

External Examiner's Report

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The thesis Philip Strammer has presented is a noteworthy achievement that well fulfills and even exceeds the expectations one can place on a researcher at this stage. His discussion is insightful and carefully crafted, and gives special attention to the details of several examples. The examples are introduced to present and explore his proposal that thinking through questions about moral relationality or togetherness are central to moral philosophy and our conception of moral understanding and life more broadly. His contribution to Buberian ethics and Wittgensteinian moral philosophy is original and the suggestion that Buber's characterization of the I-You relation can be developed by thinking of one's response to another in terms of lovingness, is brave, even bold.

To the definite strengths of the thesis one can thus count its depth and richness. However, this at points also reveal its relative weaknesses, that is, that the discussion at points goes too deep and becomes too rich. This is especially true of the many extensive footnotes that provide further commentary on almost every page as well as the heavy use of cross-references. The latter unfortunately do not help the reader that much further since it is hard to be at more places in the text than one, and the main text and footnotes already divide one's attention into two. On the whole, however, these are minor complaints that can easily be accounted for in later work.

It is a virtue of his thinking that it raises several questions. Even at the points Strammer's thinking might be challenged, e.g. in relation to his interpretation of Buber at central points, and in the prominent place lovingness gets in his vision of morality, I think we will find fruitful friction, in engaging with his thoughts. They open for the development of an understanding and a form of agreement that cannot be achieved exclusively through argument but have to be established dialogically, through extensive discussion and back and forth questioning. The questions I raise here should thus be

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read as an invitation to take these issues further to see where and whether we can find common ground on points where I do not at least initially agree with the implications of certain arguments and interpretations. That said, it should be said that I am in general in sympathy with the general starting points of the discussion, and also find the attempt to take the discussion further beyond the status quo both stimulating and promising. The questions that I raise therefore start off from a high level of agreement, which at times also lead them to be quite general or abstract, since I will address general themes and topics that I struck me as potentially problematic while reading, rather than go into the specifics of individual examples. (I will leave this to Chris.)

I will start every set of question with a short description of what I see as the main contribution of the three parts. At every step, there is of course a question of whether you recognize yourself in my description, or whether there is something you would like to add or change in it.

Part 1

Chapter 1 and 2 set off the discussion by Strammer delimiting his discussion against the accounts of moral philosophy presented by Immanuel Kant and John McDowell. He asks how Kant's and McDowell's philosophy allows us to understand moral relationality or togetherness, and finds both of them to be lacking, in mainly being reason-centered approaches which "can only lead to [conceiving] relations of a third personal kind".

Questions

- 1) The first question I want to ask here concerns the inclusion of these two thinkers as objects of criticism. In the conclusion you offer a personal narrative of your way into your main research question, which in one form reads, "*how can a better understanding of interpersonal togetherness help us get a better understanding of morality*" (p. 184).

We thus get an individual historical explanation of why you have decided on introducing these two thinkers. But we also get to see the limitations you have come to see in these thinkers when it comes to understanding moral life and understanding, and also in some sense we are told that you felt a growing disappointment in their answers, as your question has changed.

A thesis may well serve as this kind of documentation of a research journey, and I think you are well prepared for the next step of that journey with the work you have presented. Yet, I want to ask you:

- a) *If you were to rewrite the thesis now, perhaps in the form of a book, what would you hold on to in the chapters?*
- b) *What are the philosophical reasons (i.e. not only personal, historical) for including these two philosophers in your argument?*

- 2) Now in your personal narrative you describe how you have come to see new questions as relevant to exploring moral understanding or moral philosophy than you did before, especially in exploring moral relatedness or relationality. But since Kant's and McDowell's interest, arguably, is not in the moral relation (at least not in the second personal register), how fair towards their projects, and the questions they attempt to answer, do you think it is to concentrate on that which is excluded by their accounts?

