle the taken-for-granted security of our inner sanctum. Disruptions of this sort "deterritorialize" our concept of home and problematize the orientation we have taken for granted. This in turn reveals a new (uncanny) sense of home based on rejection, disruption, and the breakdown of expectations.<sup>7</sup>

Once our orienting sense of home is ruptured, how does this affect our capacity to construct a new sense of home? If we lose our capacity to trust, how does this influence our reconstruction of home? If we live in a space of fear or hatred, how does this play out as a longing for home? If home has always been the place we retreat to get away from troubling relations or the place we go to insulate ourselves from vulnerability, if home has been the place to limit outside influences and regain a sense of control in our life, how can serious displacement not stretch our concept of home in conflicting directions?

With the displacement of house and hearth as a site of safety and security, is it any wonder our concepts of home scatter to the inner sanctum of our hearts and minds? While we long for the secure, stable, and trusting environment of home, we cannot avoid the challenges posed by growth and change. In the course of negotiating these challenges, we can begin to see what it means to operate with unrealizable ideals of home, or what it means to hold people to expectations that conflict with the essential interplay between immanence and transcendence.

If home is our retreat from fragmentation, it will seem a place we can depend on for grounding. If we think of it as a place to recover from the stressful pace of life, it will become for us a place where we reassert our power in the wake of revelations of uncanny powerlessness ingested from other walks of life.<sup>8</sup> It will become a place where

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<sup>6</sup> The notions of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are developed in Deleuze and Guattari (1994). Cf. their summary discussion of these concepts in Part One. Compare the analysis offered by Iris Marion Young (1997) in "House and Home."

<sup>7</sup> See Heidegger (1996), sections 39-42, and Krell (2000), especially pp. 180-192.

<sup>8</sup> See bell hooks (1990), "Homeplace as a Site of Resistance."

we rehabilitate our deflated confidence or diminished personal esteem. But if these are the defining senses of home, they can still gain meaning in relation to new experiences.

We can think of home as a place to preserve connections between our past and present, but it is also the place where we must continually *reconstruct* these connections. Through the creativity we invest in preserving material or spiritual markers of our identity and sense of belonging,<sup>9</sup> our concept of home draws together the warp and weave of a tapestry of immanence and transcendence. Caught in a chiasmic relation of immanence and transcendence, we are assimilated to a dynamic interplay of familiarity and difference, as if we were weaving together threads of nostalgic security and transformative growth.<sup>10</sup>

The appeal of customary, routine, traditional aspects of home and romanticized images of home seem to fuel a pervasive "cultural authentication" based on nostalgic concepts of domestic identity. These material or spiritual constructions of home speak of a familiar, self-evident atmosphere of trust and belonging.<sup>11</sup> But even as cultural authentication promotes our assimilation to a social or cultural form of immanence, it also provides a basis for adventures that expose us to the risk of transformative experiences. "Chiasmic" experiences of immanence and transcendence provide openings for us to rethink our relation to home in light of new relations and experiences encountered along the way. But exposure to the reterritorialization of home is not merely a consequence of our own travels beyond the sphere of immanence. We are also exposed when others upon whom we depend embark on their own movements of transcendence. In these moments of exposure we feel the transience of identity, which can trigger the temptation to anchor ourselves in a return to familiar ground. How does this possibility impact our concept of home?

"Is it possible to retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others?"<sup>12</sup> In posing this question, Iris Marion Young is raising a central philosophical curiosity. In the course of her critique of the view of "homemaking" as an oppressive constraint on the capacity of homemakers to give meaning and purpose to their life, Young articulates a key hypothesis concerning the positive aspect of home-making: "Giving meaning to individual lives through the arrangement and preservation of things is an intrinsically valuable and irreplaceable aspect of homemaking" (149).

According to Young, this "process of sedimentation" through which our physical surroundings become "home" actually functions to produce a "materialization of identity" through a practice of "endowing things with living meaning" (149). Creative preservation is the practice of "renewing" our investment in the meaning of things. Though it functions in support of our "longing" for a "settled, safe, affirmative, and bounded identity," creative preservation also serves to inspire a dynamic cultivation of identity, which in turn contributes to promoting an affirmative yet "fluid and shifting" context for living. "Activities of preservation give some enclosing fabric to this ever-changing subject by knitting together today and yesterday, integrating new events and

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<sup>9</sup> This theme is developed with considerable insight by Iris Marion Young (1997) in her discussion of the "ambivalent value of home" (esp. pp. 156-164).

