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Togetherness as a Moral Notion
Doctoral Thesis

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Für meine Oma

ABSTRACT

Moral philosophy for the most part conceives of morality in terms of rational action. An agent acts morally, in other words, if she acts as she ought to act on pain of rational inconsistency. Accordingly, interpersonal relationality, to the extent that it reflects moral value, is understood in terms of two or more individuals interacting with one another in rationally called-for ways. This approach can be called third-personal: what is morally decisive is the agent's reasons for acting, abstract entities equally accessible, and assessable, by all. This dissertation takes issue with two variants of such a third-personal approach to moral relationality, namely the moral thought of Immanuel Kant and John McDowell. The main effort of this work is to show that a) Kant's and McDowell's accounts fail to do justice to what it means to find oneself vis-à-vis a unique other, addressed by, and responding to, her, and b) to develop an alternative understanding of moral relationality that seeks recourse to Martin Buber's dialogical phenomenology and post-Wittgensteinian moral philosophy. The proposed alternative revolves around the notion of the second-personal relation – or the 'I-You relation,' as Buber speaks of it – and explicates how this mode of relationality not only underlies the third-personal understanding of morality but comes with its own *sui generis* moral-existential charge – namely the claim to respond lovingly to the other.

KEYWORDS

Together, I-You relation, Martin Buber, love, morality, goodness, conscience, Immanuel Kant, John McDowell

TITUL

Sounáležitost jako morální pojem

ANOTACE

Morální filozofie obvykle uvažuje o morálce v rámci racionálního jednání. Aktér jedná morálně, jen když jedná tak, jak by jednat měl a činí tak pod hrozbou racionální nekonzistence. V takovém případě je potom interpersonální vztahovost, do té míry, do jaké reflektuje morální hodnotu, chápána ve smyslu vzájemné racionální interakce dvou či více jedinců. Tento přístup lze nazvat pohledem z perspektivy třetí osoby: morálně rozhodující jsou důvody, které jednajících k jednání vedou, abstraktní entity jak přístupné, tak i hodnotitelné všemi. Tato disertační práce se staví proti dvěma variantám takového přístupu k morální vztahovosti, a to morálnímu myšlení Immanuela Kanta a Johna McDowella. Hlavním cíli této práce je a) ukázat, že ani Kant ani McDowell nejsou schopni náležitě vystihnout, co znamená ocitnout se tváří v tvář jedinečné osobě druhého, být jí osloven a reagovat na ni, a b) rozvinout alternativní chápání morální vztahovosti, které hledá východisko v dialektické fenomenologii Martina Bubera a v postwittgensteinovské morální filozofii. Navrhovaná alternativa se zakládá na konceptu vztahů z perspektivy druhé osoby – totiž na vztahu mezi "já a ty", jak o něm hovoří Buber – a vysvětluje, že tento typ vztahovosti nejen předchází chápání morálky z pohledu třetí osoby, ale zároveň přichází i s vlastním morálně-existenciálním nábojem – totiž s požadavkem láskyplně reagovat na druhého.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Sounáležitost, vztah já-ty, Martin Buber, láska, morálka, dobro, svědomí, Immanuel Kant, John McDowell

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Introduction

On Togetherness

The task that the present dissertation sets itself is, as the title says, the development of an account of *togetherness as a moral notion*. Yet, what I am after is not an analysis of the word ‘togetherness’, for what I want to show does not hang on it. Instead, I will develop the notion by speaking in various different terms, mostly of *relationality* and, more specifically, of *second-personal relationality* – or, differently put, of the *I-You relation*. Speaking of second-personal relationality in the way that I do is to speak of togetherness, namely of the togetherness of I and You. That is not to say that I-You togetherness is solely a matter of two or more individuals being mutually attentive to one another, as is the case, say, in a good conversation or in a loving embrace – far from it. Even the Good Samaritan – in the parable which I will discuss in chapter 6 – saw in the half dead man in the ditch a You and, in this sense, was together with him. So, wherever there is an I relating to a You, I and You are together in this minimal, yet already morally charged, sense. Yet, speaking of moral togetherness in this minimal sense is merely the *terminus a quo* of the present analysis and, thus, one side of the coin. The other side of the coin, the *terminus ad quem*, is togetherness understood as that towards which I-You relationality is ‘geared,’ so to speak, namely *loving togetherness*, or, as I will at times speak of it, *togetherness in a loving spirit*. This is not to be understood as an end or as some kind of intentional object of those who relate to one another as I and You; rather, it is, as it were, intrinsic to I-You relationality to move in the direction of loving togetherness. Phenomenologically, this movement is reflected in I and You finding themselves claimed in loving response to one another, as well as in the experience of witnessing love, especially when it is pure, as something of manifest and unqualified *goodness*. Accordingly, the less-than-good, all the way down to the morally bad and the evil, are, on the account that I offer, understood in terms of *unlovingness*, reflected in the forces that inhibit, oppose, or even destroy the movement of I and You towards one another in a loving spirit, fostering withdrawal, rejection, and separation instead.

The Third- and the Second-Personal

To many, this presumably sounds somewhat elusive, if not outright arcane. However, I will not throw you, the reader, in at the deep end but instead begin my discussion in a terrain that will be more familiar to most, especially those who are acquainted with ‘established’ moral

philosophy, namely with the moral thought of Immanuel Kant and John McDowell. Both thinkers are particularly influential exponents of what I will call a third-personal approach to morality. To adopt a third-personal approach to morality means to conceive of it as primarily concerned with abstract entities that are equally accessible to, and assessable by, all, namely with *reasons*, as well as with the investigation of reasons and of what gives them their normative force, namely *rationality*. On third-personal views, then, moral relationality – that is, the relation between individuals to the extent that it is of moral significance – is understood as mediated by the respective individuals' practical reason. In other words: when I relate to You, or You to me, in ways that reflect moral worth (or its lack), then this can be traced back to our capacity for rational thought and action, as it is this capacity that is in charge of judging, deliberating on, and deciding for the morally called-for ways of interacting with others. Accordingly, reflecting on the moral dimension of our interpersonal relations is understood in terms of articulating and assessing our reasons for interacting with one another as we do.

To conceive of morality in second-personal terms means to take issue with such a picture. In the following investigation, the criticism of third-personal accounts of morality revolves around the motif that a concern with reason directs one's attention away from the unique other – the second-personal (You) – and towards the abstract – the third-personal, i.e. reason (It). This motif plays out in different forms throughout the dissertation, especially in the critical discussions of the first three chapters. Let me thus give an outline of the structure of the present work, beginning with the criticisms of the reason-centred accounts of moral relationality in the first three chapters and the subsequent development of the alternative, i.e. the second-personal and 'love-centred' conception of moral relationality, in chapters four to six.

Overview

I begin in chapter 1 with an analysis of Immanuel Kant's conception of moral relationality. The reason for choosing Kant as my first 'opponent' is that his thought embodies a particularly deep variant of what I called a third-personal approach to moral philosophy, namely one that is, as it were, *purely* or *absolutely* third-personal. In other words, Kant's moral philosophy, at least as far as its metaphysical underpinnings go, has no room for the particular individual other than as an *occasion* for exercising one's moral duty. At the same time, however, this disregard of the particular other leaves this other in a better position than do many other moral theories, namely in that it does not force the other into some positive conception but, in an attitude of respect, keeps the distance and, thus, leaves the other free. This brings me to the structure of the chapter.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I begin by briefly outlining Kant's conception of reason, reason-giving, and the will before then showing what it means to relate to others in such a way that reason demands, i.e. by living up to one's positive duty (of beneficence) towards rational humanity. As this duty does not require personal interaction with particular others at all, I will then broaden my analysis so as to include the view that Kant developed in his later writings, namely of respect and love as complementary forces; in doing so, I show that, although thereby refining his account, Kant ultimately still fails to deliver a satisfying account of moral relationality because he remains unable to conceive of love as more than a mere inclination.

In the second section, I then examine what it means for a will to be embedded in a concrete situation among others, thus bringing to light that Kant is unable to conceive of a relation with others that is not always already pre-mediated by the subject's reflective self-relation, failing to recognise that a reflective self-relation presupposes the relation with others.

In the third section, finally, I set out to seek for traces of the second-personal in Kant's philosophy. To this end, I first subject his concept of the end-in-itself to a critical analysis that unearths the phenomenological presuppositions of his notion of absolute worth before eventually turning to his *Third Critique* and his belated attempt to develop a mode of relationality to the particular that is not mediated by the universal. After illustrating that this is where Kant gets closest to a proper understanding of the second-personal, I conclude my discussion by showing that he is ultimately kept in check by his failure to conceive of a relation to the world that is not practical yet still filled with meaning and salience.

In chapter 2, I then turn to John McDowell. The reason for this turn is that McDowell sees similar problems in Kant's account as I do and that he locates the 'cure' for these problems in concepts that I also take to be crucial, namely *responsiveness*, *spontaneity*, and *perception*. In other words, McDowell seeks to re-embed the Kantian subject, detached from the world in rational self-relation, in the lived engagement with others, and in such a way that does justice to the spontaneous responsiveness that marks much of our interactions, even those that are morally charged. Yet while I do think that McDowell enriches the Kantian 'story' in some respects, he falls behind it in others, eventually also failing to bring us closer to a genuine understanding of the second-personal. The main problem I see in McDowell's thought is his flawed account of the moral development of children.

This is how I will proceed to bring these issues to light: the chapter is subdivided into three sections. In the first section, I critically examine McDowell's language-centred conceptualism. To this effect, I first look at how McDowell conceives of the child's awakening

to the world – namely as an awakening not primarily to *others*, but to *language* (which, conceived of as a “repository of tradition,” means that the child is from its earliest moments onwards entirely at the mercy of the socio-historic forces shaping it). In the following two sub-sections, I then examine how McDowell conceives of the individual – which is, unsurprisingly, as always already *conceptualised*. Seeking recourse to Hannah Arendt and Christopher Cordner’s discussion of Emmanuel Lévinas, I expose that McDowell can conceive of the particular other only as *relative* other, not as *absolute* other (Lévinas), only in terms of ‘what’ she is, not as a unique ‘who’ (Arendt). I transition towards his ethical thought by showing that McDowell, not unlike Kant, can conceive of salience, or meaningfulness, only as a function of the respective agent’s conceptual outlook.

In the second section, I then turn towards the specifically ethical dimension of McDowell’s understanding of relationality, again with a focus on upbringing. Here, Aristotle becomes far more central than Kant. I begin by sketching McDowell’s understanding of ethical education with recourse to Aristotle’s notions of ‘the *that*’ and ‘the *because*’, illustrating how, for McDowell (as for Aristotle), the child’s moral life begins with the *acceptance* of what it is taught. The social dimension of the child’s habituation into virtue becomes even more central in the following sub-section in which I bring to light an aspect of Aristotle’s ethics that McDowell neglects, namely the important role of *the desire for social recognition* in the child’s development of a conception of what is noble and, hence, virtuous. In section 3, I problematise the one-sidedness of the Aristotelian picture of moral development, suggesting that the parent-child relation is of moral significance not only to the extent that the parent *praises* the child when it acts appropriately and reproaches and *shames* it when it does not. I discuss this one-sidedness by means of an example which illustrates that, while the Aristotelian parent qua authority figure may make the child come to internalise a desire for doing what is noble, she is unable to make it see *the moral point* of what it is doing; indeed, an Aristotelian ethical upbringing may even turn out morally seriously flawed, namely to the extent that it diverts the child’s attention away from others and towards a concern for nobility. I conclude the chapter with some remarks on the peculiar *lovelessness* of the McDowellian-Aristotelian account of ethical upbringing.

Chapter 3 marks the transition to the second half of the dissertation. In the first section, that means ‘becoming concrete.’ This ‘becoming concrete’ takes the form of a detailed discussion of a multi-faceted example depicting a morally charged engagement of two individuals. I deliberately chose an autobiographical encounter, and one that is of great significance to me, both personally and in that it has been the object of much philosophical reflection already before

I began to work on the present thesis. The motivation behind choosing this example is that it has served me for a long time as an exemplary case of an engagement of two individuals which emphatically *cannot* be made sense of by the kinds of reason-centred approaches to moral philosophy that I discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

The discussion of the example proceeds in three steps; in each of the three steps, one segment of the conversation is presented and subsequently discussed. The aim of the discussion is to illustrate that the conceptual armamentarium of thinkers such as Kant and McDowell – which I will refer to as ‘the language of practical reason’ – is unable to capture the morally salient dimension of the engagement. In the first step, I thus reveal the limitations of conceiving of interaction with others as grounded in deliberation and decision. In step two, I first show that neither Kant nor McDowell is able to account for the moral significance of emotions, such as pity, before problematising the notion of (rational) intentionality, both in its Kantian and its McDowellian form. Lastly, I discuss the role of giving and asking for reasons in our morally charged engagements with one another, showing that the level of moral understanding that I am concerned with underlies rational discourse (to the point where the asking for reasons may itself become nonsensical).

In the chapter’s second section, I then proceed to illustrate in which sense, and to which extent, both the Kantian as well as the McDowellian conception of moral relationality can be re-described in terms of what Martin Buber calls the I-It relation. This discussion reveals McDowell as the less radical moral thinker than Kant, precisely because he cannot but conceive of the other as an always already conceptualised other – an It, in Buber’s language. Kant, on the other hand, while in a certain sense being *the* paradigmatic thinker of I-It relationality, is a decisive step ahead of McDowell, namely in that he, as already mentioned, puts at the heart of his moral thought the idea that the moral relation to the other must be a relation in which the other is not squeezed into a conceptual mold, hence refraining from conceiving of the other in terms of an It. This being said, conceiving of the other as *not-It* is not the same as relating to the other as *You* – which is why I leave behind Kant and McDowell at this point and turn towards the alternative offered by Buber.

The discussion of Martin Buber’s thought in chapter 4 marks the turning point of the dissertation. By this point, so I hope, the theoretical groundwork will have been laid so thoroughly that my shift towards a markedly different philosophical approach – namely one that fuses the phenomenological and the dialogical – will not strike the readers as elusive or arcane anymore but, instead, be welcomed as a promising alternative for countering the

shortcomings that were laid bare in my discussion of the reason-centred accounts of interpersonal relationality.

The chapter begins, in section 1, by positioning the present work in relation to the thought of Buber. This is important in that Buber considers himself as religious thinker, whereas my work hardly addresses the religious. Yet, although God plays an important role in Buber's dialogical philosophy, a discussion of the moral-phenomenological dimension of the I-You relation, so my claim, need not make substantial reference to God. After this lead-in, section 2 picks up where I left off in the previous chapter, namely with Buber's thought that in-between I and You, there stands no It and that, in this sense, the relation is unmediated. This claim raises the question, discussed in section 3, as to how the relation between I, You, and It is to be understood; the answer is provided in the form of a differentiation between two forms of 'spokenness,' namely *speaking-with* and *speaking-about*: whereas speaking-with is unmediated and refers to how I and You address, and respond to, one another simply in virtue of their 'whole being', speaking-about means I and You speaking about something, some It. In section 4, I then address the objection of an imagined McDowellian who holds that one need not postulate an unmediated I-You relation to account for contact with reality if one conceives of the mind-world relation dialectically. In a final discussion of the subtleties of McDowell's thought, I show that, even dialectically understood, he ultimately fails to get us even an inkling closer to the You.

Section 5 then turns to Buber's own alternative, namely his dialogical phenomenology of what it means to find oneself standing in a relation to a You. Here, I first examine the temporal dimension of the encounter with the You, that is, a *presence* that is both lived and open to the future. Then, I turn to how the You appears in space, namely as standing out from the It-world, indeed as that in the *light* of which the It-world appears. In section 6, this phenomenological groundwork is implemented by showing what it means for I and You to relate to one another in a world shaped by social and historical forces. Here, Buber's differentiation between *person* and *ego* becomes central: while the ego relates to others by first defining itself in terms of the concepts that it has acquired by being part of a socio-historical world, the person unreservedly puts itself at the mercy of the dialogue with others, so that any socio-historical factors merely constitute the necessary background. I then shift my attention to the ethical dimension of Buber's thought. In section 7, I first discuss the encounter with the You in terms of a meeting of will and grace, thus showing that on a Buberian picture, the ethical is never merely a matter of the I and its will but concerns just as much how the I is approached by, and thus encounters, that which is absolutely other to itself. In the final section, section 8, I

eventually turn to responsibility and conscience, two notions that will become central in the dissertation's final chapter, and how, on a Buberian outlook, the moral demand announces itself from out of the dialogical precisely where the I had failed to respond wholeheartedly to the You and, thus, is haunted by the call of conscience.

Chapter 5 functions as a transition between the dialogical (discussed in chapter 4) and the moral (discussed in chapter 6). The notion that I use to mediate between the two is *love* or, as I will often speak of it, *lovingness*. The task that the chapter sets itself is to translate the dialogical philosophy of Buber into a 'language of love,' that is, to show that, for an I to relate wholeheartedly to a You means to respond *lovingly*, or *in a loving spirit*.

The first section takes as its starting point the discussion of Buber's contentious remark that love, as a "metaphysical and metapsychical fact,"¹ is the "[t]essential act that [...] establishes immediacy,"² and, thus, relation. I first examine what Buber means when he speaks of love as 'metaphysical and metapsychical,' namely that love is emphatically not a feeling 'within' the respective individual and its psyche but, instead, something that manifests between I and You (sub-section a.). That this does not mean that Buber thinks that all relations are perfectly loving is then shown in the subsequent discussion, namely by bringing to light that the I may reject the claim to respond lovingly that it faces vis-à-vis the You, thus turning away from the You and the relation (sub-section b.). I then turn to the already mentioned distinction between love and lovingness, the former referring to love in the substantive or verbal sense ("There is *love* between them" or "I *love* you"), the latter in an adverbial sense ("She responded *lovingly* to him"); unsurprisingly, my attention will be focussed on the latter (sub-section c.).

In section two, constituting the main body of the chapter, I then examine how the notion of lovingness outlined in section 1 plays out in real life encounters and engagements between individuals, including what it means to respond unlovingly to others. This is done via five examples. The first example displays a loving engagement of two young lovers and, thus, examines what it means for two persons who love one another (in the 'substantive' sense) to engage lovingly with one another, paying special attention to what it may mean for them to lapse into unlovingness (sub-section a.). Example two reflects on what it means for a moral-spiritual authority to respond lovingly to another who seeks him out for advice, thus raising the issues of what it may mean to be present in one's words and of the relation between lovingness and power (sub-section b.). I then turn to the Biblical story in which Jesus heals a possessed man so as to examine what it means to respond lovingly in the face of danger and derangement;

¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 66.

² *Ibid.*

given that Jesus engages with the possessed man and with the evil spirits possessing him, the discussion will also provide the occasion for reflecting upon what it means to respond lovingly to two ‘individuals’ at the same time (sub-section c.). The fourth example returns to the conversation around which much of chapter 3 revolved, this time shifting the attention to the position to the ‘friend in need’ so as to examine what it means to bare one’s heart and to share one’s suffering with another in a loving way (sub-section d.). Example five, finally, turns to Daryl Davis, a well-known political activist known for ‘converting’ Ku Klux Klan members to leave their organisation, so as to illustrate what it means to respond lovingly to those who are filled with hatred – and what it means to be ‘infected’ by their hatred (sub-section e.).

In chapter 6, I connect the love-centred understanding of interpersonal relationality, developed in chapter 5, to the moral domain. I do so in two steps, the first focussing on the ‘negative’ connection between love and morality, the second on the ‘positive’.

The negative connection between love and morality, discussed in section 1, is elucidated via the concept of conscience that was already introduced in chapter 4. Beginning sub-section 1 with a discussion of an everyday example in which someone is struck by her conscience after having failed to respond lovingly to another, I investigate the nature of conscience by juxtaposing three ‘contenders,’ namely *guilt*, *shame* and *remorse*. Expatiating that guilt and shame direct one’s attention away from the individual whom one has hurt or wronged – i.e. to a rule one has violated (guilt) or to one’s own flaws and shortcomings (shame) – I expose them as spurious forms of conscience. Once again returning to Buber’s notion of conscience as the pained awakening to the belated address of the other, I expound that conscience, at least in cases of serious moral wrongdoing, is best understood in terms of remorse. Before the background of this insight, I then critically discuss Raimond Gaita’s rich but in my view troubled claim that there are socio-cultural boundaries as to who does and who does not count as an intelligible object of remorse. In sub-section two, I then reverse the set-up by turning to cases in which it is not *one’s own* unlovingness that one is struck by but that of *another*. To this end, I return one more time to the example featured in chapter 3, this time so as to elucidate what it means to be disappointed and betrayed by another. After expounding that a loving response to another’s unlovingness entails the attempt to bring the other (back) into a togetherness in which a loving spirit prevails, I reflect on the intricacies of the relation between remorse and forgiveness. I end the discussion by turning to Kafka’s short story “The Judgment” in order to bring to light what it may mean for someone to be stuck in a life that is (almost) entirely devoid of the kind of love that I am concerned with.

In section two, I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of what it means to encounter love's moral charge in a 'positive' way. This takes the form of an examination of the experience of finding oneself standing witness to love that is of such a purity that one is struck by its manifest and undeniable *goodness*. The discussion begins, in the first sub-section, with a reimagination of the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, taking as its protagonist the Levite who turns around, and is moved, by the goodness of the love displayed in the Samaritan's response to the wounded man. Turning to Marina Barabas's insightful discussion of goodness with the claim that the good person just *is* the loving person, I then complicate her claims that goodness inspires wonder and is encountered as extraordinary, showing that, while not mistaken, the picture is more nuanced. This paves the way for my discussion of Raimond Gaita's understanding of saintly love in the second sub-section. The discussion revolves around an autobiographical anecdote of an encounter Gaita had in his youth with a nun whose pure love towards the ineradicably afflicted left a deep mark on him. Although Gaita's discussion offers deep insights regarding what it means to be struck by love's goodness and how such experiences may deepen our moral understanding, I nonetheless take issue with some of what he says. My main reservation once again concerns his culturalistic tendencies and his claim that what is and is not an intelligible object of love is bound up with, and in a certain sense bounded by, the prevalent 'language of love.' In sub-section three, I raise a further point of criticism against Gaita, namely his failure to see, or to address, that the light cast by love of a strikingly pure kind illuminates the life of the witness not only in the form of a practical challenge to overcome one's own flaws, but also by deepening how one will find oneself claimed in loving response to others. I then conclude the dissertation by bringing to light that speaking of love's goodness does not, in the last instance, mean speaking of *the goodness of the one who loves purely* but, instead, *the goodness of loving togetherness as such*.

First Part:
The Scope and the Limits of the Third-Personal Conception of
Morality

Chapter I:
Kant: Moral Togetherness as a Relation of Rational Wills

0. Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to develop a notion of togetherness understood in terms of second-personal relationality – that is, the relation between particular individuals unmediated by third-personal concerns (or, as I will later call it following Martin Buber, the relation between I and You, unmediated by It) – as intrinsically morally charged. For this purpose, I will begin with a critical discussion of two influential theories that conceptualise moral relationality as third-personally mediated, more precisely as mediated by *rationality*, namely the theories of Immanuel Kant and of John McDowell. By showing up the limitations of their respective conceptions of togetherness (and its moral dimension), I will distance myself from two prominent variations of established – that is, reason-centred – moral philosophy while, at the same time, adumbrating the alternative account I will subsequently develop. While the next chapter’s discussion of McDowell’s Aristotelian virtue ethics will put the focus on moral meaning, education, sociality, internalisation, and perception, this first chapter engages in a critical discussion of the Kantian understanding according to which any relation, in order to reflect moral worth, must be understood as a relation of individual rational subjects, i.e. beings defined by their fundamental rational *self*-relation. At the centre of my criticism will stand the claim that, due to his construal of the subject qua rational will as the basic unit of all practical and moral matters, Kant can think togetherness at best in the form of *cooperation* between individual rational subjects or, differently put, as a relation that reflects moral worth because, and to the extent that, the separate relata have *good reason* to interact.

The chapter is divided into three sub-chapters. In the first sub-chapter, I engage with a standard reading of Kant’s moral philosophy that focusses on deliberation and decision. I will begin by giving a brief overview of some of the central themes of Kant’s moral thought with a special emphasis on his conception of the positive duty towards others, the only form of moral

interaction with others that his philosophy offers. Elucidating the limitations of this conception of moral relationality, I will turn to Kant's own later attempt to bring in love as a complement to duty and show that the resulting picture ultimately remains unsatisfactory.

In the second sub-chapter, I turn to a reading of Kant which shifts the focus away from the 'inside' of the subject's deliberation process and towards what it means for us to think ourselves "under the idea of freedom".³ After addressing the question what it means for the moral law to be unrepresentable and unknowable, I offer a brief outlook on how a moral relation to another might look like that is not an expression of an underlying concern with the lawfulness of one's own will. I then address the question of what it means for a will to be engaged, firstly by calling attention to Kant's failure to recognise the moral significance of the will's colouring – i.e. of *how* one wills in contrast to *what* one wills and *why* – and, secondly, by showing that the self-reflection that defines the will presupposes that there already is a relation between individuals who reflect on their motivation *together*. I end this sub-chapter by showing that Kant account of intersubjectivity fails to accommodate the idea of a togetherness which is not mediated by self-reflection but rather serves as its ground.

In the third part I tend to the, as it were, phenomenological presuppositions of Kant's understanding of relationality. The first section zooms in on the way in which Kant introduces the concept of the end-in-itself and how he weds it to absolute worth, indicating a reliance on a pre-theoretical experience of absolute worth with which we are acquainted from our everyday, dealings with one another. I then conclude the chapter by briefly delving into Kant's *Third Critique* and its attempt to develop a mode of relationality that is not conceptually mediated, namely that of the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful. I show that Kant indeed points us in the right direction, yet he still remains entangled by his own theoretical commitments, above all a limited understanding of the notion of *interest* and the inability to think 'beyond' the subject and its transcendental constitution.

1. Kant's Understanding of Togetherness as a Meeting of Wills

a. Reason as the Linchpin of all Moral (Inter-)Action

According to a standard reading, Kant claims that action – and, thus, also *inter*-action with others – is grounded in the deliberative efforts of the individual person qua subject imbued with

³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. & transl. by Allen W. Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 64.

a rational will.⁴ In order to shed light on the question what, on this reading of Kant, it means for one to be vis-à-vis *others*, it is thus irremissible beforehand to take a brief look at what it means to be *someone* in the first place.

Kant holds that what distinguishes human beings from all else in nature⁵ is that we can⁶ act *from reasons*.⁷ It is the capacity to act from reasons – to act on laws that we give to ourselves – that makes us free and, thus, sets us apart from non-rational nature, a vast conglomerate of merely passive objects wholly determined by natural laws. That by virtue of which we act from reasons Kant calls the *will*.⁸ The will is that which puts reason in action. Be it me asking my professor for counselling or me answering a work client’s question or me helping an old lady across the street or me having a beer with a friend – all of these can only be attributed to *me* as *my* actions if I am taken to having done them on the grounds of certain reasons and, thus, as expressions of my rational will.⁹ When being asked, for instance, why I helped the old lady across the street, I cannot give a natural scientific explanation in which I only appear as a link in the a chain of natural causality – i.e. I cannot refer to the natural law – but I am called upon

⁴ Cf. Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50–1 & esp. in the ‘Introduction’ (e.g. 6: our “practically rational nature [...] brings with it both the capacity for and the necessity of *choosing* our actions. Choice is our plight, our inescapable fate, as rational beings.”)

⁵ Kant makes clear, however, that it is quite thinkable that there could be other reason-endowed beings: “Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to be valid morally, i.e., as the ground of an obligation, has to carry absolute necessity with it; that the command ‘You ought not to lie’ is valid not merely for human beings, as though other rational beings did not have to heed it.” (*Groundwork*, 5; cf. also *ibid.*, 24) Thus, Kant’s interest is primarily on reason-endowed beings, not on human beings. (It should be added that in what follows, I will, except under specific circumstances, speak not of ‘rational beings’ but of ‘reason-endowed beings’ because it is closer to Kant’s original term *Vernunftwesen*.)

⁶ More precisely: *we cannot but think ourselves as able to act from reason(s)* because we cannot but think us “under the idea of freedom” (*ibid.*, 61.) Because we cannot but think ourselves as free, in other words, we have to think ourselves as being able to act on the basis of our own laws, namely those we represent to us in the form of reasons: “Every thing in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the faculty to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, i.e., in accordance with principles, or a *will*.” (*ibid.*, 29.)

⁷ First propounded in the antinomy of causality of freedom and causality in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (transl. & ed. by Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 535–7), Kant develops this thought mainly in the *Groundwork* (e.g. 73: “the human being presumes to claim a will that [...] thinks of actions through itself as possible, or indeed even as necessary [...]”) It should also be noted that while Kant himself speaks of *reason*, i.e. in the singular, I think it is in line to say, with Kant, that acting from reason means being able to produce *reasons*, i.e. to give accounts of our doings that show that they are not unreasonable. But as not everything we do *is* rational and, hence, we often do not have ‘real’ reasons for what we do, another, wider concept encompassing both the rational and non-rational accounts of our doings is needed – that of the *maxim* (which I will discuss below.)

⁸ Kant develops the connection of *will* and *action* mainly in part I of the *Groundwork* (9–21)

⁹ This does not presuppose the assumption that a reason is an entity that exists as it were ‘inside’ the depths of my psyche and which was already there before my acting, serving as the ground of its motivation and only waiting for me to discover it in retrospective reflection; rather, it must be understood as a precondition of thinking of oneself as a being who acts on its *own* ‘grounds’ because only then can one understand oneself as *someone* – i.e. a free and self-dependent being – and not merely as *something* – i.e. a being at the mercy of the external forces impinging on it. This, however, allows for the possibility that reasons may be *retrospectively* ascribed to oneself when trying to make sense of how one has acted. I will come back to this in chapter 2 below.

to give *my* reason, i.e. *my* law.¹⁰ So, I can only make sense of *myself* as interacting with others if I take this interaction to be grounded on *my* reasons. My reasons are, in turn, understood as the results of *my* deliberative efforts: having a reason for acting in this or that way means that I did not *have* to act as I did but that I had the choice to act differently and, hence, that I decided for one course of action rather than another. Only then does the question ‘Why did you act in this way (and not in that one)?’ make sense – and only then will it show, via one’s reasons, that one was not determined by either this or that but that one was free to make up one’s own mind, free to do what one wanted to do and, thus, that one is responsible for one’s action.¹¹

Importantly, this holds not only in relation to myself, or some, or most persons but necessarily to *everyone* to the extent that he or she is a subject, a practical being imbued with reason.¹² I thus relate to him, her, and them as to beings who are *essentially* identical to me. To relate as someone to someone else means to relate as a will to another will, as a being who makes sense of itself as acting from reasons to another being who does the same. Yet, this essence – the will as such – has, on Kant’s account, no content. No account of what the will *in itself* (i.e. in its being identical in all beings who have a will) wills can be given because our epistemic access to it is restricted to its mere form¹³ and this form is, in its turn, wedded to the content in which it appears. This *content*, however, is to be found only in the particular subject, that is, in how it conceptualises its own doings; more specifically, it becomes manifest in the connection of the action (the means) and the aim (the end) articulated in the *form* of a propositions such as ‘I drink coffee in order to work more effectively’ or ‘I spoke with my father because I did not want our relationship to deteriorate any further’.¹⁴

Such subjective articulations of one’s own motivations, rational or not, are what Kant calls *maxims*.¹⁵ The articulation of maxims in a propositional form has two important implications: on the one hand, it shows that maxims (and, hence, also reasons) are dependent on *someone*, some individual subject, having them. Thus, they are necessarily tied to the first-

¹⁰ For a good analysis of Kant’s notion of autonomy as that in virtue of which the subject can give itself its *own* law (instead of the law that the subject gives *to itself*), cf. Christoph Menke, *Autonomie und Befreiung: Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2018), 22–6.

¹¹ Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 57; I will further discuss the notion of *responsibility* in chapter 3.

¹² Cf. footnote 4 above.

¹³ Kant, *Groundwork*, 16; Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 13; for a thorough analysis of Kant’s prohairetic conception of action, cf. Tim Henning *Kants Ethik. Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2016), 52; for Aristotle’s discussion of *prohairesis*, cf. NE III.2-5.

¹⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, 44–5; Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 57–8.

¹⁵ For a thorough analysis of the concept of maxim and its significance for Kant’s moral philosophy, cf. Patricia Kitcher, “What Is a Maxim?,” *Philosophical Topics* 31, no. 1/2 (2003): 215–43.

personal perspective.¹⁶ On the other hand, it also follows that, despite being tied to the first-person perspective of the individual subject, maxims are, precisely by virtue of their propositional nature, *not* private but inherently open to all other subjects – and, hence, for critical assessment by all.¹⁷ This leads to the objective side of the will – the *moral law*.¹⁸

The claim that maxims are intrinsically open to critical assessment points to the issue that lies at the heart of Kant’s moral thought, namely the issue of their (moral-)normative status: it is precisely their formal character which lays our maxims open to critical assessment as regards their rationality or irrationality understood in the sense of their consistency or inconsistency.¹⁹ A rational maxim is a maxim the validity of which is not restricted to me and my personal wants and desires but one which could, in principle, be rationally affirmed by everyone else, too.²⁰ Maxims of such a kind, i.e. consistently willable maxims, are reasonable maxims – that is: reasons.²¹ Put differently, maxims, if they conform to (the universally shared capacity of) reason, are reasons.²² This is commonly referred to as the *universalisability* of reasons.²³ If they are out of line with reason, however – that is, if they contradict it by contradicting its own formal requirements – they are still maxims, yet irrational, partial²⁴ ones. Maxims have thus built into them the formal requirement of attaining the status of reasons, yet, due to the subject’s susceptibility to the irrational desire for particular objects, they can and

¹⁶ Kant, *Groundwork*, 16; this is not to say that reasons cannot be ascribed from the position of the spectator. They certainly often are. But even if they are, still the final critical authority on whether they are an appropriate explanation of why one acted in the way one did must remain the subject who carried out the action in question.

¹⁷ Andrew Reaths, *Agency and Autonomy in Kant’s Moral Theory. Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 19: the “procedure” of submitting “your actions to public scrutiny” is initiated by citing the maxim of your action, which commits you to view it, at least initially, as a sufficient explanation for what you did.

¹⁸ Kant, *Groundwork*, 16; 37.

¹⁹ For a perspicuous analysis of the formal character of the maxim, cf. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 75–6.

²⁰ Kant, *Groundwork*, 37–40.

²¹ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (transl. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 29: “Practical *principles* are propositions that contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or *maxims*, if the condition [under which they apply] is regarded by the subject as valid only for his will; but they are objective, or practical *laws*, if the condition is cognized as objective, i.e., as valid for the will of every rational being” (emphases in the original.)

²² *Ibid.*, *Groundwork*, 6; 50–1.

²³ This is expressed by the 1st and 2nd formulation of the categorical imperative, i.e. “*Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*” (*ibid.*, 37; emphasis in the original) & “*So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.*” (*ibid.*, 38; emphasis in the original.) For detailed discussions, cf. Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 76–110, esp. at 81–5; Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 61–5.

²⁴ Irrational maxims are partial in that they are defined in terms of ‘making an exception for oneself’ – presupposing that that the others do not act upon it, the subject with the irrational maxim exploits the status quo for its own benefit. This thought will be further examined in what follows.

often do fall short of this requirement.²⁵ In other words, it is an intrinsic requirement of the accounts we give of our motivations that they have a form to which all others can agree.²⁶

A maxim that I claim for myself while denying it to anyone else – such as, for instance, “I steal because I want to get rich” – is a maxim yet, because it is inconsistent, it is not a reason. It is inconsistent because it could not be everyone else’s reason as well, simply because the very possibility of it being my maxim depends on the fact that people generally do *not* act upon it – that is, only in circumstances in which people generally do not steal is it possible for me to steal in order to get rich. Another way of expressing this is that if I steal from others in order to get rich, then I degrade the others to a mere means to my ends and, thus, I exploit them. In stealing, I thus willingly degrade the reason of others to a means to my ends²⁷ and, hence, to the maxim which I must claim to be my reason. In this way, however, reason negates itself – (what I claim to be) *my* reason comes into conflict with reason *as such*. A contradiction arises and what I claim to be my reason is shown to be an irrational – and, hence, immoral – maxim. In other words, acting on irrational maxims means to act in ways that does not respect, but parasitically impinges upon, the others’ free will (qua practical reason *in actu*) by making an exception for me on the cost of everyone else.²⁸ This is what it means for Kant to act immorally.²⁹ Acting on rational maxims, however, shows that I do not act irrationally and, hence, not immorally.³⁰

It becomes clear that the question whether someone has acted on a universalisable maxims qua reason becomes an endeavour with a peculiar double nature, neither purely personal nor purely public: on the one hand, it remains intimately tied to the person whose maxim it is, as only she is the authority of what is to count as an appropriate articulation of why she acted in the way she did. On the other hand, it is always also a public matter, both because reasons can be ascribed also by others and because, once the respective person produces a maxim articulating what she did and to which end, everyone can critically assess whether it is in fact universalisable or not. The necessity of understanding ourselves as beings who articulate

²⁵ Marina Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” in *Religion Without Transcendence?*, eds. D. Z. Phillips & Timothy Tessin (London: Palgrave, 1997), 177–232, at 194: “Thus (the very thinking of) the material maxim involves the need that it fit into the *form* of the law.”

²⁶ Which means that if someone gives such an account, yet shows no interest in the others’ agreeing with it, the question would become pressing as to why she makes the effort of giving an account in the first place.

²⁷ This reflects the 3rd formulation of the categorical imperative: every rational being “ought to treat itself and all others *never merely as means*, but always *at the same time as end in itself*.” (ibid., 51; emphases in the original.)

²⁸ This point is brought out well by Tim Henning, *Kants Ethik*, 12–3. Indeed, acting from irrational maxims parasitically impinges upon not only the free will of *others* but also upon *my own*. In abusing others, I also abuse myself. Given that my present concerns lie on the relations between individuals and not on the individuals’ self-relation, this line of thought will not be developed further.

²⁹ Ibid., 13; for an illuminating discussion of the problematic consequences of this view (mainly that it fails to do justice to the gravity of evil), cf. Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” 200.

³⁰ I say ‘not immorally’ because acting on a rationally consistent maxim – a reason – does not by itself show that this reason reflects moral worth. I will propound this point below.

their motivations in a propositional form thus at the same time requires that we understand ourselves as beings whose motivations are not a merely private matter, restricted to our private endeavours and with no bearing on anyone else, but as public and open to critical assessment by all. The question of what a moral – i.e. universally valid – motivation is, is intrinsic to the very endeavour of spelling out one’s motivations. Following Arendt, one can thus say that “[p]ublicness is already the criterion of rightness in [Kant’s] moral philosophy”³¹ and that, accordingly, Kant thinks of morality as the “the coincidence of the private and the public”.³² This, then, must of course also hold for our interactions with others: whenever the moral worth (or its lack) of our interaction with others stands at issue, a maxim must be spelled out and subjected to critical assessment. Whether a way of interacting with others is moral – i.e. rational – thus hinges on whether the motivation that underlies it has an universalisable form indicating that it is not self-interested³³ but expressive of respect for all.

In the light of such a construal, the focus of the question what it means to be a good person towards others, to engage with them in ways that could be described as moral, shifts away from everyday notions such as ‘being kind’, ‘being honest’, ‘being forgiving’ or ‘being loving’ towards a concern with (inter-)acting from reasons. More specifically, it shifts towards a concern with practical motivations that are *not bad* in the sense of *inconsistent*, that is, with maxims that *do not* impinge on the others’ capability to act freely.³⁴ This yields a picture of interaction that is mainly negative in nature, describable in terms of keeping one’s distance from the other. As Barabas puts it: “The response appropriate to [the other under the description of an autonomous Will] is respect, expressed primarily in a refraining from interfering with his practical rationality”³⁵ and “in recognizing him as a limit on my action – an End to my ends. Morally speaking the other thus emerges as a do-not-touch, as what is not to be engaged with.

³¹ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures and Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992), 49.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ I use the term ‘self-interested’ for lack of a better alternative. It is meant in the sense of ‘grounded in inclination’ and, hence, done because one expects to ‘get something out of it’. It corresponds with Lévinas’ usage of the term *egoism* (cf. “The Trace of the Other,” in *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 345–59, at 345) – which I find even more misleading – and what I, along Buber, will refer to as *ego-ic* in chapter 3. Thus understood, even the kind of altruism in which the altruist thinks only about others and not at all about himself may be ‘self-interested’, namely when he ultimately does what he does only because it gives him pleasure, gratifies him, heightens his self-esteem, or the like. In other words, he does not do it because it is good to do it but because he likes to do it. In this sense, his actions do not reflect respect and, hence, no moral worth. Cf. *Groundwork*, 13–6; for a good critical discussion of altruism in such a ‘spirit of inclination’, cf. Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter: The Depth of Moral Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2002), 45–60.

³⁴ *Groundwork*, 48: The “principle of humanity and of every rational nature in general *as end in itself*” is “the supreme limiting condition of the freedom of the actions of every human being.”

³⁵ Marina Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” 198.

The basic moral relation to another – respect – is thus negative.”³⁶ Thus understood, the ideality of Kant’s “realm of ends”³⁷ would be everyone’s keeping his or her distance from everyone else. *Good* interaction would to the greatest extent amount to *no* interaction. While I agree that the Kantian account indeed emphasises distance, his moral thought also offers theoretical resources by means of which this all too austere picture of moral (non-)relationality is at least somewhat humanised. In what follows, I will thus examine two respects in which Kant can be said to bring relationality back into his understanding of morality, the first being the notion of positive duty and the second his account of friendship as a unity of love and respect.

b. Duty Towards Others, or: Moral Benevolence

i. The Double Negativity of Positive Duty

To develop what Kant means by *positive* duty, I first address what he means by *duty* as well as the difference between actions “in conformity with duty”³⁸ and actions “from duty.”³⁹

Now, showing that one’s practical motivations formally qualify as reasons does not show that they are of moral worth. That is so because fulfilling the formal requirements of reason may do no more than make one’s action morally *permissible*.⁴⁰ If, say, I travel the world and, on being asked why I do this, I reply ‘because I enjoy it’, then my maxim ‘I travel the world because I enjoy it’ is formally unproblematic because universalisable and, hence, it is a morally permissible reason. Yet that is only to show that it is not *immoral* qua irrational. It would be immoral and, hence, impermissible⁴¹ – because not universalisable – if I were, for instance, to reply ‘because I want to personally contribute as much as possible to the CO₂ emissions so that human civilisation collapses as quickly as possible’. Both the morally impermissible and the morally permissible maxim, however, coincide in showing that the deed in question was determined by inclination, not by reason. The source of the motivation of both is therefore *not* a moral one but rather that the former contingently coincides with the requirements of reason while the latter does not.⁴²

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kant, *Groundwork*, 51–4.

³⁸ Ibid., 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kant fully develops the idea of actions being rationally permitted or forbidden in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (in *Practical Philosophy*, transl. & ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88).

There is, however, a kind of maxim that is not merely morally permissible because universalisable but morally, i.e. categorically or universally, demanded. It is these maxims (and what makes them categorically demanded) that lies at the heart of Kant's conception of morality. Such maxims are found only where one faces a contradiction in a maxim's form because it is only in such a case that it is categorically demanded *not* to act in the way that is spelled out in the given maxim.⁴³ After having fooled someone, I may, for instance, tell myself that "I lied in order to reap the profits"; yet, if I assess the formal consistency of such a maxim, I will come to see that I cannot have rationally willed it – indeed, that neither I nor anyone else can never rationally will it. In this case, I face the insight that I must never lie – or, formulated positively, that I must always speak the truth.⁴⁴ For Kant, not lying, or speaking the truth, is a reason every rational being must subscribe to; hence, it is a categorical imperative – that is: a moral *duty*.⁴⁵ In this sense, moral duty is, at bottom, *negative*.⁴⁶

At this point, then, the differentiation between actions "in conformity with duty" and actions "from duty" becomes relevant. When I speak the truth for no other reason other than its being categorically demanded of me to never lie, then, according to Kant, I act from duty and my action reflects genuine moral worth. If, however, I have some kind of end for the sake of which I speak the truth – such as to impress others or simply because it pleases me – then I still manifestly do what duty requires from me, yet I do not do it from the right kind of motivation (which would be a purely rational one) but out of a given inclination. In such a case, I act in conformity with duty.⁴⁷ When I act in conformity with duty, my maxim is not only universalisable but rationally demanded; my moral shortcoming is, thus, that its being categorically demanded is, as it were, 'not enough' for me to will it but that I need a further, empirical incentive, an object of inclination: I do what is morally demanded yet only because *I want something* (such as 'to feel good'.)⁴⁸ The problem with inclination is, firstly, its

⁴³ For the four well-known examples Kant gives of this kind of contradiction, cf. *Groundwork*, 38–40; for a thorough discussion of the role of contradiction in Kant's moral philosophy, cf. Pauline Kleingeld, "Contradiction and Kant's Formula of Universal Law," *Kant-Studien* 108, no. 1 (2017): 89–115.

⁴⁴ This is a variation of Kant's well-known example of the one who considers breaking a promise (*Groundwork*, 39).

⁴⁵ Kant introduces the concept of *duty* in the *Groundwork*, 13; cf. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 63.

⁴⁶ This is a contentious claim given that it is widely acknowledged that Kant held that there were negative and positive duties. As I will show in what follows, however, even positive duties are, at bottom, negative.

⁴⁷ Kant, *Groundwork*, 13.

⁴⁸ Cf. Kant, *Groundwork*, 58–9; this does not mean that I must have taken 'feeling good' as the end of my action for the realisation of which 'speaking the truth' merely happens to be an appropriate means. I might indeed simply speak the truth in an autotelic (*selbstzweckhaft*) way, i.e. in a way in which I want nothing else beyond speaking the truth so that speaking the truth becomes both the end as well as the means (cf. Andreas Luckner, *Klugheit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 57–8 & Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 56.) Yet even if this is the case, my reason may still be based on my inclination to help them and, hence, remain at the mercy of the contingency and possible fickleness of my empirical will.

contingency: being part of our nature, it is subject to its caprices and so, if I, for instance, find a better way to feel good the next day (or if I come to desire something entirely different), then it may well be the case that I will lie to those whom I only told the truth the day before.⁴⁹ This, secondly, points to the fact that action grounded in inclination is what Kant calls an “alien impulse”⁵⁰, that is, it is not grounded in the subject’s own laws (autonomy)⁵¹ but in those of nature (heteronomy).⁵² Thus understood, acting from inclination is not genuine acting at all but nature taking over the steering wheel – in which case it is the moral duty of the subject to take it back. This self-assertion over against inclination *is* duty.⁵³ Acting merely in conformity with duty lacks the resolution to do what is good *because it is required* that distinguishes the good will and, thus, the autonomous subject. But again, ‘speaking the truth so as to feel good’ is a reason that could be had by everyone and so, it is not immoral.