In other words:

a) *Yes, you are right in saying that they fail to answer your question. But are you open enough to what their own questions are and how their answers are interrelated to these questions?*

b) *In what way would your discussion have been different if you had approached them, not necessarily on their own terms, but more in the light of the challenges they tried to target?*

- 3) Again, returning to the ways in which I do think it is important to point out that an interest in relationality has not been a standard part of modern moral philosophy, *how do you, or how should we, understand the lack of a second person perspective in the history of philosophy?* If we see, as you also show us, that they are not aware of your question, not to say urgently aware of it, then how should we understand this lack of awareness?

a) *What is it, on the account that you develop, that prevents them from seeing this aspect of our existence (if that is their failure) or giving it the weight you think it deserves in their moral philosophy?*

b) *What role would you e.g. give to historical explanations here, what role to a personal failure to recognize this feature in their own life?*

In other words, is it because they are seeped in a culture of "I-It" that they have difficulties to discern the I-You relation, or relationality as a whole, or do their philosophy reveal their own personal failure to respond to the address of You?

Part 2

Chapter 3 makes a first attempt to move beyond the reason-centered approaches of Kant and McDowell. Leaning on Buber's division of the two basic words which mark our twofold existence, the I-It and the I-You, Strammer first attempts a translation of "the Kantian and McDowellian conceptualisations of the moral dimension of togetherness into another philosophical register, namely one that could be called *pronominal* or *personal-pronominal*" (p. 169). He does this to show that their "moral philosophy can be understood as exemplifying, although in different ways and with certain reservations (especially in the case of Kant), what Buber calls the I-It relation, that is, the relation between a first-personal and a third-personal relatum." (p. 169).

In Chapter 4 he then moves on to describe what Buber sees as characteristic of the alternative I-You relation, to show how attention to a second personal morality reveals aspects that the former philosophies could not address properly. In his presentation of Buber

he foregrounds topics that are central to his general discussion, such as Buber's claim that the I-You relation is not mediated, or that it is direct. He elaborates on what this means in relation to "spokenness", where *speaking with* rather than *speaking about* is that which characterizes the I-You relation, and considers how one should think of the I-You relation as placed in a socio-historically shaped world.

Questions

- 4) The first question I want to raise concerns your attempted translation of Kant's and McDowell's philosophical thought into an I-It relation. You follow Buber in this interpretation of the history of Western philosophy, but you also add that this translation can only be done with certain reservations.

So I want to ask:

- a) *First, what limitations do you see in this attempted translation? In what way do you see that it could be vulnerable to criticism? (And here, of course, I want you to expand upon the question and not just repeat your arguments.)*
 - b) *Second, are there other pronominal registers into which they could also and more appropriately be translated?*
I am thinking e.g. of the way in which you say that McDowell foregrounds the "We of community" (p. 72 ?), that is, the first person plural, which is not really present in Buber's thought? (Or, if you disagree with me and think it is present, then how?) Or as an other alternative, what of the third-person plural if one rather thinks of the I and the others as I-Them?
 - c) *Third, given that there is something important that is captured in speaking about their moral philosophy as viewing the first person from a third person perspective, do you think that there could also be a point in thinking of one's own actions from a third person point of view (and thereby also find more sympathy for the Kantian or Aristotelian version of the third-person shaping and guiding our understanding of the first-person?)*
(Buber writes in *Between Man and Man* that "Maxims command only the third person, the each and the none." (p. 136) But isn't there a point in especially Kant moving towards the *everyone*, as what can be meaningfully said about my actions from the perspective of what they mean for *each* and *all of us*, as a whole, rather than just from my perspective, or in relation to you?)
- 5) The second set of questions I want to raise concern your reading of Buber and how to understand the relation(s) between the I-It-relation and I-You-relation. This foregrounds some of my following questions.
 - a) I would first like to hear: *How do you understand the final sentences of the first parts of I and Thou in the light of your previous discussion? "without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human."*

(trans. Kauffman, 85)/ “without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man.” (trans. Gregor Smith, p. 32)¹