<sup>10</sup> See Merleau-Ponty (1968), especially chapter four ("The Intertwining – the Chiasm").

<sup>11</sup> See Rybczynski (1986), especially the opening chapter on "Nostalgia."

<sup>12</sup> Young (1997): 141

relationships into the narrative of a life, the biography of a person, a family, a people" (153).

Though Young is by no means alone in casting home as "the site of the construction and reconstruction of one's self," by emphasizing performative aspects of the "materialization of identity," she allows us to see a highly relevant dimension of home: the dimension where meaningful things operate as "material mirrors" capable of reflecting back to us the embodiment of our ever-shifting narrative identity (161-63).

But even the materialization of home cannot always secure the sense of home we aspire to in these complicated times. People with materialized identities may still find themselves yearning for a lifestyle, for company, for social nourishment, for the vitality of community, and above all for meaning, belonging, and a sense of *place*. As self-evident traditions of home-life become less and less accessible, we become increasingly attached to a nostalgic sense of the meaning of home. In the process, we may anchor this sense of home in an appropriation of invented traditions, most noticeably when our connection to self-evident traditions begins to wane and take with it our sense of homeplace.<sup>13</sup> This is the point where we might begin to wonder how meaning works -- how the giving (and taking) of meaning works -- especially in the context of the intertwining of past and present, as in the materialization of home or the appropriation of an invented tradition. What do we learn when the meaning-making process breaks down, when it ceases to appropriate or reanimate the meanings in which we have anchored our sense of home? Once we see how creative articulations of meaning contribute to the preservation of home as a centering environment, we can perhaps see what it means to experience a breakdown or deflection of this power of creative preservation.

Another interesting aspect of homemaking lies in the tenuous friction between our desire to have a *place*, a *home*, or a *ground*, and our desire to go *beyond* these structures, to leave our home, to be free for travel, adventure, and the experience of wildness. This friction reflects a kind of estrangement within the existing confines of familiarity. Sensing the trappings of immanence, we aspire to step outside and "transition" to a new sense of home, one that can only be framed within an awareness of strangeness, otherness, alterity, or the wild. The sojourner lives for this sense of home. Others merely vacation there. Some cannot step there at all.

In more extreme forms, we may experience a radical loss of equilibrium, or suffer significant disorientation with respect to our life situation. In such a case, we seem to "fall out of [our] life" or fall out of our normal *place* in life. In contrast to this, we might refer, as Hans-Georg Gadamer does in his writings on health,<sup>14</sup> to the life in which a general feeling of well-being negates the question of health and carries us forward on the firm ground of a "hidden harmony" or "protected composure" (116). When we are "at-home" in the concealment of our good health, when we are functioning "in our element," Gadamer finds that "we are open to new things, ready to embark on new enterprises" and in our forgetfulness of ourselves, we "scarcely notice the demands and strains which are put on us." "This is what health is" (112). It is also for him the

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<sup>13</sup> This point is developed insightfully by Witold Rybczynski (1986). See the chapter on "Nostalgia." For a related discussion, see Jackson ( ), especially "The Mobile Home on the Range," where he reflects on the slow erasure (and subsequent reterritorialization) of the "vernacular" sense of home (in his analysis of the extension of home into the village common).

<sup>14</sup> See Gadamer (1996)

paradigmatic sense of being-at-home.<sup>15</sup> If for Gadamer home and health are a reflection of "internal balance and equilibrium," and if every loss of equilibrium promotes "the search for a new point of stability," nevertheless, it should come as no surprise he would hold that "in the vast technical structure of our civilization, we are all patients" --all a little out of balance, that is. As he explains it, "our personal existence is clearly something which is everywhere denied and yet it is also something which is always involved in the attempt to regain that balance which we need for ourselves, for our lived environment, and for the feeling of being at home in the world" (81).

For Gadamer, the effort to regain our balance and equilibrium "permanently confronts us" with the "concrete task" of having to "(continually sustain) our own internal balance within a larger social whole, which requires both cooperation and participation" (81). It also involves for him the capacity to listen, to be open to the realization that "the other may not only have a right but may actually be right, may understand something better than we do" (82).