According to the present reading of Kant, the phrase ‘acting from duty’ thus means to act in a way *because one has recognized* it to be rationally required, or, put differently: it is to act because one has recognized one’s maxim to be categorically demanded.⁵⁴ It means to act from a reason that, rationally, I *cannot not* recognize to bind me in whatever I do. Acting out of such a sense of requirement means acting out of *respect* for the law⁵⁵, that is, the moral law of reason, formulated in the categorical imperative.⁵⁶ I just suggested that what we can do by virtue of our rational nature is to determine the will *negatively*, namely by critically assessing and, where necessary, categorically rejecting certain reasons, namely reasons which are not

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6: “For as to what is to be morally good, it is not enough that it *conform* to the moral law, but it must also happen *for the sake of this law*; otherwise, that conformity is only contingent and precarious, because the unmoral ground will now and then produce lawful actions, but more often actions contrary to the law”; Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁵¹ Kant introduces the concepts of *autonomy* and *heteronomy* at *Groundwork*, 51; he develops it *ibid.*, 58.

⁵² Ibid., 58–9.

⁵³ ... which means that in the absence of inclination over against which to assert itself, there is no duty simply because the call of duty does not arise and because duty is what it is in virtue of this call (cf. Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 31: “Kant assumes throughout that acting from duty is possible only where rational self-constraint is required”.) This thought will be picked up again in my discussion of the relation of Kant to Buber in chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 47: “a right action is one that is done by a morally good person *because it is right*” (emphases in the original.)

⁵⁵ Kant, *Groundwork*, 16: “*Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law*” and “an action from duty is supposed entirely to abstract from the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will, so nothing is left over for the will that can determine it except the *law* as what is objective and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, hence the maxim of complying with such a law, even when it infringes all my inclinations.” (emphases in the original); for a thorough analysis of Kant’s understanding of what is involved in acting from duty, cf. Marca Baron, “Acting from Duty,” one of the essays appended to edition of Kant’s *Groundwork* with which I am presently working (91–110). As regards the concept of respect, Kant discusses it at length in ‘On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason’ in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 94–114.

⁵⁶ Kant introduces the notion of the *categorical imperative* at *Groundwork*, 31, yet develops it in its four formulations from 37–58.

universalisable simply because of their form.⁵⁷ Where we do, we thus arrive at a *negative*⁵⁸ (also called *perfect*⁵⁹ or *narrow*⁶⁰) duty, that is: a categorical prohibition. Sometimes, such negative duties can be re-formulated in positive terms without resulting in any complications (such as ‘I ought to speak the truth’ for ‘I must not lie’), yet sometimes they cannot (there is, e.g., no straightforward way of reframing in positive terms ‘I ought not to steal’.) Regardless of whether a positive reformulation can be given or not, all duties of this kind are *negative* because they, at bottom, prohibit certain forms of action.⁶¹ Not doing something on the basis of having recognized that doing so would mean to act irrationally is thus, Kant holds, one central way in which rationality comes to bear upon how we act and interact with others.

However, Kant holds that there are also *positive*⁶² (also called *imperfect*⁶³ or *wide*⁶⁴) duties, both towards oneself and towards others. That is, reason itself tells us that we should not only *reject* irrational maxims by recognising the categorical imperatives that result from their negation but that we are rationally necessitated to adopt certain maxims which make us proactively *strive towards* ‘doing good’. What that exactly means and how Kant arrives at this conclusion will be explicated in what follows.

The examination of the internal structure of the concept of the will reveals that, apart from there being maxims which, by their very form, contradict themselves when the attempt is made to universalize them, there are also other maxims the universalization of which, while not directly resulting in a self-contradiction, are in some way in a conflict with the concept of the will itself⁶⁵. This can be illustrated by means of Kant’s example of the duty to develop one’s own practical abilities (or “talents”⁶⁶ as Kant calls them): the reason why it is immoral to let these abilities rust is that this would conflict with the concept of the will as a self-developing capacity.⁶⁷ Kant’s concept of the will is defined not only by its function, namely its striving to set itself ends and realise them through action, but moreover by its striving to fulfil its function

⁵⁷ In reference to Onora O’Neill’s influential essay “Consistency in Action” (in *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Critical Essays*, ed. Paul Guyer (Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 103–31), such formally non-universalizable maxims are often described as leading to a *contradiction in conception* (ibid., 119–22).

⁵⁸ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 544.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 567.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 521.

⁶¹ Strictly speaking, the injunction ‘I must not lie’ is not identical to ‘I must speak the truth’ because one might also live up to it by, for instance, taking a vow of secrecy.

⁶² Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 544.

⁶³ Ibid., 521.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 521.

⁶⁵ Hence the common label *contradiction in the will*, again in reference to O’Neill’s essay “Consistency in Action,” 122–7.

⁶⁶ Kant, *Groundwork*, 17 & esp. 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

well. This entails that the will wants to realise itself ever more fully as a practical capacity.⁶⁸ It follows, in turn, that the will both wills to a) not merely realise the ends which it set itself but realise them *in the best and fullest way* and to b) not merely be able to set itself ends but to be able set itself *ever more, and more diverse, ends*.⁶⁹ Thus, the will has an intrinsic end of self-development so that, accordingly, willing in line with one's own will means to endorse such a self-development.⁷⁰ So, if I want to lead an idle life, critically reflecting on why I want to do this will reveal that I cannot rationally will it because that would contradict what my will must, by its very nature, will, namely the flourishing of my own practical abilities.⁷¹ If I want what is contrary to the development of my will, I basically use my will in order to promote its own atrophy. Accordingly, the respective duty is not appropriately captured in a simple negative formulation expressing a prohibition – i.e. *do not be idle!* – because that would, apart from distorting it so as to make it look like a contradiction in thought, miss what is positive in it, namely the will's self-necessitation to self-development. Instead, it is more aptly understood in the form of a double negative: 'Do *not not* develop your practical abilities!' Although this duty also does not positively determine how one should act *in concreto*, it still yields a single, most abstract "end in general"⁷² to which we, as rational beings, must subscribe, namely the development of our practical abilities. Thus, claiming that the will must necessarily will its own self-development is not a claim regarding its content but regarding its form – a form, however, which by itself suggests a certain direction and, therefore, gives rise to some contents rather than others. How exactly we are supposed to live up to such a duty is, however, beyond what Kant lays out as the domain of morality proper (and will be discussed in more detail in the next section).

The corresponding duty to help others in realizing their happiness – which gradually brings me to my own concern – is surprisingly similar in structure: One *cannot not* will to promote the others' happiness because in a world in which acting on a reason such as 'I will not help others (in becoming happy) because of X' would be law, i.e. a world in which individuals would not help each other in realizing each other's undertakings that stand in the

⁶⁸ Henning, *Kants Ethik*, 44–59.

⁶⁹ Ibid.; this thought found its way into the heart of the philosophy of Hegel, in the poignant formulation "The free will which wills the free will" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, transl. T. M. Knox, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46.

⁷⁰ Cf. Jennifer K. Uleman, *An Introduction to Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 111: "Kant's moral law, expressed in the categorical imperative, has as its specific end the free rational activity of the will itself."

⁷¹ This line of argument is perspicuously developed by O'Neill in "Consistency in Action," 123–4. Another good rendering of it can be found in Henning's *Kants Ethik*, 44–59.

⁷² Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 517; Kant develops the idea of the general ends of practical reason – "*one's own perfection and the happiness of others*" (ibid.; emphasis in the original) – ibidem on pages 517–20.

service of their respective ideas of a happy life, one's own will would not get the support it might need to realise its own ends (or to realise them well) in its own striving to happiness.⁷³ Yet this would again be in conflict with the internal structure of the will which per definition wills to realise the ends it sets. This is so because willing the ends one sets oneself includes taking up the means available for their realisation and that, in turn, includes the possibility of having to accept the help of others.⁷⁴ So, ultimately, the strictly moral reason for helping others is not liking, loving, cherishing them, or wanting to see them happy – which, for Kant, would all fall under the heading of 'acting from inclination' – but that deciding not to do so would mean to promote a world in which the will – and, thus, one's own will – would be deprived in the support it might need in order to go about doing what it does in an effective way⁷⁵. Moral benevolence is, according to Kant, the promotion of the well-being of others on the basis that oneself might be compelled to accept the help of others in one's quest for one's own happiness – that is, "benevolence from principles."⁷⁶ It is basically propelled by the thought that 'we are all in the same boat' and that, given that I might want your help, it would be inconsistent for me not to also help you.⁷⁷

ii. Helping 'Humanity' and Helping Others

This last mentioned claim points in two important directions, one *beyond* Kant, i.e. to a criticism of his theoretical presuppositions, while the other points *inside* Kantian moral thought, that is, to an immanent criticism of his construal of morality, and one of which he apparently became

⁷³ The underlying – and in my view highly problematic – assumption is that all living beings strive by their nature for their own self-preservation and self-development and, accordingly, that such selfishness must form the backdrop of any theory of morality. While this is no doubt a view that far predates Kant, Kant explicitly addresses and develops this view, the central concept being the *organism*, in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer; transl. Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 244–55. For a helpful discussion – although not in a critical spirit – of the connection between Kant's concept of the organism and his conception of morality, cf. Paul Guyer, "From Nature to Morality: Kant's New Argument in the 'Critique of Teleological Judgment'," in *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom. Selected Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 314–42, esp. 320 ff.

⁷⁴ This is how Kant puts it in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 572: "everyone who finds himself in need wishes to be helped by others. But if he lets his maxim of being unwilling to assist others in turn when they are in need become public, that is, makes this a universal permissive law, then everyone would likewise deny him assistance when he himself is in need, or at least would be authorized to deny it. Hence the maxim of self-interest would conflict with itself if it were made a universal law, that is, it is contrary to duty. Consequently the maxim of common interest, of beneficence toward those in need, is a universal duty of human beings, just because they are to be considered fellowmen, that is, rational beings with needs, united by nature in one dwelling place so that they can help one another." For helpful elucidations, again cf. O'Neill, "Consistency in Action," 122–3.

⁷⁵ It can thus be said that, on the Kantian picture, helping others in a way that reflects moral worth reflects a concern with neither them qua particular individuals nor with oneself as a particular individual but rather with the will as such, abstract and impersonal. Below, especially in chapter 3, I will try to show that this does not merely go against widely shared intuitions regarding morality but that it is indeed morally highly problematic.

⁷⁶ Kant, *Groundwork*, 53.

⁷⁷ Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 60.

aware in his later writings. While I think the former leads to the deepest objection to the Kantian account, namely a criticism of the idea that in moral respects we are to consider ourselves solely as rational wills, I want to begin by having a closer look at the latter. The issue is that the duty to promote the happiness of others does – at least in most circumstances – *not* by itself entail that one actually has to engage with *individual* others.⁷⁸ This is so because the duty as such is formulated as an entirely abstract end (of the will), namely simply as the duty to promote the happiness of others – full stop.⁷⁹ The duty does not state whose happiness one should promote. It is per se not restricted to certain groups such as ‘my family and friends’ or ‘those I happen to meet’ and it does not favour anyone as a receiver of one’s support. Nor does the duty specify when or how one should strive to actualize it. Its only specification as an *end* entails that it is demanded to act in its favour unless there are other stricter (i.e. negative) duties which require unrestricted acquiescence – although, of course, perfecting oneself by cultivating one’s talents is the other such moral end, meaning that it must be left to the judgment of the respective subject which of the two positive duties to apply and how.⁸⁰ Given this, it has to be born in mind that there are many ways in which one can promote the well-being of others, many of which do not involve personally interacting with others, such as, for instance, being an outstanding medical scientist developing new medicines or being a prominent activist fighting for a social cause. These seem to be perfectly sound ways in which one can live up to one’s duty towards humanity. Even the one who, having taken a vow of silence and living as a hermit in total isolation, may live up to his duty towards others, for instance by writing books meant for the instruction of others or by dedicating his life to help save the natural environment.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Kant seems to assume that the reason that we do interact with one another qua individuals is that we are “united by nature in one dwelling place” (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, 572).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 519: “When it comes to my promoting happiness as an end that is also a duty, this must [...] be the happiness of *other* human beings, *whose* (permitted) *end I thus make my own end as well.*”

⁸⁰ It may be objected that positive duties cannot be as demanding as I portray them given that Kant himself states that, in regards to such duties, “a playroom” exists, meaning that “the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty.” (*ibid.*, 521.) So, it is indeed the case positive duties cannot prescribe actions but leave room – but that does not mean that there is room as regards the scope of positive duties as such. This becomes clear in the sentence following the one just quoted: “But a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another” (*ibid.*) In other words, playroom exists but only in determining which of the two positive duties to practically implement and how. And that amounts to the point I just made. (One more point: Kant does make it clear that one ought not to entirely wear oneself out trying to make others happy and perfecting oneself but that one should also ‘take a break’ in order to look after oneself – this, however, is not to put an end to the positive duties but is itself intrinsic to them: taking a break to look after myself is a *means* to the better fulfilment of the *ends* of making others happier and perfecting myself (cf. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 522–4).)

⁸¹ Against this, it may be held that the life of such a hermit – or of generally everyone living in such a detached way – would be against duty in that one would thereby bring oneself into a situation in which one could not anymore expect the help from others which Kant states is intrinsic to the concept of the will (*Groundwork*, 40). I agree that this suggests that one ought never to live so far away from people as to be unable to ask them for their help when need be (apart from the fact that isolation means eluding the “feeling of virtue” (*The Metaphysics of*

In the light of this, we can now re-imagine the *realm of ends* as a society in which everyone, on top of striving to realise his or her own ends while keeping his or her distance to others, also makes the ends of the others his or her own, yet in a way that for the most part abolishes *personal* interaction. Seeing that my elderly neighbours are afraid to go to the supermarket when a dangerous virus sweeps the world, I thus have no moral incentive to offer them my help directly but could just as well help to start an initiative that looks to it that food is delivered to the elderly in my neighbourhood – or, even better (because promoting their freedom): I could invest in the development of affordable high-end masks that markedly decrease the risks of an infection, allowing the elderly to go shopping again. Conveniently enough, this also makes it unnecessary to look after my grandmother who always bores me so with her stories...⁸²

This being said, it should be pointed out that there *are* extraordinary situations in which my positive duty, although entirely abstract, does – more or less – determine a concrete action towards others. In line with the problem I just sketched, Henning describes the gap between the abstract end set by reason and its practical implementation as follows: “Perfect [...] duties demand specific actions. Imperfect [...] duties often only demand that you do *something*. What exactly that is, is, from the perspective of morality, arbitrary or contingent”⁸³. It may *prima facie* seem as if how I go about attempting to realise this duty is entirely up to my empirical “arbitrary choice”, my *Willkür*.⁸⁴ But if that were the case then I could, say, walk past a horrible car accident with seriously injured persons lying about without even hesitating whether I should help yet still retain a clear conscience because I might, after all, promote the others’ well-being in some other ways – say, by donating money to a charity specialised in helping car accidents.⁸⁵

Morals, 588) promoted in a social environment.) On the other hand, however, Kant seems to have far greater problems with the notion of asking for help than with freely offering it. This comes out markedly when he says that, because it is “a heavy burden to feel chained to another's fate and encumbered with his needs” (ibid., 586), in friendship, “each is generously concerned with sparing the other his burden and bearing it all by himself, even concealing it altogether from his friend, while yet he can always flatter himself that in case of need he could confidently count on the other's help” (ibid.).

⁸² But what if it would make my grandmother happy if I were to listen to her stories every once in a while? Well, as Kant puts it: “It is for them [i.e. the others] to decide what they count as belonging to their happiness; but it is open to me to refuse them many things that *they* think will make them happy but that I do not, as long as they have no right to demand them from me as what is theirs” (ibid, 519). In other words, grandma has a right to ask me about coming over for a visit but if I think that this would not really make her happy, or if perhaps there would be other ways to make her happy, then I can respectfully decline. Apart from that, it is, as was said, up to me how to fulfil my duty towards others; so, if I leave my grandmother by herself and lonely, I may reveal myself as rather callous, but if I invest my time and energy in, say, helping the poor instead, then this callousness will not be a moral blemish but ‘merely’ a psychological one.

⁸³ Henning, *Kants Ethik*, 73; my translation, emphasis in the original

⁸⁴ Kant introduces the term *Willkür* – somewhat unhappily translated as ‘choice’ or ‘arbitrary choice’ – in the *Groundwork*, 46, yet develops in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 375–82.

⁸⁵ The ‘reverse scenario’ is discussed by Raimond Gaita, namely that of the absurdity of the idea that one may one may suffer a bad conscience, and even be haunted, because one had failed to send money to Oxfam (cf.

Again, Henning offers a fruitful explanation of how the positive duty to do good to others is to be understood:

Let us assume you come past a scene of accident. It is clear that, apart from you, in the near future no one who may help will come by. You are not in danger if you help and nothing of all too big a significance for you will be lost if you do. And also in other regards, there is no weighty moral reason that counts against it. It would be implausible to say that morality would still leave you leeway [Spielraum]. On the contrary, it appears as definitely wrong not to help in such circumstances. [...] It is, after all, your duty to pursue the end of helping others and to save them from adversity. To have such an end also includes to seek for the best way to put it into effect. Here, an unrivalled clear occasion [Gelegenheit] to fulfil your duty presents itself to you. At the same time [...], no other moral duty is present [besteht] which prohibits [you] from making use of exactly this occasion [Gelegenheit]. Thus, there is no other duty which accounts for you not making use of the occasion; instead, you positively decide to not pursue the obligatory end. In such a case, Kant's ethics would have the correct result: not to help would be wrong.⁸⁶

Thus, the duty to *not* promote the well-being of others – yielding the as such undetermined end of precisely this: *promoting* the well-being of others – can indeed have a determinate content *if the circumstances are accordingly*. This is so because, according to Henning, the indeterminacy does not make a duty less strict, lenient, or even supererogatory⁸⁷, but instead serves to explain its relation to other duties. If I, for instance, would have to kill someone in order to help the person who had the accident, then this would not be allowed because a negative (perfect) duty is in the way. (That is to say: because a negative duty unambiguously states a prohibition by making it clear what *not* to do, the positive duty at issue, being wider and, hence, more flexible in how it may be lived up to, has to be fulfilled in some other way, which does not conflict with the negative one⁸⁸.) And if I would pass by the scene of accident while driving my seriously ill grandmother to the hospital, then deciding whom I should help would not be a matter of duty anymore because, after all, positive duty demands of me simply to help others

Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception (London: Routledge, 2002), 55–60). Gaita's point – both in this discussion and in his moral philosophy more generally – is that, especially in cases of wrongdoing, morality has an irreducibly personal and relational dimension. I will discuss Gaita at length in chapter 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 74–5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–72; for a more thorough exploration of the notion of the supererogatory in the context of Kant's thought, cf. Marcia Baron, "A Kantian Take on the Supererogatory," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33, no 4 (2016), 347–62.

⁸⁸ Kant, *Groundwork*, 38; Henning, *Kants Ethik*, 72–3.

how I can – and given that I can, by virtue of my limited practical capacities, only help one of them, my duty will simply be to do just that. Deciding *whom* I should help in a scenario like this will, thus, be beyond duty⁸⁹. Generally speaking, it can thus be said that if there are no other duties which either compete with, or even override, the duty to do good to others, then there is no excuse not to act from it and ‘do good where it is called for’ – it is, after all, an end and having an end means doing what is possible towards its realisation.

Before continuing, I want to add some critical thoughts on Kant’s understanding of the moral character of helping others that anticipates my later discussion of the issue. Is there not, first of all, something at least morally tasteless about the scenario of someone seeing someone else in a severe car crash and stopping to reflect on whether he has weighty reasons *not* to help?⁹⁰ Sure, there are scenarios when *not* helping someone seems to be called for, such as in the scenario in which one’s grandmother also requires urgent medical attention – but in such scenarios, one would, as I said, not have to reflect on whether one need *not help* but rather on *whom one should (not) help*. Faced with having to decide to help either my grandmother or the man trapped in the burning car, I may very well frantically think through both alternatives – yet that will not be a reflection on whether the situation is such that *helping* (as such) is morally required from me but rather on *how* I should do what I have to do, namely to help.

Secondly, even if it would be granted that stopping to reflect on whether one should help is morally unproblematic, the list which Henning gives us as possible reasons for not helping the person who just suffered a possibly serious accident reads somewhat like a charade. Reflecting on whether one really has to help at all is, at least in many situations, *per se* morally

⁸⁹ Although I do not think Kant anywhere explicitly states it, I nonetheless do not think that even in such a situation, the decision can thus be left up to one’s caprice. Given that it is, after all, still the will that has to implement the duty in practice, it will most likely be *practical* considerations that will be decisive, such as ‘Who has the higher chance to survive?’ or ‘Whose life will be less compromised if they survive?’

⁹⁰ The comedian Louis C.K. has a sketch in which he addresses this iffy matter in a wonderfully subtle way. In the sketch, Louis C.K. tells the story of how an elderly lady slips and falls, himself and several other bystanders witnessing the incident. The focus of the story lies on the fraction of the second which immediately follows the lady’s fall: none of those who saw it (and who now see her lying on the floor) simply rushes towards her so as to help. Instead, they all turn their eyes away from her and towards each other in order to instantly negotiate, simply via their glances, whose responsibility it will be to look after the lady (Louis C.K. getting the ‘short end of the stick’), thus exposing the absurdity of the situation and the ‘immorality’ of us human beings. In the sketch, weighing whether one should help or not is carried out not in introspective reflection but face-to-face with others (which in fact already yields a more sophisticated picture of deliberation than the one presently discussed); nonetheless, the issue in question remains: the psychological set-up behind the looking towards the others in order to determine who will take the responsibility could be described along the lines of ‘Do I *really* have to help? Is there maybe not someone else who would do it instead?’ The joke only works because a) we have all found ourselves in such or similar situations and b) because we are all implicitly aware of there being something deeply off about reacting in such a way. Precisely because we are somehow aware that we all should not have been primarily concerned with each other but with the old lady, and precisely because we are equally aware that we should not see the responsibility to help as a burden which, if possible, should be avoided, does the sketch work as it does. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x598orzdu0&t=85s&ab_channel=SaturdayNightLive; from 1:23 onwards)

problematic; it becomes even more problematic, however, if one imagines that someone then decides – with a clear conscience⁹¹ – *not* to help because he can be sure that very soon, the next person will stop to help or because he has seen action movies in which cars explode after they had an accident, killing everyone in the vicinity.

Granted, there are certainly scenarios in which these would be good reasons not to help – for instance when you see that directly behind you is an ambulance or when you see that the car’s tank is indeed about to blow up. Yet, even in such scenarios, it seems that something of great moral importance is missed when suggesting that what is morally important in a situation such as this is the *right decision*, for this suggests that, morally speaking, the matter is basically settled once you recognise that the attempt to help would be futile and, hence, ‘decide’ to drive on – as if it would be of no moral significance if, in the light of the realisation that you *can do* nothing, you may just as well stop being concerned with the situation and with the fate of those in it. And, indeed Kant himself seems to suggest that in such a situation – as indeed in *any* situation – feeling compassion would reflect have no moral significance at all: “when another suffers and, although I cannot help him, I let myself be infected by his pain (through my imagination), then two of us suffer, though the trouble really (in nature) affects only *one*. But there cannot possibly be a duty to increase the ills in the world and so to do good *from compassion*.”⁹² It seems that Kant’s delimitation of morality to action and the nature motivation distorts something basal and essential to our everyday understanding of morality, namely that it has to do with that, and how much, we matter to one another simply qua individuals.⁹³ Here, we get a first hunch of what will become an important theme later in the dissertation, namely that the preoccupation with duty – indeed with any rational criteria – can lead to a callousness towards, even an neglect of, individuals that is itself *morally* problematic.⁹⁴

Yet, I think Henning’s above quoted analysis nonetheless holds: commitment to the positive duty towards others can determine concrete actions towards them if the circumstances present a clear occasion to exert one’s duty and are, moreover, such that they do not allow for any other course of action. But even if that is granted, it is clear that such a positive determination of action through duty is highly exceptional and cannot – and is not intended to⁹⁵

⁹¹ While conscience plays virtually no role in the *Groundwork* (it is merely mentioned once *en passant* (39)), Kant dedicates one rather brief discussion to it in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (124–7) and eventually ascribes to it a somewhat more prominent role in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (524, 528–30.) I will to a (critical) discussion of conscience in chapters 4 and 6, both Kantian and otherwise.

⁹² Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 575; emphases in the original.

⁹³ While this is one of the guiding thoughts of the dissertation as a whole, it will play an especially important role from chapters 3 to 6.

⁹⁴ To anticipate this, cf. Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 141–50

⁹⁵ That is: Kant was certainly aware of the fact that that there must be a kind of sociality – partly natural, partly what he famously termed an “unsocial sociability” (*Towards Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics*,

– serve to account for all possible kinds of positive engagements with others. And not only that: it falls considerably short to capture the moral significance that we attribute to our relations to one another.

c. Love as Duty's Complement

Before turning to love, it should be maintained that even in his later moral philosophy, Kant's conception of morality proper does not at any point involve the caring about *individual* others. From the standpoint of morality, caring about individuals and their well-being is and remains a matter of inclination. One ultimately does it because one *feels* drawn to particular individuals. As laid out above, a good will yields action out of a rational concern with others as embodiments – or, as Cavell puts it, “hosts”⁹⁶ – of reason, i.e. a concern with humanity understood as the universally distributed free rational will. This, in turn, only entails turning to individual persons to the extent that it serves to further humanity – as *occasions* for duty.⁹⁷ Still, Kant still struggles to connect duty with love, not because our actions are morally better when done lovingly but rather because loving others as it were enlarges the purview of duty.

How is this to be understood? As I read him, Kant suggests the following picture: It is our moral duty to promote the happiness of others. The state that every human being, qua natural being, strives for is its own happiness.⁹⁸ Now, as I said above, one can contribute to the happiness of others in a plethora of ways which do not involve actually engaging with *individual* others, that is, person to person, face to face. Still, what it *does* involve are the others' *ends*. This is so because while no one has a clear idea as to what her happiness would so much as *amount to*, let alone how they could *attain it*⁹⁹, it is at the end of the day the individual subject who has to set herself the ends which she takes to be best suited for realising her respective

Peace, and History, ed. Pauline Kleingeld, transl. David L. Cooclosure (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 6) – in order for the concept of duty to get any ‘grip’ in the first place.

⁹⁶ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 399.

⁹⁷ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 597; while Kant apparently saw no problem with speaking (or writing) in such a way, this is different in Gaita's discussion of Kant – although not speaking derisively, Gaita contextualises the idea of others as ‘occasions’ of exercising duty in such a way that its problematic character comes clearly to the fore (*Good and Evil*, 145.)

⁹⁸ Kant, *Groundwork*, 15: “all human beings always have of themselves the most powerful and inward inclination to happiness, because precisely in this idea all inclinations are united in a sum.” And later, *ibid.*, 32: “The hypothetical imperative that represents the practical necessity of the action as a means to furthering happiness is assertoric. One may expound it as necessary not merely to an uncertain, merely possible aim, but to an aim that one can presuppose safely and *a priori* with every human being, because it belongs to his essence” (emphasis in the original).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*: “the human being cannot make any determinate and secure concept of the sum of satisfaction of [all inclinations], under the name of ‘happiness’”. And later, *ibid.*, 34: “the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate concept that although every human being wishes to attain it, he can never say, determinately and in a way that is harmonious with himself, what he really wishes and wills.”

individual happiness (as well as the means she takes to be best suited for realising these ends.)¹⁰⁰ It is integral to respecting others that one respect their ends as that through which they hope to find their happiness¹⁰¹ – and as *all* our natural¹⁰² ends are directed towards happiness, one is thus also obligated to respect their (however vague) respective visions of happiness as well as of how to attain it (as long as it is not in conflict with the demands of rationality). The positive duty towards others shows that respect, while actualised in keeping one’s distance from others, entails a ‘distanced support’ in the form of making the others’ ends one’s own.¹⁰³ This freely willed adoption of the ends of others, it is true, will remain on the level of impersonal support to the extent that the relationship to these others is distant and impersonal – but it need not be.

Take, firstly, politician who is in the position to exert his power so as to influence the lives of the many. Given the sheer amount of individuals the ‘many’ comprises, there exists for him not even the possibility to get to know those on behalf of whom he decides. Still, he will find himself morally obligated to ask himself what it would mean for him – that is, in relation to the scope of his practical power – to have the best positive impact on the well-being of all the many he does not, cannot get to know. He might decide that, given the current social issues, the best way for him to live up to his positive duty towards the citizens is to advocate for a reform of the health care system. Given that he has a general knowledge of human nature, he can reasonably assume that what all people want is a good life, and, as part of a good life is a good health, everyone can be assumed to also want a good health and, thus, a good health care system. The politician thus does not know the specific ends of those in whose name he wants to exert his power, not only because he simply does not happen to know them, to stand in a personal relationship with them, but because it would be far too many in order for him to possibly know even a mere fraction of them and, thus, their respective individual ends. A manager of a small company who feels that the employees are unhappy, on the other hand, *could* (at least to a certain extent) get to know all of the, say, dozen employees personally, find out about what they value at the workplace and what they think could be improved, thus taking

¹⁰⁰ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 519; cf. also Andreas Luckner “Klugheit und Orientierung. Historisch-systematische Ortsbestimmungen,” in *Klugheit: Begriff – Konzept – Anwendungen*, ed. Arno Scherzberg, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 3–23, at 10–1.

¹⁰¹ Kant further differentiates between natural and moral happiness, the latter being the “satisfaction with one's person and one's own moral conduct, and so with what one *does*” (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, 519.) As this kind of happiness cannot be procured by setting oneself ends, I will not consider it here.

¹⁰² That is, with the exception of the two moral ends of self-perfection and making others happier.

¹⁰³ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 519: “When it comes to my promoting happiness as an end that is also a duty, this must therefore be the happiness of *other* human beings, *whose* (permitted) *end I thus make my own end as well*” (emphases in the original); cf. also Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 100–1.

all of their positions into consideration to try to make everyone happier.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, however he *need not* because doing so is, as already stated, not demanded by morality, at least not as long as there are other occasions in his life for fulfilling his duty towards others.

But apart from the fact that there are relationships into which we are simply ‘thrown’, such as the relationships to those who raised us and where around when we were still dependent (especially the relationship to the mother)¹⁰⁵, there are of course other settings in which relationships to individual others *do* come to develop, and in such a way that reason is not required as a source of motivation. Relationships of that kind are taken care of by what Kant calls inclination – it is simply part of our natural make-up that we happen to like, adore, are drawn to, fall for, want to be there for and care about particular others.¹⁰⁶ The most pronounced such inclination towards particular others is love.¹⁰⁷ Those who love one another need no sense of duty in order to seek out one another’s presence, they simply do – and while this does not, according to Kant, carry any moral weight, it is by itself not in conflict with it either¹⁰⁸. Furthermore, given that the lovers already care about (and for) each other, they will be close to, and familiar with, the respective others’ wants and needs. Being with my girlfriend includes at least partly knowing what she wants and strives for, what she cares about and fears, what she wishes and dislikes, both in concrete everyday situations as well as ‘in life in general’. And given that is the case, i.e. given that I know *her* concrete ends, I will (if I am a Kantian) take this to be an occasion to exert my duty towards rational humanity. Again: the relation to the

¹⁰⁴ If he only does this in order to curb productivity, then he will, of course, not live up to his duty but simply act according to the hypothetical imperatives (cf. *Groundwork*, 31–33) involved in profit maximisation.

¹⁰⁵ This casts a new light on the ‘grandma example’ from footnote 82: even if, early in life, I decide to lead a solitary life without engaging, or entertaining any relationships with, others, the relationships that have shaped me when I was young will continue to accompany me. So, if I would know that my grandmother was still alive and that nothing would make her happier than my visit, then this would present another person’s concrete end serving me as an occasion to exercise my duty. That does not mean that I will have to take this occasion – I may, again, also help humanity in other, more impersonal ways – but its presence will indicate that there is a relationship from which I am unable to abscond.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Towards Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, 6–7: “Human beings have an inclination to *associate* with one another because in such a condition they feel themselves to be more human, that is to say, more in a position to develop their natural predispositions.”

¹⁰⁷ Meaning that, as Kant himself says, love is, at bottom, self-interested: to love something means to “regard it as favorable to my own advantage” (*Groundwork*, 16). It also means that to the extent they are governed by inclination, relationships must always remain at the mercy of the inconstancy and fickleness of empirical nature (a point to which I will return below.)

¹⁰⁸ The problematic cases only arise if love is pitted against requirements of duty as, for instance, if one of the two lovers assumes that revealing a painful truth might lead her psychologically unstable partner to take his own life. For Kant, it would be the morally required thing to speak the truth regardless of what the consequences may be, even if it would conflict with love’s requirements. From the perspective of love, on the other hand, one may withhold the truth out of love for the other – which is not to say that this would be unproblematic: if, out of concern for the other, I decide to keep quiet, I will be pained by the fact that a barrier has been erected between myself and my beloved and that, thus, we are not fully together in love anymore (I thank Hugo Strandberg for pointing this out to me.) While I cannot at present delve deeper into the implications of this issue, I will return to the question of what it means to love, and to relate lovingly, with one another, in chapter 5.

other is not of moral significance to the extent that I love and care about the other qua *individual* other but, rather, to the extent that she presents a concrete occasion for the exertion of duty, namely in the case that one, for whatever reason and out of whichever circumstances, happens to know her ends. Often (but not always), inclination simply plays an important role in becoming familiar with the other's ends to begin with.

Korsgaard supplements this by an important observation: "Once you have adopted a purpose and become settled in its pursuit, certain emotions and feelings will naturally result."¹⁰⁹ In other words, inclination – and, thus, also love – is not something which is simply either there or not but something which may follow the very purposes we set ourselves. Someone may, for instance, decide to work as a nurse because she wants to have a positive impact on the lives of others. When she starts her job, she will relate to the patients quite impersonally – they will already present to her occasions for furthering humanity, yet not in such a way that is connected to their personal ends.¹¹⁰ When she gradually gets to know them, however, she will likely develop personal relationships with at least some of them. As a result, she will come to develop a sense of their suffering and misery, learn about their fears and hopes, their regrets and wishes. Thus already, the scope of her occasions for doing good towards humanity will widen. Moreover, she may find some of the find some of the patients to be wonderful persons with whom she can laugh and to whose stories she likes to listen; she may even come to love one of them (or more.) If so, she will have come to develop an inclination towards them qua individuals. This inclination to them, however, will in its turn motivate her to engage with them more, to get to know them even better, and, accordingly, provide her with ever more and more nuanced and specific occasions of exercising her moral duty towards others. Thus "participating and sharing sympathetically in the other's wellbeing through the morally good"¹¹¹ will not increase the moral worth of what she does but it will display the interrelation of (natural) inclinations and (moral) duty: It was through her (abstract and impersonal) moral end of furthering rational humanity that she came to engage with them to begin with, yet in and through their engaging with them, she developed inclinations to them which, in turn, provided her with

¹⁰⁹ Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 59.

¹¹⁰ Of course, one must also differentiate between what she does because it is her duty *as a nurse* and what she does because it is her duty *towards others*. So, it is imaginable that a nurse may help others but only because of the money (although given the salaries nurses mostly receive, this is quite unlikely.) In that case, it does not reflect moral worth. On the other hand, her being a nurse will necessarily play a role in her sense of duties towards others, simply because she would not be in that position of helping others if she would not be a nurse. In the 'morally ideal' way, she would have chosen to become a nurse out of a sense of duty for humanity and, accordingly, have made use of her being a nurse – of her know-how, employment, and so on – to more fulfil her duty towards others in a more encompassing way than before.

¹¹¹ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 585.

new occasions of living up to her moral duty – which, in its turn, deepened her inclinations even more, which... and so on.

Understood in this way, love is simply one of the various inclinations that brings one closer to, and acquaints one more fully, with others. It is what Kant derisively termed “pathological love”¹¹² in the *Groundwork*, juxtaposing it to “practical”¹¹³ love – which is, as he later clarifies, *nothing but* the fulfilment of one’s positive duty towards others.¹¹⁴ Just, as the last pages already adumbrated, the positive duty towards others – or, as he also calls it, “rational benevolence”¹¹⁵ – can very well go hand in hand with the vision of a world of distance and detachment. In his later writings, however, Kant later attempts to rehabilitate love as a “moral force”¹¹⁶, especially in his *Metaphysics of Morals* (but also in his *Lectures on Ethics*.¹¹⁷) There, he turns to interpersonal relations as something the moral character of which – at least in its consummation – must be understood in terms of unity of love and respect.¹¹⁸ Thus, Kant characterizes the “ideal”¹¹⁹ of friendship as “the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect”¹²⁰ and “the most intimate union of love and respect”¹²¹, marked by a mutual sharing, and participating in, one another’s lives on the basis of a good will.¹²² The particularly moral dimension of friendship thereby consists in the friends opening themselves to one another: “*Moral friendship* [...] is the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other, as far as such disclosures are consistent with mutual respect.”¹²³ So, moral friendship offers a place for honesty and self-disclosure without those

¹¹² Kant, *Groundwork*, 15.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 530–1 & 569–70.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 575

¹¹⁶ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 569.

¹¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath & J. B. Schneewind, transl. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), e.g. 24–5, 29–35, 172–3, 177–90.

¹¹⁸ This raises questions as to the possibility of how such a unity is to be thinkable at all, given that a sense of duty arises only in the presence of inclinations running counter to it. Kant remains ambiguous on this point. On the one hand, he repeatedly states that there need not be a tension, let alone a contradiction, between love and duty. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, for instance, he claims that “to love one’s neighbour means to perform all duty toward him *gladly*” (108). In other words, fulfilled neighbourly love is practical love that is at the same time also natural – pathological – love. He admits that this must always remain an ideal given we are imperfect creatures susceptible to temptation (ibid.). At the same time, however, he also suggests that such a conflict is necessary only as a *possibility* – in particular instances and relationships, maybe even for entire phases of life or entire lives, love may be in complete harmony with duty (ibid., 108–9). What we can never exclude is that even if it is, inclination may at any point come to revolt against duty once again (ibid.). To the extent that is so, however, it would seem that there is no point to speak of duty either, given the simple fact that duty – and along with it, morality – simply becomes a non-issue.

¹¹⁹ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 585.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 584.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 585.

¹²³ Ibid., 586.

who thus open themselves having to fear any hostile repercussions from the respective other.¹²⁴ In other words, an open friendship makes possible trust and confidence.¹²⁵ Interestingly, Kant never makes it explicit what *exactly* he takes to be morally good about trust, confidence, and openness. From the way he phrases it, however – and when regarded in the context of his overall oeuvre – it would seem that the moral goodness of such a friendship lies in the fact that in it, precisely due to the mutual loving trust, the temptation to pretend is kept to a minimum and, thus, that it offers the best place for autonomy to flourish.¹²⁶ Friendship thus understood would be of moral worth because it promotes free self-actualisation, together. Yet, unfortunately, Kant never gets this far.

What he does emphasize, however, is that this remains – with very few exceptions¹²⁷ – an ideal and that real friendships are marked by a deep and irredeemable tension: “The principle of *mutual love* admonishes [the friends] constantly to *come closer* to one another; that of the *respect* they owe one another, to keep themselves *at a distance* from one another.”¹²⁸ Although friendship is as close as we, qua finite beings imbued with reason, can get to moral consummation, it is still characterized by a fickleness that is better described in terms of a precarious annulment of opposing powers than as a harmony.¹²⁹ While respect admonishes to keep my distance, love draws me ever closer towards the other and so, the ‘good relationship’, realised in its fullest in friendship, is in a constant state of abeyance, caught between two opposing forces.¹³⁰ If love abates, then what is left is merely a relationship in which both respect each other, which is equivalent to a relation in which interaction is limited to the necessary minimum or to its overall annulment. In the former case, the relation will likely develop – or rather devolve – into a respectful making-use-of-one-another, such as in a relation between two businesspeople or of two persons who only use each other for sexual pleasure. If so, the relationship will lack the closeness conducive to free and open self-actualisation and, in that respect, would fall behind the ideal of morality actualized in friendship. Yet even without such

¹²⁴ Ibid., 586–7.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ This transpires e.g. when he writes: “[The friend] is not completely alone with his thoughts, as in a prison, but enjoys a freedom he cannot have with the masses, among whom he must shut himself up in himself” (ibid., 587).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 568.

¹²⁹ This becomes clear especially on the following lines: “Although it is sweet to feel [a] possession of each other that approaches fusion into one person, friendship is something so delicate (*teneritas amicitiae*) that it is never for a moment safe from interruptions if it is allowed to rest on feelings, and if this mutual sympathy and self-surrender are not subjected to principles or rules preventing excessive familiarity and limiting mutual love by requirements of respect” (ibid., 586; emphasis in the original).

¹³⁰ For a good discussion of this point, cf. Marguerite La Caze, “Love, that Indispensable Supplement: Irigaray and Kant on Love and Respect,” *Hypatia* 20 (2005): 92–114.

love, the relationship will, if respect is there, need not reflect *less* moral worth than the respectfully loving relationship.

If, on the other hand, love remains while respect crumbles the relationship becomes morally corrupt. Things may look perfectly fine as long as the lovers make each other happy and happen to care about each other's well-being – but once the euphoria abates, the doors are opened to all kinds of reactions, from cool indifference to meanness to viciousness. And even as long as the lovers take delight in one another, matters may become 'ugly' in that, without the necessary distance demanded by respect, there is nothing keeping love from blending into infatuation, possessiveness, and even obsession.¹³¹ This is so because, as pointed out above, love of this kind – that is, love that is not practical benevolence – is and remains an inclination and inclinations are self-interested. In the absence of respect, inclinations motivate actions aimed to satisfy them no matter the cost, and they are bridled only by other, stronger inclinations or by their abatement. So, the disrespectful lover may show (a feigned, manipulative) kindness to the beloved one aimed at bringing the beloved closer to him and allow him to take pleasure in her – yet if the desire abates, he may cast her aside, and if he realises that she has become dependent on him so that his spurious sweetness is not needed anymore to make her stay, things may well get even worse. I would agree to all of this – yet question whether what we are dealing with here deserves to be called love.¹³²

Given that the consummate relationship is an ideal, Kant infers that where there arises a disharmony between respect and love, the former must always retain the upper hand and put love in its place – that is, *below* respect.¹³³ And not only that – even where there is no such tension, the picture of friendship he offers conveys that, as it were, respect has to stand guard against the corrosive effects of love that remains unchecked – after all, it is in love's nature to "constantly come closer" to the other, threatening the distance maintained by respect. Thus, I keep a certain distance from my friend and see to it that he does the same in relation to me.¹³⁴ Indeed, even in the ideal moral friendship, disclosing oneself is limited by that which is

¹³¹ Joel Backström seems to share my view when he, in critically discussing La Caz' "Love, that Indispensable Supplement," writes that "If someone tries to 'justify a suffocating and restrictive relationship on the grounds of the strength of their love' that is not an expression of *love*, however, but rather of possessiveness" (*The Fear of Openness. An Essay on Friendship and the Roots of Morality* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2007), 147; emphasis in the original).

¹³² This will become apparent especially in my discussion of Kafka's *The Judgment* in chapter 6.

¹³³ This is also echoed in Kant's *The End of All Things*: "Respect [and not love] is without doubt what is primary, because without it no true love can occur, even though one can harbor great respect for a person without love" (in Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, transl. & ed. Allen W. Wood & George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 230).

¹³⁴ Backström puts this poignantly when he writes that "[i]n respecting another I see him, both physically and in a broader, more figurative sense, as surrounded by a *zone of inviolability*" (*The Fear of Openness*, 144).

“consistent with mutual respect.”¹³⁵ Even the consummation of loving trust and openness is, for Kant, coloured by a hue of wariness – one opens oneself to the other and lets the other come close to one but *not quite*.¹³⁶

But while this may be true in actual, lived relationships, Kant concedes that overall, love is an indispensable moral force and that respect alone would not suffice: “[S]hould one of these great moral forces fail, ‘then nothingness (immorality), with gaping throat, would drink up the whole kingdom of (moral) beings like a drop of water’”.¹³⁷ A humanity without love would self-destroy – respect alone cannot do the trick. Kant thus seems to reveal that he was, or at some point eventually *became*, aware that the positive duty towards rational humanity cannot, as long as it remains wholly abstract and impersonal, actualise itself – and that, given that positive duty does not by itself draw the individual subject towards others and their ends, it requires inclination as a complement. Yet, Kant provides no further explanation as to why love is suddenly ascribed the status, not just of a *complement to* morality, but as a “great *moral force*” in its own right – a perplexing claim, given its status as an inclination.

This being said, there is one other section in the *Metaphysics of Morals* in which Kant gives a hint as to why this may be the case. When briefly examining what he calls the “aesthetic preconceptions of the mind’s receptivity for the concepts of duty as such”¹³⁸, Kant lists, among moral feeling, conscience, and respect, the love of the neighbour, also called “love of human beings.”¹³⁹ Love of human beings cannot be demanded by duty, Kant says, not only because it is a feeling and feelings cannot be demanded but also because it is a precondition to being called upon by morality in the first place. This connects to Kant’s above stated insight: if love would not draw us towards particular others, there would, as Backström puts it, “be no such thing as morality in our lives at all.”¹⁴⁰ But whether it is merely the capacity for feeling positively inclined towards others (which would be a purely natural propensity) or whether it is aesthetic in the strict sense as is developed in the *Third Critique* (to which I will come below) remains

¹³⁵ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 586.

¹³⁶ Backström takes this to mean that, for Kant, “[f]riendship is [...] something so *delicate* that it cannot survive too much familiarity or too strong expressions of feeling” (*The Fear of Openness*, 153) and that “that respect, which sounds like a very stern and even sturdy thing, is actually a virtue for very brittle people” (*ibid.*). I sympathise with Backström’s daring psychologisation of Kant according to which – if I read him correctly – the cool, detached, ratio-centric posture is, at least in moral respects, an attempt to cover up, and compensate for, an exceptional brittleness and touchiness. However, I cannot address it any further in the present work.

¹³⁷ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 569.

¹³⁸ This is my own translation of the title of the section (“*Ästhetische Vorbegriffe der Empfänglichkeit des Gemüts für Pflichtbegriffe überhaupt*” (*ibid.*, 528)) given that I think that Gregor’s translation is rather poor (i.e. “concepts of what is presupposed on the part of feeling by the mind’s receptivity to concepts of duty as such” (*ibid.*)).

¹³⁹ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 530.

¹⁴⁰ Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 143.

unsettled. Against the latter counts that Kant does explicitly speak of it in terms of “a matter of feeling”¹⁴¹, a formulation which he usually uses to describe empirical inclination. Against the former, however, counts that Kant characterizes love of human beings, as an (albeit subjective) precondition of an a priori faculty (i.e. duty), must itself be a priori – which, in turn, categorically disqualifies all inclinations. The only alternative is that Kant may have intended this peculiar love of neighbour as a *sui generis* domain of the human constitution¹⁴² – yet, if so, he does far too little to make this clear and explain how it is to fit into his larger architectonics (especially given that it would seem to altogether overturn his dualistic outlook).¹⁴³ In any case, he does state why love of the neighbour is indispensable for morality, namely because without it, we would not hear the call of duty, or: *only because we can and do already love on a pre-rational level, can we make it our duty to promote the well-being of others*. This is a strong statement which I take to be in obvious tension with many of Kant’s other core assumptions, and it is one that comes fairly close to what I will develop from chapter 3 onwards. Unfortunately, Kant does not pursue this line of thought further.