- b) *In what respects, when and how, according to you, can the I-It relation have a distorting or corrupting effect on moral understanding and the I-You-relation? Does the I-It relation always have to be seen as having this effect on the I-You relation?*
- c) *Do you see any room for moving between the attitudes in one’s actual relationship with specific others in a way that would not be morally corruptive or distorting? And do you think Buber leaves us any such room? (What could Buber e.g. mean when he says that we can, in relation between men, sometimes seek “relaxation in the It-World” (trans Kauffmann, p. 60-61)?)* “turn aside and relax in the world of *It*” Gregor Smith, p.16?)
- d) *Do you see any tension in thinking about these two forms of relation first as characteristic of our twofold attitude and then in claiming that the I-You attitude is in some way more fundamental to our way of relating?*
For me this tension seems to grow when you go on to connect I-You with lovingness and also state that this seems to imply that I-It is unloving. (You say this explicitly on 237, “given that he (Buber) equates the fully actual I-You relation with unreserved love (i.e. a loving relation), reversely implying that the relation that is caught up in the I-It is unloving” (p. 237).

Part 3

In chapter 5 and 6 Strammer first presents his own reading of Buber and its relevance for thinking about love in relation to morality. He introduces the term lovingness as central to his project, to distinguish this kind of love from the love that we encounter in specific personal relationships. He suggests that this kind of lovingness is central to what Buber speaks of in bringing in the I-You relation. He then goes on to show how these considerations of lovingness, or unlovingness, what it means to respond lovingly or unlovingly to someone, has for our thinking of morality.

Questions

- 6) The first point I want to challenge you on is the suggestion that we read Buber as stating first that the I-You relation should be understood as a loving relation, and second that love is the fundamental force that establishes the I-You-relation. You write:

“In other words: there can be no relation, no engagement or encounter, in which love is *entirely* absent – for if it were, there would be no relation in the first place. For Buber, love is thus a – indeed, *the* – fundamental force of our existence: without love, we could not relate to one another and without relating to one another, we – and, along with us, the world –

¹ All my references to Buber’s *I and Thou* are to the two translations. I think we have the same version of Kauffman. I have an edition of Gregor Smith from 2004 (Continuum).

would cease to be. Yet, we *cannot but* relate to one another and the ‘act’ that establishes relation is love.” (p. 235)

In support of this you quote from a paragraph that you think makes this clear although Buber does not state this directly. In footnote 958, you say it is “fairly obvious” (p. 234) that we should read him as you do. I am not as certain that this is fairly obvious. (Must we read the “essential act that here establishes directness” (trans. Kauffman, p. 66)/the “act of the being which provides directness” (trans. Gregor Smith 19), as, in your words the “act which establishes relation”(p. 235)?) Nor would I say that it is easy to understand what he is saying in that paragraph, even if I of course do not wish to deny that being wholly present in relation to someone as You can be seen as a form of unreserved love.

But what are we e.g. to do with your above reading that there cannot be any relation without love in the light of the following quote by Buber. (A similar point is made by Buber in one of the paragraphs following the one you quoted which speaks about love that is blind. Trans. Kauffman, 67-68, trans. Gregor Smith, 20)

“Dialogic is not to be identified with love. But love without dialogic, without real outgoing to the other, reaching to the other, and accompanying with the other, the love remaining with itself—this is called Lucifer.”
(*Between Man and Man*, p. 24)

In this paragraph it rather seems that it is the love that incorporates an I-You relation (the one where I takes responsibility for You) that is the real, true or pure love.

So, how do you think that we should understand the relation between love and the I-You-relation against the background of these paragraphs?

- 7) One thing that complicates the matter is that there is an ambiguity in love in how we speak about love. On the one hand we can speak about love as a responsiveness to the other. On the other hand, we can see love as a responsibility for the other. Now Buber expressly says the last. “Love is responsibility of an I for a You” (trans. Kauffman, p. 66) “Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou.” (trans. Gregor Smith, p. 20). But he also seems to speak about love as a form of responsiveness between I and You. As something” in between” I and You (ibid), as that which moves between us. The ways in which I move you and you move me, the way we work in each other.