This resonates with the thought of Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's postmodern sensibility lies in his sense of the importance of exposure to wildness, as a way to maximize opportunities for disorientation.<sup>16</sup> His message is a call to vigilance, to "live deliberately" in relation to the situations we have created for ourselves, and to question the point of our societal structures, especially those that sustain social and intellectual conformities. Thoreau's writing urges us to seek out the unfamiliar in all we take for granted, to embrace the "setting of surprise" as a site of wonder. But even here we encounter a search for balance in the tension between home and wild, between comfort and estrangement. The impetus to question conformity is clearly a call to self-fashioning, one that seeks after new ways of relating to ourselves, to others, and to our surroundings. Thoreau sees the necessity for refinements in our attunement to the ever-shifting fields of human experience.<sup>17</sup> But he values as well a healthy tension between the call of the wild and the cautions of deliberation, attunement and domestication. Once again we see evidence of an ongoing dialectic/dialogue between immanence and transcendence (staying within and passing beyond). Here, following Iris Young, we might say we face the limits of our "nostalgic longing for an impossible security and comfort" and must wrestle continuously with the complexities inherent in our ideal of home. For while we might be tempted by the fantasy of a "settled, safe, affirmative, and bounded identity," we are always creatively engaged in the dynamic cultivation of our identity. If we idealize home as the grounding support for "a bounded and secure identity," sooner or later we recognize it can only provide "support" for "personal and collective identity in a more fluid and material sense."<sup>18</sup> We need a sense of home that sustains equilibrium and balance, not sameness, because the creative demands of dynamic cultivation require us to ground our identity in things, people and places whose meanings change through time.

The philosophical problematic of home opens onto a field of discovery. In our exposure to discovery, we risk displacement from the "seductive" constructions of home reflected in our longing for "spaces of safety and withdrawal."<sup>19</sup> We gravitate from a

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<sup>15</sup> See Gadamer (1996): 78-81

<sup>16</sup> In this connection, see Klaver (1995) and Bennett (1994)

<sup>17</sup> See Jane Bennett (1994), especially chapters two and three, where she develops the concept of "heteroverse" as a basis for understanding our relations to otherness.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Young (1997): 157-58 and 164.

<sup>19</sup> See Bonnie Honig (1994): 570. Later she identifies this longing as a false seduction of home.

sense of home as a conceptual/spiritual space of unity/integrity (offering up comforting horizons of safety and security), and the collateral sense of a well-ordered/welcoming/dependable space of family unity held in orbit by the warm attraction of the cozy hearth, over to a sense of home as a space of internal divisions, strategic alliances, re-negotiated boundaries, and ongoing struggles of identity formation. But what is the meaning of this decentering negotiation of "home" as a locus of discovery? What is the meaning of this shift of emphasis from security to openness? What is this sense of home as a place of shifting amplitudes and transfigurations of goals, aspirations, expectations, commitments, resistances and overcomings? Is there no remainder to the "centering" location of home? Or can we still lay claim to a residual sense of home as the locus of "withdrawal, resistance, and preparation [for]" the battles and challenges of everyday life?<sup>20</sup> In recognizing the ongoing dynamic of placement and displacement, what happens to our sense of "home" as a place to reclaim our identity, integrity and dignity? Can we salvage a hybrid sense of "home" to reflect the ongoing tensions between "building up" and "tearing down"? Such a hybrid would displace our familiar concept of home (as a "conceptual-spiritual space of integrity" lodged safely behind boundary walls) and locate home at the nexus of identity/difference dynamics. The effort to resignify home along postmodern lines follows swiftly on the heels of efforts to lodge the analysis of "identity-formation" in the facticity of contestation.<sup>21</sup>

Bonnie Honig argues that human subjectivities develop and evolve in relation to a dynamic interplay of personal, family, social, cultural, and transcultural "boundaries and categories." Subjectivities form and evolve as makeshift coalitions born out of "intrasubjective" as well as intersubjective negotiations, alliances, and contestations, and as a result often straddle the boundaries of inner and outer.<sup>22</sup> These boundaries and categories aim "to define and contain" our subjectivity, but the active/passive dynamic implicated in the ongoing production of our subjective constitution, working in combination with social factors of interaction, cuts through any privilege we might afford a subject-centered mode of analysis. Honig draws attention to some of these factors in her analysis of the "orchestrating" function of "political and moral projects of ordering subjects, institutions, and values." She writes:

[H]uman beings are constituted as subjects not just by their own groups but *also against* them, as well as by and against multiple and often incommensurable groups, and by and against meta-narratives of rationality, gender, citizenship, and sexuality that are larger than any single community or nation-state. The subjects formed by and against all these processes are constituted by multiple and often incommensurable identities and differences. (Honig 1994: 565)

The postmodern analysis of "*decentered*" subjectivity reveals human beings "riven by plural, incommensurable identities and differences" who must "continually renegotiate their boundaries and affiliations with the nations, communities, groups, networks, discourses, and ideologies that partly constitute them and enable their

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<sup>20</sup> Honig (1994): 583. Cf. bell hooks (1990). The following analysis of "home" and "identity" is developed in concise detail by Honig (1994). See especially pp. 583-589.

<sup>21</sup> See Connolly (1995) and Foucault (1988) for insightful reflections on the "ethos" of pluralization.

<sup>22</sup> For an interesting discussion of the inner/outer dynamics of home, see Platt (1996).

agency" (566). Human subjectivity is an *open system* of loose-fitting alliances comprising values and commitments embroiled in tribal contestation. My subjectivity is not "already formed" by the time I engage incommensurabilities. Instead, these "inescapable conflicts" and "ineradicable resistances" continue to "cross-cut the formation of subjectivity itself, forming and shaping 'differences' that trouble and resist identity from within." Honig draws a striking implication for concepts of home. If we accept that resistance, adjustment and negotiation are basic elements of subjective constitution, we should "give up on the dream of a place called home" if by "home" we mean "a place free of power, conflict, and struggle, a place -- an identity, a private realm, a form of life, a group vision -- unmarked or unruined by difference and untouched by the power brought to bear upon it by the identities that strive to ground themselves in its place" (567).

The "conceptual geography" of home takes on a new complexity when we factor in Honig's notion of "dilemmatic spaces." Honig analyzes the commonly understood notion of dilemmas as "situations in which two values, obligations, or commitments conflict and there is no right thing to do."<sup>23</sup> She finds a direct correlation with the common tendency in social/political/ethical theory to think of dilemmas as "the spectral bearers of fragmentation from which unitary subjects must be protected." Taken together, these two notions implicate the traditional concept of "home" as a "space of safety and withdrawal." But daily life is "mired in dilemmatic choices and negotiations," and such choices and negotiations are not "discrete events," but "spaces" ("spaces which both constitute us and form the terrain of our existence").<sup>24</sup> Subjective constitution unfolds on "conflictual axes" of "identity/difference" within a lifespace "where difference looms as incoherence and engenders unending and never quite mastered struggles of resistance, adjustment, and negotiation" (569). These dilemmatic spaces cut across homelife with varying "intensity" and "gravity." They arise as "eventful eruptions" of latent turbulence, and they reflect "periodic crystallizations" of the "incoherences" and "conflicts" operating (often implicitly) in the constitution of "social orders" and their "subjects" (569). But what does it mean to lodge our concepts of home in dilemmatic spaces? What is implied by this new signification of home?

Honig's resignification of "home" reflects a "differentiated site" of "coalitional partnerships." These partnerships are born out of interlacing dependencies, are ruled by "temporary alliances," and produce "a set of relations marked simultaneously by rage, struggle, mutuality, and debt." Here, in the lap of embracing estrangement, we find that "life itself is at stake," and no amount of deception can displace this recognition (584-85).

If Honig is on the right track, we cannot eliminate difference or conflict from identity. We often *presume* we can, and we bank on this when we configure our sense of home by analogy to the womb. But, as Honig points out, "the traditional figuration of the womb as a site free of difference, conflict, and struggle" is every bit as fanciful as "the perfect, homeful bliss with which the mother-child dyad is conventionally viewed" (583). She reminds us of how the biological relation of mother and fetus is "a series of

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<sup>23</sup> Honig (1994): 568. See pp. 568-70 for Honig's discussion of "dilemmatic spaces" and pp. 579-89 for a careful application of this discussion to her analysis of "home." More tentative discussions along these lines can be found in several classic writings in the cultural, feminist, and critical studies movements. Compare Martin and Mohanty (1986), Pratt (1984), Kaplan (1987), and Reagon, (1983).