2. The Engaged Will

As I already mentioned *en passant*, Kant holds that we cannot but think ourselves as standing “under the idea of freedom” which effectively means that we must understand ourselves, in contrast to all other natural beings we know of, as acting not merely in accordance with the laws of nature but from laws of our own, laws with a representational character – *reasons*. I would agree with Kant at least in that much (albeit not all) of what we do lends itself to a subsequent description in terms of *what one did in order to achieve something* (which is what the Kantian maxim expresses). Someone retroactively describing herself in action will, thus, be usually able not only to give some kind of description of the situation in which she acted but also of what she did within this situation and in order to achieve what end. This presupposes that there is not only a perception of the world but also of oneself and of one’s motives present to one within the very process of acting, even if these are not in one’s mind. Action, even if it

¹⁴¹ Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 530.

¹⁴² Pärttyli Rinne (*Kant on Love* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 110–44) can be said to occupy a middle ground here, advocating for an additive understanding of neighbourly love according to which Kant holds that neighbourly love is neither merely feeling nor action but that it combines “feeling or sensation, rationally willed action, and the cultivation of a moral disposition” (ibid., 111) into a whole. While I think Rinne’s reading is fruitful, I do not think that adding up the various dimensions of love into an encompassing notion offers anything genuinely new – as I see adumbrated in Kant’s talk of a love of the neighbour that is, as it were, pre-rational and ‘aesthetic’.

¹⁴³ Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 144.

is not concerned with explicit deliberation, is in that sense always already reflective – it always already includes the agent’s consciousness of herself as acting.¹⁴⁴ However, the will is not only a capacity that identifies the situation in order to act so as to realise its purposes. Another dimension of action, understood as issuing forth from a will, is that the will is itself situated in the concrete circumstances of the action and, thus, *always already an engaged will*. I want to take a look at two important implications of this fact.

a. The *How*, the *What*, and the *Why* of Willing

Firstly, the will is not exhausted in its being a practical-pragmatic-technical capacity¹⁴⁵ but, as the will of a finite, sensible being, it is also often experienced as in some way or other *coloured*. Another way of putting this is to say that a description of the will is not exhausted merely in terms of *what* it is concerned with but also with *how* it wills. A will may, in a given situation, be coloured by my being e.g. angry, depressed, in love, bored, distracted, irritated, deluded, grumpy, and so on. Given that we are beings that are within, and part of, the world, our wills are equally part of the world and, hence, they are always in a constant flow of a manifold of overlapping, intertwining, and rivalling psychological and often emotionally charged states. Accordingly, no will can ever be as it were *pure* in the sense of *detached* from the psyche in which it is embedded, or *unengaged* from the contextual flux in which it finds itself.¹⁴⁶ Saying that such states colour the will, i.e. that they colour *how* a person wills, of course also stands in relation to *what* is willed.¹⁴⁷ Someone who is angry may not simply will the same things he wills when he is not angry, only in an angry way, but, due to his anger, he may will different things. I may, say, throw my trash into the bin so that it topples – but when I am angry, I throw it so vehemently *in order to* make the bin topple. In both scenarios, the effect was the same, yet I willed different things in them – while in the first scenario, my end was to dispose of my

¹⁴⁴ The thought that the I, as the unity of “transcendental apperception”, of the ‘I think’ accompanies all of one’s representations (and, thus, all one’s experiences and actions) (cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 230–4) is, of course, one of the main tenets of Kant’s project. For my present purposes, however, I will not be able to look at it more closely but, instead, mainly ‘work with it’.

¹⁴⁵ This tripartite distinction mirrors Kant’s distinction between hypothetical-technical, hypothetical-pragmatic, and categorical imperatives in the *Groundwork* (31–7).

¹⁴⁶ Kant would certainly be the first to emphasise this. After all, his entire moral philosophy revolves around the idea that we are finite creates whose wills are tempted hither and thither by all kinds of natural influences – and that it is precisely because of this, and in the face of this, that we have assert ourselves as autonomous beings with a free will. Precisely because of this focus on the practical, however, the just mentioned colourings of the will are relevant to Kant only to the extent that they determine the way in which we will, namely from inclination as opposed to from duty.

¹⁴⁷ This anticipates the next chapter’s discussion of ‘the *what*’ and ‘the *why*’ in McDowell and Aristotle (and what I take to be one of its main shortcomings, namely the neglect of the ‘loving how’ – which, in turn, will become central in the form of the notion of *lovingness* in chapter 5).

rubbish, it was to make the bin topple in the second. Here, the *how* came to shape the *what*. This need not be the case, however; after all, I may simply throw the rubbish into the bin in order to dispose of it, i.e. will what I always will, yet will it *angrily*.

In either case, having one's will coloured in a certain way means that it will be via this will that one comes to perceive the world and act within it in a way that one cannot simply 'step out of'. If one is angry, then this is bound up with one's will – as I said, as long as one is angry, one wills (and, accordingly, perceives) *angrily*. Or, differently put, one has no practical control over one's being angry because the anger is at that moment the very mode of one's practical being. The angry person may of course very well be aware of the fact that she is angry – but that does not change the fact that she *is* angry, that *how* she does what she does, and perhaps even *what* she does, are expressions of her anger, and that her very perception of her surroundings will be shaped by it. Indeed, even her thinking about herself as angry while being angry will itself be coloured by her anger; that is, she will angrily think about herself as being angry. Merely switching to the reflective mode will not, *per se*, suddenly elevate her above herself and her emotions. As long as she is angry, her anger is part of her relation to the world, including herself¹⁴⁸. This is not different in cases in which awareness of the state of one's own will is much less likely (say, grumpiness) or even per definition impossible (e.g. self-deception.) I think it is fair to say that grumpiness is something that is usually ascribed to others from the position of the bystander, not to oneself. And it is not possible at all that someone can be both self-deceived and aware of himself as being self-deceived because it is intrinsic to self-deception to be in a state of *repressed* awareness regarding what one actually wants or believes, does or did¹⁴⁹ – once I become aware of the fact that, up until then, I had been deceiving myself, I cannot simply continue deceiving myself (which is, of course, not to say that I may not slide back into self-deception shortly after.)¹⁵⁰ Still, both of their respective wills, that of the grumpy and the self-deceived person, will be coloured by their grumpiness/self-deception and, thus, they will perceive and act grumpily/self-deceptively. Their relation to the world will be inseparably tied to the state – the *how* – of their will.

Kant does not speak such terms. He does say, however, that a will can have its “determining ground”¹⁵¹ either in inclination or in duty. In other words, *what* we will is, for

¹⁴⁸ Of course, reflecting on her anger may calm *her* – and, hence, *her will* – down. But that does not mean that she will therefore enter some aloof level of reflection, detached from the engagement of her will.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Hugo Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 28.

¹⁵⁰ For an illuminating discussion of ‘the concept of self-deception as morally central’, cf. the chapter by the same name *ibid.*, 26–39.

¹⁵¹ *Groundwork*, 78; the notion becomes far more central in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, however (although in the edition I am referencing, it is translated with “determination basis”).

him, rooted in one of two different fundamental ways of *how* we can will. He does not differentiate between the will's various colourings as I did – such as willing self-gratuitously, half-heartedly, etc. – because for him, all that is of moral interest is whether a given action issued forth from a will that is good or one that is not. Thus, we can differentiate between acting *out of* an inclination – say, acting *out of anger* – and *with an* inclination – say, acting *angrily*. Kant is interested only in the former; I want to call attention also to the latter.

The reason for this is that I would like to call attention to a particular, and I think morally relevant, colouring of the will, namely that of *willing lovingly*.¹⁵² At this point, I want to content myself with foreshadowing an idea I will develop at length at a later point, namely that, when it comes to the moral dimension of interpersonal relationality, *how* people engage with one another is often of a morally greater relevance than *what* they do in relation to one another and *why*. This is a prominent theme in the thought of many of the philosophers that I will discuss in the present work, such as Raimond Gaita, Christopher Cordner, or Hugo Strandberg.¹⁵³ Let me illustrate what I mean by means of an example that will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4: Imagine someone giving moral advice to another out of a sense of moral duty yet in a way that is morally jaded.¹⁵⁴ As Gaita puts it, such a person would, in a weighty sense, have “nothing to say”¹⁵⁵ in that he would not be “present in his words.”¹⁵⁶ Translated into the just devised language of the *how* and the *what* of willing, the *what* – giving someone moral advice – could be said to have a twofold *how*: one the one hand, it is willed *out of a sense of duty*, i.e. out of the recognition that ‘I ought to try to help’, while, on the other, being willed *in a morally jaded way*. It is not the case that the latter negates the former, not even that it negates its moral significance; rather, the jadedness exposes the action willed out of a sense of duty as morally substantially lacking, namely in that it fails *to be wholeheartedly responsive*¹⁵⁷ to the interlocutor. It is precisely such a responsiveness, so I will show alongside Gaita and others, that is intrinsically connected to the notion of *goodness*.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² In my discussion in chapters 3 and 4, I will show that even putting it in that way does not go far enough – that is, that as long as the will (understood in a Kantian sense) is central, it stands in the way of a loving response.

¹⁵³ Other thinkers to mention are R. F. Holland, Joel Backström, Hannes Nykänen, Camilla Kronqvist, Lars Hertzberg as well as Marina Barabas and, to a certain extent, Peter Winch.

¹⁵⁴ Gaita discusses this example in two variations, once in *Good and Evil* (268–72) and in “The Personal in Ethics,” *Attention to Particulars. Essays in Honour of Rush Rhees (1905–89)*, eds. D. Z. Phillips & Peter Winch (London: Macmillan, 1989), 124–150, at 136–40.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁵⁷ This notion will become more prominent from chapter 4 onwards; for a discussion of what it may mean for the will to be wholehearted (although not in the context of Kant but Augustine), cf. Hugo Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 161–3.

¹⁵⁸ That is, goodness emphatically not in the Kantian sense of being *right* or in the (soon to be discussed) Aristotelian sense of being *virtuous* but rather in the sense of the Good Samaritan – *loving*.

b. The Embeddedness of Reflection in Relation

This brings me to the second, closely connected point, namely that reflection on (some)one's engaged will is at bottom inseparably bound up with *relating to others*. This leads us yet another step away from Kant's preoccupation with the *individual* subject and the *individual* subject's reflection on its *own* deeds and motives.¹⁵⁹

As I just said, it is often possible to reflect on the state of one's own will while still being in that state. If so, both the state itself and how one reflects on it coincide ('An angry reflection on one's own anger'). Yet, very often, this will not be the case and the state of one's will in reflection is different from the state of one's will on which one reflects. So, *even the reflective position is one of an engaged will*. The will occupied with the activity of reflecting is not only to be accounted for in terms of *what* it is doing – i.e. reflecting – but also *how* it does so – e.g. self-gratuitously, self-deceptively, half-heartedly, playfully and so on. That is, even the one who retroactively makes sense of *whatever* she has done at some earlier point, as well as *why* and *how*, still does so – necessarily – from a position within the world, situated in a certain context, and hence with an will that is engaged and, thus, coloured in this or that way. This adds an extra layer of complexity to the issue. Firstly, I encounter a will that is coloured in one way or another. On top of that, the perspective from which I get into view *how* that will is coloured is *itself* engaged, i.e. an engaged will. This has an important implication: whenever I reflect on myself and make sense of my actions, I always do so in the light of how my will is *presently* coloured. There is no position at which the will may not be influenced by the circumstantial factors, whether they pertain to "inner" or "outer" experience,¹⁶⁰ neither when doing something nor when reflecting on that engagement at a later point of time. Given that the *how* can, and often does, effect the *what* in various different and often subtle ways, *how* I reflect on my prior action will thus come to shape the outcome of this reflection, that is, it will shape in which terms I will make sense of my former action. An infinite regress ensues: whatever reflective position I take up, I will, while still occupying this position, be unable to simultaneously reflect upon the nature of the engagedness of this position and, hence, on how my will is coloured.

¹⁵⁹ Kant's concept of the subject, although universal, is always the *individual* subject due to its being bound to a particular body, sense apparatus and will. As I will discuss in the next section below, Kant is, as I see it, ultimately unable to account for the possibility a relation between subjects.

¹⁶⁰ That is, pertaining to the psyche and pertaining to the world of appearances. Kant makes this distinction in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (606); it runs through his entire critical oeuvre. Martin Buber picks it up in *I and Thou*, yet as part of a criticism of the Kantian theoretical system (Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, ed. & transl. Walter Kaufmann (Charles Scribners' Sons, 1970), 56. This criticism will be discussed in chapter 3, section 1.a., as well as in chapter 4.

And to the extent that I do reflect on the way in which my will is presently engaged and coloured, I will have already torn myself away from the engaged position and come to occupy a higher reflective level which, however, will now (i.e. as long as I do not tear myself away from it yet again) remain opaque to me.

Let me try to illustrate this by means of an example from the sphere of interpersonal engagements. Say, someone – let’s call her Ann – is angry at a colleague for being late for an important meeting. Momentarily, she becomes aware of herself as being angry – yet only fleetingly; after all, her anger has an addressee – her colleague – and it is with him (and his shortcomings, such as his unreliability, his sloppiness, and so on) that she is concerned. Now, if Ann later reflects on herself as having been angry, then this reflection will not happen in a reflexive vacuum but in a concrete situation, a situation which presents an occasion for the reflection – and in which her will is coloured in some way. She may, for instance, visit her elderly uncle – a person she trusts and whom she takes to be very kind and warm-hearted – and, feeling that she can bare her heart to him, she tells him about her earlier anger episode. In the calm and kind presence of her uncle, she may come to see her behaviour towards her colleague as exaggerated and childish, and accordingly, she will describe her own prior state of mind accordingly (“I don’t know what got into me... sure, he was late but something just drove me crazy. Maybe it was that he did not seem to be sorry. But still, it was over the top... maybe I also wanted to get back at him for something else, namely...” And so on.) Alternatively, it can be imagined that after work, she meets up with a friend and, while having a glass of wine, they exchange stories of their working lives. Her friend might tell her the story of how a colleague of her always makes inappropriate remarks and that just the day before, she could not ignore it anymore and confronted him about it. The spirit of righteous retribution with which she tells this story colours off on Ann who, thus moved, comes to describe her own anger towards her colleague quite differently than she did in the presence of her uncle (“I don’t know what got into him – sure, being a bit late is the one thing but fifteen minutes, at an important meeting! And then he did not even excuse himself! Of course, I was angry – I was fuming! And you know, if that would have been the first time that he did such a no go, it would be the one thing. But just a few weeks ago, he...” And so on.)

It can, of course, also be imagined that Ann goes home after work and ponders about her anger without being influenced by anyone else and their presence and mood. But that would not change the fact that there would be a certain context to her pondering, a situation in which, and as part of which, she reflects on her earlier behaviour. *How*, in that situation, she reflects can only come into view from yet another, a third position. Maybe, from this third position, she

will look back on her pondering about her anger and think about it as having been very composed and level-headed (which is not the same as claiming that it is detached). Yet, of course, this third position is itself again embedded within a situation – and so on... Again: There is no outside, disengaged position from which we can articulate how we were, at some prior point, actively engaged in the world. And not only this: even if there is no one else with whom she speaks about why she acted as she did, her solitary reflection will nonetheless more or less resemble a conversation, yet one in which both positions are taken up by a single individual.¹⁶¹ She might, for instance, find herself struck by the disproportionateness of her anger but, unlike in a real conversation, she will put the question why that may have been the case not to someone else but to herself. It will also be her who is answering, perhaps in a satisfying way, perhaps not, perhaps giving rise to further queries. That is how conversations with oneself are wont to play out. The important point is that conversations with oneself with oneself are modelled on conversations with others – we learn what questions are by having others put them, either to oneself or to others; we learn what answering is by hearing others give them or by giving them to others ourselves, and so on.¹⁶² Only because we have come to learn what it means to be in a conversation with someone else can we converse with ourselves.

c. Subjects Encountering One Another in the World

Kant's moral philosophy invites being read as a theory that revolves around the *individual* subject and its capacities, as well as their limitations, to reflect on, and critically assess, the form its *own* motivations take when spelled out in propositional form. It must also be acknowledged, however, that he does not speak about the individual subject but about the subject *as such*, the abstract universal, of which all individuated rational beings are instantiations.¹⁶³ Or, differently put, we are individuated beings (*subjects*) only in virtue of our

¹⁶¹ This is not to say that thinking and talking to oneself are *just like* conversations with others, the only difference being that the plurality that marks the conversation with others will simply collapse into one in the case of a soliloquy. What is missing is, as it were, the genuine "otherness of the other" (Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 395), a notion I will explore further in the next chapter, or, as Buber puts it, "the moment of surprise" (*The Knowledge of Man. Selected Essays*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 113).

¹⁶² Lars Hertzberg develops this thought in an insightful manner in "On the Need for a Listener and Community Standards," *The Practice of Language*, eds. Martin Gustafsson and Lars Hertzberg (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 247–59. E.g.: "To think of something as a story (or as a report, a resolution, etc.) is to think of it as something about which certain questions can be asked. Hence a bit of writing is only a story, say, against the background of the sort of interchange we have in telling and listening to stories, etc." (255) and "Writing down things for oneself is an activity that is connected with participating in conversations" (254). I think the same also holds for conversations with oneself.

¹⁶³ It would be misleading to say that develops a theory of the subject or of subjectivity. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he undertakes "to examine knowledge through pure reason" (Eduard Molina, "Kant's Conception of the Subject," *The New Centennial Review* 17, no. 2 (2017): 77–94, at 79) – yet, because knowledge is inextricably tied to the self-consciousness of the being whose knowledge it is, this undertaking revolves around the

empirical nature – to the extent we are *subject*, we are all identical, coinciding in the same rational substance. As is the case with every universal, the notion of the subject, understood as instantiated empirically, thus signifies a unity-in-multiplicity, i.e. *subject* that is at the same time *subjects*.¹⁶⁴ And that, in turn, suggests that there might be in Kant’s thought at least room for an, as it were, transcendental relation, that is, a relation of subjects to each other qua subjects. Would Kant’s practical philosophy, read in this way, not yield the theoretical instruments to accommodate the kind of reservation I put forward above, namely that of the individual that finds itself before all else in a communion with (its own) reason and which is able to relate to others only in virtue of such a foregoing rational self-relation? Would such an inter-subjectivity not do away with this kind of quasi-solipsism and posit that, instead of *through* reason, we always already relate to one another *in* reason?

Much could be said about this point, yet I will restrict myself to merely two rather brief remarks. The first is that, while it was along those lines that the most famous of Kant’s successors – the triumvirate of the well-known German idealists Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel – thought that Kant’s philosophy should be further developed, entering a discussion with them would unfortunately by far exceed the scope of this dissertation.¹⁶⁵ (This being said, I *will* engage with a position that stands at least partly in this tradition in the next chapter, although in a far more contemporary and analytic vestment, namely John McDowell and his virtue ethics.) The second, and in line with what many of Kant’s successors came to recognise – the first presumably being Fichte¹⁶⁶ – is that while Kant’s philosophy indeed *points to* the possibility of an inter-subjectivity, he does not offer any theoretical elaborations on what that inter-subjectivity might look like – indeed, it seems that his dualism prevents him from doing so. Let me say a few words about what I take to be the issue.

The main problem as I see is that a relation between subjects can, on Kant’s picture, only take place in the empirical world because it is only there that, as I said, subjects are

development of the concept of “transcendental apperception, an original form of consciousness that is expressed in (and produces) the proposition ‘I think’ and that is a condition of any objective representation” (ibid.; for the respective section in Kant, cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, 230–244, esp. at 231–2.)

¹⁶⁴ Kant differentiates between empirical, transcendental, and noumenal self-consciousness (cf. Eduard Molina, “Kant’s Conception of the Subject,” 79). Empirical self-consciousness was already mentioned – it is what Kant also calls “inner experience”, i.e. the psychological consciousness of the I of itself in time. To the extent we are embodied, individuated subjects, we thus have an empirical self-consciousness, also individuated and embodied – to the extent, however, that we have a transcendental consciousness (the ‘I think’ of apperception) or noumenal self-consciousness (i.e. as we must think, but can never experience, ourselves as free acting beings), however, we are identical because both are not empirical.

¹⁶⁵ For a helpful collection of essays dedicated to this thematic, cf. Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), especially the essay “The Structure of Intersubjectivity” (334–45).

¹⁶⁶ I will address Fichte in the next section.

individuated and are, thus, in the position to encounter both each other and themselves in it. This, however, means that when we encounter one another (or ourselves), then this is always qua empirical beings – as *objects* in the world. At the same time, however, we encounter one another (and ourselves) as objects that can rationally reflect on, and critically assess, our grounds for action, suggesting that we are objects that are not determined by the laws of nature but who determine ourselves by laws of our own – hence as objects that are *also* subjects. When relating to other rational beings, we thus supposedly relate to them as peculiar hybrids, as “subject-objects”¹⁶⁷. This must be so, on the one hand, because if we would not see *others* as subjects, we could neither see *ourselves* as subjects – for one can only relate to oneself as a subject by relating to other subjects¹⁶⁸ – thus negating the very sphere of reason and relapsing into a state of ‘blind nature’; and, on the other, because if we would not see subjects at the same time as objects, we would not *see them at all* – that is, we would not encounter them as individuated beings within the world to whom a relation can be established in the first place. In short, any transcendental relation between subject must, at least as long as we stay within the precincts of Kant’s thoughts, be at the same time an empirical relation – and not only that: it will be a relation at all *only* to the extent that we encounter ourselves as empirically individuated beings.

Indeed, it even seems that on Kant’s account, the very attempt to surmount the other’s empirical being and to instead establish a relation to them purely qua subject is doomed to fail in that the more successful such an attempt is, the more one’s own subject-ness will come to coincide with that of the other, thus abrogating the very relation it seeks to establish. In a world, thus, in which all rational beings have made the ends of every other rational being fully their own, the only thing that would still differentiate them from one another would be their empirical idiosyncrasy, that is, that each of them would still occupy a specific spatiotemporal location and perspective. Such a coincidence is ultimately impossible in that the individuated subject is constituted both by its being the locus of *empirical* synthesis¹⁶⁹ and by its being a will with *empirical* content;¹⁷⁰ still, the empirical is not part of the abstract concept of the subject as such – without it, it would simply be empty, without any content. In short: on Kant’s account, it is

¹⁶⁷ Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” 197.

¹⁶⁸ This is so because, as already pointed out, relating to oneself or to others as to subjects requires the ability to *represent* what we experience and do – which, in the case of actions, amounts to giving reasons. However, we do not give reasons (or think) in isolation – we give reasons to (and think with) one another. While Kant himself does not at any point address this (quite crucial) thought, it is implicitly reflected in his political thought, for instance when he states that “the external power that deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts publicly, deprives him at the same time of his freedom to think” (quoted from Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 234.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 236–42.

¹⁷⁰ That is, the content of the maxim articulated in the connection of means and ends (cf. section 1.a. above.)

only in virtue of what is not-subjective – i.e. the empirical – that the relation to the other as subject is possible. As Strandberg puts it: as “‘humanity’ is here not an empirical, biological category”, “freedom is not possible to experience theoretically.”¹⁷¹ Yet, if relating to others is inseparably tied to relating to them qua empirical phenomena, then this is only possible on the basis of just the kind of underlying rational self-relation that we hoped to rid ourselves off when suggesting that Kant might allow to think a transcendental relation between subjects, for it is, on Kant’s account, possible to relate to empirical phenomena only qua rational subject (i.e. qua locus of the synthesis of the empirical manifold in the form of the subsumption under concepts.¹⁷²) Accordingly, I agree with Fletcher and Wolff that “[b]ecause the noumenal self is abstracted from the phenomenal world, we ‘have no consistent account of the way in which several rational agents encounter one another in the natural world and establish moral relationships to one another.’”¹⁷³

Thus, the kind of togetherness as it is sketched above – that is, a togetherness that is not grounded in, or mediated by, a reflective self-relation but in which, conversely, all reflecting and critical assessing is embedded – is not conceivable as long as we think along the lines of Kant. Speaking with others about one’s motives for action – indeed, about anything at all – is a mental, yet also an irreducibly ‘worldly’ activity. Indeed, it is only via the lived engagement with others that I am able to perceive their thoughts, be it articulated in the form of utterances, written down on a piece of paper, digitally as a text message, or in whatever other form.

I will return to this line of thought in the next chapter; for now, I will turn to another dimension of how Kant conceptualises the (moral) relation to the other, namely qua end-in-itself, and how this notion contains hint that points us beyond his third-personal outlook.

3. Subjectivity and Otherness

a. Recognising the End-in-Itself, Encountering Absolute Worth

In the *Groundwork*, Kant’s *modus operandi* is the following: after raising the question of the nature of a *good will*¹⁷⁴ and introducing the concept of *duty* as the key to the answer¹⁷⁵ (in the

¹⁷¹ Hugo Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 110.

¹⁷² Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 236–42.

¹⁷³ George P. Fletcher, ‘Law and Morality: A Kantian Perspective’, *Columbia Law Review* 87, no. 3 (1987): 533–58, at 543, quoting Robert Paul Wolff, *The Autonomy of Reason: A Commentary on Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973), 15.

¹⁷⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, 9–13.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 16–21.

first part), he leads over to an examination of the concept of the *imperative*¹⁷⁶ (for duty is always encountered in the form of an imperative – “Do X!”) Expounding that if there is to be an imperative that capture the *moral* sense of the notion of duty, it must be an imperative of a categorical kind, he raises question what would be required for such a categorical imperative. By first showing that such a categorical imperative is a *formal* requirement of reasons, he shows that the subject whose reason it is experiences itself as obliged to meet this requirement – in respect to the thinking subject itself, the formal and real thus fall into one. But how, then, about others? That is, how is it possible to know which other beings are, in fact, rational and, thus, *are* to be respected by me (as well as in the position to demand my respect)?

It is here that Kant turns to the notion of the *end-in-itself*: the scope of the categorical imperative extends to all those beings who must be thought of as ends independently from any ends we might set ourselves lest we lapse into irrationality. Strikingly, the way in which he introduces the concept is less assertive, namely in the subjunctive: “But *suppose there were* something whose existence in itself *had* an absolute worth, something that, as end in itself, *could* be a ground of determinate laws; then in it and only in it alone *would* lie the ground of a *possible* categorical imperative, i.e., of a practical law.”¹⁷⁷ *If* one goes along with Kant, in other words, and *does* suppose that there were something of an absolute worth in the sense of an end independent of all of our manifold empirical ends, then that *could* ground a categorical imperative. But what if not? Kant does not address this eventuality but – rather unphilosophically – simply shifts the subjunctive to the indicate mode and postulates that what he just presented as a possibility is actually real:

Now I *say* that the human being, and in general every rational being, *exists* as end in itself, not merely as means to the discretionary use of this or that will, but in all its actions, those directed toward itself as well as those directed toward other rational beings, it must always at the same time be considered as an end.¹⁷⁸

What is going on here? Is this not merely an unsubstantiated postulation? I think that yes and no. As stated above, it is not an unsubstantiated postulation in respect to the subject reflecting on its own maxims – it does recognise reason *in itself* as end-in-itself. It is not unsubstantiated as a universal statement either, i.e. that *any* rational subject must recognise reason in itself as end-in-itself. So, the problem is not to show that there is an intrinsic connection between the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 30 ff.

¹⁷⁷ Kant, *Groundwork*, 45; my emphasis.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., my emphasis.

concept of the rational subject and reason as end-in-itself.¹⁷⁹ It is, again, in respect to the question how we are supposed to determine whether others actually *are* rational subjects (and, hence, whether they, qua rational beings, have to be treated as end-in-itself)? In this regard, Fichte, Kant's heir and at times said to have perfected the Kantian system¹⁸⁰, remarks, in a way that strikingly anticipates what would later become known as the 'problem of other minds'¹⁸¹, that "[i]t is a weighty question to philosophy, which it, to my knowledge, never resolved: How come we attribute the concept of rationality [Vernünftigkeit] to some objects in the sensible world and not to others; what is the characteristic difference between these classes?"¹⁸² So, when Kant claims that "the human being, and in general every rational being, *exists* as end in itself", he, as it were, avoids the real problem – which is not how one can know whether the rationality of other human beings may be end-in-itself but, rather, how one is supposed to know that the human being – that is, *the human beings* that populate the world around one – are indeed rational beings? The answer to the question cannot be 'because they are ends-in-themselves' because that notion, as Kant himself recognises, depends on rational nature. Again: encountering one another in the natural world, we cannot encounter others as rational subjects – all that we can do is to *conjecture* that they are subjects because they can, like us, produce reasons for acting. But that is of course scandalous in respect to Kant's notion of absolute – i.e. *unconditional*¹⁸³ – moral worth, for it now appears that unconditional moral worth is conditional upon something, i.e. rationality, of which we can never be positively certain whether the others actually have it or not.

Kant introduces the notion of the end-in-itself as a necessary ingredient, an up to that point missing link, of the conception of the will: we have to recognise each other to be ends-in-themselves because this is what a consistent conception of the will requires: without it there would neither be anyone to respect but oneself nor would there be others with whom to critically assess one's maxims. On Kant's account, it is thus made to look like we are of absolute worth *because of this recognition*. As just pointed out, however, this would lead to the incongruity

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 46: "*Rational nature exists as end in itself*" (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸⁰ Adorno, for instance, describes Fichte as "the wholly consequent [der ganz konsequente] Kant", the Kant who has "found to himself [zu sich selbst gekommene]" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2010), 165; my translation).

¹⁸¹ For an overview of the 'problem' and the debate surrounding it, cf. Alec Hyslop, "Other Minds," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/other-minds/>>.

¹⁸² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1979), 80; my translation.

¹⁸³ Kant usually reserves the term 'unconditional' to qualify the good will or the validity of the moral law. However, his discussion in the *Groundwork* (45–6) makes it clear that he uses 'absolute' synonymously with 'unconditional', given that he contrasts absolute worth with merely "conditional worth" (ibid.).

that our absolute worth depends on a rather anchorless, conjectural, assumption. A closer look in Kant's wording, however, reveals a further nuance, easily overlooked but I think of great importance: Kant does not say that we *are* ends-in-themselves but that the human being "exists *as* end in itself". The word 'as' here strikes me as important because it suggests that human beings *are* not simply ends-in-themselves, that the notions 'human beings' and 'ends-in-themselves' are not simply interchangeable, but that there is a gap between the two: human beings *exist* – full stop. That is clear and uncontroversial and nothing needs to be added. Yet, according to Kant, they at the same time *exist as* something more, namely *as* ends-in-themselves. Or, differently put, human beings have to be *thought of* as ends-in-themselves. And why? Because they must be thought of as rational beings. And why that? Well, because that is just what the consistent conception of the will requires.

Putting it like this, it seems to me, points to something of importance, namely that when Kant speaks of the absolute worth of human beings, it is not the notion of the end-in-itself that does the real work. True, we *are* of absolute worth for the conception of the will, namely as that which provides the material counterpart to the formal requirement intrinsic to maxims. The question, however, is whether the absolute worth we encounter when we relate to one another is conditional upon our relating to one *another as individual subjects with rational wills not to be violated* – or whether it is rather a matter of relating to one another *simply as individual human beings*. I think this latter possibility is faintly adumbrated in the German original, yet lost in the English translation; let me thus offer my own translation – geared towards accuracy, not readability – of the above quoted passage:

Supposed, however, there were something the Being [Dasein] of which has, in itself, an absolute worth, which, as end-in-itself, could be a ground of determinate laws, then in it, and only in it, would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, i.e. [of] a practical law.¹⁸⁴

On the one hand, Kant speaks of the "Being [...] which, in itself, *has* an absolute worth" while, on the other, stating that, considered "*as* end-in-itself", this Being could be a ground of determinate laws and, thus, of a categorical imperative. In English, the 'has' is changed into a 'had'. In the English translation, it thus reads as if there were a straightforward connection

¹⁸⁴ This is the passage in the original: "Gesetzt aber, es gäbe etwas, *dessen Dasein an sich selbst* einen absoluten Wert hat, was, als *Zweck an sich selbst*, ein Grund bestimmter Gesetze sein könnte, so würde in ihm, und nur in ihm allein, der Grund eines möglichen kategorischen Imperativs, d.i. praktischen Gesetzes, liegen." (Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2013), 61; for the sake of simplicity, I did not include the emphases of the original in my translation. I wrote 'Being' with a capital B in order to avoid confusion in the following discussion.)

between absolute worth and end-in-itself: if human beings *had* an absolute worth, they *would be* ends-in-themselves (and vice versa.) In the German original, however, the formulation is somewhat ambiguous: although certainly possible to read it as the translation suggests – and perhaps intended in this way by Kant – it is *also* possible to read it in such a way that the (human) Being’s absolute worth is not conditional upon its being thought of as end-in-itself. If read in this way, the claim as a whole is still in the subjunctive – both the existence of the Being that has an absolute worth and the recognition of this Being as end-in-itself are at this point merely something to consider as a possibility. However, this does not hold for the connection of the *Being* with its *having an absolute worth*, for it is “the Being [...] which *has*, in itself, an absolute worth.” Again, whether such a Being actually exists or not is put into question – yet if it would, then its existence would not be dependent on its being thought of as end-in-itself. And not only that: its being an end-in-itself would depend on its being such a Being – namely one that is of absolute worth, irrespective of whether it is conceived of as end-in-itself or not.

Another way of approaching this issue is by asking whether the attempt to ground absolute worth in rationality (and, thus, in conceptualising the others as ends-in-themselves) does by itself convey an actual – or, to put it with Kant, a *material*, not a merely *formal*¹⁸⁵ – sense of such absolute worth in others. If someone were to regularly lie to others for his own benefit, for example, and you were to reprimand him by saying that he cannot rationally will this because he thereby treats others as means although he must rationally will to recognise, and treat, them as ends-in-themselves, then it would be readily imaginable that the habitual liar would simply brush this reprimand aside and say that he does not care about what kind of status others have in some theory of morality. If he is then shown that this means that whatever reasons he gives for lying cannot be proper (i.e. consistent) reasons – that he cannot justify his deeds – he might go on to say that he does not care about the consistency of his own motivations but simply wants to enjoy the benefits of lying to others. The last thing the Kantian could then do, it seems, is to show the liar that he cannot even consistently claim *that*, i.e. that he is interested only in his own benefits with no regard for others whatsoever, for the very fact that he *does* explain his motivations towards others – in this case towards you – shows that he *does* care about what others have to say and, thus, about their wills. But instead of replying to that, the liar might just turn away and leave, thereby ceasing to argue, explain, or justify his motivations

¹⁸⁵ “All maxims have [...] (1) a *form*, which consists in universality [and] (2) a *matter*, namely an end, and then the formula says: ‘That the rational being, as an end in accordance with its nature, hence as an end in itself, must serve for every maxim as a limiting condition of all merely relative and arbitrary ends’” (*Groundwork*, 54; Kant adds as a third necessary feature of maxims their “complete determination” (ibid.) but that is not of relevance for my present purpose.)

and, instead, simply *showing* that he has no such interest in others after all. This shows two things: firstly, the notion of the end-in-itself cannot do any actual work unless for those who *already* relate to others as being of absolute worth; secondly, even those who, like the imagined scoundrel, wholesale reject the notion of the end-in-itself (and, thus, the ‘language game’ of reason-giving), will still be regarded by others – us – as being of absolute worth (for if he were not, we would not be shocked, disappointed, or indignant, and would not reproach or otherwise appeal to him.)¹⁸⁶

I do not think that this shows that the Kantian account is wrong; it is just meant to show that it can only take as its last refuge that people actually *do* engage with one another in a give and take of reasons that reflects that they *are* of concern to one another, indeed to such an extent that it may well lead to the revision, suspension, or even annulment of their own undertakings. Yet, *that* they find each other to be of such absolute worth cannot be traced back to some rational ground because it itself provides the as it were ‘groundless ground’¹⁸⁷ of the kind of theory of the rational will that Kant expounds¹⁸⁸. Nor does it mean that the encountered absolute worth is dependent on the give and take of reasons.¹⁸⁹ Kant’s postulation that human beings exist as ends-in-themselves thus cannot expect universal endorsement simply in virtue of its being formally required for the concept of the will; what Kant has to bank on is rather that his readers *do* indeed find his notion of the end-in-itself meaningful not only as a formal requirement but by relating it back to their own lives and how it reflects their ‘non-theoretical’ sense of the other as morally significant.

So, Kant does not *show* that others are ends-in-themselves; rather he *presupposes* it, that is, he presupposes that his readers cotton on to what he points to when he speaks as he does. Only when they do, the formula of humanity¹⁹⁰ – and presumably the other formulations as well¹⁹¹ – will strike them as meaningful. What they must cotton on to, in other words, is what

¹⁸⁶ For an influential essay discussing the connection between responses of this kind and ascriptions of responsibility, cf. Peter Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 2008), 1–28.

¹⁸⁷ This expression is freely borrowed from Meister Eckhart (*The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, transl. & ed. Maurice O’C. Walshe (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2009), e.g. 400.) I will briefly return to Meister Eckhart in my discussion of Buber and his understanding of conscience.

¹⁸⁸ This thought – that we simply are of ‘absolute worth’ to one another – will be further explored from chapter 3 onwards, especially in connection to the thought of R. F. Holland and Raimond Gaita.

¹⁸⁹ This thought points in the direction of what I take to be a very fruitful approach to the ethical dimension of our relations to non-human beings. This can be found already adumbrated in Buber (*I and Thou*, 56–9 & esp. 144–6 & 172–3) but also in more contemporary writings, such as Peter Atterton, “Lévinas and Our Moral Responsibility Toward Other Animals,” *Inquiry* 54, no. 6 (2011): 633–49. Unfortunately, this discussion exceeds the scope of the present dissertation.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Kant, *Groundwork*, 51

¹⁹¹ The argument for the equivalence of the different formulations of the categorical imperative is elegantly made by Henning in *Kants Ethik*, 88–9.

Kant points to when he speaks of the absolute worth we have for one another, yet not *on the basis* of an abstract, third-personal account of morality but simply by reference to the (second-personal) lived relations with others in which we find ourselves, and, thus, *as a basis* for such a (third-personal) account. With this, I can conclude with Strandberg that “what we have found here is thus something which precedes the categorical imperative: the recognition of someone as someone to care about. In other words, Kant presupposes something positive which he never makes explicit. And this is what makes treating someone badly awful: it is to sin against *someone*.”¹⁹²

b. The Aesthetic as the Gateway beyond the Third-Personal

Despite this failure, however, the veiled recourse to lived experience hidden in Kant’s discussion of absolute worth is revealing and points in the direction of a more directly second-personal mode of relationality. Interestingly, at least the nucleus for such an understanding can already be found in Kant’s own later work, namely in the *Critique of Judgment*, especially in the *Preface*, the *Introduction*, and the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. I want to conclude this first chapter by offering a brief exposition of Kant’s attempt to account for a mode of relationality that is not third-personally mediated and of which he realised that it must in fact underlie such mediation; in doing so, it shall become clear in which respect Kant fails yet again, though in a way that will be of help to further this dissertation’s philosophical central concern, namely the development of the moral dimension of the second-personal relation.

In the Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant writes:

The power of judgment in general is the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the power of judgment, which subsumes the particular under it (even when, as a transcendental power of judgment, it provides the conditions *a priori* in accordance with which alone anything can be subsumed under that universal), is *determining*. If, however, only the particular is given, for which the universal is to be found, then the power of judgment is merely *reflecting*.¹⁹³

Both judgments about *how things are*, i.e. empirical judgments, as well as judgments about *what one ought to do*, i.e. moral-practical judgments, are determinative, for they both require that the universal, under which a given particular is to be subsumed, is already given. In

¹⁹² Hugo Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 111.

¹⁹³ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 66–7; emphasis in the original.

empirical judgments, it is given in the form of an empirical concept which allows for cognition of the particular at hand. In practical judgments, the universal comes in both as the concept under which the object of one's desire can be subsumed so as to make it one's end and as the concept under which what is at hand is subsumed so as to make it the means to realizing said end¹⁹⁴. However, in neither case, is the universal already connected with the particular; rather, it requires an activity on the part of the subject in which the concrete, initially un-conceptualised particular is connected to the universal. In the case of empirical and practical judgments, it thus requires a determining judgment, that is, a judgment by means of which the subject makes use of a universal that is already "given" and subsumes the particular under it. When judgment is determining, it functions under the guidance of the understanding, for it is the understanding which, according to Kant, subsumes the particular under the universal¹⁹⁵; when judgment is reflecting, however, it is free from this guidance and, hence, works on its own principle:

The reflecting power of judgment, which is under the obligation of ascending from the particular in nature to the universal, therefore requires a principle that it cannot borrow from experience, precisely because it is supposed to ground the unity of all empirical principles under equally empirical but higher principles, and is thus to ground the possibility of the systematic subordination of empirical principles under one another. The reflecting power of judgment, therefore, can only give itself such a transcendental principle as a law, and cannot derive it from anywhere else [...]¹⁹⁶

What Kant remarks here anticipates the seminal rule-following problematic that would come to occupy Wittgenstein and many of those who followed in his footsteps more than a century later, namely that the process by means of which the universal (concept, rule) is found to the particular cannot itself be determined by another rule but has to work on its own, that is, spontaneously.¹⁹⁷ In the *Preface* to the first edition of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant complements this thought as follows:

¹⁹⁴ Of course, the moral law is also a universal – indeed *the* universal, or rather: universality *as such* – yet it is importantly different in that it is the one universal which is not reached by beginning with the particular but which is inherent to all other, 'lesser' universals that are formed in such a way. That is, it is the one universal that is simply given to any being that is able to form universals, as their intrinsic formal requirement as it were.

¹⁹⁵ This is so because the concepts are, for Kant, rules and the understanding is the "faculty of rules" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 242).

¹⁹⁶ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 67.

¹⁹⁷ For an influential essay on this problematic, cf. John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 221–62; my criticism of McDowell's 'solution' to this problem – namely second nature acquired via upbringing – will, although without direct reference to the rule-following debate, occupy the first part of the next chapter.

[The power of judgment] therefore has to provide a concept itself, through which no thing is actually cognized, but which only serves as a rule for it, but not as an objective rule to which it can conform its judgment, since for that yet another power of judgment would be required in order to be able to decide whether it is a case of the rule or not.¹⁹⁸

Finding a concept which gives the rule to a particular (and, hence, makes the particular an instantiation of that rule), in other words, cannot rely on yet another rule because that second-order rule would, in turn, require yet another, third-order rule “in order to decide whether or not the judgment is a case of that [second-order] rule”; this third-order rule, in its turn, would give rise to the need of yet another, fourth-order rule explaining the workings of the third, and so on – an infinite regress would ensue. So, finding a route from the particular to the universal must be possible without recourse to any other rules, simply by the workings that are distinctive of the power of judgment, according to its own “transcendental principle” which “reflective judgment gives as a law, but only to itself”.

c. Encountering Beauty

For Kant, the free activity of the power of judgment is illustrated in its purest form in reflective judgments of the kind he calls *aesthetic judgments*, more specifically those aesthetic judgments that are concerned with the *beautiful*, because it is only in those judgments that the subject is not at all concerned with the determinative function of the power of judgment but simply persists in the pleasure of the free reflection that is the invigorating play of its own mental faculties to which the given presentation animates it.¹⁹⁹ Although appearing to the subject as an objective quality in a given presentation²⁰⁰, beauty is radically subjective²⁰¹ and, hence, judging something to be beautiful is, when the judgment is pure²⁰², actually nothing but an expression of a subjective feeling of pleasure.²⁰³ At the same time, however, judgments of this kind can,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 76 & 89–104, esp. at 102–4: the beautiful is “not grounded in any concept (like that of the powers of representation to a faculty of cognition in general), no other consciousness of it is possible except through sensation of the effect that consists in the facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding), enlivened through mutual agreement” (104).

²⁰⁰ The judge of beauty “will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a property of the object [...] although it is only aesthetic” (ibid., 97).

²⁰¹ “The judgment of taste is [...] aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective” (ibid., 89).

²⁰² Kant differentiates between pure beauty and impure, or “adherent”, beauty, the latter being beauty that is appended to a particular already subsumed under a concept (ibid., 114–6).

²⁰³ Ibid., 90–1.

indeed must, claim universal validity²⁰⁴ for the ground of the pleasure which they express lies in the subject's transcendental make-up – i.e. the free interplay of its faculties²⁰⁵ – and not its empirical make-up (which would make it agreeable and reduce it to mere enjoyment.)²⁰⁶ In other words, beauty does not only express the subject's pleasure but at the same time its sense that the beautiful thing is 'worthy' of such a reaction, indeed that it 'invites' and 'calls for' it.²⁰⁷ The experience of the beautiful is thus the experience of a particular non-conceptualised other which is at the same time not merely private but entailing the implicit conviction that others must see it in the same way as oneself.²⁰⁸

This form of relationality thus seems a promising candidate also for an alternative kind of *ethical* relation to otherness. However, Kant, kept in check by his theoretical commitment to his earlier works, fails in two other respect to explore what such a form of relationality may entail beyond just the apprehension of the beautiful, an exploration which, if carried out thoroughly, would have cast his earlier 'third-personal' conceptualism in a critical light.

The first is that, on Kant's picture, the response to beauty persists in "contemplation"²⁰⁹ which keeps the distance between subject and what it encounters as beautiful. That is so because any response that goes beyond the merely passive into the active and extends itself, in whatever way, in the direction of that to which it is a response, must, on Kant's view, be tied to an interest, either natural or practical.²¹⁰ As I stated above, however, an interest is tied to a concept and, hence, to determinative judgment: we can only be interested in *something*.²¹¹ Once interest comes in, the peculiar uniqueness of what is apprehended is lost sight of. Accordingly, Kant defines the aesthetic judgment as "disinterested"²¹² and, hence, as motivationally inert.²¹³

What Kant fails to see, however, is, firstly, that the absence of practical or pathological interest does not as such amount to the kind of total disinterest, the spellbound rapture, that he takes to mark the judgment of the beautiful, a disinterest that goes so far as to have no regard

²⁰⁴ "In the judgment of taste nothing is postulated except such a universal voice with regard to satisfaction without the mediation of concepts, hence the possibility of an aesthetic judgment that could at the same time be considered valid for everyone" (ibid., 101).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 102–4.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 91–2.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Barabas, "Transcending the Human," 212: "Failure to perceive beauty is a failure [...] to respond, to acknowledge, to give it its *due*" (emphasis in the original.)

²⁰⁸ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 99–101.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 95

²¹⁰ Already in the *Groundwork*, Kant differentiates between "pathological interest", i.e. 'taking an interest' and "practical interest", i.e. 'acting from interest' (30). This differentiation corresponds that between the interest in the "agreeable" and in the "good" that he develops in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (91–6).

²¹¹ That is: interested in that of which we have a representation *as something*, because it is such a representation that, as mentioned above, is the precondition for it to be the object of the will.

²¹² *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 91.