Now you speak about love not as a particular or specific relationship between two people that can grow over time, but rather as a loving relation or as a way of responding lovingly to a you. Thus, you seem to foreground a certain kind of responsiveness in the I-You-relation. In your continued discussion you also often refer to this as a question about what we may mean with seeing something

as a loving response. I am not quite sure what aspect of responsiveness and responsibility you touch upon here, but I would have liked to hear more about:

a) *how you understand love as responsibility for you, and*

b) *how that responsibility is actualized in concrete encounters.*

Buber writes (and you quote without commenting on the last section, p. 299):

“The idea of responsibility is to be brought back from the province of specialized ethics, of an ‘ought’ that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding.

Responding to what?

To what happens to one, to what is to be seen and heard and felt.” (Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 18–19)

The responding here is not just a loving response to a You, an awakening to the You, by being touched by love. It is a concrete responding to something happening to one, something experienced (seen, heard and felt). Does this, in your reading of Buber, make it part of the It-world?

Buber also writes that love is a “welthaftes Wirken” that shows itself, or is or becomes effective in “helping, healing, educating, raising up, saving” (trans. Gregor Smith, p 11), or in that “now one can act, help, heal, educate, raise, redeem” (trans. Kauffman, p. 66.)

(I don’t find the Kauffman translation especially helpful in thinking about this paragraph, and precisely not in translating “welthaftes Wirken” to a “cosmic force”. The translation by Gregor Smith is perhaps not better in precisely that sentence but I find it guides my thought better here. You can of course go back to the German, as I have.)

- 8) My worry in the above questions, is whether your focusing on “lovingness” as a question of what “a loving response” would be became too expansive. It covers more than the call to “be loving” or even “be more loving” that gives more weight to how we interact with others. I can’t be loving all on my own. But I can think of my responses as loving responses, and I don’t know what the moral worth of that thinking is in many cases.

Two places that caught my attention here were the following:

“The one who hates can only hate because she has already been touched by love – her hatred is thus a reaction to, an attempt to get away from, love, yet an attempt that can never fully succeed (other than by self-annihilation, that is.)” (p. 235)

“conscience’s call does not merely make us aware of our own failure to respond lovingly [...] but in that it awakens us to the reality of the one in relation to whom we failed to respond lovingly. Yet that awakening to the

other's reality just *is* one's – belated – loving response to her” (p. 294-295).

Now, what would you say is the real take home message in those passages? Can the I, who hates, or just fails to respond lovingly, in the first person, still say that my hate, and lack of love, in itself was “a loving response”/“a response to love”? How can I be so sure? Or is this only something you can say of somebody else, in the third person?

- 9) A central topic throughout your discussion is the way in which the I-You-relation according to Buber is not *mediated*. You return to this issue in chapter 6 and discuss it in relation to the thought of Raimond Gaita (although it could also have been welcomed to here return to McDowell.) In your discussion, you reject what you see as Gaita's understanding of the “language of love” as something that conditions what is possible for us to see in another, as something that could come before seeing the other as a you. I don't think your criticism here really captures Gaita's position. I agree with your criticism of the idea that our understanding of the Other, of You, is *socially and historically conditioned* in the sense that language is a social construct, or a system of ideas, that precedes the I-You-relation and limits our possible understanding of the other, of seeing something new in the other, of delimiting one's understanding. But I don't think Gaita is making that claim. And I don't think he needs to be making that claim. (The whole point about the nun is to a certain extent that our vocabulary does not necessarily shape how we experience others, but that our encounters with others can give us a renewed sense of what our words mean, what significance it has to speak them.)

We can come back to this in discussion, but what I roughly think that Gaita, after Rhees, wants to make is a *conceptual* claim, a point about how our words have meaning in specific contexts. He does not make a *historical* claim. (Note that when you say that Gaita holds that “the slave owner cannot feel remorse”, Gaita says he “could not”. His argument, here, I would say, is of the form “If he responded in the way he did, then he could not have been said to feel remorse”. It is not of the form “his circumstances prevented him from reacting to the slave woman with remorse”.)

Now, to this you can retort that the Kauffman translation of I and Thou says that “Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You” (p. 62), and we can argue about translations. Gregor Smith says “No system of ideas” (p. 17). The German says “Keine Begrifflichkeit”. I, however, don't think that Buber here necessarily has to be read in opposition to what Gaita says about the language of love. Because the Wittgensteinian idea of language and communication can be so inclusive. Especially after Rhees.

