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In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other

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When traumatic experiences occur, our patterns of living—the ways in which our bodies and minds have grown accustomed to feeling and reacting—are threatened. When psychologists, philosophers, or theologians turn their attention to trauma, they face a daunting task, as trauma is a concept that is incredibly difficult to understand and to describe. Yet it is crucial to persist; if such disciplines can offer nothing about trauma, then they betray their very purpose and those people who have been traumatized. By drawing on resources across these disciplines (and others), the contributors here struggle together to foster conversation that deepens the ability of practitioners and theoreticians alike to engage with the effects of trauma.

The essays range over a diverse landscape for inspiration—discussing thinkers such as Augustine, Ranciere, Foucault, Freud, Heidegger, Kristeva, and Lacan; literary works from Homer to Shakespeare to Joyce; case studies from clinical practice, film, even the book of Job—all in order to identify new avenues for working through trauma's far-reaching effects, both for individuals and in its social and collective dimensions. Though these authors certainly do not speak with a singular voice, the volume is held together by an underlying "ethical turn," a commitment to acknowledge the subjectivity of the victim. As the work demonstrates, this allows a kind of exploration not possible when adhering to a particular methodology or theory, thus avoiding the reductionism common to medical models for mental health.

It is sometimes said that trauma remains with us in our cells, at a level beneath the analysis of memory and scars. As this volume argues, even this profound insight does not push far enough. As difficult as it may be to understand trauma and to deal with its reverberations, the process of trying to do so can be transformative—even hopeful.

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