²¹³ Ibid., 90–1 & 95–6.

at all for the existence of the beautiful thing.²¹⁴ As long as one can still re-summon the representation of it in one's imagination in such a way that it re-creates the original sense of beauty, Kant holds, it does not make a difference to aesthetic judgment whether the beautiful grove upon which one has just stumbled continues to exist or whether it will be bulldozed over by a steam roller. So, Kant does acknowledge that it is intrinsic to the experience of beauty to want to dwell in its presence, yet this presence may just as well be imaginary.²¹⁵ This, however, strikes me simply as flawed phenomenologically. I am not denying that it is possible to encounter beauty in what one summons up in one's imagination. Yet, it seems to me that in some, even many, encounters with beauty, the experience is closely bound up with taking a delight precisely in the existence of the thing in question, with simply cherishing its being, irrespective of any practical designs. It is distinctive of the beautiful that we *care* about it.²¹⁶ So, of course I may still take delight when I recall the beauty of the grove – but when it has been bulldozed over, this memory will be enmeshed with sadness, perhaps even grief that it is not anymore.²¹⁷

Once it is acknowledged that the beautiful is something about which we care, we are only a short stone's throw away from acknowledging that the response to it can extend beyond the merely contemplative. Depending on what exactly it is that one finds beautiful, one's response will take on different forms, such as approaching it (because one is drawn to it) or stepping back from it (so as to get it into better view), going around it (because one wants to see it from all sides), as well as simply dwelling in its presence, reaching out to it, touching it, perhaps caressing it, tracing its form with one's fingers or eyes, breathing it in, moving to its

²¹⁴ “[T]o will something and to have satisfaction in its existence, i.e., to take an interest in it, are identical.” (ibid., 94) and “Not merely the object but also its existence please. Hence the judgment of taste is merely contemplative, i.e., a judgment that, indifferent with regard to the existence of an object, merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure” (ibid., 96). Kant's problem is that he fails to conceive of the possibility of an interest in the existence that is not tied to one's own pleasure or to the furthering of rational humanity. He seems to be blind to the possibility that one can simply delight in the existence of a thing apart from these two alternatives.

²¹⁵ This is Kant's example: “I could even easily convince myself that if I were to find myself on an uninhabited island, without any hope of ever coming upon human beings again, and could conjure up [...] a magnificent structure through my mere wish, I would not even take the trouble of doing so if I already had a hut that was comfortable enough for me” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 90). Note that the example works (if it works) because it is ‘merely’ a building and not a place whose beauty is connected to the life that blooms there. Note also that Kant does not here juxtapose *productive* and *reproductive* imagination – for him, even the ‘re-summoned’ palace is, if it is an experience of beauty, the productive imagination at work (ibid, 124).

²¹⁶ Thus, Simone Weil writes: “Joy (pure joy is always in the beautiful) is the feeling of reality. Beauty is the manifest presence of reality” (*Notebooks II* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 360; quoted from Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” 212). What is lacking in Kant, then, seems to be a ‘proper’ notion or reality.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 218: “The form taken by love when its object it destroyed is *grief of suffering*” (emphasis in the original).

rhythm or joining into its melody, and so on.²¹⁸ If it is in danger, we may try to protect it, perhaps even sacrifice ourselves for it, or stand frozen in horror.²¹⁹ If it is destroyed we will be, as I said, saddened or even filled with grief, we may try to come to terms with the experience – and/or cherish its memory – by creating art inspired by it, or even try to create something of a similar beauty.²²⁰

For Kant, all of these responses are inconsistent with a judgment of beauty because he thinks of them as tied up with interest and, hence, with relating to the beautiful thing as a determinate something that represents a good for the subject. If my response to beauty were indeed that I would at some point come to deliberate as to what to do, then settle for a certain course of action – such as reaching out so as to touch it – and then execute that plan, then I would be fully on board with Kant that this would interrupt my free engagement with the beautiful thing and, hence, be at odds with what he calls aesthetic judgment. The crux, however, is that our responses are often not expressions of the kind of practical (natural or moral) interest that Kant talks about but that they precede the level of deliberate action. Especially in the face of beauty, our responses are better captured in terms of what I will later develop as an *immediate and loving response to that which claims us*.

d. Kant's Failure to Recognize the Otherness of the Other

However, the focus of my present work lies on the relation not to the particularity of the beautiful but to the individual other being that claims one in *moral* response. On the Kantian account, such a relation is not thinkable, not even when one takes into consideration the *Third Critique*, for even there, he remains caught up in the conceptual framework of the *subject*.

Above, I quoted a passage from the *Introduction* of the *Third Critique* in which Kant states that free reflective judgment “is supposed to ground the unity of all empirical principles under equally empirical but higher principles, and is thus to ground the possibility of the systematic subordination of empirical principles under one another.” Now, Kant's interest lies in the *logical* antecedence of a free reflective engagement with the world before a conceptually determinative one – conceptualising what we encounter in the world, including the entirety of natural regularities and laws, no matter how general, *logically presupposes* a free reflective

²¹⁸ I would say these are various ways in which the joy in – or, as Barabas describes it, the “glad attention” (ibid., 213) to – the beautiful may manifest.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 218.

²²⁰ Barabas makes the important observation that the ways of speaking about the relation to beauty are the same ways in which we also speak about the relation to what we love. This foreshadows the discussion from chapter 3 onwards.

engagement with it. What he does not see – or, for whatever reasons, does not address – is that the relation between the reflective and the determinative seems to be also of *developmental* importance. What I have in mind is not how the human way of being in the world may have, over the millennia, developed from a less to a more determinative mode of judging – although this is also a very interesting (yet highly speculative) matter – but how we, qua individuals, develop from beings who do not and cannot yet subsume what they encounter under determinate concepts into beings who can and do.²²¹ Free reflective judgment, in other words, may seem to point to a way of accounting for the emergence of the subject (and its third-personally mediated mode of relating to the world via the will) out of a pre-subjective state in which the individual's (i.e. the infant's) way of relating to the world is as yet one of free playful reflection²²².

It may seem that if Kant would have seen, or acknowledged, this possibility, he would have also realised a) that the pre-subjective is not marked by a disinterested contemplation but by an engagement with the world and with others which, while as yet indeterminate both epistemologically and volitionally, nonetheless reflects care, concern, and thus understanding²²³, and b) that it is in and through the engagement with other at this level that the pre-subjective individual gradually comes to acquire the conceptual resources necessary in order to subsume the thus far merely freely reflected under determinate concepts.²²⁴ And I agree with much of it. This being said, this conceptual route was not open to Kant. The issue is that, for him, the free reflective way of engaging with the world is after all still a form of *judgment* (although of a more basic kind than determining judgment) and, as such, it remains tied to the *subject*: judging is specifically the *subject's* way of taking a stand on what it encounters – in aesthetic judgment, it does not cognise or act but it still deploys its faculties of understanding, imagination, and indeed reason.²²⁵ Whatever the mode of the pre-subjective infant's relating to the world may be called, it is not what Kant calls free reflective judgment. Moreover, free

²²¹ This notion of development is close to what Menke, following Herder and Nietzsche, calls “aesthetic genealogy” (*Kraft. Ein Grundbegriff ästhetischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2017), 55; this and all the following quotations are my translations) which he, in a nutshell, understands of a “dark force” (ibid., 64; Herder's term, not George Lucas') of creative, non-purposive form of expression (ibid., 59–65) which, as the Other of rationality, not only predates, underlies and motivates the development of our practical-rational capacities (ibid., 72–85) but also at all times jeopardises them (ibid., 110–5).

²²² Ibid., 63–5; cf. also Buber's illustrative description of how the infant relates to the world, and others, around it (*I and Thou*, 76–9). This is of course not to exclude the infant's merely biological drives, needs, and impulses, such as crying when hungry or afraid, seeking the security and protection, and so on, but what could be called its ‘mental life’ (although this requires a notion of the mental that is wider than that of thinkers such as John McDowell whose thought – including his understanding of *mind* – will be discussed in the next chapter.)

²²³ I will develop this thought in the next chapter.

²²⁴ Ibid., 80–1; in a similar spirit (though a very different style), cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 414 ff.

²²⁵ Reason does not come into play in the form of rational action, yet still plays a role in beauty's being “a symbol of morality” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 225–8).

reflective judgment is only understandable as a temporary *suspension* of the practical, interested, conceptually determinate relation to the world that otherwise distinguishes the subject and which, thus, can be understood as its *modus operandi*.²²⁶ Put differently, the subject that finds itself in the presence of beauty suspends its otherwise interested and, thus, determining world relation and, for a more or less prolonged period of time, exerts its mental faculties in a free play of reflection. As such, the relation to the other in its mere particularity is, on Kant's account, dependent on the 'normal' way of relating to it as conceptually determined – it is only thinkable as an *exception*.

Still, one gets the sense that in his later work on aesthetics, Kant began to sense the relevance of a mode of relationality fundamentally different from the one around which he had erected the sophisticated theoretical construct that was his critical philosophy; with this dawning on him, it seems he began running against the walls of his own theory, partly succeeding – namely in showing that, and how, the relation to the particular must be understood to precede the conceptually mediated relation – yet also partly failing, namely by ultimately remaining caught up in the conceptual cage of the subject and its will.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I critically examined Kant's understanding of relationality. I began with an exposition of his conception of moral action and its intrinsic connection to reason and duty, followed by an analysis of Kant's understanding of the *moral* relation to others, i.e. living up to the positive duty of benevolence. Showing that this duty can be fulfilled in markedly impersonal ways, offering a vision of the Kantian realm of ends as a society of detached cooperation, I turned to Kant's later moral writings, especially *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in which he, perhaps having become aware of the lack of relation in his prior works, puts a greater emphasis on love as duty's 'worldly complement'. Although offering promising insights into the nature of what a moral relationship may look like, his account revealed itself as riddled with tensions, seemingly due to his inability to recognise love as more than a 'mere' inclination. I then turned to an issue neglected by Kant, namely that reflection on the will, as always already engaged, must itself also necessarily be engaged – an engagement, ultimately, with others, not mediated by a rational self-relation but embedding it. Exposing Kant's inability to conceptualise

²²⁶ As far as I know, Kant does not thematise the temporality of the judgment of taste. Apart from the fact that he speaks of something that seeks to "sustain" (ibid., 127) itself, thus suggesting that it tends to be short-lived, it is also apparent from sheer common sense that a being that would remain in the state of rapture that is aesthetic contemplation would simply be unable to survive.

intersubjectivity, I turned to his to the end-in-itself so as to ‘excavate’ from it its ‘moral-phenomenological core’: the experience of absolute worth underlies the concept of the end-in-itself, not vice versa. With this, I turned to Kant’s aesthetics and the promising alternative it offers of second-personal relationality while, at the same time, remaining entangled in the ‘first-and-third-personal’ system he developed in his critical philosophy.

Chapter II:

McDowell: Moral Togetherness as a Relation of Virtuous Agents

0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I expounded how, on a Kantian conception of morality, a moral relation is to be understood. I showed that, because what Kant takes to be *the* criterion of morality, namely the law of reason, is defined in terms of impersonality, its implementation by particular individuals engaging with one another can only lead to relations of a third-personal kind, that is, to relations of an I to others as to *occasions* for doing what moral duty demands. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of Kant's attempt, developed in the *Third Critique*, to move beyond a third-personal and towards a second-personal mode of relationality. Yet, while this account provided – an illuminating yet nonetheless flawed – conception of what an *aesthetic* second-personal relation may look like, it did not get us closer towards the *moral* second-personal, that is, the relation in which the other is a locus of moral salience simply qua individual other and not in virtue of some overarching, impersonal instance.

With these questions, I want to turn to John McDowell and his attempt to bring Kant 'down to earth.' An influential philosopher in a wide range of debates since the 1970s, McDowell's earlier work was primarily concerned with the (then) contemporary analytic philosophy (especially epistemology²²⁷ and philosophy of language²²⁸), late-Wittgensteinian philosophy,²²⁹ as well as with ancient philosophy (and here especially with Aristotle).²³⁰ It was only with *Mind and World*, a lecture series first published in 1994,²³¹ that he developed a disjunctivist position strongly indebted to Kant (and complemented by other continental thinkers, such as Hegel²³² and Gadamer).²³³ Central to this shift towards Kant was his development of a critique of a dogma dominating contemporary Anglo-American philosophy,

²²⁷ Cf. e.g. John McDowell, "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 369–94.

²²⁸ Cf. e.g. John McDowell, "Truth-Conditions, Bivalence, and Verificationism," *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*, 3–28.

²²⁹ E.g. John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 221–62; "Are Meaning, Understanding, etc., Definite States?," *The Engaged Intellect. Philosophical Essays*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²³⁰ E. g. John McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," & "Virtue & Reason," both in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, respectively 23–49 & 50–73.

²³¹ John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

²³² *Ibid.*, e.g. 111.

²³³ *Ibid.*, e.g. 115 ff.

a dogma which McDowell, following Wilfrid Sellars,²³⁴ refers to as the *Myth of the Given*.²³⁵ This ‘myth’ – which I cannot here discuss at length – can be summed up in a nutshell as the assumption that, at its most basal level, sense perception is confronted with “bare presences”²³⁶ that are devoid of conceptual content, i.e. simply ‘given’ in experience, and that it is, accordingly, the scientific registering and measuring of these ‘givens’ that grants us access to, and gradually develops a comprehensive picture of, objective reality as it is ‘in itself’.²³⁷ In his influential criticism of this dogma – which, as I see it, renders a valuable service to contemporary philosophy – McDowell turns to Kant’s epistemology and presents him as the champion of a better alternative, namely one that begins with the subject that always already conceptualises that which it encounters.²³⁸ What is *given*, McDowell thus shows with Kant, is thus always already also *made*, namely in virtue of our conceptualising it – there is no accessible pre-conceptual level of relating to the world; our conceptualising activity goes “all the way out”²³⁹ to reality as it impinges on our senses.²⁴⁰

This brief summary is of relevance in that it shows that McDowell approaches Kant primarily via epistemological questions – just as the concern underlying the onset of Kant’s critical project was the possibility of (empirical) *knowledge*, the concern that motivates McDowell’s shift to Kant is the mitigation of a rampant yet metaphysically deluded theory of *knowledge*.²⁴¹ Thus, McDowell approaches morality via epistemology.²⁴² All the while, however, Aristotle remains the figurehead of McDowell’s ethics; indeed, his earlier work on Aristotle plays an important role in fleshing out, and buttressing, his shift towards Kant – as

²³⁴ Cf. Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²³⁵ *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* was originally presented in the form of a lecture series titled ‘The Myth of the Given: Three Lectures on Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’ (Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 13); cf. also McDowell, *Mind and World*, xiv ff.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, xi ff.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 ff. It should be noted that McDowell seeks to be more careful in how he presents this idea in that he seldom outright states that, in relating to the world, we *conceptualise* everything but, rather, that the mind’s relation to the world is one in which “conceptual capacities” (*Mind and World*, e.g. xx) are at work, that the ‘items’ we encounter are “conceptually organized” (*ibid.*, 6) and that “the world’s impressions on our senses are already possessed of *conceptual content*” (*ibid.*, 18; my emphasis). The reason for this wariness is, I think, to retain a sense of the difference between what happens, as it were, automatically in perception (i.e. in ‘taking in conceptual content’) and what we do when we reflect on what we have taken in (i.e. *conceptualising* in the more straightforward sense of the word – that is, *conceptual thinking*). The important point for my present purposes is simply that, for McDowell, every mind-world relation is mediated by concepts with an essentially socio-linguistic nature. This is what I will mean when I use the verb ‘to conceptualise’ in the present chapter.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 & 69.

²⁴⁰ See the telling title of lecture 2 of *Mind and World*: “The Unboundedness of the Conceptual” (*ibid.*, 24).

²⁴¹ It should be noted, however – and will re-surface in this and the next chapter – that, for McDowell, ethical knowledge is quite different from empirical knowledge.

²⁴² The same could be said about Kant, yet only historically, not systematically.

becomes particularly apparent in chapters 4 to 6 of *Mind and World*.²⁴³ In the present chapter, I will discuss how McDowell resorts to Kantian conceptualism in order to provide a theoretical underpinning to Aristotelian ethics while, on the other hand, resorting to Aristotle in order to go beyond Kant. For although he sympathises with Kant’s focus on consciousness, reason and conceptuality McDowell finds lacking what he calls Kant’s “transcendental story”²⁴⁴ and the concomitant dualism of the noumenal and the phenomenal as it introduces what he regards as various untenable metaphysical assumptions resulting in the unsatisfying picture of the human being torn out of nature and put over against it.²⁴⁵ Seeking recourse to Aristotle’s ethics – and especially to his account of moral development, socialisation into virtue, and second nature – McDowell accordingly seeks to amend Kant’s reason-centred philosophy (including his moral philosophy) by re-embedding it in nature.²⁴⁶

To this end, two notions become central in McDowell’s thought, namely *communality* and *perception*. McDowell seeks to amend Kant, firstly, by showing that the concepts that we fall back upon when we reflect on our actions and our character are at bottom *communally*²⁴⁷ – and thus also historically²⁴⁸ – constituted, namely as sedimented in constantly transforming practices embedded in traditions.²⁴⁹ More precisely, it is in virtue of their inherently communal character that practical concepts are *normatively* charged²⁵⁰ – the communal is not only regarded as the ‘home’ of the concepts by recourse to which we orient our actions, it is, moreover, due to their social constitution that these concepts always already exert, as Hedrick puts it, “what is usually an informal, subtle form of normative pressure to do things the

²⁴³ Ibid., 66 ff.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 106.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., esp. chapter 5 (7–107).

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 77–86.

²⁴⁷ Cf. McDowell, “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” 243: “we have to situate our conception of meaning and understanding within a framework of communal practices.” In the following discussion, I will use the terms *communal* and *social* interchangeably; in *Mind and World*, McDowell expresses a certain reservation with the term *social* for describing what he is after but this reservation is geared towards the worry that the notion of the *social* may be taken to constitute “the framework for a construction of the very idea of meaning” (95) on the side of the proponents of “restrictive naturalism” (ibid.) As I do not use the notion in the way restrictive naturalists do, this problem should not arise in my discussion.

²⁴⁸ John McDowell, “Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint,” *Having the World in View. Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 107: “what is a reason for what is a historically situated achievement, unintelligible except in the context of a community;” cf. also McDowell, *Mind and World*, 126.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.: “natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what.” I will return to this idea repeatedly over the course of this work.

²⁵⁰ “[T]he status of free agenthood”, an expression McDowell takes over from Robert Pippin, “has a normative shape that is maintained and [...] groomed by the continuing practice of a community. The idea of the status is inseparable from the idea of participation in a communal practice” (“Towards a Reading of Hegel on Action in the ‘Reason’ Chapter of the Phenomenology,” *Having the World in View*, 167).

right/appropriate way.”²⁵¹ Secondly, one of McDowell’s central efforts is geared towards showing that, in order to supersede a Kantian conception of action which – unsatisfyingly – presents reason as standing over against nature,²⁵² conceptuality and social normativity must be thought of as to a large extent internalised as second nature.²⁵³ In this way, so the claim, can justice be done to the spontaneity²⁵⁴ that marks most of our actions: it is by the integration of the socio-practically acquired and normatively charged concepts all the way down into our sense *perception*²⁵⁵ that our responses can be thought of as spontaneous while at the same time being expressive of reason.²⁵⁶

One could thus say that McDowell, not unlike Hegel, seeks to go beyond Kant by going back to Aristotle.²⁵⁷ In any case, sociality/normativity and perception are as it were McDowell’s remedies to the unsolved problems Kant left us with. In what follows I will flesh out how McDowell thus seeks to go beyond Kant; in doing so, I shall develop my answers to the two questions which with I was left at the end of chapter 1. In a nutshell, I will show the following: 1) on McDowell’s account, there *is* a responsiveness to others qua *particular* others, yet one that presupposes as its ground a conceptual outlook qua second nature yielding reasons for acting; it could thus be said that, for McDowell, the relation to the other qua particular other is an achievement which requires the acquisition, and internalisation, of a conceptual outlook and, thus, into what he, following Sellars, calls the “space of reasons.”²⁵⁸ 2) There *does* exist a pre-

²⁵¹ Todd Hedrick, “Review of Rahel Jaeggi’s Critique of Forms of Life,” *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 25.8.2019, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/critique-of-forms-of-life/> (accessed 8.6.2023). If the (indirect) reference to Jaeggi seems obscure, it is worth noting that Jaeggi’s understanding of social life is very close in spirit to McDowell in that she, too, understands action as embedded in, and guided by, normatively charged communal practices, practices which may reveal themselves as problematic and thus call for critical reflection and transformation (cf. Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, transl. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), esp. chapters 1 and 2). I will not examine these parallels any further in the present work, however.

²⁵² McDowell, *Mind and World*, 41–5.

²⁵³ McDowell first introduces the notion of *second nature* in *Mind and World* (80 ff.). He at times illuminates his understanding of second nature with the notion of *Bildung*, i.e. the “the moulding of ethical character” (ibid., 84). He is right to hold that Kant does not really have a concept of second-nature (ibid., e.g. 110) and, hence, no differentiation between practical reason that has become internalised and practical reason that is exercised in the form of deliberation.

²⁵⁴ In order to anticipate possible confusions: I use the term ‘spontaneity’ here in a double sense, namely a) as a *terminus technicus* of Kant’s philosophy, referring to the spontaneous workings of the imagination and understanding which, together with the receptivity of the senses, synthesises the ‘manifold’ (cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 236–42), and b) in the non-technical sense of ‘immediate’, ‘without thinking’. As the following discussion will hopefully show, these two dimensions of the notion go hand in hand in McDowell’s thought.

²⁵⁵ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 69: “spontaneity permeates our perceptual dealings with the world, all the way out to the impressions of sensibility themselves.”

²⁵⁶ In “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?,” (*Mind, Value, and Reality*, 77–94) for instance, McDowell speaks of a “perceptual capacity” acquired in “moral upbringing” by means of which “one learns [...] to see situations in a special light, as constituting reasons for acting” (85).

²⁵⁷ This becomes most clearly apparent in *Mind and World* from section 7 onwards.

²⁵⁸ The term is introduced by Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 299. It is one of the most central concepts in McDowell’s *Mind and World* where he uses it to refer to the “rational structure of beliefs and

conceptual relation to others on McDowell's view which indeed foregoes the conceptually mediated relation, yet not in the sense of a meaningful relation to a particular other but rather as blind and mindless 'first-natural' relation to be explained in natural-scientific terms. For McDowell, this kind of relation is paradigmatically represented in the infant who first relates to others in the same way a "dumb animal"²⁵⁹ does but who then, by gradually joining into the activities of those around it, comes to open its eyes to language and, thus, acquires just the kind of conceptual outlook required for responding to others in a minded, meaningful way. It is the acquisition of a conceptual outlook that, on McDowell's view, is the precondition of virtue and, thus, of relationality reflective of ethical worth.

Before having a closer look at how McDowell attempts to capture what it means to be a mind in the world, let me first make a few general remarks. Despite his focus on sociality and perception(-cum-response), and despite his attempt to elucidate what it means to be a mind that *relates* to the world, McDowell's philosophy does not foreground the relations in which individuals stand *with one another*. Indeed, togetherness plays a somewhat uncanny role in his thought in that it is at the same time omnipresent *and* absent throughout. It is omnipresent given that at the heart of what is arguably McDowell's main philosophical concern – namely explaining the possibility of meaningfulness in speech, thought, and action²⁶⁰ – lies the notion of *praxis*, a notion which implies the convening and participating of a multiplicity of individual subjects in various forms of activity.²⁶¹ Thus, speaking and acting meaningfully always already implies others. At the same time, however, togetherness is strangely absent in McDowell's thought in that relations between individuals thus play a role to the extent they are 'enablers' of meaningful speech, thought, and action, or 'introducers' into the world of meaning. Speaking about human togetherness²⁶² in a McDowellian spirit is possible only by a detour via the shared

concepts" (Tim Thornton, *John McDowell*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2019), 281) into which we are initiated in childhood and in and through which we come to know "what is a reason for what" (cf. footnote 249 above). McDowell seeks to reconcile the space of reason with the "realm of [natural] law" (e.g. *Mind and World*, xv) by showing that "the world itself cannot be thought of as lying outside the space of reasons. To be a world at all it has to possess the kind of structure that we, as rational subjects, can find intelligible" (Tim Thornton, *John McDowell*, 10; cf. also *Mind and World*, 71).

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 70; for another interesting thought experiment on this thematic, cf. McDowell's examples of the wolves that acquire reason, thus developing a second nature out of the first ("Two Kinds of Naturalism," *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167–97, at 169–73).

²⁶⁰ As will be shown below, the acquisition of language lies at the heart of McDowell's explanation; cf.: "command of the language is needed in order to put one in direct cognitive contact with that in which someone's meaning consists" ("Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," 249) and "it is only because we can have [...] 'a reflective knowledge of features of *others*' understanding of a particular expression' that meaning is possible at all" (ibid., 254; emphasis in the original).

²⁶¹ Cf. "Virtue and Reason," *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 50–73, at 64.

²⁶² On McDowell's view, animals do not possess the reflective conceptual capacities that human beings have and which condition the possibility of meaningfulness; hence, most animals are, for McDowell, precluded from a meaningful life and, thus, from being together in meaningful ways (cf. *Mind and World*, Lecture VI).

practices and the meaningfulness of which they provide the ground.²⁶³ So, although meaningfulness in speech and action always already implies others, the others as such – at least qua unique individuals²⁶⁴ – as it were disappear behind the prevalent forms of understanding, even in the case of a criticism of those understandings. In McDowell’s thought, togetherness thus can be said to serve a transcendental function, i.e. as the condition of the possibility for meaningfulness – and, thus, meaningful interpersonal relations – as such.²⁶⁵ Accordingly, meaningful engagement with others is necessarily *mediated by*²⁶⁶ the socio-normatively charged conceptual outlook that one has acquired (and since then further developed) via one’s initiation into the space of reasons. In this sense, relating to a particular other means *relating to something*, where the word ‘something’ refers to the concept under which she, in her particularity, other has become subsumed.²⁶⁷ Thus, the underlying mode of relating to others is structurally identical to relating to objects.²⁶⁸

While I agree with McDowell that speaking of meaningfulness presupposes that multiple individuals relate to one another, I think that he puts the wrong focus, namely on the We of community, instead of the I-You of the relation to the particular other.²⁶⁹ The main

²⁶³ This aspect of McDowell’s thought is certainly motivated by his criticism of Davidson and his notion of *triangulation* according to which “self-standing subjects” are “pairwise engaged in mutual interpretation” (*Mind and World*, 186), giving rise to a “mutual understanding” (McDowell, “Towards a Reading of Hegel on Action,” 167) which, due to Davidson’s causal conception of mind-world relationality, bears “no rational constraint” (*Mind and World*, 186). This leads to an unsatisfactory understanding of language: “What we call ‘the English language’ is”, on Davidson’s view, “a concatenation of ‘I’-‘thou’ relations, not a practice that is essentially the property of a ‘we’” (McDowell, “Towards a Reading of Hegel on Action,” 167). In other words, Davidson’s account yields a picture according to which a language is a sum total of the speech of individual pairs of speakers while McDowell suggests that it is the other way around, i.e. that the meeting and speaking of individuals is always already embedded within a language. While I am sympathetic with at least parts of McDowell’s criticism of Davidson, I do not think – and will later proceed to show – that Davidson’s conception of I-Thou relationality is the only conception there is; indeed, I think it requires a richer conception of the second-personal to overcome the limitations of McDowell’s ‘We’-centred conception relationality.

²⁶⁴ I will develop what I mean by this from the next chapter onwards.

²⁶⁵ That McDowell rejects Kant’s transcendental idealism does not mean that his thought does not feature transcendental arguments or lines of thought (which he himself acknowledges; cf. e.g. “Sellars, Kant, and Intentionality,” *Having the World in View*, 16–8). After all, his endorsement of Kant’s ‘slogan’ “thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 193–4) and the concomitant interlocking of spontaneity and receptivity is, as McDowell himself acknowledges, a transcendental ‘move’ in its own right (this is brought out nicely by Richard Gaskin, *Experience and the World’s Own Language. A Critique of John McDowell’s Empiricism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 65–8).

²⁶⁶ The concept of *mediation* is, of course, central to post-Kantian, especially Hegelian thought (by which McDowell is also strongly influenced.) While I will be unable to address Hegel’s concept of mediation, this chapter can be understood as an attempt to spell out McDowell’s conception of a conceptually mediated mind-world relation as well as to bring to light its limitations. For a good introduction to Hegel’s concept of mediation, cf. Brian O’Connor, “The Concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno,” *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 1-2, no. 20 (1999): 84–96, esp. section 1.

²⁶⁷ In connection to the last chapter, it can thus be said that, on McDowell’s account, every relation to particular others can be explained with what Kant calls *determining judgment*.

²⁶⁸ Recall the last chapter, section 2.c., and its discussion of the ‘subject-object’ in Kant’s thought.

²⁶⁹ Which is not to say that I advocate an account on which communality, tradition, shared language, and the like, are unimportant. The problem I see is simply that McDowell presents the meaningfulness of the relation between I and You as in a significant sense *secondary* to the meaning that is there already, pervading a

problem I see, in other words, is that he misses a crucial distinction, namely that between social, or communal, relationality and concrete interpersonal relationality as it is lived face-to-face with others. McDowell seems to think – or so at least his writings reflect – that there is only *one* relevant alternative to the unfeasible dichotomy between private language (according to which meaning is conjured up by the individual in isolation from others)²⁷⁰ and the idea of meaning being fixed independently from concrete use (culminating in what he calls “rampant Platonism”)²⁷¹, namely that meaning arises, lives, and transforms first and foremost in a *community*;²⁷² what he thereby undercuts, however, is that the modes of relationality that come to the fore once one zooms into the fabric of life shared with others exhibit crucial differences, and that – so I will try to show – the direct, embodied relation to others plays an irreducible when it comes to matters of meaning and meaningfulness.²⁷³ Missing this point, McDowell assumes that the, as it were, ‘smallest interpersonal unit’ in which meaning may arise is that of a community in which meanings and understandings are, at bottom, public.²⁷⁴

Connected to this is another, more specifically *moral* issue in McDowell’s thought: on McDowell’s view, the precondition for a relation to reflect ethical value (i.e. virtue) is that it must be mediated by the respective agent’s ethical outlook, that is, by her conception of virtue. As one may fail to live up to one’s conception of virtue, however, it further requires, McDowell holds with Aristotle, that the agent strives to act in an *exemplary* way, i.e. as an example of what *we* (ought to) find virtuous. Although the conception which mediates this relation (and gives expression to my striving for virtue) is *mine*, I can reasonably hope that this conception is fit for the task of being realised in an exemplary way because its contents are not simply conjured up by my fantasy and caprice but are the reflection of what I have learned is *actually* virtuous. In other words: Trying to be virtuous means trying to exercise my capacity for virtuous action, practical wisdom (*phronesis*), in an *excellent* way; excelling in matters of virtue, in turn, means ethically standing out from among the others – and, hence, of being able to reasonably

community, instead of seeing this communal aspect as constituting *the backdrop before which* I and You engage meaningfully with one another. This thought will be developed further, both in this and the next chapters.

²⁷⁰ McDowell develops his reading of Wittgenstein’s influential ‘Private Language Argument’ in “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” 238–46 (cf. also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edition, transl. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), esp. §243.

²⁷¹ McDowell introduces and elaborates the expression in *Mind and World*, 77–8. In a nutshell, it is the view that meaning is not just fixed by community standards but taken to exist on some mysterious, transcendent plane.

²⁷² Cf.: “How can a performance be nothing but a ‘blind’ reaction to a situation [i.e. a case of direct understanding-in-perception] and [still] be a case of going by the rule [...]? The answer is: by belonging to a custom [...], practice [...], or institution [...]” (“Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” 242).

²⁷³ This distinction will become relevant in section 1.d. below.

²⁷⁴ As Gaskin puts it, “language is a public phenomenon, in the sense that what words mean is a matter not of the individual’s say-so, but of how these words are used by the community” (*Experience and the World’s Own Language*, 83).

expect that others regard my action as exemplary for how *we* should act.²⁷⁵ Again, the conception that mediates the individuals' relation to one another – this time with respect to its ethical quality – remains bound up with the communal, with the *We*.

In this chapter, I will expound the understanding of togetherness which – often between the lines – underlies McDowell's philosophy and, thus, show how he, too, fails to offer a satisfactory account of second-personal relationality. To this effect, I will begin where I left off in the last chapter, namely with the question of how we develop into conscious beings among, and in the engagement with, others. Here already, what I take to be the two unsurmountable challenges to McDowell's philosophy are presented, namely a) our on his account inexplicable development from pre-conceptual into conceptual beings and b) the impossibility of relating to the other qua *real, individual other* and not via a *conception of the other*. I will invoke Arendt's distinction between the *what* and the *who* in section 2 and elaborate it in section 3 by discussing, alongside Christopher Cordner, the Lévinasian distinction between *relative* otherness and *absolute* otherness, pointing out that McDowell can only think the former, not the latter. In the second sub-chapter 2, I will then, in the first section, proceed to give a brief summary of McDowell's appropriation of Aristotelian ethics with a focus on his account of moral development followed by an examination of the role the desire of social recognition plays in it (section 2). Sub-chapter 3 will conclude the chapter with an in-depth discussion of the relational dynamics in moral development, both as Aristotle and McDowell conceive of it and of the picture that I set against them, namely one on which the focus is not on authority and inculcation but love and attention. With this, the scene is set for the next chapter: the development of an understanding of second-personal relationality.

1. Language and Others

a. 'Light Dawning' – through Language?

McDowell speaks of the infant's awakening to a world as an awakening to language. It is among and through others that we develop into conscious beings by acquiring concepts by means of which we become able to make sense of the world and ourselves – including those others. McDowell characterizes this process in the following way:

²⁷⁵ This line of thought will be further developed, and substantiated with references, in section 2.b.

The natural metaphor for the learning of a first language is “Light dawns”. For light to dawn is for one’s dealings with language to cease to be blind responses to stimuli: one comes to hear utterances as expressive of thoughts, and to make one’s own utterances as expressive of thoughts ... And light does not dawn piecemeal over particular sentences: “Light dawns gradually over the whole” – a more or less coherent totality, that is, of sentences that one has been drilled into simply accepting. A difficulty in saying anything satisfying about the phenomenology of understanding is thus that working one’s way into language – or better, being cajoled into it – is, simultaneously, working one’s way into a conception of the world.²⁷⁶

McDowell deploys Wittgenstein’s (I think beautiful) metaphor of ‘light dawning’²⁷⁷ for the small child’s awakening to the world. Here already, the peculiarity of how he describes this awakening is relevant. It is clear that McDowell wants to convey that the light dawns for the child through its being engaged with by others. After all, the child gradually starts to hear utterances as “expressive of thoughts”, presupposing that there must be others expressing them. Yet, the others as such do not appear in McDowell’s formulation but remain mysteriously hidden beyond what he seems to think is of greater relevance to the infant’s development, namely its being engaged with *in the medium of language*. This leads to a somewhat contrived way of putting the matter: instead of presenting the child as being engaged with by *others*, McDowell states that it is engaged with by (seemingly speaker-less) “utterances” and “sentences” confronting it, as if out of the void; instead of presenting the others as appearing to the child as speakers, the child is described as being somehow involved in “dealings with language”, a language no doubt *spoken* yet somehow *without a speaker*.

This odd way of putting it, however, is not due to sloppiness on the parts of McDowell. Rather, it follows from his commitment to the already mentioned disjunctivist claim that any mindful engagement with the world – including others – is thoroughly conceptually mediated. This means that the infant who has not yet acquired the concepts necessary in order to make sense of those who address it is as yet unable to relate to them *as others*²⁷⁸ at all. Before relating to others as others who populate a world alongside everything else that we might encounter –

²⁷⁶ John McDowell, “Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding,” *Value, Meaning, and Reality*, 333.

²⁷⁷ This is the whole paragraph §141: “When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, transl. Denis Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969).

²⁷⁸ That is to say: they will of course relate to others from birth onwards, perhaps even already before that; however, their crying, whining, grasping, seeking the warmth of another body or their mother’s breast, and so on, is, at these early stages, not yet intentionally directed at others *as others*. I will discuss intentionality in the next chapter.

such as objects, ideas, practices, activities, and so on²⁷⁹ – we only respond blindly to stimuli, in principle not different e.g. to how the spinal cord contracts when the patellar reflex is tested.²⁸⁰ McPherson succinctly points to the centrality of language in McDowell’s account of the child’s awakening to the world and the beings inhabiting it:

It is through acquiring conceptual capacities that our eyes are opened to the space of meaning, including ethical demands that are regarded as being ‘there in any case.’ Language enables the possibility of having a ‘world’ (as opposed to a mere ‘environment,’ as with non-rational animals) that is open to understanding in light of the meanings that arise for us within it.²⁸¹

It is by awakening to the meaning in those linguistic structures that the baby will first become able to understand that ‘mommy’ refers to the very being in front of it – indeed, that there is ‘a being’ in front of it at all.²⁸² Yet, ‘mommy’ alone is not a linguistic structure and so, in the spirit of Spinoza’s *determinatio negatio est*²⁸³ – every determination is a negation, i.e. is possible only by negatively relating it to that which it is not – the child will not acquire an understanding of such linguistic items in isolation but, as McDowell puts it, as part of a “coherent totality”. This means that an understanding of ‘mommy’ will, to stay with the above examples, develop hand in hand with an understanding of things, such as ‘potty’, ‘toy’, ‘food’, of verbs such as ‘loving’, ‘hurting’, ‘playing’, or as attributes of ‘mommy’, such as ‘smile’, ‘warm’, or ‘red hair’,

²⁷⁹ McDowell takes over Gadamer’s distinction between *environment* – referring to the animal’s way of relating to its surroundings, namely one that “is structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives” (*Mind and World*, 115), so that “the milieu it lives in can be no more than a succession of problems and opportunities” (ibid.) – and *world* – that is, the specifically human way of relating to its surroundings in which “coping with problems and exploiting opportunities” is transformed by “conceptual powers” by means of which we “weigh reasons” and ‘decide and think what to do’ (ibid.). Thus, McDowell agrees with Gadamer that a life in a world means to “rise above the pressure of what impinges upon us from the world” into a “free and distanced orientation” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second edition, transl. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2006), 441–2, quoted from McDowell, *Mind and World*, 115).

²⁸⁰ That is, all responses to the surroundings that are “structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives” (cf. the previous footnote.)

²⁸¹ David McPherson, *Virtue and Meaning: A Neo-Aristotelian Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 29.

²⁸² It is the bridging of this radical developmental gap between ‘relating to the surroundings entirely devoid of understanding’ and ‘light dawning’ which I think McDowell fails to satisfyingly account for. Below, I will address Hegel’s notion of habituation as a more promising candidate.

²⁸³ Spinoza’s formulation is the following: “So since figure is nothing but determination, *and determination is negation* [*Quia ergo figura non aliud, quam determinatio, et determinatio negatio est*], figure can be nothing other than negation, as has been said” (quoted from Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “‘Omnis determinatio est negatio’: determination, negation, and self-negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel,” *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckart Förster & Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 175–6; emphasis in the original). Melamed points out that “[t]he original Dutch text of the letter is lost” (ibid.). The link between Spinoza and McDowell is, again, Hegel who “transformed into the slogan of his own dialectical method: *Omnis determinatio est negatio* (‘Every determination is negation’)” (ibid., 176; cf. also G. W. F. Hegel, *Heidelberg Writings. Journal Publications*, transl. and ed. Brady Bowman & Allen Speight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8–9).

and so on. And not only that – in order to be able to see something as ‘red’, it will have to be able to differentiate it from ‘blue’ and ‘green’ and the other colours, just as it will, in order to perceive something as ‘warm’, also have to be able to perceive something else as ‘cold’ (and so on).²⁸⁴ Likewise, the child will gradually come to learn who ‘mommy’ is by learning that she is *not* ‘daddy’, ‘granny’, ‘teddy’, or ‘blanky’; later, this will be complemented by the understanding that all of them are ‘you’ when addressed directly (just as it is itself ‘you’ when being addressed by them), something which, in turn, is understood only in contradistinction to the meaning of notions like ‘I’, ‘he’, ‘we’, and so on.²⁸⁵ On McDowell’s picture, not only the ‘awakened’ child’s relating to its mother but to *everything* displays this logical structure, i.e. one in which the other is conceptualised via language. This language is meaningful independently of the child’s initiation into it, so that the child’s being able to *see meaning* as well as of *meaning something* – and, thus, its ability to meaningfully relate to others – arises only as part of a process in which it acquires ever expanding web of socio-linguistic concepts.²⁸⁶

Another peculiarity of McDowell’s picture is that it hints at a relation to language before it becomes meaningful, namely a relation that has the form of “blind responses to stimuli” which, at that early point (i.e. before awakening to it), “one has been drilled into simply accepting”. It is not clear what McDowell may mean by “accepting”, given that one cannot accept (or reject) anything one relates to as a meaningless stimulus. I think what he is after is that already before developing an understanding of the language that will gradually come

²⁸⁴ This line of thought is reflected also in Marina Barabas’s “In search of goodness,” in *Philosophy, Ethics and a Common Humanity: Essays in Honour of Raimond Gaita*, ed. Christopher Cordner (London: Routledge, 2011), 82–105, at 87: “When the meaning of any particular depends on its contraries and on its place within some context, thought and speech involve an interrelated *whole*, which in turn suggests coherence, *order*. Experienced reality generally, and the important or meaning emphatically, must ‘make sense’” It must be noted, however, that in the same discussion, Barabas does emphasize the “speech character” and the “*relational nature*” of meaning. (All emphases in the original.)

²⁸⁵ In a later essay, “Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective” (*The Engaged Intellect*, 152–9), McDowell phrases the point in such a way that the others are *somehow* present. As he puts it there, “learning to talk” must at first “be just acquiring propensities to vocalize, or react to vocalizations of others, in ways that pass muster with one’s elders. None of this proto-linguistic output is understood until a great deal is understood” (157). Bracketing the normative implication (‘pass muster’) – I will return to it below – the others have now entered the scene – but from which perspective? It seems only from the perspective of the ‘elders’ themselves or from that of *us*, i.e. those who observe the elder-infant relation; after all, the infant cannot yet make sense of anything around it, including its elders. But that seems dubious. That is, I agree with McDowell that the infant does not understand the “proto-linguistic output” just as it does not understand the elders’ vocalizations. But does it therefore not in some sense understand that it engages with others, others who address it in some ways, invite it to join into what they do and to produce the sounds they make, and so on? Even despite the fact that it cannot reflect upon, and articulate it in language?

²⁸⁶ As Bertram puts it, on McDowell’s view, “[c]onceptual structures precede the activities of individual human beings in general” so that “[a]ll human activities rely on structures that they did not establish by themselves”; thus, it is “necessary that human beings are introduced to conceptual structures while they mature. Human beings need to be educated in or – as McDowell puts it – initiated into the space of reasons” (Georg Bertram, “Two Conceptions of Second Nature,” *Open Philosophy* 3 (2020): 68–80, at 69).

disclose a world, the infant already somehow *gets used to* various sounds in various patterns and constellations. And not only that, it will also come to react to these sounds in various ways, yet rather like Pavlov's dog or Skinner's pigeons, that is, in a fashion of mindless conditioning. The baby may reproduce²⁸⁷ its older siblings dance moves by wiggling around and, after a while, come to do it whenever a certain kind of music is being played, or it may make a certain sound whenever the smell of baby food is in the air – yet at no point will it hear *music* or smell *baby food*. It reacts but its reactions reflect no understanding at all.

McDowell does not address how it is supposed to be possible for a child to make the leap from blind, mindless reactions to its environment to minded responses to a meaning-filled world. Indeed, it seems that McDowell's own account does not offer the conceptual resources to make sense of this transition, instead framing it as a kind of 'quantum leap' that somehow occurs with the child's being 'cajoled into language'. One way in which McDowell's account might be complemented in this respect would be by bringing into play the Hegelian idea that mind emerges through *habituation* – the continuous repetition makes the child gradually come to see patterns, thus as it were creating the possibility for mind to emerge out of its opposite, the mindlessness of recurrence²⁸⁸. Yet although McDowell regards his own project, despite its heavy emphasis on Kantian motives, as in an overall Hegelian spirit – he even goes so far as to describe *Mind and World* as a prolegomenon to Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*²⁸⁹ – he does not address this alternative (and, indeed, it has been argued by many that this is not merely a point of neglect but something that stands in conflict with some of McDowell's basic theoretical commitments).²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ I say 'reproduce' because if the child is at that point really as mindless as McDowell suggests, then even speaking about *imitation* seems to concede too much to it, given that imitation requires that the distinction between succeeding and failing to imitate must have already been grasped.

²⁸⁸ Hegel defines a) habit *as* second nature and b) habituation *as the process that gives rise to* second nature. Ad a): "Habit is rightly called second nature; *nature*, because it is an immediate being of the soul; a *second* nature because it is an immediacy *posited* by the soul, incorporating and molding the bodiliness that pertains to the determinations of feeling as such and to the determinacies of representation and of the will in so far as they are embodied" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, transl. W. Wallace & A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131 (§410)). Ad b): the "self-incorporation of the particularity or bodiliness of the determinations of feeling into the being of the soul appears as a repetition of them, and the production of habit appears as practice" (ibid.). As such, habit represents the intermediary between animal unfreedom and human freedom: "In habit man's mode of existence is natural, and for that reason he is unfree in it; but he is free in so far as the natural determinacy of sensation is by habit reduced to his mere being, he is no longer different from it, is indifferent to it, and so no longer interested, engaged, or dependent with respect to it" (ibid.).

²⁸⁹ McDowell, *Mind and World*, ix.

²⁹⁰ That is to say: habituation is central to McDowell's thought (cf. e.g. "Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle's Ethics," *The Engaged Intellect*, 40–58, at 50–2), yet he gives no account of how it is supposed to bridge the gap between first and second nature. As thinkers such as Forman and Levine show, however, Hegel's concept of habit points to an intermediary stage between first- and second nature with its own *sui generis* form of *nonconceptual* content (i.e. *not* what McDowell calls 'the Given') that McDowell's theory cannot accommodate: for Hegel, so Forman, "perceptual habits that make possible an objective consciousness mark not the *abandonment* of the nonconceptual sensations of our prespiritual infancy but, rather, their *Aufhebung*, their

What is decisive about McDowell's formulation of being 'cajoled into language', in any case, is the radicalness with which it presents the child as being at the mercy of language: initially utterly passive, a *tabula rasa*, a receptacle for conceptuality, the child is by being thrown into language – the human mind sedimented in objective structures of meaning – that it becomes someone, a mind with agency and capacities it can exercise. The child is the one who is being shaped, as yet powerless, while the language imposed upon the child does the shaping, itself remaining unchanged.²⁹¹ In developing into someone who shares the world with others, the child's initial passivity gradually makes way to activity, an activity that sets off with the child's becoming *spontaneously receptive*²⁹² in coming to making sense of language – and, hence, the world and others – to which it is exposed.