(This becomes both a bit abstract and esoteric, but I think a possible rendition of what Buber says about the relation of language and world that can be perfectly aligned with at least my Wittgensteinian sensibilities, is this: Speaking of I-It or I-You has the sense

it has within my speaking one of the basic word; I speak the basic word, and then the world of experience, or the world of relation, what world I'm *in*, what mode of existence I am in, is seen in the way I speak.)

(My feeling here is that you're misled by temporal pictures, although you want to get out of that scheme. You speak of the relation preceding *relata* in the I-You-relation (p. 215). I think that rather than speaking of precedence we can think of *relata* and relation as parts of a whole. Here talk of precedence makes no sense.

So here we can say, yes, *relata* do not precede relation. But that does not mean that the relation precedes *relata*. We can conceive of the relation between *relata* and relation in other ways than temporal precedence. Perhaps in more spatial terms. But not as a conceptual framework.

But I struggle with your remarks about the relation being unmediated. Not the idea, but how you make sense of it. Also on p. 187-188)

So let's get back to some questions. You say that your understanding of the language of love differs from Gaita's.

a) *How do you understand the language of love?*

b) *How do you on consideration think that your understanding of it differs from his, if I challenge you to think that he is not making the claim you think he is (i.e. that it historically conditions what I can say?)*

c) *Do you think of loving as something we may also have to learn? Or is loving just something that is given to us in response to the claim of love?*

Furthermore, if we can learn to love better, then what role does language have in this learning?

- 10) Finally returning to your main question about how a better understanding of interpersonal togetherness can help us get a better understanding of morality (p. 184): *how do you understand your positive contribution to understanding morality in the final chapters?*

Do you want to say that there are aspects of moral understanding that go beyond the spheres discussed by Kant and McDowell, and that these aspects can be spelled out in a relational ethics that involves the encounter of I and You in a way that can be characterized as loving. (Where love can be called upon both as an awakening to the other as a you and as a responsibility for a you.)

That is, is your main suggestion that a reflection of these aspects in these terms complements our thinking about morality?

Or do you want to say that this presentation of a relational ethics can capture everything that is of importance in moral understanding in a way that the other accounts cannot? That it is a more fundamental account of morality than the reason-centred one?

This brings us back to the question of how your questions relate to other ways of perceiving the task of moral philosophy, and whether there are other questions we need to raise than how to understand moral relationality.

This is perhaps most central when it comes to thinking of what one can call a negative and a positive morality, where the focus in the first is on preventing wrongdoing, and in the second on promoting good ways of relating. Can, as it were, all questions raised by the first, be answered by recourse to the second?

You write e.g.

”Apart from the fact that I do not think that much hangs on whether one speaks in ‘positive’ terms of loving responsiveness (as I have been doing) or in ‘negative’ terms of an absence of condescension (as Gaita does)” (p. 352)

And my question is: *Why don't you think much hangs on this?*

Is there not a great difference in the ways in which I can come to realize that I had acted unlovingly (e.g. with condescension) and the ways I am not struck by thought that I responded lovingly to someone, and the possible problems in my e.g. cherishing that thought and reveling it. The first thought can haunt me (in the sense primarily as you suggest that I'm haunted by the image of *him*), and if I'm haunted in this way it appears to be quite a good thing. But if I am struck in a similar way by having responded lovingly to someone, it does not necessarily reveal something good. Rather than an awakening to another it reveals a preoccupation with myself.

I also think it is premature to suggest that when something is not loving, it is straight away unloving. I can do something promptly, matter-of-factly, dutifully, and no one may congratulate me on being loving in my ways of acting towards another. But that does not necessarily make my acting unloving, at least not necessarily in the eyes of others. (I agree completely that I might still think of myself as failing, even if I see no place for blame. But here it seems that the standards we can apply to ourselves when it comes to being loving are different than the ones we judge others by.)

Thank you! It was great having the opportunity to engage with this work.

Camilla Kronqvist