<sup>24</sup> Honig (1994): 568. Compare Mary Douglas (1993). For a nice discussion of this theme in terms of displacement, see Katherine Platt (1996).

genetic conflicts, a set of struggles over the resources needed for survival." Clearly the womb is a coalitional space -- and still quite literally a home -- in which mutual dependencies and internal differences "cross-cut and inhabit each other, cooperating with and waging war against each other in a perpetual motion of mutuality, engagement, and struggle" (587).

### **Applications in Philosophical Practice**

How we come to have a sense of place in life, to be "at home" with ourselves and our surroundings, and the extent to which we can sustain this against the tides of change and contestation that stretch and wash over the boundaries and categories which aim to contain us, opens up a rich domain of philosophical reflection with respect to themes and concepts of home and identity. The urgency with which we engage these reflections will reflect not only the restlessness, discontent or unhappiness in our life, but also the extent to which we are open to engaging critical engagements with the defining and constraining concepts of home and identity that give shape and focus to determinations of meaning and sense in our life. It remains to be seen what types of problems, questions or issues we might encounter in counseling settings that would invite a careful analysis of concepts of home.

I have suggested some possible avenues of discovery that might open up in the process of thinking about home from a postmodern frame of reference. The question remains as to how we might translate personal problems into philosophical problems without losing the context of relevance through which the client initiates the counseling engagement. Since the goal is to open a dialogue that will address the client's concerns at a deep level of understanding and with greater attunement to their personal life and contexts of involvement, it seems reasonable to begin with problems of restlessness, discontent, unhappiness, and questions about meaning and purpose in life, but also important to slowly draw these issues and concerns into more abstract discussions of identity and home. Dominant metanarratives of home and identity often drop a serious weight on our life, and a great deal of frustration and turbulence results from ill-considered attempts to find our way home in life or to preserve our integrity in the face of life's complexities. By directing attention to the boundary zones of home-identity, we can learn to bring reflection, creativity, and wonder to bear on the never-ending search for home. The philosopher's practice should be attuned to these dynamics. We cannot give adequate expression to the dynamics of our subjective constitution without learning to engage the dilemmatic spaces in which our lives are so often lodged. Nor can we grasp the full dimension of these dilemmatic spaces until we begin directing some conscious attunement to the nests of issues and assumptions underlying our ambivalent relations to "home."<sup>25</sup>

Reflecting on home offers a basis for effecting subtle detachments from complicated experiences in life. Thinking about home -- reflecting on how we materialize our identity and our sense of place; discussing our understanding of hospitality or the connection between privacy and community; articulating what we feel at home with in our life, and why; paying attention to how we interpret uncanniness in life; or thinking out the implications of our psycho/eco/logical balance -- contributes to self-understanding while simultaneously revealing open horizons of possibility. These

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<sup>25</sup> Butler (1996) offers an analysis of the "promising ambivalence" in the dynamic of home.

explorations serve not only to center but also to de-center us in relation to concerns, temptations, attractions, tendencies, plans, dreams, frustrations, and significant relations in our life. They provide context for discussing the connections and disconnections of family, community, and human being. Affording people the philosophical space to develop and reflect on their sense of home provides a basis for reflecting on deep philosophical questions -- questions concerning meaning and purpose, or seeking a basis for evaluative judgments -- while still providing a solid basis for reflecting on our personal choices, priorities, aspirations, and values. Traces of identity are revealed in the multiple facets of home. Problems and challenges are framed and discussed with more attunement to perspective.<sup>26</sup> The philosopher's role is to prod the understanding, and to offer perspective on the rich contradictions in life, the different kinds of human beings, both within and around us, and the forward movement of a recombinant life making its way through countless transformations of home. The explosion of opportunities for movement on multiple levels of human existence has opened up the philosophical field of play. Our task is to elicit the courage and curiosity to engage this field with open eyes.

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<sup>26</sup> For compatible discussions along these lines, cf. Lahav and Tillmans (1995), especially the articles by Prins-Bakker, Boele, Schefczyk, Segal, and Norman.

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