Now, it is, of course, true that the child can neither choose the language it is exposed to nor which kinds of associations it makes between things as a result of such an exposure. That it comes to understand that 'hurting' is the word used to describe a certain sensation which is reflected in how people act – say, by crying, contorting their faces in various ways, etc. – is not something the child can choose, let alone define for itself at a whim. As I already adumbrated above, however, this does not mean that meaningfulness only comes about in the way McDowell suggests, namely where a (shifting and organic yet nonetheless) quasi-objective body of meaningful logical connections is acquired by an individual. What McDowell fails to

preservation within the habit" (David Forman, "Second nature and spirit: Hegel on the role of habit in the appearance of perceptual consciousness," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 4 (2010): 325–52, at 349). This preservation within habit is then what provides the ground for the development of conceptual content proper. Levine extends the point to the practical domain when he expounds that there are habits that are, or have become, so deeply ingrained in our bodily activity that they do not qualify, as McDowell puts it, as "an exercise of agency in the sense that involves the agent's knowing what she is doing and why" (John McDowell, "The Myth of the Mind as Detached," *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, ed. J. K. Schear (London: Routledge Press, 2013), 51). Hence, habit of this kind "does not fall within the purview of the 'I do' and so is not the product of an exercise of one's practical rational/conceptual capacities" (Steven Levine, "McDowell, Hegel, and Habits," *Hegel Bulletin* 36, no. 2 (2015): 184–201, at 189); instead, they are "non-conceptual yet rationally expressive bodily habits" (*ibid.*, 199). Another respect in which McDowell's concept of second nature may be said to stay behind that of Hegel concerns its, as it were, uncriticizability. Christoph Menke, e.g., convincingly argues that, while McDowell's concept of second nature is thoroughly *positive* – that is, something he considers only in respect to what it *enables* us to do and how it *liberates* us – Hegel's richer concept of second nature is not only positive (in its enabling, liberating character) but also *negative*, namely in that it always relapses into 'mere', i.e. mindless, nature and is, hence, something which spirit must at all times seek to overcome (cf. *Autonomie und Befreiung*, 41–7 & esp. 123–34). But this points to something other than second nature (as the coming-together of subjective and objective spirit), namely absolute spirit, i.e. spirit that, in free self-reflection, sublates second nature's unfreedom. In a similar spirit, Carré holds that "for Hegel, unlike McDowell, the naturalness of ethical consciousness is only a point of departure (*terminus a quo*) and not so much a point of arrival (*terminus ad quem*)" (Louis Carré, "McDowell and Hegel on Following a Rule," *Hegel-Jahrbuch* 1 (2015): 357–62, at 362).

²⁹¹ That is not to say that McDowell thinks that human beings cannot change language; as he makes clear, they do so, namely a) simply and inadvertently in virtue of using it in ever new situations and b), in the sense of what McDowell refers to as a more exceptional "kind of originality" that "calls those who understand it to alter their prior conception of the very topography of intelligibility" (*Mind and World*, 186–7).

²⁹² This way of putting it points to the already mentioned Kantian thesis, much discussed in the first lectures of *Mind and World*, of experience requiring an interlocking of receptivity and spontaneity.

account for with his conceptualism is that, even before it has come to learn a language, the child is precisely *not* merely a receptacle for meaning (even if that meaning is understood as being freely and intelligently implemented in subsequent action) but, from the very beginning, a participant in meaningful engagements with others. In order to show this, however, a different understanding of meaningfulness is required. To this effect, I want to begin by suggesting an alternative way of understanding what it means to relate to others.

b. Conceptualising the Other

One of the implications of McDowell's thought is, as I pointed out above, that the only way of meaningfully *relating* to one another is by *conceptualising* one another. Take a trivial everyday encounter, say, someone approaching you on the street, asking you for the direction. In which sense can it be said that *your* perception of, and response to, the other are conceptually mediated? In a straightforward sense, such a claim may be taken to mean that you perceive the other person, say, *as* a man, *as* being middle-aged, *as* being bald, *as* seemingly having an Asian ethnical background, *as* stroking his beard while listening to you, *as* looking at his phone every couple of seconds, or *as* always repeating the last few words of your sentence as if to make sure he understood correctly, and so on. In this way, you may account for *what* you perceive when encountering the man. Giving an account *of what* one perceives, however, is always *of an object*, not *the object* (i.e. that which underlies the account given). It is this object – i.e. the other qua encountered, individual other – that eludes the grasp of conceptualisation. When thus speaking or thinking about the man, you refer to him as your perceptual content, as it were – you refer to all that which you perceive when you perceive him.²⁹³ Relating to another individual, on the other hand, means, on the McDowellian picture,²⁹⁴ perceiving this other as a being who relates to the world in just the same kind of conceptually mediated way in which you yourself also do – as another subject. That means perceiving him as someone who understands what he perceives and does in such a way that he could (but need not)²⁹⁵ articulate it in a description, a description that makes explicit the conceptualising activity that has already been going on implicitly in his very perceiving, and responding to, the world around him.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ This thought will be further developed in my discussion of Martin Buber in chapter 4.

²⁹⁴ To my knowledge, McDowell himself never addresses interpersonal relationality at all; the account I am now developing is thus to be understood as following from his thoughts and theoretical commitments

²⁹⁵ I already quoted McDowell above as holding that agency “involves the agent’s knowing what she is doing and why”, i.e. the understanding of what she does in the form ‘I do X’. In order to show that one has such an understanding, one accordingly has to be able to articulate it in language (which, given the centrality of language on McDowell’s view, is hardly a strange requirement).

²⁹⁶ For McDowell, experience, although in a certain sense automatic and for the most part ‘behind the scenes’, always, as it were, conceptually pre-structures what one perceives in such a way that can be fallen back upon by

That is to say that one's relation to others qua subjects entails perceiving them as (self-consciously) interacting with what they encounter instead of (blindly) reacting to it. So, unlike the dog that instinctively simply lashes out to snatch a flying Frisbee, the subject who catches it, even if it is fully spontaneous and out of the blue, understands what he does *as* him catching a Frisbee.²⁹⁷ Similarly, you perceive the man you encounter on the street not as blindly reacting to your presence but as understanding what he does in responding to you, namely *as* approaching you, *as* greeting you, *as* asking you for the direction, and so on. For McDowell, the *subject* is, at bottom, an *agent*.²⁹⁸

That, however, leaves the McDowellian picture in a predicament that is worryingly close to the unhappy Kantian picture discussed in chapter 1, namely one in which the others are related to as odd subject-object hybrids. The difference of the McDowellian picture is that the activity that distinguishes the subject is not to be understood as standing *over against* nature but as a *part of* it. This, however, makes it all the more obvious that, as fully integrated into nature, another subject can be meaningfully related to only under the same conditions that hold for all meaningful relation towards natural beings, namely by conceptualising it. Yet, conceptualising it means, as just pointed out, conceptualising it *as something*, as an *object*. So, conceptualising another as a subject does not mean relating to this other in a way that is essentially different from relating to objects – on the contrary, it means conceptualising her as a *special kind* of object, namely one which relates to, and interacts with, the world from his own, irreducibly conceptual perspective. So, the one who is recognised as a subject is conceptualised as an object, yet in a way that entails the recognition that one's own conceptualisation of her cannot fully 'get a hold' of her because she, too, conceptualises the world around her, and in a way that is irreducibly tied to her own perspective.

In that sense, the McDowellian subject has a peculiar kind of individuality: as something perceived, it is an object and hence displays an individuality like any other object, namely that of an instantiation of something more general. As another conceptualising creature, on the other hand, it exhibits an individuality that is beyond the individuality that becomes manifest in particular instantiations of a genus. This peculiar individuality of the agent is irreducible to anything else, anything more general; it is, as it were, free-standing or self-contained. This being

conceptual thought: "The conceptual capacities that are passively drawn into play in experience belong to a network of capacities for active thought, a network that rationally governs comprehension-seeking responses to the impacts of the world on sensibility" (*Mind and World*, 12).

²⁹⁷ This is an example McDowell himself deploys in his "Response to Dreyfus" (*The Engaged Intellect*, 324–8, at 327).

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 328: "Openness to the world is enjoyed by subjects who are essentially agents"; cf. also McDowell, "Towards a Reading of Hegel on Action," 166: "A fully-fledged human individual is a *free agent*" (emphasis in the original).

said, even this free-standing individuality of the agent is in a certain sense strikingly impersonal because what distinguishes it as the kind of individuality it is, is its own ability to conceptualise – that is: to subsume under *general* terms – what it encounters. So, while the impersonality of the object lies in its being an instantiation of something more general, the impersonality of the subject lies in its relating to what it encounters as instantiations of general concepts. Accordingly, what McDowell calls “a meeting of minds”²⁹⁹ is a meeting of two beings who recognise each other’s irreducible individuality but who, at the same time, understand this irreducible individuality as nothing more than the respective other’s ability to conceptualise what (and whom) she encounters in a way that is just as third-personally structured as one’s own.

It seems to me that this misses the distinctly second-personal nature of an encounter between two individuals as it is captured precisely in phrases like ‘a meeting of minds’. While I will delve deeper into the nature and significance of the second-personal in the next chapter, I will for now content myself with juxtaposing the just sketched McDowellian understanding of ‘minded relationality’ to that of Hannah Arendt. In the following poignant passage from *The Human Condition*, Arendt calls attention to the important difference between *who* someone is and *what* someone does (or, more generally, *what* can be said about someone):

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of “who” in contradistinction to “what”

²⁹⁹ McDowell, “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” 253; it should be noted, however, that what McDowell is after with this notion is the already mentioned ‘accessibility’ of another’s mind, i.e. the possibility of *understanding* one another without having to *interpret* one another. (This is the claim McDowell makes against Kripke (ibid., 226–32).) In this sense, however, the emphasis of McDowell’s expression is on something else – something more ‘mundane’, I am inclined to say – than the picture I just ascribed to him, namely that a ‘meeting of minds’ is a meeting primarily as regards the *contents* of these minds, not so much of the *minds as such* whose contents they are (i.e. the individuals themselves). This point becomes particularly in McDowell’s later essay “Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective,” in which he seeks to show that the three eponymous concepts are co-constitutive, thus claiming that one cannot “have the concept of intersubjectivity first, without yet having the concept of objectivity.” I agree with McDowell – my substantial reservation concerns his assumption that a relation, in order to reflect meaningfulness and understanding, must be thought of in terms of (inter)subjectivity and objectivity. This reservation is developed in more detail in a scathing (but I think poignant) polemic by Hannes Nykänen in which he criticises McDowell for “entirely miss[ing] Wittgenstein’s point” for holding the view that “human beings cannot understand *each other*; they necessarily need a medium” and that that medium is conceptuality. For McDowell, so Nykänen, “I-you understanding, the fact that we understand *each other*—not some mediating discourse—appears as magic” which is why he claims that “only the objectivity of a discourse makes understanding possible” (Hannes Nykänen, “This Thing with Philosophy,” in *Moral Foundations of the Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Joel Backström, Hannes Nykänen, Niklas Toivakainen, Thomas Wallgren (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 329–62, at 346–8; emphasis in the original).

somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does.³⁰⁰

Here, an important difference to the McDowellian account becomes apparent: while for him, the agent is a ‘who’ in the sense that she interacts with *what* she encounters and speaks *about* it with other agents, Arendt’s ‘who’ is distinguished in its *uniqueness* – that is, in *how*, as the unique individual he is, he acts and speaks.³⁰¹ In other words, Arendt’s ‘man’ – in the sense of ‘human being’ or, better, *Mensch*³⁰² – is an individual not only in that he constitutes an irreducible perspective on the world, a perspective that is first-personal in its ability to (third-personally) make sense of the world around in terms of a totality of ‘whats’, but rather in the incomparable uniqueness reflected in whatever he does. In being vis-à-vis another *who*, we are thus confronted with an individual that is neither conceptualised as a ‘what’ (object) nor encountered as merely another locus of conceptualisation (McDowell’s agent qua subject-object). (To anticipate a point made by Martin Buber that I will further explore in chapter 4: it is only in and through this relation to another unique *who* that we become able to relate to this other in terms of a *what*.) Obviously, we can, and often do, describe others in terms of Arendt’s ‘what’, just as we often speak about *what* they do or *what* the world may look like from their vantage point; this is not a problem at all – it only becomes a problem if we think that this is what it means to relate to them in their unique individuality.

A McDowellian response to Arendt’s point would be that even the case of being vis-à-vis another, one will see him *as another* – as the infant in the example in section 1 arguably

³⁰⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 179.

³⁰¹ It should be noted that only the first time Arendt uses the word “unique” in the above quoted passage (i.e. in “unique personal identities”), it refers to *absolute* uniqueness, while the second time (i.e. in “the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice”), it is used in a relative sense. The first notion of uniqueness could thus be termed *existential*, i.e. the uniqueness that comes simply with existing, while the second notion is *comparative*, i.e. the uniqueness of the one in comparison to another. I am at present interested in the former, existential notion of uniqueness. Arendt’s understanding of ‘existential uniqueness’ is strongly influenced by Duns Scotus’ notion of *haecceitas* (‘thisness’, i.e. concrete particularity, over against *quidditas*, i.e. ‘whatness’; for a good overview of Scotus’ theory, cf. section 3 in Richard Cross, “Medieval Theories of Haecceity,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/medieval-haecceity/> (accessed 10.6.2023); for Arendt’s discussion of Scotus, cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind 1 & 2* (San Diego, Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 125–46. For a helpful discussion of Arendt’s relation to Scotus, cf. Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt: Life is a Narrative*, transl. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 60–3.

³⁰² The German ‘Mensch’ – the word Arendt uses in the German version (cf. Hannah Arendt, *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* (München: Piper, 1981), 165) – retains the ethical richness and meaningfulness of ‘man’, yet without being gendered in the same problematic way (that is, ‘Mensch’ *is* gendered (it is male – ‘der Mensch’) but the gender is merely grammatical; the word does not have any straightforward masculine connotations); in this way, it also avoids the natural-scientific staleness of ‘human being’ (*menschliches Wesen*). Unfortunately, there is no corresponding English word. I will mostly translate it with ‘human being’; at times, however – especially when the richer meaning of Mensch seems of particular relevance (e.g. in my discussion of Buber in chapter 4), I will take the liberty to use the word ‘man’ instead.

cannot – and that, in turn, requires conceptualisation. That is, I do not simply encounter the man on the street in isolation from everything else, i.e. without a context within which he becomes intelligible to me *as* someone. I must see him as having a certain kind of shape, the kind of shape recognizable as a body (in contrast to the shape of inanimate objects), more precisely a human being’s body, erect, with a head and limbs, moving in certain ways, as someone who does certain things and appears to be aware of his own doings, and so on.

I have two replies to this reservation. Firstly, I do not read Arendt as suggesting that the kind of picture offered by McDowell should be wholesale rejected but that it stands in need of an important amendment because it misses the crucial point about what it means to relate to others. That is, relating to another as a ‘who’ is, on her view, never *just* a relating to a ‘what’ (or to a being that can itself relate to ‘what’ is around it) but *moreover* – and *mainly* – a relating to an individual whose uniqueness goes beyond anything that can be captured in the third-personal language of the ‘what’. After all, she says that the *who* is “implicit in everything somebody says and does”, meaning that ‘everything’ – i.e. the ‘totality of whats’ – *is* there, providing the background before which the ‘who’ appears. No matter how long and complex the account of qualities and features one gives in describing ‘who’ one is, the account will never be complete, for it will only ever be an account of something – or rather: someone – thus failing to capture the someone of whom it is an account. Perhaps the way in which one may come closest to this underlying uniqueness is simply by giving one’s name, the symbolic equivalent of one’s individuality, as it were. With Lévinas, one could say that no matter how encompassing a totality may be, it does not by capture the infinity of the other.³⁰³

Secondly, it is important to bear in mind that the ‘what’ indicates the mode of *speaking-about* – it is when I speak about someone that I speak about *what* she is like or about *what* she does. So, saying that I always already relate to others in such a way that I conceptualise them – the activity of conceptualising being reflected precisely in the ‘what’ – amounts to claiming that I always already *stand in a conversation with myself*, a conversation in which I tell myself – even if mostly in a highly implicit way – *what* the others around me are like, what they do, etc. This conversation with myself must, accordingly, precede all conversations with actual others – after all, it is only after having conceptualised them in the mode of self-conversation that I can converse with them. Now, I do not deny that one *may sometimes* first try to ‘get a hold’ on another in reflexive self-relation before actually interacting with her. Yet, I do not

³⁰³ This is of course an allusion to Lévinas’ magnum opus *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, transl. Alphonso Lingus (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979); while the work in its entirety can be regarded as an exploration of the just stated idea, Lévinas makes the idea particularly clear on pages 35–52. I will return to his central claims in footnote 317 below.

think that it is possible for us to *always* first converse with ourselves before conversing with others. As I already touched upon in the previous chapter with recourse to Hertzberg,³⁰⁴ conversing *with others* (in the broadest sense of the word)³⁰⁵ logically precedes the possibility of conversing *with oneself*.³⁰⁶ Even a diary entry meant only for myself “is only a story, say, against the background of the sort of interchange we have in telling and listening to stories.”³⁰⁷ If that is the case, however, then serious doubt is cast on the idea that conceptualisation is a condition of the possibility of relating to others; it rather seems to be the other way around: conversing with others – and, thus, speaking with them about (other) others – seems to condition the possibility that we can reflectively relate to ourselves, that is, make use of the language that is at home *within* the relation with the other so as to make sense of the world ‘to ourselves’ (as opposed ‘to others’).

What is important in respect to Arendt’s differentiation between the ‘what’ and the ‘who’, in any case, is that when we talk *about* others in talking *with* others, it is the latter level of relation – that of the speaking with, not that of the speaking about – at which we relate to others as unique individuals in the sense of Arendt’s ‘who’. So, even if we speak about others in terms of *what* they are like, of *what* they do, or of *what* they experience – we do so in relating to, and speaking with, another individual who, in his uniqueness, is not captured in the language of the ‘what’.

³⁰⁴ I.e. Lars Hertzberg, “On the Need for a Listener and Community Standards”.

³⁰⁵ That is, entailing all meaningful language use.

³⁰⁶ Hertzberg’s text is motivated by a debate that is relevant for my present concerns but which I, due to the limited scope of the present work, cannot examine in greater detail, namely the debate revolving around the question whether meaningful language may be private or whether it presupposes ‘community standards’. As the title of Hertzberg’s text suggests, he holds, against both ‘Scylla’ and ‘Charybdis’, that language, in order to be meaningful, requires first and foremost a speaker and a listener (Ibid., 253 ff.). As for some other philosophers – such as Peter Winch (cf. especially in the essays “Eine Einstellung zur Seele” and “Who is my Neighbour?” in *Trying to Make Sense* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), respectively 140–53 & 154–66) – central to Hertzberg’s overall position is Wittgenstein’s remark “My attitude towards him is that towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul” (*Philosophical Investigations*, 178). According to their reading, this remark can be understood as the gateway to a more dialogical reading of the late Wittgenstein (cf. “Attending to the Actual Saying of Things” or “The Sense Is Where You Find It” in *Wittgenstein and the Life we Live with Language* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), respectively 9–24 & 25–38.). It should be noted, furthermore, that McDowell himself does not thematise this part of Wittgenstein’s late writings. That this neglect may itself be of philosophical interest is suggested by Raimond Gaita in a footnote to his essay “Ethical Individuality” (published in *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch*, ed. Raimond Gaita (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), 147): “what one thinks Wittgenstein has to teach (or what may be derived from him) depends upon how one places that remark [i.e. ‘My attitude towards him...’]. If, for example, one thinks that his philosophy of mind depends upon it then one will read his remarks on language differently from those [like McDowell] who think that the concern with rule-following mediates the concern with language and the concern with mind.” I think this remark is very much in line with the overall thrust of my present point, namely that while McDowell reads Wittgenstein as making the point that “the concern with rule-following mediates the concern with language”, I (along with Gaita and Hertzberg) think that the kind of attitude Wittgenstein is after actually is, in a certain sense, phenomenologically ‘deeper’ than any concern with rule-following (and that it is indeed its very condition).

³⁰⁷ Hertzberg, “On the Need for a Listener,” 254.

c. Mundane and Absolute Otherness

This last point can be further elaborated by means of Christopher Cordner's illuminating criticism of what, according to McDowell's understanding, it means to relate to otherness, that is, as an *always already conceptualised* otherness. In "Absolute Otherness and Common Humanity", he describes McDowell's picture of the relation between mind and world as one marked by a 'mundane transcendence' which he distinguishes from the kind of transcendence that enters the picture via the notion of what, following Lévinas, can be called 'absolute Otherness':³⁰⁸

Experience is characteristically 'of a world'. My experience of a cup, for example, reaches (as John McDowell puts it) 'right out to the world'. The reality of the cup is, if you like, the transcendent reference of the experience. Such 'transcendent references' are woven together into the fabric of the mundane world we inhabit. Transcendence *here*, in this sense, betokens only the real being of a mundane world which my experience is 'of'. But the sort of experience of another that I have been speaking of can be taken to point to an outside or beyond *that mundane world*. There is a ready sense in which others are realities in the weave of that mundane world, and *then* there is the experience in which absolute Otherness is realised to us. This gives a sense in which anyone who is responded to in (as we might say) their full humanity is responded to as an 'outsider' to that mundane world.³⁰⁹

In the above, Cordner contrasts the kind of transcendence involved in experiences of everyday objects to that involved in the experience of others. The cup can be experienced as a cup (i.e. in a way in which it can later be described as a cup) because it is experienced as standing in relation to other things which it is not (recall: all determination is negation.) Yet, because on McDowell's account *every* experience is of the former kind – i.e. 'mundane transcendence' – even the experience of others – other subjects, minds, or agents – must accordingly be transcendent only in such a mundane sense. Experiencing *others* is, for McDowell, ultimately 'at the same level' as experiencing *other things*. On his "'Greek' conception the world

³⁰⁸ It should be noted that this is not Lévinas' own expression but Cordner's extrapolation from the following passage of Lévinas' *Totality and Infinity*, 194: "The Other is not other with a relative alterity. [...] The alterity of the other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity" (quoted from Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter. The Depth of Moral Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2002), 88).

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

‘contains’ other people, too, among other things”³¹⁰ – the problem being, as Backström puts it, “that you are no mere part of ‘my’ world.”³¹¹ This anticipates the kind of language I will deploy in the next two chapters: for McDowell, experiencing *someone* as a *You* is simply a special kind of experiencing *something* as an *It*.³¹² As everything is conceptually mediated, the decisive mode of mind-world relation is that of I-It. Or as I just put it above: as every relation to otherness is conceptual in nature, the criterion of a mind-world relation becomes the ability to *represent, and speak about, It*.

What Cordner takes to be McDowell’s levelling of two importantly different ways of relating to otherness can be illustrated by reformulating the above quoted passage so that, instead of being exemplified by the experienced “reality of a cup”, the McDowellian mind-world relation is illustrated by the experience of *another*. First consider an instance which McDowell’s conception *can* account for, namely the case of someone being perceived as acting virtuously – say, by someone *showing solidarity* with someone else:

My experience of someone’s showing solidarity, for example, reaches [...] ‘right out to the world’. The reality of her showing solidarity is, if you like, the transcendent reference of the experience. Such ‘transcendent references’ are woven together into the fabric of the mundane world we inhabit. Transcendence *here*, in this sense, betokens only someone’s real, virtuous action in a mundane world which my experience is ‘of’ [etc.]

The McDowellian picture can accommodate virtuous action because it is something which is perceived as manifesting in the world as an instance of two general concepts, namely *action* and, specifying the action, *virtue*. I will discuss McDowell’s Aristotelian understanding of virtue – as well as the scope and limits of its particular conceptualism – in the next section. For now, I want to proceed to give another example of an encounter with otherness that cannot be accounted for by McDowell’s account.

Instead of perceiving another as showing solidarity with someone else, imagine now the case of perceiving another *being in pain*. Saying that the perceived reality of another’s being in

³¹⁰ Joel Backström, “From Nonsense to Openness – Wittgenstein on moral sense,” in *Wittgenstein’s Moral Thought*, eds. Edmund Dain & Reshef Agam-Segal (London: Routledge, 2017), 247–75, at 252; it should be added that Backström does not here ascribe a ‘Greek conception of the world’ specifically to McDowell. Apart from the fact that McDowell *is* strongly influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, however, Backström’s description captures McDowell’s thought very well: as he puts it, a “Greek philosophical frame” knows “no neighbour, only ‘the subject’ (singular) – in the guise of, say, the *sage*, the *cogito*, the *scientific observer*, or the *moral agent* – facing and ‘making pictures’ of ‘the world’” (ibid.; emphasis in the original).

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² This is the terminology of Martin Buber; when he speaks of It, it is meant in a way that also entails the He and the She, i.e. all *relata* in the third-personal singular (cf. *I and Thou*, 54).

pain can be satisfyingly accounted for by calling it the ‘transcendent reference of the experience’ and by stating that such references are ‘woven together into the fabric of the mundane world we inhabit’ seems to be a misguided way of putting it, for it suggests that the pain one perceives is what it is – has the meaning it has – simply (and only) in virtue of it occupying a ‘conceptual locus’ in the overall web of the conceptual structures by means of which one makes sense of the world. But that, it seems, undercuts that intrinsic to the experience of the other’s pain is a sense of its significance, indeed of its *moral* significance – of its claiming one in a morally-charged response,³¹³ as I will call it in the next chapters. That is, the pain that one perceives another to have does not have the meaning it has just because one subsumes the particular perceived reality under a general term (‘pain’) but also – and, as I will show later on, even *primarily* – because this very pain moves, touches one.³¹⁴ *That* it thus touches one, furthermore, is not due to it occupying a place in a conceptual totality; rather, the experienced significance seems to manifest on a different level than the conceptual – call it that of the existential,³¹⁵ i.e. of the existentially foregoing dimension of the encounter with otherness. That means that part of one’s sense of the significance intrinsic to one’s experience of said pain is the *understanding* that it is *someone’s* pain, the pain of an individual being in whose presence I find myself, in a way that is irreducible to any given conceptual outlook.³¹⁶ In other words, the *other’s pain* is of concern for me because *she* is of concern to me – yet *she* is of concern to me not because she occupies a certain position in my overall conceptual outlook but first and foremost in virtue of my encountering her as a particular individual.

³¹³ Drawing from Peter Winch, Raimond Gaita, and Christopher Cordner, I explore the notion of ‘being claimed in response to another’ in “Being Claimed in Immediate Response to Another. Against a Foundational, and Towards a Relational, Understanding of Moral Status”, in “The Foundations of Moral Standing”, special issue, *De Ethica* (forthcoming).

³¹⁴ This brings to mind Wittgenstein’s well-known reflection from §287 of his *Philosophical Investigations*: “How am I filled with pity *for this human being*? How does it come out what the object of my pity is? (Pity, one might say, is one form of being convinced that someone else is in pain.)” The point – to be more fully elucidated in section 3.c. below as well as in the following chapter – is that understanding the pain of another means being moved by it. For a good discussion of this thought, cf. Hannes Nykänen in “Wittgenstein’s Radical Ethics,” *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* 6, no. 1 (2018), at 2–3.

³¹⁵ Apart from footnote 301 above in which I presented Arendt’s notion of uniqueness as ‘existential’, invoking the notion of existence both a) foreshadows my discussion in chapter 4 of what could be called Martin Buber’s ‘existential-phenomenological dialogism’ and b) brings my present discussion in the vicinity of Joel Backström’s and Hannes Nykänen’s I-You relational philosophy (cf. e.g. Joel Backström, “Wittgenstein and the Moral Dimension of Philosophical Problems,” *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, eds. Marie McGinn & Oskari Kuusela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 729–52, at 747; Hannes Nykänen, “This Thing with Philosophy,” 365), two thinkers who will become more prominent in later chapters.

³¹⁶ This idea is expressed poignantly by Hannes Nykänen in “Wittgenstein’s Radical Ethics,” 7: “Relating to another person’s expressions of pain or fear is not about applying certain concepts in order to assure oneself of the existence of a relevant ‘episode of consciousness’, to use an expression of McDowell” (The McDowell quote is taken from “One Strand in the Private Language Argument,” *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 283).

It is this lived, morally-charged encounter with otherness which, I take it, Corder has in mind when he deploys Lévinas' notion of absolute otherness. Something is a *relative* other in that the perceiver perceives it as other to herself yet as falling under a concept – and, hence, within a conceptual outlook constituting a (dynamic and organic) totality – which the perceiver *has already acquired*. In other words, the other's otherness is relative to this already acquired conceptual outlook. This is the McDowellian position in which concept acquisition and possession are key in the mind-world relation. That something is an *absolute* other, on the other hand, in that the perceiver perceives it as other to herself in such a way that it is not accommodated to conceptual outlook *at all*, i.e. as being intrinsically non-conceptualised. The other's otherness, differently put, is encountered as existing, and claiming one, from a position that is absolutely beyond what is grasped conceptually. Thus, the transcendence of the other as absolutely other, as it were, transcends the kind of mundane transcendence involved in every mundane experience of something as relatively other. With Lévinas, this point could, again, be brought out by saying that the infinity that enters with the other disintegrates the totality that constitutes mundane experience.³¹⁷

d. Two Ways of Speaking about Meaningfulness

If Corder is right, then McDowell cannot accommodate in his thought the kind of otherness of beings the engagement with whom provides the starting point for any kind of conceptual outlook in the first place. Perhaps McDowell would even agree with this claim, stating that what he is concerned with is precisely that which *can* be meaningfully articulated in language, which *can* be grasped conceptually – and that the kind of absolute otherness that Corder points to simply cannot.³¹⁸ Reversely, however, that would imply that, on McDowell's view, the other qua *absolute* other is, because it cannot be comprehensively grasped in the mode of speaking-about, in a certain sense *nothing* – or, more precisely: because the other qua absolute other is *no thing*, it must, for McDowell, be *meaningless*, i.e. *nothing*. At best, the unique individual

³¹⁷ In *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas states that “[t]he breach of totality is not an operation of thought [...] The void that breaks the totality can be maintained against an inevitably totalizing and synoptic thought only if thought itself finds itself *faced* with an other refractory to categories [...] It is not I who resist the system [...]; it is the other” (ibid., 40). And shortly after: “Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. [...] To think the infinite, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object” (ibid., 49). And: “The face [i.e. of the Other, the Stranger] breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being” (ibid., 51). Thus, what I above described alongside Arendt as the ‘who’s’ “going beyond” the ‘what’ can now be re-described alongside Lévinas as the Other’s transcending all generalities and, thus, breaking into the totality. I will return to Lévinas in the next section.

³¹⁸ This would be in line with his claim as to the interdependency of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity in “Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective,” esp. at 152–4.

other thus “shrinks”, as McDowell himself says in critical reference to Kant’s notion of the I, “to the continuity of a mere point of view”,³¹⁹ a locus of thought and action in the world yet without any substantial presence within it.

Now, in a sense, I would agree with this. The very point of the notion of absolute Otherness is, after all, that it is other in precisely that sense that makes any attempt at integrating it in the structures of meaning by means of which we make sense of the world inadequate. What is thereby omitted, however, is that despite its not being conceptual, the encounter with others *is* experienced as meaningful, albeit in a markedly different sense of ‘meaningful’ than McDowell uses the word.

The words ‘meaning’ and ‘meaningful’, as well as their various inflections, are equivocal in at least one sense. On the one hand, they refer to *what something means* in the sense of its being articulable in language, thus expressing one’s understanding of the given conceptual connections. Call this *conceptual meaning*. A tautological example of this would be ‘Bachelor *means* unmarried man’; a logically more lenient example would be ‘Being an artist *means* staying a child even when you have become an adult’. Understood in this way, something has a meaning or is meaningful for someone if that someone can, in some way or another, articulate *what* this meaning consists in; in that sense, meaningfulness is, as I said, tied to the individual’s ability to grasp something *as something*. This is the dimension of meaning/meaningfulness that stands in the foreground in McDowell’s thought.

On the other hand, ‘meaning’ and ‘meaningful’ (and their inflections) indicate a sense of *importance*: something (or someone) is of meaning, or is meaningful, to someone in the sense that it, or she, is of importance – often of a deep, existential importance – to that someone. Something is meaningful in this sense if it plays a role for a life filled with meaning.³²⁰ (This

³¹⁹ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 100.

³²⁰ This sense of meaning is nicely illustrated in Camilla Kronqvist’s “A Passion for Life: Love and Meaning,” *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 6, no. 1 (2017): 31–51) in which the question is discussed in which sense love may be understood to make life (more) meaningful. Already formulations such as “finding meaning in one’s life” (ibid., 33) point to a dimension of the word ‘meaning’ that is not captured by McDowell’s notion with its focus on conceptual content. A meaningful life is not a conceptual content, not even a totality of such contents. Consider also how Kronqvist describes what it is like to be around someone one is fiercely in love with: one is “immersed in conversation, bubbling with enthusiasm, amazed that suddenly there is this person whose every word, gesture and movement is filled with *meaning*, something to dote on and listen to, something at which to look and wonder” (ibid., 35; my emphasis). Here, a lot of conceptualisation is obviously going on – Kronqvist speaks of conversation and of words – but still, it seems clear that the meaning life has become imbued with once it has been enriched by the beloved’s presence is not something that could in any way be reduced to a conceptual content, not even a whole lot of it. This comes out when Kronqvist goes on to thematise the other sense of the word ‘meaning’, i.e. the one I termed *conceptual*, when she speaks about “the meaning of ‘love’,” namely to oppose the idea that any definition of the term would help us in getting a better understanding of the meaning love has in our lives: “our concern is still too much on what the word love denotes, as if it would be possible to define the meaning of ‘love’ by searching for what the word designates” (ibid., 37; the way in which love plays a central role in a life filled with meaning will become a more prominent theme in chapters 5 and 6).

does not mean, however, that whatever is meaningful for one must therefore positively contribute to one's life's – a case of rape is in a certain way of profound meaning to the rape victim, yet obviously not because it positively contributes anything to the victim's life but precisely due to its being so traumatic and destructive.) Call this *existential meaning*.³²¹

To this, a third way of speaking about meaning/meaningfulness can be added which combines the first with the second way: something can be said to have meaning, or to be meaningful, in the sense that *someone means something with it*, that is, that she gives voice to it in speaking with others, yet not simply in such a way that reflects the meaning which is already there, as it were sedimented in an independently existing language, but rather in such a way as to give expression to what is meaningful to us and of what we, accordingly, want to share with others.

Now, in which sense exactly do the first two senses come together in the third one? On the McDowellian picture, it would be like this: someone saying to someone else that something is meaningful in the existential sense entails – indeed, it even *depends on* – the linguistic-conceptual sense precisely in that it is *something* that is thus considered existentially meaningful. How exactly one will be able to frame this *something* in language, moreover, will depend on the language as it exists as a repository of meaning from which one can draw so as to articulate oneself intelligibly. Putting it this way allows the McDowellian to say that, of course, all kinds of things can be *important for* non-minded beings, even immensely so, yet without their thus being *meaningful to* them – for, once again, meaningfulness proper requires that whatever it is that is of importance to some being can also be conceptualised by this being *as being thus important*. It may be *important to* the hedgehog to find a mate but in the absence of the hedgehog being able to reflectively relate to this sense of importance, it is not *meaningful for* it in the way it may be for a person.³²² Something is of meaning (in the existential sense) if it is of importance *and* if the being for whom it is of importance is conscious of its being important.)

I think that this view gets it wrong, however: not only does existential meaning depend on, or entail, conceptual meaning but *vice versa* conceptual meaning likewise depends on a

³²¹ In *The Mystery of Being, Volume I* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), Gabriel Marcel points to this ambiguity of the word 'meaning', leading him to the conclusion that it is at the end "too vague and confused altogether" (ibid., p. 172) to be of help for the discussion. As I hope will become clear in what follows, just this ambiguity helps me to develop the point I intend to levy against McDowell.

³²² This, so McDowell, is also why animals cannot choose *not* to act on what they experience as important (*Mind and World*, 115). Likewise, the child's maturing is to be understood as a development from a state of life devoid of meaning to one filled with meaning – cf. *Mind and World*, 88: "the structure of the space of reasons [...] can be the framework within which meaning comes into view only because our eyes can be opened to it by *Bildung*, which is an element of maturity of the kind of animals we are. Meaning is not a mysterious gift from outside."

sense of existential meaningfulness.³²³ In other words, in order for someone to conceptualise something, this someone has to see whatever it is that she conceptualises as meaningful enough for her to do so (and again, what may be meaningful enough to conceptualise may derive its meaning from its having had a horrible impact on one's life.) If that is so, however, then that first impulse towards conceptualisation, that first sense of significance, cannot itself already be conceptualised. This connects back to my discussion of Kant's aesthetics at the end of the last chapter: the activity of subsuming the given reality under concepts cannot itself depend on prior concepts as this would lead to an infinite regress. Something else is required, something which Kant thinks – erroneously, I think – can only be the aesthetic pleasure taken in a sense experience.³²⁴

2. The Virtuous Person's Way of Relating to Others

a. Moral Education: 'The *That*' and 'the *Because*'

In order to lead over to McDowell's understanding of what it means to morally – or, to use his preferred diction, *virtuously*³²⁵ – engage with others, I now proceed to apply the just developed sketch of his account of the child's awakening to the world – an awakening at the heart of which

³²³ In "Rules: Looking in the Right Places" (in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, eds. D.Z. Phillips & Peter Winch (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989)), Cora Diamond illustrates this point by asking what is involved in the "re-identification of chairs" (ibid., 15), i.e. of seeing a particular chair as multiple instances of the same rule (although, of course, the example is not about chairs in particular but about what is involved in conceptualisation in the sense of rule-following): "Unless there is a life in which its being the same chair again has some *significance*, unless there are in that life ways in which it *matters to people* whether it is the same chair or one like it, unless this is part of patterns of life and talk in which it matters in some way whether this is the same dog or same house or same person or same kettle, the coming out with 'same chair again' in the same conditions in which we might be not doing what we do with those words" (ibid.; my emphasis).

³²⁴ I would assume that the McDowellian would resort to first-nature here – our basal senses of importance are something we have carried over from our foregoing, first-natural lives as infants. I would be sympathetic to this formulation, the only (substantial) problem being that the McDowellian would, as discussed above, be unable to bridge the gap between first- and second-nature – and I think not only because he is merely missing some final link but because his conception of first-nature makes it impossible for him to locate within it the kind of encounter with meaning, face to face with another, that I am here pointing to. (This implies that I think that infants and many animals do stand in meaningful relations with others – or, differently put: I do think that even infants and many animals relate to others in a way that reflects understanding, firstly of their being in the presence of – i.e. of finding themselves addressed by and responding to – *others* and, secondly, of *how others respond to them*, even without being able to distance themselves from their understanding so as to articulate it in language. It is the infant's response to the parent's smile, anger, caress, and so on, that reflects such understanding, just as the dog's response to its owner's happiness or to the death of a fellow pet that reflects understanding. Although an interesting topic, the limited scope of this work does not allow me to further explore it further, or how it casts a critical light on McDowell's first-second-nature dichotomy. This idea is lucidly discussed in David Cockburn's "Human Beings and Giant Squids," *Philosophy* 69, no. 268 (1994): 135–50.)

³²⁵ As this marks the turn to Aristotle's ethics, the following discussion will often refer to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Unless stated otherwise, I will use the following version: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); I will refer to it with the common abbreviation NE. It should further be noted that I will use the terms 'virtuous' and 'moral' interchangeably (also unless stated otherwise.)

lies, on McDowell's view, an opening up to language as the key to meaningful, minded relations to the world, including others – to what he says about the beginnings of moral development via education. Given that McDowell's discussion of moral education is strongly indebted to Aristotle, especially as it is expounded in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the following analysis will often seek recourse both to McDowell's reading of Aristotle as well as to Aristotle himself.

Saying that the child's mental awakening begins with its awakening to language means that it begins with the child coming to learn what the things *are* by learning what they are *called*³²⁶ (as well as the child's ability, somewhat lagging behind its ability to *understand*, to *make use* of the acquired language.) This has an equivalent in Aristotle's thought, reflected in the following passage:

We must not demand explanation [...] in all matters alike, but it is sufficient in some cases to have 'the *that*' shown properly, just as in the case of starting-points. 'The *that*' is a first thing and a starting-point. Of starting-points some are seen by induction, some by perception, some by a certain habituation, and others in other ways again.³²⁷

This can readily be connected to McDowell's claim about the centrality of language in the process that is the mind's development because, although stated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's claim is not specifically about starting-points in *ethical* development but about the mind's – or, as Aristotle would put it: about *the rational part of the soul of the human being*³²⁸ – development *as such*. For Aristotle, just as for McDowell, the journey of the mind begins with the acquisition of 'the *that*', be it in ethical matters or elsewhere.³²⁹ And here, Aristotle makes it straightaway clear that the acquisition of the 'the *that*' depends on it being "shown properly", that is, shown *by others* – by those who are already in possession of 'the *that*' and who are the first to be around, and to engage with, the child in its infancy. The parents are usually central in this process, yet others, such as older siblings who already have some notion of 'the *that*', may be, too. At the beginning of ethical development thus stands the scene of an encounter between two parties, one in possession of 'the *that*' and one without it, in which the

³²⁶ If it is supposed to result in the child's coming to actually acquire an understanding, this process must, as has been shown in the last section, entail coming to learn what the things are *in relation to one another*, i.e. as part of an overall conceptual outlook.

³²⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7 1098a33-b4, quoted from M. F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on learning to be good," *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy, Vol. II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 263.

³²⁸ Cf. *De Anima* III.4-9, 429a10—431b19.

³²⁹ Cf. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on learning to be good," 263; this idea is also echoed by McDowell when he speaks of 'the ethical' as one "tract of the space of reasons" (*Mind and World*, 82), thus implying the existence of other such tracts, and that "initiation into conceptual capacities" includes "responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics" (*ibid.*, 85).

one who has it passes it over to the other who does not but who, accordingly, acquires it. Only after this first step has been taken, a common basis for intelligible communication has been established and only then can the new participant in the shared world, initiated into it by the acquisition of language, continue her journey by herself.

Thus far, I have mainly been rephrasing what I have been stating in 1.a. What distinguishes the acquisition of ‘the *that*’ in specifically *ethical* matters is that it is not merely descriptive, i.e. that the one who acquires it does not merely become able to state what *is* virtuous or what *ought to be done* qua virtuous, but that she at the same time acquires a “motivational tendency”³³⁰ of *coming to desire doing what is virtuous simply because it is what ought to be done*.³³¹ This is where the role of others becomes especially apparent: it is others, primarily the parents, who tell small children not only *what* “doing well”³³² means, that is, to act “*in accordance with excellence*”³³³ (i.e. behaving in *that* and *that* and *that* way because those are excellent ways of behaving)³³⁴; in doing so, they moreover instil a desire in their protégées for doing these things *as the excellent things to do*. In this way, the child’s *orektikon*, its faculty of desire,³³⁵ will be formed – or ‘geared’ – towards an ever deepening appreciation of doing what is *noble*.³³⁶ The first step is thus taken in the process of the child’s gradual habituation into an ethical outlook.³³⁷

Burnyeat elucidates that already this first step on the ladder leading towards virtue reflects reason, albeit in a very crude form:

³³⁰ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *The Engaged Intellect*, 23–41, at 40.

³³¹ Cf. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good,” 264: “the ultimate goal toward which the beginner’s practice is aimed is that he should become the sort of person who does virtuous things in full knowledge of what he is doing, choosing to do them for their own sake”; cf. also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.12, 1119b13–18: “the temperate man desires the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought; and this is what reason directs.”

³³² This is one of McDowell’s translation of the Greek *eupraxia* standard expressions for describing ethical action. Cf. “The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 7.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 55; cf. also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a16–8.

³³⁴ That would, as McDowell puts it, “produce moral propensities that are merely obedient to an extraneous exercise of reason, like those of a trained animal” (“Deliberation and Moral Development,” 52).

³³⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* III.10, 433a31–b1; for McDowell’s discussion of the *orektikon*, cf. “Deliberation and Moral Development,” 51–2 & “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 30–1.

³³⁶ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 31: “In acquiring the virtues of character, a person is taught to admire and delight in actions exemplifying the value of nobility. Coming to value the noble integrally includes an alteration in one’s motivational make-up, in what one finds attractive: it shapes one’s conception of what it is worth going in for”; cf. also Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good,” 263 ff. I will come back to the relation between the noble, the virtuous, and the excellent below; for now, suffice it to say that the noble is that which an agent desires to do because it satisfies her sense of excelling in terms of virtue in such a way that it at the same time satisfies her desire to appear well in the eyes of others. Or, differently put, the noble brings together the universality of the concepts of virtue with the desire for public affirmation.

³³⁷ I do not think that this in any well helps McDowell to explain how the gap between first- and second nature is bridged. He speaks of a formation of the *orektikon* that precedes its subsequent trans-formation (cf. “Deliberation and Moral Development,” 51) but it remains opaque how that is supposed to go about.

It is not that the evaluative responses have no thought component (no intentionality): on the contrary, something is desired as noble or just, something inspires shame because it is thought of as disgraceful. The responses are grounded in an evaluation of their object, parallel to the way appetite is oriented to a conception of its object as something pleasant; in this sense both have their ‘reasons’.³³⁸

In short, the child who first learns what it means, in a given situation, to do what is virtuous and who comes to desire doing it because it is noble, will be able to understand that its being noble is a reason for acting in said way. Now, Burnyeat adds that the response to an ethical requirement is parallel to the cravings of the appetite in its reason-constituting intentionality: just as I may desire something *because* it is noble, I may also desire something *because* it gives me some bodily pleasure. However, the ‘reason’ intrinsic to appetitive intentionality lacks ‘the *that*’: the one who merely acts on her appetite does not do so because *that* is what she perceives she ought to do (on the grounds of its being noble). Rather, she does it simply because she feels like it – that is what distinguishes the appetitive.³³⁹ Now, of course, what a child feels like doing need not differ from what it will be taught it ought to do – a child may, for instance, feel like looking after her younger sibling and then be taught that this is exactly what she ought to be doing. But even in that case, her coming to desire doing it after she has understood that she *ought to* act in the given way will be different from her merely doing it because she *feels like* doing it – for then, she will see helping as noble and, thus, her sibling’s neediness as presenting an ethical reason for helping.³⁴⁰ So, it is in first acquiring a conception of, and developing a desire for living up to, ‘the *that*’ as the noble thing to do that the child also develops a conception of what is ignoble, of what are the respectively uncalled-for ways of responding³⁴¹, i.e. to simply follow one’s basic, immediate appetite.³⁴²

³³⁸ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good,” 271.

³³⁹ That is, to the extent that it has not (yet) been reshaped by habituation into virtue; cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, II.3, 414b6.

³⁴⁰ McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 39: “actions that manifest virtue of character must be chosen” – that is, chosen for their own sake (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.1 1120a23-24: “virtuous actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble.”)

³⁴¹ McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 39.

³⁴² That is not to say that following one’s basic, immediate appetite is always uncalled-for, only that it is uncalled-for when the situation calls for a virtuous response. So, while the child who, ‘all other things being equal’, simply follows her appetite and eats the candy is not acting ignobly, this changes once, say, the little brother who has no candy also asks for some. A child who has been sufficiently ethically educated would perceive the new situation as constituting a reason for acting virtuously instead of giving in to her appetites, namely by sharing her candy with her brother. So, wherever an ‘ethical *that*’ is perceived as a reason in such a way that it exerts a normative pressure on the perceiving individual to act in a certain way, it will be over against some ‘appetitive *that*’. Apart from that, the very distinction between the called-for and the uncalled-for only emerges with the child’s beginning to internalise a sense of the former because only in that way will the contrast to the latter arise.

On McDowell's reading of Aristotle, this process of ethical habituation will gradually permeate all the way down into the smallest crevices of the child's perception, thus coming to bear on its most spontaneous responses to its environment, including its engagements with others.³⁴³ However, this is, of course, not to say that by coming to develop a desire for doing what is noble, other desires which are rooted in our pre-rational set-up will simply be superseded. Rather, the desire to do what is noble will first enter the scene as a *challenge* to other desires, that is, the challenge of acting nobly in the face of various incentives to acting in ways that will by that point appear as ignoble.³⁴⁴ Indeed, it is only because the child comes to find itself claimed by two forms of desire, the one pulling it towards doing what its appetite craves, the other pulling it towards doing what is noble, that the inherent normative force of the desire for doing what is noble comes out³⁴⁵: the ethical *ought* makes only sense in the face of something that challenges it and over against which it has to assert itself.³⁴⁶

Following Burnyeat, McDowell thus holds that, already at its inception, the formation of ethical character by means of language and habituation yields reasons for acting, even when the actions are spontaneous responses to the situation at hand.³⁴⁷ So, while the child need not be concerned with any reasons while it is caught up in the flow of spontaneously responding to the world around it, these response, if they are to reflect ethical worth, will have to be understood as elicited by (however crude) ethical reasons.³⁴⁸ Such ethical reasons testify to the child's having acted on what it then experienced as a normative requirement to act in just this, rather than in another, way. The touchstone for assessing whether the child can be understood as having acted on an ethical reason is its ability to produce a reason itself – and that, in turn, presupposes language. As McDowell puts it: “Acting for a reason, which one is responding to as such, does not require that one reflects about whether some consideration is a sufficient rational warrant for something it seems to recommend. *It is enough that one could.*”³⁴⁹ This is

³⁴³ That, at least, is what follows from McDowell's ‘Kantian turn’ in *Mind and World* – which by no means represents a turn away from Aristotle but rather an underpinning of his earlier discussions of Aristotle with a full-blown commitment to a Kantian conceptualism.

³⁴⁴ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good,” 271.

³⁴⁵ It should be added that for Aristotle, as for Plato, the soul exhibits an intermediate part, *thumos*, with its own form of desire that cannot be reduced to either appetite or reason (but which can, if all goes well, come to be guided by reason). Cf. *Pol.* VII.7 1327b19-38 & *De Anima* 414b2, 432b4-7 (For further discussion, cf. Victor Saenz, “Shame and Honor: Aristotle's Thumos as a Basic Desire,” *Apeiron* 51, no. 1 (2017): 73–95).

³⁴⁶ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good,” 271. This can be re-described along the lines of McDowell's (Spinozistic-Hegelian) conceptualism, namely that the concept of virtue (and, hence of, virtuous action) depends on the concept of vice just as the concept of the noble depends on that of the ignoble; cf. also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.3 1105a 2-5; cf. *ibid.* II. 1109b 7-13.

³⁴⁷ “Kantian Themes in Hegel and Sellars,” *The Engaged Intellect*, 129.

³⁴⁸ Responsiveness to the requirements of virtue can thus be regarded as one ‘tract’ of what McDowell calls our overall “responsiveness to reasons” (e.g. “*Ibid.*,” 128).

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 129; my emphasis.

not to say that what is thus articulable must be sophisticated or meet certain standards of correctness.³⁵⁰ The small child, for example, who, on being asked why she makes her crying brother eat a gummi bear, replies ‘Medicine!’ can thus be understood to produce a (crude) ethical reason for why she has acted as she did – namely that she perceived that it was ethically called-for (noble) in the given situation to try to make her brother’s pain go away. Of course, what she takes to be medicine (i.e. the gummi bear) is in fact not medicine but that rather testifies to her lack of understanding concerning medical matters. What matters ethically is she had, or at least appeared to have, a certain reason for doing what she did, namely that doing just *that* was, in these circumstances, the noble thing to do – and that *that*, in turn, was enough of a reason for doing it.³⁵¹

Now, saying that an understanding of ‘the *that*’ provides the one who has it with a reason for doing it means that ‘the *that*’ is, as McDowell rightly observes, always already a primitive form of ‘the *because*’.³⁵² Yet if that would be all there was to ‘the *because*’, then, when asked why one did a certain thing, the most one could do in terms of providing an ethical reason would be to say ‘Because it was the noble thing to do’. But that would merely indicate a serious lack

³⁵⁰ Cf. “Virtue and Reason,” 51.

³⁵¹ This merits a brief comparison with another influential proponent of virtue ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse, who states the following: “When small children act from their inclination or desire to help others, and get it wrong, saying, for example, ‘She wanted the bandage taken off’, we do not ascribe a mistaken conception of goodness to them. They are too young to have a concept of goodness, and we start teaching it to them when we say such things as, ‘Yes, I know you wanted to do her good, but it’s not good for babies to have their wounds unbandaged; she needs it to be left on’” (*On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 106). So, while the child may be told what to do better if she gets it wrong or praised if she gets it right, her doings will not yet reflect virtue or vice – “full virtue”, so Hursthouse infers, “can be possessed only by adults” (ibid.). I think McDowell would agree with the beginning and the conclusion of this passage: as long as mere inclination – the unguided appetite – directs the child’s doings, firstly, it does not yet have “a conception of goodness” (i.e. of virtue), just as, secondly, ‘full-blown’ virtue is reserved to those who have a mature ethical outlook (which, at least mostly, will be adults.) However, I think McDowell would find problematic what Hursthouse states in between these two claims because for him, virtue is not something which one either simply *has* or *does not have* – a child may go the first steps in the direction of virtue without, at the same time, having a mature conception of what it entails and requires. (That is the very point of his discussions of ‘the *that*’ and ‘the *because*’ in “Eudaimonism and Realism”, “Aristotle on Deliberation”, and “Some Issues in Aristotle”.) The more important issue, however, is that Hursthouse seems to suggest that a deed can reflect ethical value *only* if one ‘gets it right’ in such a way that a lack of practical knowledge automatically banishes a deed from the precincts of virtue. Again, it would seem to me that McDowell would agree that someone who is in “full-blown possession” (“Eudaimonism and Realism”, 37) of virtue must indeed get it ‘practically right’ – but that does not mean that, say, trying to provide first aid to someone who just suffered a heart attack, yet failing due to the limited nature of one’s medical expertise, means that one’s deed will therefore reflect *no ethical value at all*. For McDowell, what is ethically central is that the agent in question sees the situation as a reason for helping and proceed to help without any temptation coming to bear on her resolve (cf. “Virtue and Reason” 55–6 and “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?”, 91 ff.); failure as regards the specifics would certainly blemish the nobility of the deed, yet not do away with virtue entirely. I think that while the McDowellian account thus better captures the specifically *moral* dimension, it still falls short in its focus on reason and action, instead of on care and love. For a fruitful critical discussion of Hursthouse’s example – which, I think, can also be of help to see the limitations of the McDowellian picture – cf. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 409–11.

³⁵² McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism”, 37: “a possessor of the *that* is already not devoid of the *because*. He can say ‘Because it is noble.’”

of ethical reflection and understanding. Just like the acquisition of an understanding of ‘the *that*’, so the acquisition of ‘the *because*’, too, is a gradual process.³⁵³ In contrast to acquiring ‘the *that*’, however, it is a process of reflection over the course of which an understanding of the rational linkages gradually accrues between the initially scattered “pockets of thought”³⁵⁴ that have developed in first acquiring ‘the *that*’.³⁵⁵ Whereas an understanding of ‘the *that*’ entails the ability to say why one did just *that* (namely *because* it was ‘the thing to do’), a more mature grasp of ‘the *because*’ allows one to produce more and more complex logical connections and, thus, reasons.³⁵⁶

On McDowell’s reading of Aristotle, the level of sophistication of the understanding of the rational linkages that make up the ethical ‘tract’ of the space of reasons will, moreover, be tied back to how one perceives the world around one. So, someone who has a deeper understanding of ‘the *because*’ will not only be able to give more nuanced explanation of why she acts as she does but she will accordingly also perceive more, and more nuanced, ethical connections in the world she encounters. She will perceive situations not anymore simply as occasions for doing ‘the *that*’, where ‘the *that*’ is buttressed by its being noble, but she will, in perceiving the situation as calling for doing ‘the *that*’, at the same time have a rich understanding of *why* it is the case that she ought to do just *that* (i.e. *because of that* and *that* and *that*, etc.) The capacity designated for this task, increasingly enriched by a more and more encompassing possession of ‘the *because*’, is *phronesis*³⁵⁷, practical wisdom, and the one who excels in exercising it is the *phronimos*, the person of practical wisdom, or virtuous agent. Thus, there is an intrinsic connection between a full possession of ‘the *because*’ and virtuous action.³⁵⁸ Now, the *phronimos* is distinguished in two ways: firstly, she is, as just stated, the person who is distinguished not only by her ability to reliably see *what*, in the respective circumstances, the virtuous thing to do is but also *why*. Secondly, the *phronimos*’ perception, fully permeated by the demands of virtue, has become so fully adjusted to them that all the temptations of the merely appetitive have lost their motivational power.³⁵⁹ In other words, her desire for doing

³⁵³ Ibid., 34–5; “Aristotle on Deliberation,” 55–7.

³⁵⁴ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on learning to be good,” 271.

³⁵⁵ “Aristotle on Deliberation,” 55–7.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Aristotle introduces the concept in the Nicomachean Ethics 1140a24–1140b30; McDowell discusses it e.g. in “Some Issues in Aristotle,” 27–32 & 38–49.

³⁵⁸ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 35: “when one reflectively moves from mere possession of the *that* to possession of the *because* [...] [o]ne reflects on one’s inherited scheme of values, or the perceptions of choiceworthiness in action in which that scheme of values expresses itself.”

³⁵⁹ McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle”, 48: “In full-fledged practical wisdom the correct conception of doing well, with the understanding that the worthwhileness that it embraces is pre-eminent, is so ingrained into one’s motivational make-up that when an action is singled out as doing well, any attractions that alternatives might

what is noble has become so fully her second nature that, whenever she finds herself in a situation calling for a noble response, all non-ethical incentives are “silenced”.³⁶⁰

Thus, acting virtuously requires a) a thorough understanding of what is noble and why and b) an unwavering desire of doing it. However, what is noble and why cannot be tied back to anything that lies beyond the virtuous agent’s conception of what is virtuous – that is, the *phronimos* has an outstanding understanding of virtue’s requirements, yet this understanding is not tied to her having accessed some independent ethical truth. Because there is thus no “blueprint”³⁶¹ for virtue, the individual who seeks to be virtuous is therefore ultimately thrown back onto herself, more precisely onto her overall “conception of doing well”³⁶² as it seeks implementation in concrete situations.³⁶³ The striving for virtue thus at the same time means seeking to act in an exemplary manner, thus setting an example “for the sort of life a human being should lead.”³⁶⁴

At this point McDowell becomes critical of Aristotle, namely for an uncritical and “unreflected contentment with the mores of his audience,”³⁶⁵ thus giving rise to the perhaps partly justified worry that he is “smugly accepting the outlook of a particular social group.”³⁶⁶ On Aristotle’s view, in other words, the nature and domain of virtue can be more or less clearly and definitely described – there is no room for possible problems or inconsistencies within the conceptual structures which a progressive exploration of ‘the *because*’ taps into.³⁶⁷ McDowell’s answer to this ‘smug’ conservatism, untimely in its lack of critical self-reflection, is that the notion of ‘the *because*’ can do far more work than Aristotle thought: if, in exploring ‘the *because*’, we find ourselves confronted with irrationalities in the very fabric of the ethical outlook we have inherited,³⁶⁸ it is our “standing obligation”³⁶⁹ to “rethink the putative rational linkages”³⁷⁰ that constitute this tract of the space of reason and, thus, partake in its

have are seen as having no bearing on the question what to do.” For a longer discussion of this thought, cf. “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?,” 91 ff.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.

³⁶¹ This is a term McDowell often uses to describe a reading of Aristotle he strongly rejects, i.e. one on which virtue is taken to be definable in a system of rules valid independently from actual ethical life and praxis. Cf. e.g. “Some Issues in Aristotle,” 32–3.

³⁶² McDowell, “Deliberation and Moral Development,” 47.

³⁶³ According to McDowell, “practical thought” – at which the *phronimos* excels – entails “*putting* [a general conception of the end] *into practice* in specific circumstances.” Yet, as “the content of a general conception of the end cannot be formulated in rules, applying it to particular predicaments is not a straightforward matter” (“Some Issues in Aristotle”, 32; emphasis in the original).

³⁶⁴ McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 66–7; cf. also Aristotle, NE 1144a31-3.

³⁶⁵ McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle”, 36.

³⁶⁶ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism”, 33.

³⁶⁷ Ibid; cf. also McDowell, *Mind and World*, 80–1.

³⁶⁸ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 80–1.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 186.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

transformation towards greater rational consistency. McDowell's preferred metaphor is that of Neurath's ship that constantly repairs and modifies itself all the while being afloat on sea: "Neurathian reflection on an inherited scheme of values takes place at a standpoint within that scheme; the scheme can be altered piecemeal, but not suspended in its entirety, with a view to rebuilding from the ground up."³⁷¹

b. Reason, Recognition & the Noble

As already mentioned, it is certainly not at odds with McDowell's Aristotelian account of ethics that even the child who has not yet acquired the respective ethical '*that*' – say, that tending to a hurt sibling is a noble thing to do – may still nonetheless do just *that*, i.e. tend to a hurt sibling. If it does, however, it will not understand that '*that*' (i.e. tending to a hurt sibling) is what it does and, hence, neither that it is what is *called-for* in the given situations. In that case, its behaviour will, on McDowell's Aristotelian picture, not reflect virtue because it cannot be said to be the author of what it has done³⁷², that is, someone who *chose* to do it could. In the absence of such authorship, the child does what it does simply because that was simply what, at the given moment, it *happens to feel like* doing in a purely first-natural way.³⁷³ Yet, as long as the child has not yet acquired 'the *that*', not even in its first crude manifestations, whatever it does neither reflects virtue nor vice (given that vice presupposes knowledge of 'the *that*' and consists in disregarding this knowledge in favour of its more immediate appetitive cravings). So, only with the acquisition of 'the *that*' will the child first become able both to act in ways that reflect virtue (i.e. by living up to the demands of 'the *that*') yet also to fall short of virtue (i.e. by failing to live up to its demands) and, thus, lapse into vice.³⁷⁴ With its becoming *able to respond* in the called-for ways, in other words, the child becomes *respons-ible*.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle", 36.

³⁷² Cf. Aristotle, Pol. I.13 1260a 31–3: "since the child is not fully developed, it is clear that his excellence too is not in relation to himself, but in relation to his end and his guide." Cf. also Lucia Randolph Dow, "Growing Up Happy: Aristotle's Theory of Moral Education," PhD diss. (University of Toronto, 1998), 100.

³⁷³ I.e. it acted on "immediate biological imperatives" (McDowell, *Mind and World*, 115).

³⁷⁴ This is, again, not to say that the child therefore appears as a full-fledged virtuous person, far from it. As expounded above, much more is needed for that. Still, in acting in certain ways *because* it sees them as noble already reflects some ethical value – "The ability to see actions as noble", as McDowell puts it, "is already a perhaps primitive form of the prescriptive intellectual excellence, practical wisdom, with its content intelligibly put into place by habituation" ("Deliberation and Moral Development," 52).

³⁷⁵ Given that the figurehead of McDowell's ethical thought is Aristotle rather than Kant, it is perhaps not surprising that McDowell seldom deploys the notion of responsibility in his ethical writings. This being said, it can be accommodated quite easily – after all, McDowell frames virtuous action in terms of a "responsiveness to reasons", that is, a responsiveness which makes one "answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations" ("Sellars, Kant, and Intentionality," *Having the World in View*, 6). So, if the child, say, is asked why it gave the sibling only one hand full of candy, it may justify what she did by saying 'I gave him half!', thus trying to show that she acted on what she perceived as the requirements of justice. If, however, she is then confronted about the fact that earlier that day, she had promised the sibling to give him all the candy, what she

In having developed the ability to choose to do what it perceives to be ethically “worth going in for”³⁷⁶ (and, thus, also to give in to its appetites), the child will, to use McDowell’s language, become able to exercise its “practical conceptual capacity.”³⁷⁷ Yet, regardless of whether the child eventually does what it takes to be ethically called-for or whether it ends up succumbing to its appetitive cravings, its deeds will be attributable to it as its author – an author who will either be proud to be able to fully stand behind its deed as the noble thing it brought about by its practical powers or one who will be ashamed for not having done what it knew it ought to do.³⁷⁸ In the former case, its deed will be reflective of the virtue of *temperance*,³⁷⁹ in the latter of her moral failing qua *akrasia*.³⁸⁰ Hence, the child whose character has not yet been ethically moulded will neither feel shame nor will it deserve blame for *not* doing what would appear to others as the morally called-for thing to do – although here, too, parental praise and reprimands often have the purpose of *instilling* a sense of shame and of ethical understanding in the child in the first place.³⁸¹

This brings me to my present concern, namely the relational dynamics involved in what on the Aristotelian/McDowellian account would be the transition from the child’s pre-ethical to its ethical state. According to the Aristotelian/McDowellian account, even unreflective behaviour of the kind described above – e.g. the child’s tending to others who are hurt – will presumably still be very much appreciated by others, such as its parents. Indeed, positive feedback to such ‘unthinking altruism’ (and other welcome ways of behaving) seems an integral part of the child’s *orektikon* being shaped in such a way that it comes to understand acts of this kind as noble and, hence, as called-for in certain situations. Indeed, it not only comes to understand them as *called-for* but comes to desire them as *noble* due to its being “taught to admire and delight in actions exemplifying the value of the noble.”³⁸²

This points to an important caveat in Aristotle’s conception of the noble which McDowell leaves unaddressed, and which I will spend the rest of this section discussing, namely that, although those who have a conception of the noble are incentivised to act for its

portrayed as her concern for justice would be exposed as a mere cover for self-interest. (“If I give him half, then I keep more than I would otherwise and it makes me look like I am fair.”) In that case, what looked like her virtuous action is exposed to be a non-virtuous one. And, of course, acting non-virtuously does not mean to absolve one from one’s responsibility; rather, it means acting *irresponsibly*.

³⁷⁶ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 24.

³⁷⁷ McDowell, “What is the Content of an Intention in Action?,” *Ratio* 23, no. 4 (2010): 415–32, at 431.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Aristotle, NE 1128b10–36.

³⁷⁹ McDowell, “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?,” 91.

³⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion, cf. John McDowell, “Incontinence and Practical Wisdom in Aristotle,” *The Engaged Intellect*, 59–76.

³⁸¹ Cf. Aristotle, NE 1128b12.

³⁸² McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 31.

own sake (that is, *because it is noble*), it is intrinsic to this autotelic character of the noble that the one who acts out of a desire for it thereby also desires that others, too, will – or, at least *ought to*³⁸³ – commend her action.³⁸⁴ This reflects the twofold character of the noble: on the one hand, the noble signifies what the child has learned ought to be done simply because it is worth going in for *by itself* – yet, on the other hand, its having come to desire doing what is noble has, from the very beginning, been bound up with receiving feedback from others, both positive (i.e. by receiving praise and validation for behaving in certain ways) and negative (i.e. by being reprimanded and shamed for behaving in others). Early in life, such feedback is received primarily from the parents and others close-by – Aristotle unsurprisingly only mentions the father³⁸⁵ – while later, one receives it from teachers and peers in the political arena. The latter point is echoed in Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the Greek political arena: “What the actor is concerned with is *doxa*, fame – that is, the opinion of others.”³⁸⁶ The person who moves in the public realm cares about the others’ opinion *about himself* because it is they on which his fame – or ill reputation – depends.³⁸⁷ This is not to say that acting for the sake of the noble is ultimately nothing but a plain desire to appear good in the eyes of others – Aristotle himself makes it clear that this is not the case.³⁸⁸ Still, he does make it clear that it is an intrinsic part of acting out of a concern for the noble to *also* desire a *deserved* appreciation from one’s peers.³⁸⁹ “Virtue without a witness”, as Nietzsche poignantly puts it, “was something unthinkable” for the ancient Greeks and their moral philosophers.³⁹⁰

³⁸³ I will develop this point in what follows.

³⁸⁴ This thought is thoroughly developed by Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 24–30; I will return to it below.

³⁸⁵ Cf. Aristotle, NE X.9 1180b 3-7: “For as in cities laws and prevailing types of character have force, so in households do the injunctions and the habits of the father, and these have even more because of the tie of blood and the benefits he confers; for the children start with a natural affection and disposition to obey.”

³⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures and Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago 1992, University of Chicago Press), 55.

³⁸⁷ It should be noted that Aristotle also stresses the importance of society and politics for the ethical development of the citizens. Cf. e.g. Aristotle, NE II.1 1103b 3-6 and X.9 1179b 32-1180a 5.

³⁸⁸ Identifying “happiness with honour”, Aristotle remarks, “seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow honour rather than on him who receives it, but the good we divine to be something of one’s own and not easily taken from one. Further, men seem to pursue honour in order that they may be assured of their merit; at least it is by men of practical wisdom that they seek to be honoured, and among those who know them, and on the ground of their virtue; clearly, then, according to them, at any rate, virtue is better” (NE I.5 1095b24–30).

³⁸⁹ Cf. Aristotle, NE III.8 1116a27–9: the virtuous person has “a proper sense of shame and a desire for something noble (that is, honour), and avoidance of reproach, which is a disgrace.” The word that sets Aristotle’s virtuous person’s concern for the noble apart from a mere desire to look good in the eyes of others is ‘proper’ – the one who desires praise for having acted out of a concern for the noble desires that he receives it for having done what he ought to have done, that is, the ethically excellent thing because it at the same time reveals herself as morally excellent.

³⁹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals. Ecce Homo*, transl. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale; ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1989), 69.

So, the child's ethical development is connected to its sense of shame and honour, for it is only because the child has this sense that it is receptive to the praise and validation as well as the reproach and the shaming of the ethical teachers around her,³⁹¹ a receptivity that plays an important role for the inculcation of a conception of the noble and, thus, of an ethical outlook.³⁹² Of course, whatever ethical outlook she may thus first acquire, she will subsequently subject it to further reflection, including reflection of the critical kind (as McDowell holds with Kant against Aristotle – recalls McDowell's favoured metaphor of Neurath's ship). Still, all of these (critical) reflections have to work with what she has already got and are, thus, dependent on the concepts she has acquired beforehand by engaging with others, being met with their praise, blame, and so on. In this sense, the first contents of ethical rationality are, on the Aristotelian view, arbitrary – they are whatever the respective authority figures inculcate in the child when it is still most impressionable and most eager to please them.³⁹³ In this sense, the desire to look good in the eyes of others precedes, and indeed conditions, the desire to do what is rational.³⁹⁴ As I said, McDowell does not thematise this issue, so it is not clear what his view on it is. As it stands, however, he simply adopts the Aristotelian picture of habituation into virtue – without, however, addressing the social dynamics that are involved in it.

The question which now arises is how these two relations between the desire for recognition and the desire for rationality are related *to one another*. An answer that may suggest itself is that they reflect two different stages in ethical development: while the child must first desire the praise and validation of others in order to be open to being ethically formed, and, thus, in order to first acquire a more or less consistent ethical outlook, the person who has already undergone an ethical education has come to desire the rational-qua-virtuous for its own sake so that any reward in the form of praise or validation is merely a welcome addition. I am suspicious of this view, however, because it introduces a stark rupture in the psychological development from the ethically uneducated to the ethically educated person.

³⁹¹ Here, the role of *thumos* – the intermediate part of the soul, often translated as 'spiritedness' – in the child's ethical development becomes apparent. As Plato before him, Aristotle conceives of *thumos* as the part of the soul associated with competitiveness, honour, and shame. It is not intrinsically rationally but may be made (partly) rational, namely by the right kind of education. Due to the complex nature of *thumos* – as well as the rather minor role it plays in Aristotle's overall philosophy – I will not expound it further and instead delimit myself to a discussion of a desire for social recognition and the concomitant sense of shame and honour.

³⁹² Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* II.12 1389a 28–30: Young people "are shy, accepting the rules of society in which they have been trained, and not yet believing in any other standard of honour." Dow, *Growing Up Happy*, 133–4.

³⁹³ Which is one of the reasons why, on the Aristotelian picture, it is important to be brought up in an ethically good society.

³⁹⁴ This is a great challenge to McDowell's conceptualism – after all, he is committed to the view, expounded in section 1.a. above, that there can be no intentional, meaningful relationality before the acquisition of a second nature. But what else is the striving for honour and the avoidance of shame if not intentional and reflective of understanding?

Now, in a certain sense, it is certainly imaginable that the Aristotelian person of virtue would continue to go about doing what she takes to be virtuous, and simply *because* she takes it to be virtuous, even if no one else would praise or validate her for doing so. Her immediate reaction would be that the others are fools not to see when praise is due – after all, she developed her ethical outlook through much effort and perhaps painful self-reflection and, hence, her understanding differing from that of the others would (so she would think) surely be a sign of their ethical unreflectedness, their moral obtuseness. Accordingly her verdict: the others *may not* praise and validate me but they *ought to*.³⁹⁵ If she would *never* get any praise or validation, however, and for a long period of time, then her desire to do what is virtuous for the sake of its nobility would be perpetually frustrated. In that case, she would become unable in good faith to describe her own deeds (which, to her, are virtuous) as noble, simply because they *would not anymore be regarded as noble* – and being regarded as noble is constitutive of the very concept of the noble. This is what I meant above when I stated that the desire for the affirmation of others is intrinsic to the desire for doing what is noble: without this affirmation, what one strove for as noble ceases to be noble.³⁹⁶ This brings us back to the continuity between the psyche of the ethically uneducated child and the ethically educated adult: the adult’s desire to do what is noble feeds off from the same recognition of others that initially compelled the child to first come to accept and internalise the claims made by others about what is noble. Differently put, woven into the motivation of doing what is noble is, even for the adult, the reasonable (because time-proven) expectation that it will be met with recognition from others.

³⁹⁵ One can imagine the Aristotelian person of virtue visiting a far-away country with a starkly differing of how people ought to act and live. Imagine, for instance, a society which praises sensitivity and tenderness in men and look down upon those who seek to always show how strong and resilient they are. If he, then, someone who was socialised in a Greek polis, shows exactly such character traits, reasonably expecting to be praised for them, yet receives only disdain and ridicule, he will presumably think that praise is due and that they, these ‘softies’, have a skewed understanding of what virtue is. McDowell does not fall prey to such a culturalism, yet, as I will expound in what follows, even his conception of the noble is inseparably tied to the views of others.

³⁹⁶ For an excellent discussion of this – often overlooked – dimension of Aristotle’s thought, cf. the chapter “Aristotelian Virtue and Beyond” in Christopher Cordner’s *Ethical Encounter* (20–44). Cordner’s analysis is very close to mine: “[A] proper regard for honour and esteem from one’s peers, the desire to avoid shame, and a proud valuing of oneself as a person who has succeeded in constituting himself as virtuous” (ibid., 23), Cordner expounds, “are on Aristotle’s view requirements of virtue, so that being virtuous ‘for its own sake’ includes giving rein to them” (ibid.). This casts the idea of acting for virtue’s own sake in a new light: “Acting for the sake of the noble is acting in a way which involves giving [the just mentioned ends] rein.” More importantly, however, it shows that, for Aristotle, virtue crucially involves “the presenting of self to the public world, the carving out of an impressive *presence* before others” (ibid., 28). This has a weighty implication: “a certain kind of appearing before others is for Aristotle partly constitutive of the *reality* of virtue” (ibid., 34). (All emphases in the original.) In a similar spirit, Gaita states that, as regards Aristotelian virtue, “it is of the essence of virtue that it appear (be manifest) to those who are worthy to judge and honour it” (*Good and Evil*, 89). Thus, “its *reality as a virtue* [...] lies (in critical part) in the fact that it illuminates that life as one deserving of public honour” (ibid.). As I put it above: the noble ceases to be the noble if the others do not perceive it as such. Or: one cannot excel in matters of virtue if no one sees one as excellent.

This being said, the ethically educated adult's case is more complex because, unlike the small child, she already has an ethical outlook, held together by rational linkages. Furthermore, this ethical outlook is not external to her sense of self – something she ‘has’ in the same way that he ‘has’, say, manicured fingernails – but constitutive of it. In other words, one's sense of self co-emerges and co-persists with one's ethical outlook.³⁹⁷ If one asks oneself what one's view is of, say, abortion or the killing of animals for food, then the answers one gives will at the same time be articulations of one's ethical outlook *and* an expression of oneself (i.e. *one's self*.) So, an ethical outlook cannot simply be cast aside or stepped out of just because that towards which it is geared – the noble – has been robbed of what made it meaningful in the first place – namely the recognition of others. If one's conception of the noble is thus severed from such praise and validation, this will in some sense undermine it – or perhaps better put: empty it of its *point*. Again, Arendt puts it succinctly: “For the actor, the decisive question is thus how he appears to others (*dokei hois allois*); the actor is dependent on the opinion of the spectator; he is not autonomous (in Kant's language).”³⁹⁸ Without the spectator's praise (and even blame), the actor's moral reasoning may still be internally consistent, yet bereft of that which made this internal consistence matter in the first place. The Aristotelian person of virtue who would *only* experience indifference or hostility by others for doing what she takes to be virtuous would, it seems, eventually end up in one of two miserable predicaments: she would either obstinately clutch on to her conception of virtue (yet in a way that would at best be morally jaded and at worst pervaded with an encompassing sense of its pointlessness) or she would put her whole conception of virtue into question, be it by lapsing into some form of moral nihilism, dangerously close to a loss of a sense of self, or by giving in to the responses of the others so as to try to realign her conception of virtue with theirs (– a process, however, that could not be explained in terms her exercising her ethical-practical capacities.)³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ It is true that Aristotle speaks seldom of the self. But what I am after here is not the self understood as a technical term but simply as the ability to relate to oneself and think about *who* one is. The account of the *who* that one will give in doing so will be one that reflects a sense of what I termed ‘relative uniqueness’ in my above discussion of Arendt. On Aristotle's picture, moreover, this account, at least to the extent that it reflects one's *ethical* sense of self, will be bound up with its public image. “Aristotle's virtuous agent,” as Cordner puts it, [defines] himself morally for, and in front of, his peers” (*Ethical Encounter*, 27).

³⁹⁸ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures and Kant's Political Philosophy*, 55; I will return to the addendum on Kant below.

³⁹⁹ This point is not Aristotle's but McDowell's. For Aristotle, the question of ‘ethical realignment’ does not arise, other than that of the less-than-virtuous person towards virtue. For McDowell, however, the question as to the points of contact between differing ethical outlooks is of importance, however; indeed, I would say it is where McDowell is at his strongest. The central idea – to which I will return below, both in connection to McDowell but also in discussing R. F. Holland – is that, when individuals with differing ethical outlooks meet, a certain point may be reached at which their appeals to one another's rationality will simply come to an end and, thus, make way to the attempt of trying to make one another see something in a new light (cf. e.g. McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 64–5). This being said, McDowell only thematises cases in which someone wants to make someone else see something in a new ethical light, never that someone – as, say, the virtuous person who

To recapitulate: even on Aristotle's own account, it is not the case that the virtuous person has a self-contained desire for acting *as reason demands*, i.e. virtuously and for its own sake, so that any appreciation by others would be merely secondary to this desire; rather, it is intrinsic to her desire to act as reason demands that she can (reasonably) expect that others will praise her for doing so – namely because the very idea of what it is that reason demands is inseparably bound up with such praise. Were that praise generally absent, then *nothing* would ever come to be desired as noble; were that praise to vanish at a later point, then the respective virtuous person's conception of the noble would become emptied of its meaning. In both cases, virtue would collapse. Hence, there is a kind of being-together with others, namely one distinguished by wanting to be recognised and praised by them, which underlies and, in a certain sense, grounds both the contents of reason as well as the desire for acting in accordance with these contents.

3. Moral Development and the Spirit

Aristotelian virtue ethics is a conception which, as I said, presupposes the human disposition to desire doing what is rewarded with praise and recognition by others as well as to avoid that which is met with rejection, ridicule, and shaming. Indeed, he seems to suggest that the *only* ingredient in a child's ethical development, at least as regards its interpersonal dimension, is the desire of the young to please the elders and the elders' making use of this desire to mould the young: “[A]s in cities laws and prevailing types of character have force, so in households do the injunctions and the habits of the father, and these have even more because of the tie of blood and the benefits he confers; *for the children start with a natural affection and disposition to obey.*”⁴⁰⁰ But that strikes me as very simplistic, a stark underestimation of the psychological complexities involved in child-adult relations even at very early points in the child's development. No doubt, a sense of honour and shame is undoubtedly a disposition which most, if not all, of us have; yet, I do not see any reason to assume that *everyone must* have it, or be disposed that way to the same degree on all occasions, nor that there may not also be other pre-educational, relational dynamics that play a – perhaps *equally* or *even more* – important role in the process of moral development. By failing to address these issues, McDowell ends up with

suddenly finds himself around people with very different ethical outlooks – comes to see something in a new ethical light simply by witnessing or observing those around him. (This will become a prominent theme in the second half of chapter 6.) In any case, the point is this: coming to see something in a new ethical light cannot be explained as an exercise of practical reason.

⁴⁰⁰ Aristotle, NE X.9 1180b 3-7.

a similarly one-sided picture of moral development as Aristotle. I suggest taking a different route than McDowell, namely one which fully embraces the implications of the thymotic side of the Aristotelian conception of ethics – yet in such a way that leads beyond this conception.

a. The Recognition-Centred Picture of Moral Education

Considering how central a role ethical development plays in Aristotle’s – and also in McDowell’s – ethical thought, it is astounding how little they examine the actual relational dynamics in and through which this development takes place.⁴⁰¹ Their approaches suggest that when it comes to the onset of moral development – and indeed not only moral, but all mental development (which, for McDowell means: the development of consciousness as such)⁴⁰² – what matters is simply *that* ‘the *that*’ is acquired because it is only with this acquisition that the subsequent story of mature ethical rationality, revolving around ‘the *because*’, can be told. This intimates that for them, the question of *how* the ‘that’ is acquired is secondary (and the question of whether morality should not be approached altogether differently than via the acquisition of ethical knowledge is suspended entirely.) True, unlike McDowell, who outright rejects this question with the remark that any attempt to dig below the conceptual ‘bedrock’ must collapse into meaninglessness,⁴⁰³ Aristotle does indeed provide an account of the relational dynamics via which ethical knowledge is first acquired, an account which, as I tried to bring out in the last section, can be read in such a way as to bring to light that ethical rationality as he understands it must always remain tied to our desires for social recognition. Yet he portrays these relational dynamics as if they were quite plain and straightforward, as it were simply in the nature of human beings for the adults to enculturate the children into the prevailing ethos

⁴⁰¹ Most of McDowell’s comments on the topic are to be found in “Deliberation and Moral Development”, esp. 50–8 (and to a certain extent in “Eudaimonism and Realism”); however, his remarks are, for the most part, very general. He states, for example, that ethical education is a matter of “being habituated into delighting in the sorts of actions that exemplify the excellences of character” and of “being taught to admire and delight in actions exemplifying the value of nobility.” While these very formulations, precisely due to their generality, leave much room to how such a ‘teaching’ may come to pass (although, as I will develop below, the very notion of *ethical teaching* is problematic), his other formulations suggests that it is a one-sided and not very playful and loving process (some of his preferred expressions for this process are “moulding” or “inculcation.”) His strong emphasis on Aristotle’s notions of ‘the *that*’ and ‘the *because*’ only serves to underline this picture.

⁴⁰² Cf. section 1.a. above.

⁴⁰³ In “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” McDowell describes “sub-‘bedrock’ [...] characterizations of what meaning something by one’s words consists in” as “meaning-free” (ibid., 252; for the whole discussion, cf. 249–54). Regardless of whether or not this is a fruitful claim regarding linguistic meaning, I hope that my discussion in section 1.d. above showed that meaning is not so straightforwardly tied to language as McDowell suggests. In any case, it would make hardly any sense to say that the small child’s responses to its parents, say to their invitations and appeals, are meaningless. This becomes particularly clear when one imagines oneself being in the position of such a parent: if one would really think that one’s child would be unable to understand, i.e. find meaning in, one’s appeals and invitations to behave in this or that kind of way, then what would the point be of such appeals or invitations?

and to do this by praising and blaming, validating and shaming them – and that this is all there is to moral development.

The question is, then, whether moral development in its earliest stages feeds exclusively off of small children’s desires for the recognition of those around them or whether other relational dynamics may not also be involved (and if so, which ones and how exactly.) What about, say, the parents’ incitation and encouragement of the child to do as they do, yet without praising or shaming the child’s behaviour? What about their attempts to make the child see something in a new light?⁴⁰⁴ What about the child coming to see something in a new light through its parents’ behaviour without their trying to ‘make the child see’ anything?⁴⁰⁵ What about the child’s simply imitating the parents?⁴⁰⁶ And perhaps even more importantly, what about the child protesting against, disagreeing with, or rejecting, what the parents do, or encourage the child to do?⁴⁰⁷ It would seem to me that these are all different aspects of what is, in a greater or lesser extent, involved in a child’s coming to develop a moral outlook.

As discussing all these aspects involved lies well beyond the scope of the present discussion, I will focus on the one I think serves my present purposes best, namely that of the parents’ attempting to make the child see something in a new light. To this effect, consider the following scenario: a girl and her brother are playing in the garden while their parents are inside. She sees the boy trip, fall, and hit his head with considerable force, causing him to cry out in pain. Although the girl witnesses the situation unfold, she remains unfazed, ingenuously continuing to play. Let us assume that the parents come on the scene. Seeing that the boy is hurt and crying, the mother goes over and looks after him, caressing and comforting him and looking

⁴⁰⁴ Although focussing on the relation between teachers and students rather than parents and children, this could be said to be the guiding thought of R. F. Holland’s brief but insightful essay “Education and Values” (*Against Empiricism. On Education, Epistemology and Value* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), 52–61).

⁴⁰⁵ It should be noted that Aristotle’s account seems to make at least some kind of room for this possibility when he states that ethical development is, to a certain extent, a matter of a natural drive towards understanding that may not depend on inculcation (cf. e.g. Rhet. I.11 1371a 31b 8; Poet 4 1448b 12–15.) Yet, although important for Aristotle’s thought on the whole, he says little about it.

⁴⁰⁶ This is a fairly prominent theme in Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Poet. 1448b5–9; 1450a16–b4; or 1456a36–b8) and *Politics* (e.g. Pol. 1339b42 ff.; 1340a23–25 or 1340b14–18), namely in respect to artistic imitation, i.e. in music and poetry. While both forms of imitation are, if implemented properly, conducive to ethical education, neither is a form of ethical education per se. As regards ethical upbringing proper, Aristotle seems to consider imitation unimportant. (For a helpful discussion of the role of artistic imitation for ethical education in the thought of Aristotle, cf. Siyi Chen, “The Stages of Moral Education in Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics,” *Rhizomata* 7, no. 1 (2019): 97–118, esp. at 100–3.)

⁴⁰⁷ This thought is discussed by Hugo Strandberg in “The Bounds of the Sayable” (in *Essays in Honour of Olli Lagerspetz on his Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Jonas Ahlskog & Hugo Strandberg (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2023), 47–59, at 52–3). Generally speaking, however, the fact that children play a more significant role in the process of moral development than Aristotle or McDowell suggest, that they may perhaps even ‘teach’ the adults something, is unfortunately very much overlooked. Other thinkers who touch upon the idea but do not develop it in detail are e.g. Georg Bertram, “Two Conceptions of Second Nature,” 74; Buber’s *I and Thou*, 67; and Pär Segerdahl, Williams Fields and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh’s *Kanzi’s Primal Language: The Cultural Initiation of Primates into Language* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 89–90.

after the wound. Meanwhile, the father, a person of a McDowellian-Aristotelian bent, is irritated by his daughter's demeanour⁴⁰⁸ and takes her apparent indifference to indicate the fact that she still lacks an understanding 'the ethical *that*' required in the given situation. Accordingly, he leads her to a set of drawers and shows her first-aid kit inside; he opens it, takes out some plasters, takes his daughter to her crying brother, and tries to convey to her – presumably by employing gestures but above all by means of language – that, when her brother has such an 'owie' and if there is a blood, she *ought to* put a plaster on his wound ('*That* is what you ought to do!').

Now, it is of course imaginable that she does not 'cotton on'⁴⁰⁹ to what her father tries to teach her; yet let us assume that she does for the sake of the point I am after. Such a cottoning-on will, in its simplest form, consist in her coming to understand that she should behave in this kind of *way* (e.g. helpfully) in *that* kind of situation (i.e. when your brother is bleeding, get a plaster and put it on his wound.) If, however, she will from then on *only* help her brother and *only* when he is bleeding because had an accident, then this will not yet reflect genuine understanding⁴¹⁰ and, accordingly, provoke further interventions from the side of her parents. Imagine, for example, that, shortly afterwards, she sees some child on the playground hit her head on a metal bar, yet without any blood spilling. Given her narrow understanding of 'the *that*', her father may approach her again and try to convey to her that this situation is not relevantly different from the previous situation with her brother. If she cottons on to the follow-up lesson, her understanding has broadened in the direction of proper ethical understanding, given that she has now come to understand that it is *generally* called-for to respond to situations in which someone is hurt by being helpful.⁴¹¹ In any case, she will at this point not yet understand *why* she ought to help those who are hurt but only that it is simply *what* she,

⁴⁰⁸ Perhaps it would be more to the point to say that he, given that he is indeed a stout McDowellian/Aristotelian, would be less taken aback by his daughter's demeanour than by his own and his wife's apparent negligence as regards the ethical inculcation of their daughter.

⁴⁰⁹ This is an expression McDowell has taken over from Crispin Wright to describe the idea that "understanding is [...] a leap, an inspired guess at the pattern of application which the instructor is trying" (Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Duckworth: London, 1980), 216; quoted from McDowell, "Wittgenstein and Rule Following," 22).

⁴¹⁰ In "Value and Reason", McDowell discusses that what I just termed 'genuine understanding' requires a kind of ethical transfer knowledge: In successful ethical teaching, despite its lack of a "universal principle" (ibid., 64), McDowell holds, "the pupils do acquire a capacity to go on, without further advice, to novel instances. Impressed by the sparseness of the teaching we find this remarkable" (ibid.), concluding that, ultimately, it must be acknowledged that "the learner is required to make a leap of divination" (ibid.). In the above example as it stands, however, the girl could not yet be said to have acquired said capacity.

⁴¹¹ Although McDowell invests much effort into showing that ethical understanding does not rest on abstract principles, he still holds on to the view that it is a kind of 'general knowledge'. Thus, he states, following Aristotle, "the best generalizations about how one should behave only hold for the most part" ("Virtue and Reason," 58) – although not a domain of universal precepts, McDowell thinks of ethics as concerned with the 'best generalizations about how one should behave'.

according to her father, ought to do (and perhaps that, given the praise she receives when doing it, it is *noble* to do it.)

At this point, the starting point is established for the subsequent process of moral education in which her parents inculcate a desire for the noble in her by praising and validating such behaviour (i.e. her helping those who are hurt or in pain) and dissuade her from the ignoble by admonishing, reprimanding and perhaps even shaming her (i.e. her abstaining from helping them.) If such positive and negative feedback will be successful, then she will come to internalise her father's understanding that helping those in need is praiseworthy and not doing so is shameful. Part of this process will, furthermore, be the substantiation of this understanding by an understanding of 'the *because*', i.e. her ability to say *why* helping is praiseworthy and *why* omitting to help is shameful. Thus, she will, on the Aristotelian-McDowellian picture, gradually develop towards virtuousness.

b. Two Kinds of Concern with Others: Authority and Care

Note, however, that in this scenario, from its very beginning all the way to the girl's development into a virtuous person, she may be imagined to remain entirely untouched by the pain and hurt of others. For recall: she does not initially come to grasp 'the ethical *that*' because she feels pity for her brother or is in any other way moved by his pained predicament but because she is receptive to her father's instruction. And a concern for the pain of others need not have arisen at a later point in her ethical development either; after all, she came to deepen her desire for tending to others who are hurt because of the feedback of certain authority figures. We may thus imagine her, although perhaps an exemplar of virtue who always acts out of a keen sense of ethical appropriateness (and perhaps very ardently and passionately so), yet nonetheless with a relative disinterest towards those with whom she interacts. Or, more precisely: in acting towards, or interacting with, others, she is not primarily concerned with *them*, that is, with how *they* feel or in what kind of overall state *they* are, but rather with those whose opinions⁴¹² are important to her, that is, those whose judgments of herself she has come to internalise as her own. Hence, her failure to do what she knows she ought to do – say, to help others who are hurt or in pain – will not be expressed in remorse (if that is understood as the "pained recognition"⁴¹³ of the wrong one has done to another as it is elicited by the very

⁴¹² Recall Arendt's remark on the connection of *doxa* and 'fame' (or in this case, a good reputation.)

⁴¹³ Raimond Gaita, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 51; for Gaita's deep – but in some respects troubled – discussion of remorse, cf. *ibid*, 42–63, as well as in chapter 6, section 1.a.v. below.

presence of that other) but, instead, in shame (i.e. the negative judgment of oneself in line with the real or imagined judgment of a social audience one takes to be authoritative.)⁴¹⁴

Now, the father may be delighted in his daughter's eagerness to live up to the respective familial or social conception of virtue (and not only so as to please him and the other family members but also, and primarily, for its own sake)⁴¹⁵ – yet with seemingly little or no regard for her remaining so untouched by her brother's pain. And this seems unsurprising, given how *he* responded to the situation: seeing his daughter's apparent indifference in the face of her brother's pain, was to turn to *her* so as to tell *her* what the *appropriate reaction* was – *his son* and *his pain* did not play a noteworthy role in his response either.⁴¹⁶ However, the father need not react to his daughter with such a seeming lack of affection. It is also possible that he gets the sense that there is something off with his daughter's supposed 'noble' comportment – namely that precisely her eager concern for *doing what is noble* comes at the cost at a genuine concern for *others*.⁴¹⁷ If so, he comes to see the very thing that takes centre stage in the Aristotelian/McDowellian understanding of ethics, namely the conception of virtue for the sake of which the virtuous agent does what she does, not as the vehicle of his daughter's goodness but as a substantial hindrance to it.⁴¹⁸ And given that – so at least I think and hope – very many

⁴¹⁴ For a sharp, critical discussion of the connection between internalising the – real or imagined – judgment of others, authority and shame, cf. Frederik Westerlund, "Shame, Love, and Morality", *The Journal of Ethics* 26 (2022): 517–41, esp. at 529–31. I will discuss shame and its 'moral standing', cf. chapter 6, section 1.a.ii.

⁴¹⁵ Although this 'for its own sake' is, if it is to be of a properly Aristotelian kind, not entirely separable from its appearance before others. Thus, his pleasure in his daughter's dedication to virtue may, for instance, still be connected to how others will perceive her, the daughter, as well as perhaps the entire family, namely as worthy of praise for their noble behaviour.

⁴¹⁶ If his wife displays an equal obsession with virtue as he and their daughter do, then she, too, will not tend to her hurt son out of concern and pity but because she sees that it is called for. (That is of course not to say that the Aristotelian person of virtue *must* be so indifferent towards others – only that interest in, and concern for, others is negligible when it comes to their virtuousness.)

⁴¹⁷ This is not to say that therefore she could not act in ways that are very altruistic. Again, this has to do with how the recognition of others is built into the desire to act nobly. In discussing a virtuous soldier of an Aristotelian bent, Cordner writes that his desire for honour can be "internal to his motive for acting if it is desire for honour on the grounds of recognition by others that his action has served the honour of the regiment" (*Ethical Encounter*, 33), meaning that "his desire for honour can be something he recognizes as constrained by the need, on various occasions, for all sorts of altruistic sacrifices on his part – by the need, perhaps, to give his life for his fellow soldiers" (ibid.). Similarly, the stoutly Aristotelian girl in the example at hand may, say, risk her life to save her brother in a terrible accident because her desire for acting nobly is grounded in the fact that, say, doing so will be in the name of the family, of its reputation as honourable. (This is not to say that her concern must lie with the *family* honour. She may also think that what is at stake is the honour of her clan or tribe, the religious group to which she belongs, her nationality or her ethnicity, or some other group the honour of which is central to her own self-understanding as a member of it.)

⁴¹⁸ In *Good and Evil*, Gaita makes a point that seems to run counter to the view I am here expressing, namely that Aristotle's "point was not that it is permissible to exploit the needs of others as opportunities for noble action, but rather, that the pleasurable appreciation of the nobility of our deeds, even in their performance, is no obstacle to their virtue but is, indeed, internal to that complex motive which he called 'doing them for their own sake'" (88). My question to this would be: why does the virtuous agent find pleasure in acting virtuously? It would seem to me that it is a combination of his finding virtue rational – i.e. it makes sense to him – and of his resting assured that he will receive the praise of others for it. (It is in this sense that he will be able to 'pleasurably appreciate the nobility of his own deed'.) But if that is all which constitutes his motivation – or,

of us would sympathise with the father who would thus respond to his daughter's 'ethical obduracy', this seems to pose a genuine and real threat to the construal of ethics Aristotle and Aristotelians like McDowell offer us.

If the father would respond to his daughter with such a worry, he would presumably attempt to shift his daughter's attention away from a preoccupation with (her conception of what it means to) *being noble* and towards *others*. If he does, and if we want to try to understand this attempt, however, then we leave the philosophical territory covered by the Aristotelian/McDowellian conception of ethics because it does not yield the theoretical resources to account for such an attempt. This is so because, firstly, his attempt cannot be grasped in his teaching her some further 'ethical *that*' – after all, it has been precisely the preoccupation with 'the *that*' that lay at the heart of what he finds morally troubling in his daughter's comportment. Secondly, his seeking recourse to 'the *because*', although it gets us further, will not do the trick by itself either. It gets us further in that the father may turn to his daughter and tell her that she should not only care about her conception of virtue *because* this conception at the end of the day stands in the service of the concern we have for others (or something along these lines); it does *not* get us all the way, however, because, as long as we still move within the Aristotelian/McDowellian framework, the only way in which the daughter could come to acknowledge this 'insight' is by *yet again integrating it into her conception of virtue for the sake of which she then proceeds to act!* But that is precisely what the father does *not* want – he wants her to somehow undergo a shift of attention, away from *what she finds ethically salient to her brother*, as if to let his presence come to bear directly on this sense of salience and, accordingly, on her responses to him (and others). So, a recourse to 'the *because*' will only 'do the trick' if, by referring to it when speaking to his daughter, the father aids her in coming to see in a new light what is 'at stake' in ethical matters, what it is 'all about'. Such a shift of attitude⁴¹⁹ or stance is only understandable in terms of a shift of attention away from one's conception – and, thus, from an Aristotelian/McDowellian conception of ethics.

rather, that all else which may factor into it is extraneous to its virtuousness – then it seems that what he does in acting nobly is not that far from 'exploiting the needs of others as opportunities for noble action.' (It may of course be the case that many Aristotelians do not envisage the person of consummate virtue as concerned only with *acting virtuously* and not at all with the unique individuality – the pain, the joy, the suffering, etc – of those towards whom he exercises virtue. But that, I think, rather points to the fact that there is something of basal ethical importance which Aristotle's account does not address.)

⁴¹⁹ This notion shift of attitude will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6, section 2.a.

c. Guiding One Another's Ethical Attention

But how, then, are we to make sense of his attempt to redirect her attention? McDowell himself repeatedly points to the central role which our attempts play of making one another perceive situations in a new light.⁴²⁰ One example he offers is one person saying to another “You don’t even know what it means to be shy and sensitive!”⁴²¹ Although McDowell does not explicitly states it, it seems that what he is after is that an utterance like that may be produced as an attempt not only to make someone aware of the fact that he might have been callous but moreover to sensitise him to the given situation, to help him put himself into the feet of someone who is more sensitive and shy than he is – perhaps the speaker herself. Credit is due to McDowell not only for emphasising that such appeals may be of great ethical importance but also that they are important despite the fact that they are not directly part of the domain of ethical rationality (although they modify that domain, precisely by transforming our ethical perception and, hence, also our ethical outlooks.) This being said, they are, on McDowell’s account, always presented as just that: *trans*-formative. That is, in order for such appeals to have any impact at all, they have to latch onto an already developed – *formed* – ethical outlook. Without a form, there is nothing to trans-form. That assumption, however, is precisely what is put into question in my present discussion of moral development via the example of the ‘unfazed sister’. In the example as I have just developed it, the father’s problem is not that he thinks the form of his daughter’s ethical outlook is simply lacking and that it should, hence, be transformed, be it by making it internally more consistent or, as I just emphatically indicated, by integrating new perceptual contents. His problem is her *relation* to this outlook, a relation which, on his view, is obsessive, a preoccupation that desensitised her to the ethical importance of the living and breathing people around her. The sensitivity which she is lacking is not a part, of the outcome, of any ethical outlook but, rather, that which destabilises any such outlook by confronting it with something – or *someone* – beyond itself, someone *absolutely other*.

So, what the father wants is for his daughter to come to shift her attention away from her conception, no matter its form, and towards her brother so as to open herself, her heart, to him and his pain.⁴²² In relating to his daughter, the father’s focus thus shifts away from a

⁴²⁰ I already mentioned his brief discussion in “Virtue and Reason,” 65; another such discussion can be found in “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?,” 85–6.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴²² This thought is also developed by Strandberg, although in a different context: That someone’s being unable to forgive herself for not having told the truth to a friend may be due to the fact that she violated a principle she is committed to, i.e. that of truth-telling. Reflecting on how she may come to forgive herself, Strandberg suggests that she could either alter her principle – which he finds psychologically dubious – or to “shift the focus of attention”, namely “not on another principle, but on my friend and our ongoing relation.” He concludes: “I thus

concern both with *what* he deems important – i.e. with ‘the *that*’ he may have otherwise taught his daughter – and with *why* he deems it important – i.e. with ‘the *because*’ he would have otherwise tried to convey to her by appealing to her reason – and, instead, towards a concern with *him*, i.e. her brother, and his pain. The way in which the father will thus try to give his daughter ethical guidance will neither be in the role of a moral educator or teacher who passes over ethical knowledge in the possession of which he is and which he wants his offspring to acquire⁴²³, nor in the role of the one who has ‘thought further’ than his child and can thus help her ‘connect the dots’ (i.e. deepen her understanding of ‘the *because*’), but as someone who tries to convey a sense of the moral weight of the situation by redirecting her attention so as to come to see the situation in a new moral light.⁴²⁴

The way in which the father may do this cannot be determined *a priori*. It could entail that he might address her; if so, it will be with an emphasis that expresses his sense of the gravity of his son’s pain. He may, for instance, say “Look at *your brother*, *look*, he is crying and in pain! The *poor boy*! Do you see the wound on his forehead? That must have *hurt!*” Yet language is not decisive, as McDowell suggests it is. Instead of, or in addition to, speaking with her, the father may simply take the girl face to face with her brother, confront her with his pain close-up, attend to him in a loving way that is plain for her to see, and perhaps at times turn to her so as to invite her to relate to her brother in a similar way.⁴²⁵ It may even be enough for her to open up to her brother’s pain if he shows genuine emotions, shows how his son’s pain matters to him. The father’s thus engaging with his children, both the boy and the girl, may help to redirect her, the girl’s, attention and thus arouse in her a sense of the moral significance of the situation.⁴²⁶

forgive myself when I no longer see myself and our relation in the light of what I have done as reflected by the principle“ (*Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 164).

⁴²³ Cf. Joel Backström, *The Spirit of Openness*, 409.

⁴²⁴ The significance of the light metaphor to ‘cast light on’ moral phenomena will become prominent from chapter 4 onwards, especially in reference to Buber’s deployment of it (cf. *I and Thou*, 59). It is also central in the writings of Simone Weil (cf. e.g. “If I light an electric torch at night out of doors I don’t judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up.” (Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, ed. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 147). The light she has in mind is, as she continues to say, that which a “religious or, more generally, a spiritual way of life” may cast on “things in the world” (ibid.). As such, it is God’s love, as it were shining through the spiritual person’s deeds. The central point of the passage, however, is that the love that may manifest in someone’s deeds directs the attention to that which it illuminates rather than to itself – and this, I think, can also be said for love that manifests in non-spiritual contexts, such as that of the father’s love for his son turning the daughter’s attention to her brother and seeing him in the light of the father’s love. (This point is also made by Raimond Gaita in *A Common Humanity. Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (London: Routledge, 2002), 24); for a discussion of the Weil passage in a similar spirit, cf. Raimond Gaita, *Beyond Good and Evil*, xxx & 204–5.)

⁴²⁵ Cf. Joel Backström, *The Spirit of Openness*, 410: “The only way to ‘teach’ goodness, and the ‘concept’ of it, to a child is by *showing* the child goodness, by *loving* the child” (emphasis in the original).

⁴²⁶ A similar point is made by Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 108.

If he succeeds in touching her – or, rather, in reaching her in such a way that she lets herself be touched by her brother’s pain through his appeal – it may well be that she will be saddened or even start to cry. Yet, unlike in the case of the person who has come to internalise an Aristotelian/ McDowellian understanding of virtue, her being thus saddened will not be a result of her realisation that she has acted ignobly or shamefully. (Nor will it be due to the consequences she fears for having ignored his pain or because of the recognition that she has violated a moral rule.⁴²⁷) Rather, it will be “an expression of the recognition of the pain he is in”,⁴²⁸ an expression inseparably tied up with her recognition of his reality and her sense of his moral importance for her.⁴²⁹ If it is, then she will get what I would be inclined to call the *point* of why her brother’s pain is of moral relevance.⁴³⁰

I say the father can only ‘help’ his daughter to open up in this way because, ultimately, he cannot do it for her, nor can he teach her how to do it. The attending and the experiencing is something she can only do herself.⁴³¹ That said, the fact that he can so much as play a role in the process presupposes that she is already responsive to *him* (i.e. that his being touched by the boy’s pain touches her) in such a way that her father’s presence and his appeals help her awaken her responsiveness to her brother.⁴³² What the father does in relating to her is thus better described as (indirectly) helping her in her moral development than as (directly) morally educating her. It also means that the father will not understand the impression she gives – namely of being indifferent to her brother and his pain – to indicate a total absence of responsiveness towards her brother but rather one that is, for whatever reason, obfuscated.⁴³³ If the father would take the girl to be lacking *all* responsiveness in relation to her brother, then it would become unclear how his response to her – namely his attempt of rousing her

⁴²⁷ As would be the case for a child in whose education the inculcation of moral rules and principles would have been central. I will return to discuss such fear and its relation to guilt in chapter 5.)

⁴²⁸ Peter Winch, ‘Who is my Neighbour?’, in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), at 163.

⁴²⁹ For an extensive discussion of the moral nature of awakening to the other’s presence, cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, chapter 4 & Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 14; 77–85 & 152–3.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 218. For a thorough discussion – although not in the context of ethics – of McDowell’s philosophy as ‘repressing the question concerning the *point* of putting something into words’, cf. Avner Baz, “On When Words are Called for: Cavell, McDowell, and the Wording of the World,” *Inquiry*, 46, 473–500, esp. 479 ff.

⁴³¹ In such a case, as in the case of Jesus’ helping the man understand who his neighbour is, “no one truly has the answer who has not arrived at it for him or herself” (Winch, “Who is my Neighbour?,” 157).

⁴³² In a similar spirit, Strandberg remarks that “the fact that the child is not an *object* of the parents’ concern but responds to them, not only in sounds and with its eyes but in its very being, is [commonly] not seen as morally significant. Without such responses there would however not be any possibilities for the parents to ‘influence the child morally’ in the first place” (*Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 218).

⁴³³ This thought is developed in detail by Joel Backström, *The Spirit of Openness*, 408–17. He puts the point succinctly when he states that: “It is because the child is from the start open to others, as others are open to it, that the lack of response it may meet with is indeed felt as a *lack*, rather than being merely registered as a neutral feature of its environment. Or perhaps we should rather say that even the apparent lack of response to the child is actually a very marked *form* of *response*, a maiming callousness” (ibid., 416–7).

responsiveness – could be understood at all, for it would then resemble the reaction of someone who, irritated by someone’s blindness, would appeal to this person so as to rouse her vision and ‘open her eyes’. So, if he would take her to be utterly unresponsive, he would most likely assume from the outset that every attempt to change that predicament would be in vain. His response to her shows that is not the case. He can only be understood as trying to *awaken* her responsiveness, in other words, if it is assumed that he takes her to already be responsive, in however faint or obfuscated a way.⁴³⁴

There is obviously no guarantee that his words or deeds will be conducive to stirring his daughter’s responsiveness. Still, it must be possible, not least because only with the rousing of her moral responsiveness will it make sense to relate to the girl as a responsible moral agent, someone to reproach for not doing what she (morally) ought to do, to be disappointed in for displaying her former callousness, or to be proud of for particularly displays of responsibility, and to be taken aback by for sudden displays.

To briefly recapitulate: moral development does not begin with the child’s acquisition of what Aristotle calls ‘the *that*’, an acquisition which, through praise and blame, becomes ingrained in the child in such a way that it comes to charge its perception normatively. Of course, all of this is part of a child’s process of growing up and being initiated into whatever the prevailing *mores* are, as well as part of its subsequent (critical) reflections on the *mores*. Yet, there is an underlying level of morally charged perception, namely that of the direct encounter with others.⁴³⁵ This is the level of encounter on which ‘the *that*’ is first acquired – yet it is also, as I hopefully succeeded to show, the level at which we guide our attention away from a concern with ‘the *that*’ (and ‘the *because*’) and our concomitant conceptions of virtue and towards the beings whose moral importance for us cannot be reduced to any such conception. It can thus be concluded with Backström that:

while in one sense children ‘learn to be moral’ as they are introduced into various forms of life with their norms and sensibilities [i.e. the enculturation into ‘the *that*’ and ‘the *because*’], in another sense morality is not learnt at all; rather, the very activity of

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 411.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Hugo Strandberg, “Psycho-Analysis and the Morally Charged Nature of Personal Relations: A Response to Hannes Nykänen,” *The European Journal of Psychoanalysis* 6, no.1 (2018), 6: “[Interpersonal] relations are thus morally charged in a way that cannot be reduced to morality conceived of as a social system of conventional rules regulating people’s behaviour, a system of rules potentially internalized, for the questions here concern, among other things, why these rules have the content they have, why they have the function they have, why they are internalized (if they are). In order to answer such questions, one would have to refer to the morally charged nature of personal relations, for the system of rules is an attempt at meeting that charged nature, thus presupposes it and does not explain it.”

teaching children anything, including language and norms, presupposes a certain moral relation between child and teacher.⁴³⁶

One last point before I go on. Once the kind of just discussed pre-socio-normative concern for others is highlighted, the kind of ethical moulding emphasised by Aristotle and McDowell, i.e. one that puts the stress on the child's susceptibility to how it is viewed by others, will itself begin to look rather problematic. The issue is that it is a kind of education that exploits the child's desire for affirmation and recognition by others in that it makes such affirmation and recognition dependent on whether the child lives up to the parents' standards and ideas of the proper comportment.⁴³⁷ This brings me back to a distinction which, as I just showed, the Aristotelian account misses, namely the distinction between a concern *for a conception of virtue* and a concern *for others*. Above, this neglect was brought to light from the perspective of the agent, i.e. the sister, who, in one scenario, is concerned primarily with her conception of what it means to respond nobly to her hurt brother and who, in the other scenario, comes to open her eyes to him and his pain. This distinction is now transposed to the relationship between the 'ethical mentor' (be it a parent or someone else) and his protégée: what the Aristotelian account misses is that there is a crucial difference between a mentor's affirming, and showing recognition to, *her child* – simply 'because it is', as Erich Fromm might put it⁴³⁸ – and affirming, and showing recognition to, *what her child does*. On the Aristotelian account, only the latter is accredited a role in a child's moral development, not the former.⁴³⁹

Now, of course, not mentioning something does not mean being unfamiliar with it or deeming it unimportant. Still, it leaves us with a theoretical account of moral development that I take to be crucially lacking. For it yields to us a grim, even merciless, picture of the relation between parent and child, one in which the child is not simply given affirmation or recognition by its parents but has to deserve it by living up to their expectations. It is a harsh and castigatory picture in which shaming is seen as a normal, indeed as a called-for, part of (moral) upbringing and in which parental love is, as it were, always on probation, depending on the child's further

⁴³⁶ Joel Backström, "From Nonsense to Openness – Wittgenstein on moral sense," 256.

⁴³⁷ For an good discussion of this thought, cf. Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 207–21.

⁴³⁸ Fromm articulates it from the perspective of the child – that is, what Fromm speaks of as "mother's love" (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (London: Unwin Books 1962), 31) or "motherly love" (ibid., 34) is experienced by the child in a way that can be expressed in terms of "*I am loved because I am*" (ibid, 31; emphasis in the original). As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6, section 1.b.iii., Fromm understands mother's love as unconditional, juxtaposing it to "father's love" (ibid., 34) or "fatherly love" (ibid.) which depends on the child's living up to the parent's expectations – that is a love that is conditional.

⁴³⁹ While Aristotle does not explicitly address the role of love in ethical development – as mentioned, he only speaks of "natural affection" and the "tie of blood" – the way in which he portrays the father's (!) role in it comes very close to what Fromm terms "father's love", mentioned above.

behaviour and accomplishment.⁴⁴⁰ If the child does what the authority figures expect, it gets the carrot, if not, it gets the stick. Needless to say, this kind of education will, if successful, yield the kind of person who is primarily concerned with doing what she takes to be virtuous at the cost of a plain and direct concern simply for others.

Yet, even such a form of education can only be successful to the extent that it feeds off of an underlying level of relationality between child and parent: on the one hand, the child's desire for living up to what the parent wants from it is rooted in its concern for the parents – or differently put: just because it cares about *her parents* does she care about *doing what they want from her* so as to please them. As Backström puts it, “teaching a child to feel ashamed of particular behaviours (belching at table, say), presupposes the child's propensity to respond to your shaming, your rebukes and frowns by feeling ashamed. If *that response to you* were lacking, you couldn't teach it [...]”⁴⁴¹ On the other hand, the parents can only exploit their child's desire for validation if they have an implicit understanding that their child cares about *them*.⁴⁴² And even the parents' desire to ethically ‘mould’ their child must be understood in relation to their underlying love for it:⁴⁴³ they want to make it into a ‘good person’ because they love and care about it, yet that they seek to do so by moulding it at the same time twists this love.⁴⁴⁴ After all, what they do in regard to the child can be called ‘moulding’ only to the extent that they do something *to* the child – they impose themselves on it, exert their power over it as

⁴⁴⁰ This theme will be explored at length in chapter 6, section 1.b.iii.

⁴⁴¹ Joel Backström, “From Nonsense to Openness,” 256.

⁴⁴² This thought was developed above in relation to the father's being able to guide his daughter's responsiveness. It is worth adding that the child's desire for validation is not ‘morally innocent’. True, it is ‘normal’, perhaps ‘natural’, for children to desire their parents' validation but that does not make it any less selfish. This is not to say that children should be blamed for such selfishness, not least because doing so would, if anything, presumably just fuel resentment. I think the important question is *why* children seek validation in the first place. Without being able to explore this thought any further, it would seem to me that it has to do with the parents conveying to them, the children, that they *ought to* please them, the parents – so that the parents as it were ‘infect’ their children with their own selfishness. Again, this only works because the children really do love their parents and, thus long for their parents' love for them; yet, as they only receive a love interfused with selfishness, they answer it in a like spirit. The reverse implication is, accordingly, that in a parent-child relation in which children are loved with genuine and unselfish warmth, they will not develop the desire to seek validation; after all, they have learned that they are being loved simply ‘because they are’.

⁴⁴³ My freely switching between the words care, concern, and love is not due to negligence but deliberate. Of course, there are ways of speaking about care and concern that do not entail love – someone may, e.g., care for something, say some machine he has been told to administer, without caring about it in a way in which love is involved, just as someone may be professionally concerned with something, e.g. the thickness of the ice in the Antarctica, without therefore loving it. My point is simply that there is *also* a way in which care (about) and concern can be used as synonymous with love, i.e. qua *loving* care or concern. In doing so, I am not proposing something new. A similar point is made by Rodger Beehler: “This *caring about*, or *regard for*, another person is what in the eighteenth century was spoken of as ‘natural affection’, but which I shall prefer to characterize as a form of love” (*Moral Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 26; emphasis in the original).

⁴⁴⁴ That is not to say that all ‘moulding’, let alone all teaching is morally problematic, far from it. Obviously, parents should teach and explain a whole lot to their children, and it is certainly also good to foster the development of certain character traits, such as, say, show a certain degree of discipline regarding school work. But none of this is what I would call *moral* moulding – and that is all my claim is about.

they see fit – instead of trying to help the child come to see, and understand, for itself (as the father did in the second version of the just discussed example.)

As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6, it seems that what the parents show the child when they reward it with ‘the carrot’ is less an expression of their *love* than of their *esteem*.⁴⁴⁵ Parental love, it seems, is denied any significant role on the Aristotelian picture. Yet, such a love is precisely what enters the scene once the above made distinction is introduced, namely in the form of an unreserved love that finds expression, among other things, in an affirmation and recognition of the child that is not conditional upon *any* accomplishments or ethical excellence. Once it does enter the scene, however, that scene is markedly changed, and indeed complicated. If, for instance, the parents who relate to their child with such an unconditional love, admonish *their child’s behaviour*, they will nonetheless do it in a way that is at the same time an affirmation *of the child*, and, hence, an expression of their love for it. Reversely, their showing recognition, say, for some commendable quality of their child’s – say, its reliability or its honesty – will not ‘as such’ be their love, for if it were, then their love would be dependent on such virtuous behaviour; rather, their showing recognition for their child’s good character trait will now become the way in which their underlying, unconditional love finds expression in the given circumstances. But this, I take it, is simply a reflection of the actual complexities involved in relationships – be it between parents and children or some other constellation – in which love is interfused into all the other relational dynamics.⁴⁴⁶

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the theoretical resources that the philosophy of John McDowell offers to account for the moral dimension of interpersonal relationality. This endeavour was motivated by two indicators that McDowell could be of help to overcome the obstacles we met in chapter 1, namely a) his turning away from abstract reason and towards the social as the locus of the emergence of meaningful relationality and b) his focus on perception and response, suggesting a better account of what it means to relate to another in her unique individuality. However, McDowell’s philosopher did not deliver. In section 1, it was shown that, as regards the possibility of relating to another, McDowell’s conceptualism leaves him in a predicament that is not much better than that of Kant. In section one, I expounded how his preoccupation with

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Christopher Cordner, “Two Conceptions of Love in Philosophical Thought,” *Sophia* 50 (2011): 315–329, at 321.

⁴⁴⁶ The complexities and the ‘muddle’ with which love of the ‘motherly kind’ may be bound up with, and that it may be obscured by all kinds of other relational dynamics, is discussed by Cordner *ibid.*, 323.

language as mediating all meaningful relation made nonsense of the infant's relation to its parents and of the possibility to make the supposed jump from first to second nature. After that, in sections 2 and 3, I showed how McDowell's conceptualism is unable to accommodate unique individuality – Arendt's 'who' or Cordner's Lévinasian absolute Otherness. I concluded the first discussion with a distinction between two notions of meaning so as to show up the one-sidedness of McDowell's thought. In the second section, I turned to McDowell's moral – or ethical – relationality, beginning, in section 1, with his Aristotelian account of ethical education, revolving around the notions of 'the *that*' and 'the *because*' before then, in section 2, expiating something entirely neglected by McDowell, namely the central role which the desire for social recognition plays on the Aristotelian conception of virtue and ethical education. In the third and final section, I then propounded an example of 'moral education' in a parent-child relation, bringing to light in the subsequent discussion how limited, and indeed immoral, a strictly Aristotelian upbringing may turn out to be – and that it misses to address what I take to be central ingredient of moral growth: having one's moral responsiveness roused by coming to perceive something or someone in the light of the love of another.

Second Part: From the Third-Personal to the Second-Personal

Chapter III: Towards a Relational Understanding of Morality

0. Introduction

In the last two chapters, I showed that reason-centred moral philosophy as it is exemplified in Immanuel Kant's formalism and John McDowell's virtue ethics is unable to take into account a notion which I tried to show is of the greatest moral-existential meaning, namely that of *the other*. McDowell is at pains to supersede Kant's formalism by tying action to a socio-normatively enriched perception; following in Aristotle's footsteps, he thus naturalises reason and posits as the highest moral concept – that is, the concept which governs the perception of the virtuous person – that of *the noble*. The virtuous person does what she does for the sake of the noble and, thus, what she perceives presents itself to her primarily as *occasions* for acting for the sake of the noble. In doing so, however, McDowell fails to acknowledge that moral worth is not reflected primarily in deeds that are done *for the sake of the noble* but rather in the concern of which such deeds are expressions, namely the concern simply *for the other*. Deeds done for the sake of the noble *alone*, that is, without *any* underlying concern for others as their catalyst, would not only be morally severely compromised in that they would reflect a total indifference towards others – they would indeed be entirely unintelligible in that they would be bereft of the entire 'point' of acting virtuously in the first place. The unique individual *other* – referred to as 'absolute Other' in the last chapter and, following Martin Buber, simply as 'You' in the next – thus cannot be reduced to a particular concept among other concepts within a conceptual outlook. Instead, the concern it evokes foregoes reason, praxis, and socialisation.

In this chapter, I will begin to develop an alternative understanding of moral relationality that aims to take into account the other in just the way for which McDowell's and Kant's philosophies leave no room. This undertaking will inevitably lead to the limits of philosophical theorising as it is standardly conceived of, namely as restricted to what can be adequately grasped in an impersonal theoretical language. After all, the very point of a notion of the other as *absolutely* other is to portend to a fundamental dimension of morality that lies precisely

beyond what can be articulated in such a language.⁴⁴⁷ However, there are other ways of using language which do not face this problem, namely those that do not commit to the ideal of theoretical impersonality but which embrace personality, relationality, and situatedness. In other words: the ways in which we use language in our everyday dealings, in our ordinary conversations and reflections – where the language we use is at home, as it were, and is infused with the meaning that all so-called impersonal theoretical language has to presuppose.⁴⁴⁸ At this level – call it the Wittgensteinian level⁴⁴⁹ – language is used in a plethora of different ways in our relations with one another. What will become central for my present purposes is to use language in the attempt to make others – in this case *you*, the readers – see things in a new light. More precisely, I will try to appeal⁴⁵⁰ to you and your experiences in order to evoke your own sense, on the one hand, of the moral significance of the other simply qua unique individual and, on the other, of what is morally at stake in a philosophical account that seeks to do justice to the notion of the individual other and of the morally charged relation to her. For this reason, what follows will somewhat differ in style from the previous two chapters: where hitherto the kind of analytical sobriety stood in the foreground required to grapple with thinkers whose rigorous style reflects their understanding of what the task of moral philosophy is – namely to give an impersonal and systematic account of morality – I will from now on take the liberty where I see called for to adopt a more experimental and evocative style in order to appeal to the readers’ own experiences of moral salience which eschew articulation in impersonal terms⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ The philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas can on the whole be seen as an attempt to bring this idea to light. It is of particular centrality in his most famous work, *Totality and Infinity*, the title of which refers precisely to how the infinity encountered in encountering the Other explodes the totality of the Western *Weltanschauung* that conceptualises all there is as an instance of the Same (cf. esp. section I: ‘The Same and the Other’). Lévinas’ thought will play a role in the following chapters, yet mostly in the background.

⁴⁴⁸ For a lucid discussion of the relation between lived, interpersonal and public, impersonal language, cf. once again Lars Hertzberg, “The Need for a Listener and Community Standards”.

⁴⁴⁹ While I cannot presently delve into the Wittgensteinian understanding of language, the text referenced in the prior footnote gives a good overview about what is at stake in it. Two other excellent texts on the same topic in the same anthology are “Attending to the Actual Sayings of Things” and “The Sense Is Where You Find It”, both published in in Lars Hertzberg, *Wittgenstein and the Life we Live with Language* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), respectively 9–24 and 25–38.

⁴⁵⁰ My way of proceeding bears methodical similarities to how Kant claims we form aesthetic judgments, namely in terms of what he calls “*ansinnen*” (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004), e.g. 189 & 190), literally meaning ‘to require’ or ‘to expect’ others to do or see something (cf. the editor’s introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), xlviii–xlix), yet in the context of Kant’s aesthetics more specifically an appealing to the other’s *senses* so as to try to make them see or experience what oneself sees or experiences. For an insightful discussion of how contemporary philosophy in the spirit of the late Wittgenstein can be understood to generally proceed according to the logic set out in Kant’s Third Critique, cf. Stanley Cavell, “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy;” *Must we mean what we say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 73–96).

⁴⁵¹ This change of style will become notably especially from chapter 4 onwards.

and, thus, accommodation in a theory of morality.⁴⁵² To this effect, examples, as well as their open-ended discussion, will take a more central role.

The philosopher whose thought will for the remainder of this work serve as a kind of compass, sometimes in the background, sometimes upfront, is Martin Buber.⁴⁵³ Buber begins his *magnum opus*, *I and Thou*, by presenting the reader with what he regards as man's⁴⁵⁴ two fundamental ways of being which he respectively refers to as the *I-It relation* and the *I-You relation*.⁴⁵⁵ According to Buber, the history of modern man is a history of the ever proliferating I-It, the conceptually pre-mediated relation, as regards both life and philosophy.⁴⁵⁶ Buber diagnoses this history as a great, sprawling malaise that becomes an ever greater threat to all "actual relation"⁴⁵⁷ – the direct relation between I and You. In this chapter, I will expatiate how both the Kantian and the McDowellian conception of morality suggest being read in terms of I-It relationality. To this effect, I will begin by presenting, and discussing, a rather extensive example consisting of three snippets of a morally charged conversation between two friends; in showing that the conceptual apparatus offered by thinkers such as Kant and McDowell is unable to yield a sound phenomenological description of the encounter⁴⁵⁸, I will develop my own account, inspired above all by Buber and others, by means of which I aim to bring to light a

⁴⁵² My emphasis in the above remarks lies on the words 'impersonal' and 'theoretical': What I refute is the possibility of giving an *impersonal theoretical* account of the moral phenomena I am after, the kind of account that can be fused into a closed system equally accessible, and intelligible, to *any* thinking being, regardless of her own experiences and relations with others. I do not refute that it is possible to meaningfully articulate in language the phenomena I am interested in – that is, after all, precisely what I intend to do. That means, however, that the kind of intelligibility at stake does not presuppose any special knowledge or other kinds of intellectual effort; rather, it pertains to what I would call the 'matters of the heart', i.e. matters with which we are all in some way or other acquainted from our life shared with others but the full (philosophical) recognition of which may nonetheless be challenging. What I am after will become clearer as I proceed.

⁴⁵³ He will stay in the background in this chapter as well as in chapters 5 and 6 but will be at the centre of attention in chapter 4.

⁴⁵⁴ As already pointed out in the last chapter, the word 'man' is not supposed to be a gendered 'man' but a placeholder for human beings in general. In what follows, I will at times chose the word 'man' over its near-synonyms (e.g. human beings, persons, individuals, etc.), namely 1) when I make direct reference to a thinker who uses the term and 2) in order to get as closely as possible to the meaning of the German word 'Mensch'. (Apart from that, Buber's *Mensch* is translated as *man* in all English versions of *I and Thou*.)

⁴⁵⁵ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, transl. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970); while the work as a whole represents Buber's attempt to develop this distinction, a perspicuous introduction is given on pages 53–5.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87 ff.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 61; I will explain Buber's notion of actuality in the next chapter.

⁴⁵⁸ This is not to say that I will subscribe to any established phenomenological methodology, such as a Husserlian one or a Heideggerian one. I will use the term 'phenomenological' in a deliberately wide way, in a similar way as Westerlund speaks of phenomenological reflection: "phenomenological reflection is the activity of reflecting on our concrete first-person lived experiences with the aim of describing and explicating the essential structures that constitute the experiences under investigation" ("Shame, Love, and Morality," 518). In the light of my above methodological considerations, it can be added that I understand such reflection, at least as I seek to carry it out, as inherently dialogical, that is, in the form of an invitation extended to you, the reader, to follow me, while at the same time remaining open to new suggestions and perspectives. In this sense, what Westerlund speaks of in terms of the 'explication of the essential structures' is not at all something that I think I can but only in dialogue with others, in an open-ended way (and I think he would see it in a similar way).

moral dimension of this engagement that precedes the established ‘language of practical reason’, that is, the kind of moral-philosophical conceptual armamentarium revolving around the concept of practical reason, including notions such as action, deliberation, choice, responsibility, and judgment. Equipped with the insights of this example, I will then turn to Buber so as to show in which sense the Kantian and the McDowellian approach to relationality and morality are to be understood in I-It terms and, thus, point to what they fail to capture – the I-You. This will pave the way for the next chapter in which I will turn to Buber’s thought and explore his understanding of I-You relationality.

1. The Moral Dimension of Engaging with Another

The present chapter will revolve around an example of a morally and existentially charged encounter of two persons and I will make it my task to try to bring out how exactly this moral-existential charge is to be understood. As my discussion will hopefully bring to light, the language it requires to live up to this task has to fully take into account, indeed has to take as its central notion, the second-personal, and more specifically, the second-personal relation as irreducible to a third-personal one. The point of the example is to illustrate that, to the extent that an engagement between two individuals is made sense of in the language of practical reason, it represents what Buber calls the mode of I-It relationality and that, precisely to this extent, it fails to take into account the underlying, second-personal dimension of morality which, as I will later show, can be captured with what Buber calls the I-You relation.⁴⁵⁹

Before turning to the example, however, I think some preliminary remarks regarding the methodology are called-for: as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, firstly, every description of an I-You relation turns it – at least as regards its linguistic form – into an I-It relation. This is so because an I-You relation is essentially *presentive*,⁴⁶⁰ that is, it persists always in the mode of presently finding oneself addressed by, and addressing, another;

⁴⁵⁹ Buber himself did indeed position his thought over against – or perhaps rather: next to – moral thought, emphasizing the distinctness of the two modes of thought and their respective concerns (cf. *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge, 2002), 20–1). However, his understanding of morality seems to be a Kantian one (ibid.) and, thus, very much in line with that I refer to here as ‘the language of practical reason’; in this respect I would agree: Buber’s thought is expressly *not* moral thought. What I am after, however, is to develop, and offer, a different way of understanding morality, namely one that takes as its core notion the second-personal relation. In what follows, I will motivate this alternative understanding both a) by showing how the third-personal understanding of morality draws its ‘living substance’ – its point and meaning – from second-personal relationality and that it, thus, cannot be severed from it and b) by bringing to light in which sense this ‘living substance’ can as such, i.e. without recourse to the third-personal, be understood as moral. I will return to the relation of Buber’s thought to morality at the beginning of the next chapter.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. chapter 5, section 1.c.

accordingly, trying to *re-present* an I-You relation by giving an account of it introduces a reflective distance from it through which one comes to relate to the relation – and to the one who was then one’s addressee, one’s You – as *something*, an *It*.⁴⁶¹

Secondly, the I-You relation is inseparably tied, not only to the respective irreducibly individual *You* with whom one engages, but also to oneself as the irreducibly individual *I*. For the present discussion, this is significant in that only *I* have been part of my concrete engagements with particular others, only *I* have experienced their moral salience first-hand – which is why, in order to be able to relate to, and to get anything out of, the following example, you, the reader, will have to try to imagine putting yourself in my shoes. This introduces some further complications to the picture. For one, whether the example will have the force that I hope it will have will depend on you, both on your readiness and ability to imaginatively take my place. Now, even if it is assumed that you succeed, you might still have a markedly different picture of the imaginatively adopted position than I do. And even if there is no such marked difference and you (at least partly) come to identify with the *I* featured in the example, this ‘imaginative move’ of yours will mean that the I-You relation in which *you* find yourself will, unlike the relation in which *I* found myself, be of a merely fictional nature. That is, the *You* which you will imagine to converse with will not *really* be a *You*, it will not *really* be radically different from you in the way a *real* *You* is, one with whom you find yourself face-to-face, in flesh and blood. Perhaps most importantly, the *You* in the example will not be able to surprise you in the same radical way as a real *You* might.⁴⁶² Yet, the unpredictability inherent in the reality of the actually encountered other, the way in which one may be surprised by her in unforeseen and unforeseeable ways, is central to what Buber means when he speaks of the I-You relation.⁴⁶³

This notwithstanding, however, I still decided to present and discuss an example of this sort because, unlike *lived* I-You relations in which one’s attention is first and foremost precisely *not* on one’s *thinking about* the relation itself but on *living* it, *imagining* and *reflecting on* I-You

⁴⁶¹ This is not to say that it is therefore impossible to speak about I-You relationships; after all, this is what I am going to do for a great part of the remainder of the dissertation. It is to say, however, that any such speaking-about will happen on a different level, one that invariably re-forms the relation as it originally played out. It is also to say that any speaking-about an I-You relationship, while articulating in I-It terms, will only be possible as embedded within another I-You relation, namely that between those who do the speaking-about.

⁴⁶² Of course, the *You* as I describe it in the example will not surprise me either – after all, the description is a product of my own memory and imagination. However, it *could have*, indeed it *did*, surprise me, namely when I found myself face-to-face with it (/him). So, while *for me*, the conversation described in the example will have the form of a *memory* of an I-You relation, it will merely be a fictional – and, hence, unreal – I-You relation to *you*, the reader.

⁴⁶³ Cf. Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, ed. Maurice Friedman (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 113; cf. also Raimond Gaita (discussing the passage just referred to), *A Common Humanity*, 271.

relations allows one to shift one's attention to the nature of the relations themselves.⁴⁶⁴ In that way – so the hope at least – one may deepen one's understanding of what it means to stand in a direct, personal relation with someone else as well as of its peculiar moral dimension.

The greatest issue I see with proceeding in the way I do, however – namely autobiographically – is that of running the risk of lapsing into hubris or even into nonsensicality. Let me explain what I mean. The point of the following discussion is to develop the grounds for an understanding of morality revolving around the notions of loving responsiveness and goodness (further developed in chapters 4 and 5) in contrast to the established understanding of morality as revolving around rational (principled or virtuous) action. But can one really ascribe one's own past deeds as loving or good without either succumbing to hubris or ceasing to make sense? Barabas, for instance, writes:

Tied to its not being an end of one's endeavour is the fact that goodness is not 'known' by the one who 'has' it. As it's the essence of actions which manifest goodness that it not be performed under that description, so too that which is 'manifested' is known, if it is known, by the recipient or the observer, rather than the self.⁴⁶⁵

The point is, as Barabas herself notes, that of the Biblical "Let thy left hand not know what thy right hand is doing":⁴⁶⁶ the good, loving person is not concerned with his *own deeds*, let alone with *his goodness* as it manifests in those deeds, but simply with *others*. Putting it this way suggests that the one who *does* describe his own past deeds and responses as good, or as manifesting goodness, will, precisely in doing so, reveal himself as *not* having responded in a spirit of goodness all along, and for two reasons: firstly, assessing one's own past deeds means that one is presently, i.e. in the very act of assessing, preoccupied with oneself rather than with others; secondly, the fact that one can so much as assess one's own past deeds as to their goodness reveals that, while one was still doing those deeds, one's attention was not fully on the other but at least partly on oneself, registering their, as it were, 'moral purity' without realising that doing so impurified them. Accordingly, the one who describes his own past deeds as good reveals himself, in doing so, as less-than-good – and, instead, as hubristic.

Firstly, I agree with Barabas that one cannot perceive oneself as *good* just as one cannot perceive *goodness* manifesting in one's deeds and responses. The reason is that goodness, at least in the way thinkers such as Gaita or Barabas speak of it,⁴⁶⁷ is something that *strikes* one

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Marina Barabas, "In search of goodness," 104.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; cf. also Matt. 6.3.

⁴⁶⁷ I will discuss their understanding of goodness in chapter 5, sections 2.a. and b. I propose an alternative way of understanding goodness at the end of chapter 5, section 2.b.

in such a way that it reveals a gap between oneself and it – that, in other words, the experience of the goodness of another is concomitant with the experience of oneself being not ‘as good’. Furthermore, I agree with Barabas that, if someone would, in responding to another, at the same time reflect on, or even intend, the lovingness of his own response, then this reflection/intention would as such undermine any lovingness that may have otherwise been there, precisely because the person’s attention would then not anymore be first and foremost on the other but on oneself (i.e. one’s own action in relation to the other).

However, I do think that someone may, in speaking with another, describe his own past deeds and responses in terms of *love*, or of a *loving concern*, for another without therefore revealing himself as hubristic. If so, however, then he must not speak as if he *knew*, let alone that he could somehow *prove*, that he acted lovingly; if he would, then that would reveal that he took – and, thus, mistook – love to be an object to be known instead of something essentially experienced.⁴⁶⁸ If it is to be possible to speak of one’s own prior deeds and responses as expressions of love, then, so it seems to me, it must be marked by a certain negativity. This negativity will hopefully transpire in the following reflections, namely in the form of an articulation of my experience that my deeds and responses just cannot be captured in terms of deliberate action, principled or virtuous, that doing so would simply distort their nature and their spirit – and that the kind of other-directed responsiveness that I will later come to re-describe in terms of *lovingness* simply seems as the only feasible alternative.

This being said, I do think that someone who describes his own prior deeds and responses as *loving* can only do so tentatively and carefully and because he feels that speaking in this way is how he is claimed in testimony of how they appear to him in hindsight.⁴⁶⁹ This entails that he must be ready to rethink his account in the light of what others may have to say about his response, especially those who have witnessed it first-hand.⁴⁷⁰ In this sense, the following reflections are intended not as an account of how I did, *in fact*, respond, but rather as my attempt to speak truthfully about how my own responses occur to me in hindsight. In this

⁴⁶⁸ Marina Barabas, ‘In search of goodness’, 84; Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 20–1.

⁴⁶⁹ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 208: “In whatever position [those who speak being claimed in wondering testimony] may find themselves [...] they stand not as (ideally) unlocated rational agents.” When they speak, they do so “not so much to report their experiences as data, but to find themselves in them and to speak authoritatively out of them.”

⁴⁷⁰ Anticipating chapter 4’s discussion of the various ways in which lovingness may manifest, what I am pointing to here is that *how* one speaks about one’s past deeds and responses and their supposed lovingness may also reflect a loving spirit (and, accordingly, that the mere fact that one does speak about it does not as such reveal oneself as unloving). This claim has wider implications regarding the nature of the conversation in which such thoughts are produced, such as whether one speaks in a spirit of trust or forgiveness; I cannot presently go deeper into those issues but I will address them at later points. Whether the spirit in which my following reflections are presented is loving or not is something I will leave up to you, the reader.

sense, I do not try to anticipate or prevent critical inquiry into whether I may not in fact have responded less lovingly than in the way I present it.⁴⁷¹ My main aim is simply to sketch a *possibility*, namely the possibility of a kind of morally basal responsiveness that cannot be accommodated in the ‘language of practical reason’. And I chose to speak from personal experience because it allows me to better engage in a discussion with (post-)Kantian reason-centred moral philosophy and its focus on the first-person perspective.

One additional remark, anticipating my subsequent discussion of Buber’s distinction between I-It and I-You: showing that thinking of oneself as loving *need not* be hubristic (but, of course, that it *may* be), namely if it is done in a loving spirit, casts a critical light on the thought that it must *always* be a sign of hubris, suggesting that it might be the result of implicit I-It thinking: only if the other is regarded as an It, i.e. *something*, the *object* of love, that the love, if any, must be *mine*, and therefore *my* accomplishment. If one, by contrast, thinks consistently in I-You terms, then love, if any, is something that is there *between us*, and not something I can take pride in as if it were my accomplishment. If love is not located in one individual, in other words, but if it is held that, as something in-between us, it may come to manifest on my side rather than on the side of the other (or vice versa), then thinking or speaking about one’s own loving response need not be unloving.

a. Deliberation & Decision

Let me now recount the situation as it played out between my friend and I.⁴⁷² Although this will result in a rather stylized re-imagining of a real event, I think it will suffice to capture the spirit of at least some of its key moments. I will refer to myself as I, to my friend as D, and to his partner as L; the ‘narrator’ (both regarding the external circumstances as well as of the goings-on in my psyche) will be marked in italics.⁴⁷³ I will begin with the moment in which my friend opened up to me about the break-up:

We talk about some inanities. I notice that D seems to be somewhat distracted and brooding. There is a certain subtle unease in his comportment. The conversation ebbs

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Barabas, “In search of goodness,” 101.

⁴⁷² Due to both the length of the conversation and the years that have passed since it took place, I only remember fragments of it. Luckily (but I think unsurprisingly), the parts of the conversation that have seared themselves into my memory are the ones that are of the greatest moral and existential significance for me. It is just those passages that are of greatest interest for my present philosophical purposes.

⁴⁷³ The point of the narrator is that it allows me to get into view not only the words that were spoken but also everything else which at the time appeared (and/or which now appears) relevant to me.

out into a silence in which we both sip on our beers. After a while, D looks at the floor and says with a slightly cracked voice:

D: I think I am not with L anymore.

I: ... what?

D: Yeah.

I: What do you mean, you *think* you are not with her anymore?

D: No, we *are* not together anymore. We broke up. Today.

I (*more agitated*): What? (*Pause*) Shit. When – How did that happen?

You (*D squinches up his face, seemingly thinking of what to say; when he continues, his voice is flat but I hear that underneath it, he is seething*) Last night. She came home after she had met this old high school friend. You know, the one she always talked about so fondly. She had this twinkling in her eyes when she came through the door. I immediately knew that something had happened between them. So I asked. And she said ‘yes’. We had a big fight. I broke some stuff, it was bad. Then I packed my things and left, went to my parents’. (*He falls silent again with a quivering sigh.*)

I want to take a closer look these lines before continuing to the morally and existentially more loaded passages below. Now, much could be said even about this fairly brief conversation snippet. For my present purposes, however, I will restrict my reflections to one side, namely to my replies to my friend and how they are to be made sense of philosophically. I want to restrict it even further and zoom in on only one unassuming little utterance, namely the “What...? Shit... When – How did that happen?” that I eject after D makes clear that he and L have, *in fact*, broken up. I think that even in this simple reply something of deep moral significance is adumbrated that can be used to show up the limits of the understanding of morality-qua-practical rationality that I discussed in the first two chapters.

According to thinkers like Kant and McDowell, my reply has to be understood *either* as a blind reaction to stimuli – a purely ‘first-natural’ response, as McDowell would put it – no different than crying out in surprise when startled, *or* as a (‘second-natural’) exercise of practical reason. The first alternative is highly unlikely given that it would have to be assumed that I am under hypnosis or sleep-walking or the like, that is, in some state in which I am not consciously aware of what I am doing and, hence, not to be described as the author of my deed. Therefore, it will be taken to fall under the rubric of the second and, accordingly, made sense of in terms of the ‘language of practical reason’. Now, at the core of the conceptual armamentarium that constitutes this ‘language’ lies the concept of *action*, that is, the *individual’s* action, the one and only possible ‘seat’ of moral worth (as well as of moral

corruption.⁴⁷⁴) So, the question becomes: was the reply I gave to D an action? Of course, *I did it*, so it was my *deed* – but is that the same as saying that it was my *action* in the philosophically charged sense in which thinkers like Kant and McDowell use the word? In order for it to be an action in this sense, it would have to be understood in connection to the other concepts that make up the language of practical reason, such as deliberation, decision, means & end, responsibility, intentionality, and, of course, reason and reason-giving (to name but a few central ones).

Let me begin by having a look at *deliberation* and *decision*. For Kant (and many others with a prohairetic concept of action⁴⁷⁵), deliberation and decision are conceptually connected to action: the reply I gave my friend only qualifies as an action if it is understood as having resulted from my decision to act in this way and not in any other.⁴⁷⁶ This decision, in turn, requires a process of (however distinct) practical deliberation. So, without deliberation, no decision and without a decision, no action. And assuming that my reply was not a mere animal reflex but an action, it will be assumed that both deliberation and decision *must* have been involved, be it explicitly in the very process of acting or ascribed to myself in hindsight.

Deliberation requires different practical alternatives between which one can deliberate. It will hence have to be assumed that my friend's opening-up to me about his break-up confronted me with different possible ways of responding to it such as, for example, staying silent (so as to give him room, say, or in order to express my being dumbfounded by the news), asking him when the break-up happened (perhaps in order to satisfy my curiosity or in order to find out how fresh the wound is), and so on. Moreover, the deliberation process could have entailed a reflection on further possible ways of replying, say, because those that immediately sprung to my mind struck me as inappropriate or otherwise unsatisfactory.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Virtually all moral philosophers regard action as the sole seat of moral worth and corruption because it is only in action that one may succeed or fail to do what one morally ought to do. As I have shown in chapters 1 and 2, both Kant and McDowell hold that what is decisive is not the concrete outcome of the action that defines its moral worth, or the lack thereof, but rather the nature of its underlying motivation. For Kant, it is the form of the underlying maxim that is decisive while for McDowell, it is the agent's (proper or improper) way of seeing (qua conceptualising) the situation to which her action is a response. The uncritical assumption that morality is necessarily a matter of action is highly pervasive; for instance, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on 'Moral Theory' does not question it at all but takes it as a given. This is how the article introduces the notion of morality: "At the most minimal, morality is a set of norms and principles that govern our actions with respect to each other and which are taken to have a special kind of weight or authority" (Julia Driver, "Moral Theory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/moral-theory/>> (accessed 13.6.2023)).

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. chapter 1, section 1.a. Another well-known Aristotelian philosopher with a similar understanding of action is G. E. M. Anscombe (cf. e.g. "Practical Truth," in *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), 141–50, at 149). As I will expound below, however, McDowell is, at least in a certain respect, an exception.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 57.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Andreas Luckner, "Klugheit und Orientierung," 10–2.

Now, in order for deliberation to be able to reach a decision, it requires criteria. Simply speaking, a criterion for decision is that by means of which one forms a practical judgment and, thus, reaches a decision to act in one way rather than another.⁴⁷⁸ In order for the action resulting from the judgment to live up to its built-in demand for rationality (as it is in virtue of its being an exercise of practical-*rational* powers that its doer can fully stand behind it as its author), the criteria that guide it have to be rational.⁴⁷⁹ In other words, it is in virtue of the rationality or irrationality of the criteria that guide our decision-making processes that the resulting actions will be rational or irrational – which is to say: *right* or *wrong*. Accordingly, one’s various motivations to act in this or that way can be critically assessed as to their rationality (and, hence, to their moral worth) by recourse to the criteria of rational action.⁴⁸⁰ (As I discussed in chapter 1, the criterion for rational action on the Kantian picture is that of the formal consistency of one’s maxims; in chapter 2, I showed that McDowell’s Aristotelian criterion is nobility.) Applying this to the example at hand: if it is imagined that I was unsure as to whether I should try to satisfy my curiosity, give my friend room, or act towards him in some other kind of way, then, on the reason-centred picture, my being able to reach a right decision will depend on my seeking recourse to a criterion of rationality.

Now, taken in isolation from the concrete context in which it was uttered, the linguistic form of the reply – “What? ... Shit. When – How did that happen?” – may suggest that I *did* deliberate as to what I ought to say: my initial expression of incredulousness (‘What?’), together with the subsequent swearword giving voice to my incipient sense of the gravity of the situation (‘Shit’), are followed by a sentence that begins with an ellipsis (‘When –’) that leads to me beginning the sentence anew and proceeding to formulate it in a different way (‘How did that happen?’) So, the impression created by the first two words, namely that I struggle to cope with the news, invites reading the sentence that follows it as me deliberating as to whether I should say one thing or another, and that, while I first seem to be inclined to opt for the former, I quickly change my mind and decide to go for the latter, i.e. to ask about how the break-up

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 30: “Criteria were to be the bases (features, marks, specifications) on the basis of which certain judgments could be made (non-arbitrarily); agreement over criteria was to make possible agreement about judgments.” It should be noted that a), although Cavell does not speak about *practical* judgments but about judgments on how words are to be used, I think the point he makes also serves to illustrate the established understanding of what practical judgments are; and that b), Cavell himself does not share the just quoted view of how criteria play into our (intellectual) lives. This is indicated by the word ‘were’: criteria *were* supposed to be the bases, etc., *but*, Cavell continues, this picture is reversed on Wittgenstein’s account on which “our ability to establish criteria depended upon a prior agreement in judgments” (ibid.).

⁴⁷⁹ As was shown, Kant’s criterion for moral action is *nothing but* rationality, understood in the sense of formal consistency of one’s maxims.

⁴⁸⁰ This is an analytic point: criticism requires something by means of which it can go about its critical business – namely criteria.

happened. As regards the criterion underlying my decision, it could be said that the reply to which I first tended – say, ‘When did that happen?’ – suddenly struck me as superficial and lacking, as a question that would be raised by someone who only wants to satisfy his curiosity instead of giving his friend the room he needs to tell his story in his own way. Realising that this would be selfish, I swiftly asked myself what, at the given moment, I (rationally) *ought to* reply – a question which, on the discussed understanding of morality, presupposes a criterion of rationality that helps to decide what the called-for way of replying would be. As developed in chapter 1, the Kantian criterion, i.e. formal consistency in willing, requires of me to try to do what I take to promote my friend’s will. So, what I ought to do is, firstly, to try to find out what, in the given situation, my friend’s (rational) ends are as well as how to promote them. As his most pressing end appeared to be him sharing his story with me⁴⁸¹ – an end that seems to be rational in that it aims at getting what pains him off his chest and, thus, is conducive to his overall well-being – I thus decide to ask a question that invites him to go ahead and do so.

Here, I find myself in a conundrum because I do not recall having deliberated/decided to reply to my friend according to the Kantian understanding nor do I feel inclined to make sense of the mental processes that lead to my reply in such terms. In fact, I think that the above account substantially distorts my reply. That is, of course, not to say that if I would go far enough back in time, I would not at some point stumble over a decision that might be in some sense be understood to have ‘led’ to all that followed. For instance, it could be that I *decided* to meet up with my friend that night or that I *decided* to have a conversation with him. Perhaps both would be correct. However, I imagine that some would be inclined to think that therefore, all which follows from the respective decision – say, of entering a conversation with my friend – must therefore be thought of as being governed by my conception of what it means to do the activity in question (i.e. having a conversation.) Yet I think that would be misleading. Of course, there *are* such conception-governed activities. If I am, say, a carpenter and I decide to make a coffee table according to my concept of it, then this concept may be said to govern all that I subsequently do until the table is complete, even if I often do not actually think about this concept. But this schema does not work wherever individuals come together and engage with one another because being-with-others means constantly readjusting and ‘modulating’⁴⁸² oneself towards the respective other, perhaps leading the other where oneself wants to go, perhaps being led by the other, perhaps meeting one another ‘in the middle’ where all preceding

⁴⁸¹ To be exact, ‘sharing his story with me’ could not have been my friend’s end because that would have required that it was in his practical power to realise it. But given that I was not tied to a chair or drugged or the like, he did not have such power. At most, his end could have been his ‘*attempt to share* his story with me’.

⁴⁸² Cf. Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xx.

ends and purposes have become suspended, a state in which mutual address and response coincide.⁴⁸³ Indeed, wherever two or more individuals convene, yet one of them forces his conception of a given way of convening onto the others, any genuine engagement is frustrated.⁴⁸⁴ So, even though I might have well decided to have a conversation with my friend, this does not mean that therefore, our conversation was guided by my conception of what it means to have a conversation. If we follow Kant, however, it *must* be assumed that my reply was structured and motivated along the lines deliberation-decision-action, at least if it is to reflect anything of moral value. Without deliberating on, and deciding for, doing what I *ought to* do, what I *will* do can only be the result of my morally worthless inclinations.

At this point, McDowell's thought can be used to amend the Kantian account. As was shown in chapter 2, the rationality of a given action is, on McDowell's view, not reflected in its being done for the sake of rational consistency but, rather, in the agent's perceiving something that serves him as a (good) reason for acting in the given way. As the criteria of rationality are, as it were, embedded within perception itself, explicit recourse to them becomes superfluous. In order to be distinguished as rational, the answer to a question like, say, "Why did you give the man your sandwich?" does not need to refer to its having been done out of a concern for rational consistency but simply by pointing out, say, that "He looked famished". He looking famished *is* a (good) reason for giving him the sandwich. And giving him the sandwich because he looks famished, in turn, is the right thing to do simply because it is, say, helpful or sensitive or solicitous and, thus, virtuous (which is to say: noble). So, if I see a certain way of responding as the one to go in for simply because I perceive it to be the called-for (appropriate, virtuous) one – say, because I see it as the solicitous thing to do or say – then this by itself already entails the fulfilment of the Kantian demand for rational consistency.⁴⁸⁵

For McDowell, rationality is as it were inscribed into motivations of the type 'I do [virtuous action V] because it is virtuous'; no recourse to formal criteria of rationality is required. In the spirit of Wittgenstein's dictum "To use a word without a justification does not

⁴⁸³ This idea will be further explored in chapter 5, section 2.a.

⁴⁸⁴ For an illuminating discussion of this topic, cf. David Cockburn, "Trust in Conversation," *Wittgenstein, Human Beings, and Conversation* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), 149–160, esp. at 152 & 155.

⁴⁸⁵ As we saw in chapter 2, section b, McDowell's account faces problems of its own, especially regarding the source of the motivation to act rationally. McDowell suggests that it is possible to come to do what is noble simply for the sake of the noble itself, yet he does not address that on the Aristotelian position to which he subscribes, the desire to do what is noble is inextricably tied to a desire for social recognition. If this neglect on McDowell's part is acknowledged, it could be claimed that, although perhaps not outright irrational, McDowell's person of virtue in fact *never* lives up to the Kantian requirement of 'acting for the sake of duty' precisely because part of her motivation to act morally is always her inclination to appear well in the eyes of others. This, I take it, is what Arendt means when she says that "the actor is dependent on the opinion of the spectator; *he is not autonomous (in Kant's language)*" (*Lectures and Kant's Political Philosophy*, 55; my emphasis).

mean to use it without right,”⁴⁸⁶ McDowell’s virtuous person just knows, simply in perceiving, that doing the solicitous thing simply for its own sake is *right* (virtuous) even if she may be unable to *justify* why it is.⁴⁸⁷ In this way, McDowell is able to shift the focus away from the idea that, in order to be able to act in a morally worthwhile way, the subject’s attention must be on the criterion for rational consistency itself, and towards the idea that the agent always already takes her cues regarding which of the various given ways of reacting to the present situation is the morally called-for one directly from perception. In this way, Kantian deliberation-cum-decision makes way for McDowell’s understanding of Aristotelian *choice*. As McDowell points out in “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” “[t]he point of the link between choice and deliberation is not that choice results from deliberation but that it reveals a shape to the way the agent is minded, a kind of shape that becomes explicit in actual courses of deliberation.”⁴⁸⁸ Unlike decision (which is conceptually tied to deliberation), McDowell purports – alongside Aristotle and (implicitly) against Kant – that choice can be minded, and indeed virtuous, without any preceding deliberation and that such choice comes to the fore whenever “an agent chooses spur-of-the-moment”⁴⁸⁹ to act in a (rationally called-for) way.

This being said, even McDowell’s spontaneous choice depends on the practical agent to create for herself a picture of the situation in which she finds herself, a picture in which various practical alternatives are ‘in principle’ open to her. Only if such a picture is in place will it be possible for her to opt for one of them, i.e. the one that she perceives as constituting the best reason for acting, and only in this way will it be possible for some alternatives to be silenced.⁴⁹⁰ As was expounded in chapter 2, opting for the course of action that is perceived to be the *called-for* one is, on McDowell’s Aristotelian account, not a matter of going along with whatever one’s caprice tells one to do. Rather, it is a matter of properly understanding the various practical alternatives that are available, that is, of understanding that, and why, *this one* particular course of action is commendable – say because it is the solicitous thing to do – as well as that, and

⁴⁸⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §289.

⁴⁸⁷ McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 51; as was shown in chapter 2, every at least somewhat virtuous action entails some understanding of ‘the *because*’ and, so, entails some form of justification, even if it a justification as plain as “I did it because it was the solicitous thing to do”. While such justifications may be good enough for those who share a moral outlook, the kind of (Kantian) formal justification in question, however, is of a different ilk, namely one that aims to explicate what makes the kinds of ordinary justification work. In this sense, it could be regarded as a justification of (ordinary) justification.

⁴⁸⁸ John McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 34 (footnote 14).

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ McDowell, “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?,” 77–94, at 90–3; cf. also chapter 2, section 2.a. The theme of ‘silenced alternative vs. single-mindedness that sees only one alternative’ will be discussed again in chapter 6, section 2.a.

why, all the others are less (or not at all) commendable – say, because opting for them would mean being rude, lazy, or careless.⁴⁹¹

Now, it is surely quite striking that we human beings are able to do this, at least quite often, at a moment's notice.⁴⁹² Still, it is a – however close to instantaneous – *process* and so it *does* take time, namely the time required for the agent to develop a picture of the situation and of the various possible courses of action, including her coming to make out the called-for one. It must take time because the activity of perceiving reasons for acting is, on McDowell's view, after all a *natural* process. This also means it is a process that moves on a continuum between the temporally more and less extended. While someone in whom the desire for doing what is virtuous goes very deep, choosing the course of action that is perceived as virtuous will be ready at hand (because, as already discussed, all non-virtuous options will be thoroughly 'silenced'), for the one for whom this desire goes less deep, it will take longer to commit to the virtuous route (because the other alternatives will not be *entirely* silenced.) In other words, the difference between the temperate and the fully virtuous person is that the former, unlike the latter, needs to overcome her hesitation by virtue of her steadfastness.⁴⁹³

But this shows that, at the end of the day, McDowell's account is not all that far away from the one offered by Kant: on both accounts, the subject has to represent the situation at hand as well as the practical possibilities it opens up. There must always at least be two alternatives, namely doing what one recognises one ought to do, on the one hand, and, on the other, 'slacking off' by going along with one's inclinations.⁴⁹⁴ The one important difference between the two accounts is that the moral knowledge of the McDowellian person of virtue is embodied and, thus, implemented in practice with a 'spontaneity' that is not given for Kant's moral subject and that, accordingly, it is possible for the former, unlike for the latter, to develop such a deep and encompassing desire for acting virtuously that she has virtually ceased to feel the pull of her natural inclinations.

But what does all that mean in relation to the reply that I gave to my friend? Did I choose, in a McDowellian style, to reply to my friend in the way I did? In order for this to be the case, I would have to understand myself as having perceived various possible courses of reacting, just like on the Kantian picture, and singled out one of them as the called-for one. The called-for reaction may have been the reply I gave or a different one; in the case of the latter,

⁴⁹¹ McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 68: "Acting in the light of a conception of how to live requires selecting and acting on the right concern".

⁴⁹² This sense of wonder is also discussed by McDowell (*ibid.*, 64).

⁴⁹³ McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," 91.

⁴⁹⁴ As was said, inclinations may lead to the same actions as those done out of a sense of their being required; even so, inclinations are relevantly different in that they are elicited from different (i.e. non-moral) motives.

my reply does not reflect anything of moral worth. In the case of the former, whether the reply reflects moral worth or not will depend on whether I am able to refer to anything that I perceived in the situation to which I responded that served as a (good) reason for me having responded in just that way. For instance, I might say that I replied as I did (“What...? Shit... When – How did that happen?”) because I saw that you wanted to share your story with me and because I understood that asking you about how the thing you wanted to share with me played out was, in that very moment, the *solicitous* thing to do. So, if I can convey that I replied as I did simply because I saw it as the solicitous thing to do, then this suggests that I did the virtuous thing for its own sake – and, thus, I show the moral worth of my reply.

However, the same unease overcomes me in respect to McDowell’s account as it does with respect to Kant’s: I think that describing my reply (and what motivated it) in the terms offered by McDowell would not do justice to, but rather distort, my experience of the situation. That is, I did not feel a sense of normative pressure to reply in the way I did – but neither do I feel like I was ‘slacking off’, failing to live up to any such normative claim. Indeed, I do not think that I, at the moment of replying, perceived any practical alternatives whatsoever. If I would have to describe how my reply came about, I would rather tend to say that I found myself ‘called upon’ or ‘summoned’ by my friend, or perhaps by my friend’s face into which I then looked,⁴⁹⁵ in the light of the weighty news he had just shared with me. But this would be unacceptable on McDowell’s view. I just showed why describing my response as a minded, rational second-natural reaction to perceived reasons is misleading; yet, it would be phenomenologically⁴⁹⁶ equally off the mark to describe it as a blind first-natural response, given that, in hindsight, my reply was nothing like the mindless behaviour that philosophers are wont to use as examples for purely heterogeneous doings, such as the deeds connected to somnambulism or hypnosis. When I sleep-walk or stand under hypnosis, I do things but I am not at all aware of them nor of myself in these doings. But that was not at all the case as regards the reply I gave to my friend. On the contrary, it seems clear to me that my reply was exceptionally *full* of mind, that I was *much more* present in it than in most actions that are the fruit of deliberate decision or ‘minded choice’.

⁴⁹⁵ The *Face* is of course of the most central notions of Lévinas’ philosophy where it plays a quite similar role as it does in my present discussion. Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, esp. 79–81.

⁴⁹⁶ To anticipate the possible objection that recourse to moral phenomenology is uncalled-for in order to criticise McDowell given that his is a different concern, namely one of establishing the domain of the moral as a specific subdomain of the space of reasons, it should suffice to point out that McDowell indeed regards his own philosophy as being of a phenomenological nature, or at least of ‘covering’ phenomenology. This becomes clear especially in McDowell’s “Reply to Dreyfus.” Another helpful discussion of McDowell as a moral phenomenologist can be found in Edward Ray Falls’ “A Critique of John McDowell’s Theory of Moral Perception,” PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2021, 66–76.

The final objection on the part of the Kantian or the McDowellian that I want to address once more is that, if I insist on the claim that my response to another is not to be understood as the achievement of my practical reason *in actu*, then it cannot be attributed to *me* as its author either.⁴⁹⁷ This is so, it may be held, because it is precisely – and only – through the exercise of practical capacities, by making use of its (practical) reason, that the individual subject takes over nature’s steering wheel and decides for itself what it wants to do and why: it determines itself, i.e. it acts autonomously.⁴⁹⁸ To this I would reply that I would in a certain sense agree: my reply *did not* originate in my practical power if that is understood in the sense of my power of doing what I recognise to be the called-for course of action out of multiple such courses. In other words, I think it *would* be misleading to say that I *decided* or *chose* on the basis of certain criteria of rationality,⁴⁹⁹ be they external (as in Kant) or embedded within perception (as in McDowell), precisely because the process that lead to my reply did not entail an (however slight) stepping back and gauging which route to take. Accordingly, I would equally contend that I did not have the power *not* to reply in the way I did either. That is, of course, not to say that if the situation had changed – if e.g. he had suddenly begin to cry – I would have been unable to interrupt myself in producing the reply I was about to produce. But apart from the fact that we would then be discussing a different example, even this different example would not show that my reply was grounded in a process of choice or deliberation; after all, my interrupting my reply in order to, say, hug my friend could have been equally devoid of a representation of multiple practical alternatives as was the reply in the scenario that I chose to discuss.

In any case, the point is: my reply to my friend was neither an exercise of my rational-practical powers nor was it a failure to exercise these powers – for the issue of any such powers did not even arise. As I said, I would be inclined to say that it was rather *he, my friend*, as I faced him in the given situation who elicited my response to him in that very moment (reversely implying that this response cannot be traced back to any normative claim whose demand I felt simply in virtue of being a reason-endowed being.) But that does not mean that it was therefore merely a blind reflex, a mere heterogeneous doing. As I just said, it seems to me that, on the

⁴⁹⁷ McDowell, “Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint,” 90 & 96–7; c.f. also Kant, *Groundwork*, e.g. 49.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁹⁹ This echoes Simone Weil’s idea that a loving response requires a self-surrender, a “decreation” (cf. *Gravity and Grace*, transl. Emma Crawford & Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 32–9) that makes it so that I can become the conduit of the divine. While I think that some of the implications of this idea are problematic, I think that moral-phenomenologically Weil makes an important point.

contrary, it was overly full of mind. For Buber, this fullness of mind – or, as he says, spirit⁵⁰⁰ – is *only* to be found in the living relation between I and You: “Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to the You. [...] What is decisive [for a life among others] is whether the spirit – the You-saying, responding spirit – remains alive and actual.”⁵⁰¹ The mindedness, or spiritedness, of my response became actualised *in* the engagement with my friend rather than *before*, or *separate from*, it, in some kind of prior rational reflexive self-relation that was subsequently put into practice.⁵⁰²

The suggested alternative description of my reply, i.e. that in which my relation to my friend is put centre stage, shifts the focus away from my mental representation of the situation in which I found myself compelled to reply including the various possible practical routes it presented to me, and towards my *attitude*⁵⁰³ or *stance*⁵⁰⁴ towards him, and more specifically my *caring* or *loving* attitude towards him. Putting the focus on my caring attitude towards my friend allows, firstly, to give an alternative account of my struggling to find the right words, namely not in terms of my deliberation about what, at the given moment, the right reply would be, but as a reflection of my care about, or concern for him. This care, or concern, found expression in my attempt to wrap my head around what he had just revealed to me, yet without entailing a search for the *right* reply and, thus, a concern for criteria of rational action (explicit or implicit⁵⁰⁵). That I was overwhelmed is not surprising, given that what preceded his opening up to me was, as was said, an exchange of ‘superficial inanities’ – I simply did not at all expect the disclosure of such momentous news. I thus suggest that my stuttering and stammering be

⁵⁰⁰ I do not think it is misguided to liken McDowell’s talk of mind to Buber’s talk of spirit as the link between the two can be found in the thought of Hegel. While it would be beyond the scope of the present discussion to develop this connection in-depth, suffice it to say that McDowell’s concept of mind is very close to, and heavily influenced by, Hegel’s concept of spirit (this becomes clear e.g. in *Mind and World*, 83 & 111.) Buber’s notion of spirit, in its turn, is also indebted to Hegel, although in a more critical way – while it becomes often clear that the way he uses the term makes reference to Hegel’s understanding of it (e.g. *I and Thou*, 100), Buber’s point is often that Hegel neglected its essentially dialogical dimension, at least of all genuinely *living* spirit (ibid., 88–89; Buber makes this point especially forcefully in *Between Man and Man*, 163–70).

⁵⁰¹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 89 & 99.

⁵⁰² Cf. Michael Theunissen. *The Other*, transl. Christopher Macann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 278–85 (& esp. at 281); this idea will become central in sections 2 and 6 in the next chapter.

⁵⁰³ This obviously foreshadows Buber’s distinction between the I-It and the I-You attitude (*I and Thou*, 53 ff.) that will also become central in the next chapter. Yet it also echoes Lars Hertzberg’s suggestion that what someone experiences to be morally compelling, or even as a moral necessity, is best understood as expressive of his or her moral attitude (“Moral Necessity,” in *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch*, ed. Raimond Gaita (London: Routledge, 1990), 102–17, at 113–4).

⁵⁰⁴ As I find that the English word ‘attitude’ risks distorting what I am after by giving it too much of a ‘subjective gloss’, I will at times take the liberty to use the word ‘stance’ instead. (I would *only* use the word ‘stance’ were it not for the fact that the English literature – including the English translation of Buber – makes use almost exclusively of the word ‘attitude’. The German word I aim to capture in translation is ‘Haltung’.)

⁵⁰⁵ I.e. in either the Kantian or the McDowellian sense.

regarded as expressing my struggling to *understand*⁵⁰⁶ what I had just been told. At the same time, it was a struggle to reply to him – after all, I found myself face to face with him when he told me what had happened, seeing the expectation in his eyes as he waited for my reply. Thus, I was both overwhelmed by the news *and* felt compelled to reply, neither being understandable in separation from how important *he* was to me. (Had he earlier that day written an email to me in which he told me about the news, my response to it (while reading it by myself in front of the computer) would have been very different. Not being in anyone’s direct presence, I would not have had to answer straightaway; instead, I could have simply let the news sink in. Speaking about it with my friend when meeting him later that day, I would thus have presumably been far more calm and composed, owing to the fact that I had by then already come to understand the situation. But that was not how it went.)

One last remark: I do not claim that the reply I gave to my friend was *in fact* an exemplification of the kind of attitude I just outlined, let alone that it *must* have been. I think Kant is right to say that we have no way of being fully lucid about what actually motivates our doings.⁵⁰⁷ My aim has merely been to show that, through a phenomenological approach that seeks to do justice to the reality of the situation as I experienced it, it is *possible* to make sense of in this way. In order for the proponents of a reason-centred conception of morality to show that my alternative proposal is unfeasible, they would have to show that it does not even present a possibility.⁵⁰⁸ As long as they fail to do so, the impression remains that neither Kant’s nor McDowell’s account can accommodate responses as mundane and trivial as the reply I gave to my friend, that is, responses that are elicited neither by external stimuli nor by perceived reasons but which are as if they were elicited simply by someone’s presence.

b. The Meeting of the Gazes & Intentionality

Let me now proceed and turn to another point in the conversation which I find to be philosophically important and in which the moral dimension of the response may become

⁵⁰⁶ I already touched upon the notion of interpersonal moral *understanding* in the last chapter’s discussion, especially in connection to the question of whether relations of non-rational beings – say, of infants or animals – may reflect such understanding. While I will touch upon the issue of moral understanding repeatedly over the course of the present dissertation, I will unfortunately not be able to discuss it in greater depth. It should be noted, however, that it is of particular relevance in the contemporary dialogical moral philosophy in its Wittgensteinian variant (cf. e.g. Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, or Joel Backström, “Philosophy of Mind and/as the Repression of Interpersonal Understanding,” in *Moral Foundations of the Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Joel Backström et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 231–66.

⁵⁰⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*, 23.

⁵⁰⁸ For a similar point (although in a different discussion), cf. Lars Hertzberg, “Absolutely Personal: A Countercurrent in Moral Philosophy,” in *Ethical Inquiries after Wittgenstein*, ed. Salla Aldrin Salskov, Ondřej Beran, and Nora Hämäläinen (Cham: Springer, 2022), 105–21, at 111.

clearer. Between the just discussed passage and the one about to follow, the conversation had continued for a while; during this period, my friend told me some more details about the break-up. After he finished giving me his account of what had happened, another silence falls over us; after a while I continue:

I: Shit. Sorry.

D: Yeah, it's okay... It's just, fuck... (*He looks up at me for the first time, our gazes meeting*) What the hell am I supposed to do now? (*He is looking for words, his pain becoming more and more apparent*) Why did she *do* that? I mean... she just left. Wow. ...she didn't want to put any more effort into what we had *than that? Really?* That's what I was worth to her? What our relationship was to her? (*With bitterness:*) Awesome. Real love, hm?

I experienced the meeting of our gazes as a kind of conduit between his feelings and mine. What had up to this point been a genuine but calm sense of pity suddenly became electrified and made me feel like I had to hold down my tears – just as he had to, at least from the looks of it. Before this moment, there had remained a certain distance between us, not only due to us sitting next to one another, but also in the sense of a certain reservation that stopped me from getting close to him; at this point, however, I feel the distance vanish and, almost automatically, I reach out and put my hand on his back. This seems to release some strain from him. He just sits there for a while, from time to time shaking his head, breathing heavily.

This short passage revolves around the meeting of the gazes of my friend and me, followed by me putting a hand on his back. Before turning to the latter, let me briefly talk about the meeting of our gazes. As I described it, it should have become clear that I experienced this instance as of great significance, as intense and gripping – or better: as intensifying an already intense and gripping conversation even more. What was thus intensified by the meeting of our gazes, however, was not merely the quality of the experience or how it enlivened me. I would say that the intensification itself was of a moral nature. This is already alluded to in my description of it as an 'electrification of an up until then calm sense of pity'. The meeting of our gazes made it so that I empathized even stronger with my friend than I already did, that it roused my sense of the horribleness of what he had experienced and of what he was going through at the moment even further. Yet, in order to fully capture the moral significance of the moment our gazes met, reference has to be made not only to the intensified pity but also to the 'source' of this

intensification, namely the experience of a sudden unreserved proximity.⁵⁰⁹ This sudden proximity was bound to the intensification of my empathy with him in that it heightened his pained presence to the point where I was so fully immersed in it that I had eyes and ears for nothing and no one else but him and his misery. In the words of Buber: “The power of exclusiveness has seized me.”⁵¹⁰ The moment our gazes met, it could thus be said, his presence came to demand my undivided attention⁵¹¹ in a way that changed how I found myself “claimed in response”⁵¹² to him, a decidedly *moral* transformation that manifested in my intensified pity and my subsequent gesture. In this way, the proximity that was created when my gaze met his changed how I *related* to him and, hence, deepened what he *meant* to me and, thus, deepened the meaning his suffering had for me.⁵¹³ Speaking in a religiously charged language, it was as if our engagement became, in that very moment, flooded to the brink with *spirit*, that is, with a spirit of love⁵¹⁴ or of goodness.⁵¹⁵ On my side, this spirit manifested in the intensification of my empathy and pity for my friend while on his side, it found expression in his opening up to me in all his pain and vulnerability.

What philosophical means do moral theories such as Kant’s and McDowell’s have in order to account for what I claim is the moral significance of an occurrence of this sort? In Kant’s moral philosophy, as I discussed in chapter 1, section 3.a., moral reasoning as such already *presupposes* an understanding of the other as of absolute worth, captured in the concept of the end-in-itself. For Kant, we, qua rational beings, always already do know that other rational beings are not to be exploited; all we can do is either acknowledge it and try to reflect it in our dealings with one another or suppress it in order to do what pleases us. There can be no gradations in the concept of the end-in-itself, i.e. one cannot relate to another as of more or less absolute worth – that would mean to relativize a concept that is per definition non-relativizable. On Kant’s account, there can thus be two ways of accounting for the kind of transformation I underwent: either it is understood as me changing how I conceive of my friend,

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Buber, *I and Thou*, 62–3. Here, Buber speaks about the proximity of the fully actualised I-You relation in terms of unmediatedness. This passage will play a central role in my discussion of Buber in the next chapter (section 2.b.). For another, more thorough discussion of the ethical significance of proximity, cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, transl. Alphonso Lingus (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), esp. 81–94.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵¹¹ For Lévinas, it is precisely this state of being unable to escape the Other’s presence, her direct effect on me, that defines the I: “To be unable to shirk: this is the I” (*Totality and Infinity*, 245).

⁵¹² Cf. Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 67. This motif already appeared in chapter 2 and it will become even more central in the chapters to come. It is also a core motif of Cordner’s book.

⁵¹³ ‘Meaning’ is here used in the moral-existential sense discussed at the end of the last chapter.

⁵¹⁴ Cf. Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 111.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 34. It should be added that one cannot simply conflate a ‘spirit of love’ and ‘a spirit of goodness’; the matter requires further elaboration which will be provided in chapter 6.

namely from a mere means to an end-in-itself, thus acknowledging the moral insight I already had, yet in a repressed form, or it is regarded as a mere intensification of feeling and, hence, of inclination.⁵¹⁶ But both alternatives would misconstrue what happened in the encounter with my friend – I did not first relate to him as a mere instrument and then, when our gazes had met, I came to acknowledge him as an end to my ends. From the very beginning, I was there for him simply out of a concern for him, neither a desire to instrumentalize him nor my will to treat him as an end-in-himself were involved. Construing the transformation of my attitude as a mere intensification of feeling, on the other hand, would fail to capture its moral significance as it would make it seem that what had changed on my part was that I came to get more pleasure from tending to my friend than I did before. To describe my change of stance as an increase in pleasure would only be farcical. As shown in chapter 1, Kant can understand moral worth only in terms of respect demanded on pain of irrationality; once this presumption is abandoned, the door opens to a morally charged relation in which rational consistency makes way for a concern with the individual other.

Again, McDowell fares better than Kant in that his theory allows him to say that my transformation was a transformation of *perception* which was of moral significance in that it made me come to see – and, thus, to understand – my friend and his suffering in a new way. Such a transformation is conceivable for him because he holds that there may always arise an incommensurability between one’s habits of perception (i.e. the acquired conceptual structures governing it) and what the world reveals itself to be like.⁵¹⁷ Accordingly, one’s way of perceiving (and, hence, of conceptualising) the reality one is confronted with may always be challenged and transformed by said reality itself. In the present example, the reality that occasioned such a transformation was the gaze of my friend that I met with my own, leading to a heightened “responsiveness to the specifics of the situation,”⁵¹⁸ i.e. to the “morally important fact[s] about the situation”⁵¹⁹ – say, my friend’s facial expressions, his bodily movements, the tone of his voice, and so on.

Although McDowell does not explicitly thematise moral emotions, such as compassion or empathy, there is at least room in his thinking that an increased perceptual sensibility goes hand in hand with them – in this case, with a heightened feeling of pity for my friend. However,

⁵¹⁶ I think it would be misguided to describe the shift, on the Kantian picture, from immoral to moral action as a moral transformation because nothing really is transformed apart from the quality of one’s maxim on a single given occasion. Thus, it is not even a transformation of character since acting from duty is, for Kant, not a matter of character.

⁵¹⁷ I will dedicate a section (i.e. section 4) to this issue in the next chapter.

⁵¹⁸ McDowell, “Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 52.

⁵¹⁹ McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 53.

there is a caveat. As already stated, McDowell's holds that *any* perception in order to be a proper, minded perception – i.e. a perception in which *something* is conceived – must be understood to be governed by second-natural perceptual habits⁵²⁰. Accordingly, even encounters with reality that are transformative presuppose perceptual habits because it is precisely these habits that are transformed. Now, the issue is that for McDowell, an increased perceptual sensibility is of moral significance *only to the extent that it elicits virtuous action*. This comes out, for instance, if someone perceives, say, one's friend being “in trouble and open to being comforted”, then perceiving this “to be the [morally] salient fact about the situation” means that one “is in a psychological state that is *essentially practical*. The relevant notion of salience cannot be understood except in terms of seeing something as a reason for acting that silences all the others.”⁵²¹ For McDowell, attuning one's perception to the reality of the given situation not only means that the reasons one perceives as salient (and to which one's actions are the responses) will become ‘better’ (in the sense of reasons ‘*really* worth going in for’) but also that this process entails the silencing of the practical alternatives. So, an increased sensibility to, and concomitant intensified feeling of pity for, someone who is suffering – such as my friend in the example – is morally significant only to the extent that it leads to actions that are more virtuous. Indeed, it seems that, on McDowell's view, pity or empathy as such adds nothing to my morally improved perception – perhaps it is a psychological fact as regards human beings that such improvements are accompanied by emotions; what matters morally, however, is merely that one sees the situation in such a way that it elicits the right action.⁵²²

Now, it is true that in the conversation as I presented it, the intensification of my feeling of pity is followed by a deed: I put my hand on my friend's back. Yet, it would do injustice to what happened in the situation to say that the moral significance of my response was restricted to the movement of my hand. It would also do injustice to it, however, to say that my increased perceptual sensibility from which the movement issued was morally relevant *only* to the extent that it motivated this movement. McDowell's thought has no place for the idea that what one experiences – that is, what is disclosed to one in the encounter with another – may, of itself and without being tied to any action, be of moral significance. I experienced the moment in which we looked into each other's eyes as being of the utmost *moral* significance, however, because in this moment, I was as it were penetrated to the bone by a sense of his absolute and uncompromisable importance, a sense concomitant with my experience of him as fully exposed

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 64; McDowell, *Mind and World*, 84–5.

⁵²¹ McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 70; my emphasis.

⁵²² Cf. Weronika Wojtschanska, “John McDowell's Theory of Moral Sensibility,” *Logos i Ethos* 41, no. 1 (2016): 73–85, at 74–5.

and vulnerable in his naked humanity.⁵²³ This moment gripped and shook me, at once existentially and morally. It was a sudden disclosure of his reality that I, at the same time, experienced as a deepening of my sense of what he meant to me.⁵²⁴ As I said, this requires a different understanding of morality, one where the moral is decoupled from responsible action, a coupling usually taken for granted, and where room is thus made for the kind of responsive – but not re-active! – moral understanding that is intrinsic to encountering otherness. Why one should adopt such an understanding of morality is what I will hopefully be able to show over the remainder of the present dissertation.

Let me proceed to discuss what followed the meeting of our gazes, namely me putting my hand on my friend's back. Again, the question is: Was that an *action*? Let me here examine another concept (or rather another conceptual cluster) wedded to that of action, namely that of *means*, *ends*, and *intentionality*. Thinkers like Kant and McDowell conceive of the one who acts as conceptualising her course of action. For Kant, conceptualising one's course of action means having an articulable understanding of what one is doing and to which end it is a means. Although in Kant's days not yet the philosophical *terminus technicus* it would later become,⁵²⁵ Kant himself at times speaks about this self-reflective instrumental directedness in action in terms of *Absicht* – that is, *intentionality*.⁵²⁶ So, in order to be intentional – to have an *Absicht* – it does not suffice that a given deed displays some kind of directedness. A frog's shooting out its tongue may be said to be directed at the fly it seeks to catch but it is not intentional in Kant's sense. For a deed to have a Kantian *Absicht*, the one who acts must also be able to reflectively relate to this directedness, that is, she must be able to conceptualise what she did as the means she took up in order to realise a certain end. The hallmark of such an ability is the ability to produce maxims explaining what one did and why.

⁵²³ This formulation adumbrates chapter five's discussion of Raimond Gaita's thoughts on love and goodness both in *A Common Humanity* as well as in *Good and Evil*.

⁵²⁴ Another formulation anticipating my discussion of Gaita (cf. *A Common Humanity*, 21; *Good and Evil*, 49).

⁵²⁵ As is well-known, it was Franz Brentano who introduced this technical understanding of intentionality (cf. Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1995)).

⁵²⁶ In fact, Kant uses the word 'Absicht' in various ways. At times, he uses it in a quasi-teleological manner, e.g. when he speaks of an 'Absicht der Natur', an 'aim of nature' (Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), 20; *Groundwork*, 10) while very often, he uses it synonymously with what nowadays usually be described with the word 'Hinsicht' ('respect' or 'regard' in the sense of 'in a certain respect/regard'; e.g. *Grundlegung*, 18; *Groundwork*, 9). Whenever Kant uses 'Absicht' in a moral-philosophical way, however, i.e. in order to describe the will, it is in the sense of an instrumental means-end intention. (This becomes clear e.g. in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 40). 'Absicht', although the German word closest to *intention*, is translated into English in various ways, sometimes with 'aim' or 'end', sometimes with 'intention', and sometimes in order to refer to the content of the maxim.

So, did my putting my hand on my friend's back have an end and, accordingly, was the putting itself the means to realising this end? Obviously, what I did can easily be described as having achieved something; in fact, it *did* achieve something according to the above offered description: "it seemed to release some of his strain". Yet, this equally clearly does not mean that one *has to* describe what I did as having had the intention to bring about just this. Such a description may be ill-suited because releasing strain may have been a mere side effect of what I did. Indeed, I would say that it *was* a side effect. But what about a more general description of my intention, such as 'I put my hand on his back in order to comfort him'? Was my deed not perhaps a means to *that*, or a similarly general end? If one only looks at the description offered in the example ('I put my hand on his back'), then it *could* very well be the case that I had an intention of this kind. Furthermore, it was quite likely that my gesture did have a comforting effect on him. But again, that is not the same as saying that I *intended* to comfort him. As in the last section, I think that describing what I did in such a way would distort the reality of the engagement and, more specifically, my response to him. It would distort it precisely in making it seem as if I tried to do something *specific*, as if I had something concrete in mind, a representation of a particular end as well as of the action that I took to be the proper means for its realisation – instead of simply responding to him, of having merely him 'in mind' and letting his presence guide my response to him.

But if my putting my hand on my friend's back was arguably not intentional, what else could it have been? As long as we think within Kant's conceptual framework – a framework that ties means-ends intentionality to reason – we have to submit to the view that any deed that is not intentional is therefore also devoid of reason⁵²⁷ and, thus, of consciousness, or mind. Examples of such 'blind' doings have already been mentioned above, i.e. sleep-walking or bolting up when surprised; saying that they are mindless or 'blind' in this sense means that they cannot be ascribed to an author – they are simply the mechanisms of nature's laws at work. So, the very fact that I am conscious of what I did – putting my hand on my friend's back – shows, on Kant's view, that I must also be able to say to what end I did it. The problem is that, although I *could* confabulate such an end, it would, as I said, distort the reality of my response as I experienced it. For Kant, this means that I misunderstand the workings of my will – to which I, once again, would reply that what I did was not an exercise of my will but a response guided by my friend's presence. Rejecting the dichotomy of autonomy and heteronomy, I suggest an

⁵²⁷ Devoid of rationality (or non-rational) is not the same as irrational. Behind an irrational deed, there is still intentionality, yet one conflicting with the demands of rationality – a deed with an *Absicht* that contravenes the moral law, as it were. Hence, an irrational deed can still be said to be a corrupted form of action (or: one that does not fully live up to its own concept).

alternative, namely that my response to his presence was so full of mind that it left no room for intentionality in the Kantian sense.⁵²⁸

To this, the philosopher sympathetic to Kant might object that I am missing Kant's point, namely that morality is precisely *not* a matter of means-ends rationality but of the formal consistency of the will regardless of any particular intentions one may have.⁵²⁹ While this is important to point out, it does not change my present point. For although it is true that for Kant, a moral action does precisely *not* have as its determining ground the inclination to attain some concrete end but, instead, the respect for the moral law of reason, the latter is nonetheless conceptually tied to the former. This is so because Kant's action from duty, although suspending means-ends-rationality, nonetheless conceptually depends on it, for without it, there is nothing duty can latch onto and suspend. In other words, in order for the form of one's will to become its sole determining ground, it also requires that this will has content – and this content cannot be separated from our worldly inclinations; at best, the content can be 'purified' by the form.⁵³⁰ The moral law by itself cannot form maxims, it can only give the law by means of which they are to be 'moralised'. In addition to that, it must be noted that, as I discussed in chapter 1,⁵³¹ Kant holds that there are general ends that are intrinsic to the will itself, such as that of seeking to promote the development of the wills of others. As I said in the previous section, however, my response to my friend were not geared towards promoting *his will*, but towards *him*.

With the *end* also the *means* is abrogated. By abrogating the end, what had up to that point been understood as a means turns into a 'mere' description of the deed in question, that is, a description in relation to which 'what for?'-questions cannot anymore be answered. And I think that is precisely the case of my having tended to my friend: I put my hand on his back – *for nothing*, that is, for *no* (particular) *thing* (qua end). So, my deed was not intentional in Kant's sense – it had no concrete *Absicht*.

The attentive reader may have noticed that the view I have just lead up to is very close to that of McDowell in that he, too, rejects the Kantian means-ends model of intentionality when it comes to moral action. As he puts it, "intentional bodily actions are actualizations of our active nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated."⁵³² While this

⁵²⁸ For a forceful and thorough reading of Buber's philosophy as fundamentally concerned with a "destruction of the transcendental schema of intentionality", cf. Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere: Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), §48–60. Theunissen's reading of Buber will play a prominent role in the next chapter.

⁵²⁹ Kant, *Groundwork*, 15–6.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16–7; cf. also Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 681: "It is necessary that our entire course of life be subordinated to moral maxims."

⁵³¹ Cf. section 1.b.

⁵³² McDowell, *Mind and World*, 90.

might *prima facie* sound fairly Kantian, the difference is that for McDowell, the conceptual capacities actualised in intentional action – which makes it so that the action is *about* something⁵³³ – need not be *instrumentally* directed at an end, i.e. so that “the end is external to what is done.”⁵³⁴ That is, while McDowell does agree that instrumentality is what distinguishes *prudential* action, it has no place in *virtuous* action.⁵³⁵ This is so because, for McDowell, what the action geared towards virtue aims to accomplish – namely to live up to the agent’s conception of what it means, here and now, to do what is noble (or, more generally, to live up to her conception of what it means to live a good life)⁵³⁶ – is not above and beyond the action at issue but to be realised *within* it: “When one acts with a view to doing well, [...] what one does (*to praktōn*) is itself the end with a view to which one acts.”⁵³⁷ In other words, virtuous action aims at nothing but virtue itself – but as virtue cannot be realised anywhere but in the action itself, the action itself will be that in which its own end will have to be realised. In this way, means and end can be said to collapse into one.

Unlike Kant’s end which must be predetermined from the outset in order for the action to be initiabile, moreover, McDowell’s end of virtuous action has to be determined within the concrete situation, *vis-à-vis* the normative requirements the agent confronts.⁵³⁸ As McDowell puts it: “In the kind of deliberation excellence at which is characteristic of practical wisdom, the question addressed is ‘What action here and now would *be* doing well?’ The end proposed – doing well – is, logically speaking, a universal and the problem is to arrive at an instance.”⁵³⁹ Because, as was shown in chapter 2, it is crucial for McDowell that there cannot be an impersonal blueprint, a fixed rulebook, for doing well, it is the virtuous agent who, in virtue of her practical wisdom, determines what, according to her conception of the noble, acting virtuously here and now *is* (or, which is the same thing, what it *means*.)⁵⁴⁰ This is the difference

⁵³³ There is a wide consensus that intentionality is, at bottom, to be understood in terms of ‘aboutness’ in the sense of a “mental directedness” (cf. Pierre Jacob, “Intentionality,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/intentionality/>, esp. introduction and section 1 (accessed, 14.6.2023).

⁵³⁴ McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 24–7.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ The attempt to live up, in concrete situations, to one’s conception of what it means to live a good life becomes important, so McDowell holds alongside Aristotle, especially when a situation presents multiple, perhaps even conflicting, features calling the agent to act in different ways, so that it ceases to be clear, even to the virtuous person, what it would mean to act nobly. Her conception of a good life then comes in as – for lack of a better word – a kind of ‘meta-compass’: “A conception of how to live shows itself, when more than one concern might issue in an action, in one’s seeing, or being able to be brought to see, one fact rather than another as salient” (“Virtue and Reason,” 68–9).

⁵³⁷ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 26.

⁵³⁸ McDowell, “Deliberation and Moral Development,” 46.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43–4.

⁵⁴⁰ For a discussion of the interwovenness of what we *mean* and of what we take to *be*, cf. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 180–6.

between acting *for the sake of* virtue and *in order to* achieve something.⁵⁴¹ For McDowell, the intentionality of virtuous action is thus neither directed towards the future, towards some state of affairs yet to be realised, nor to the consistency of the form of one's will, but to the present situation and what it means to respond to it "with a view to doing well."⁵⁴² Hence, the McDowellian can understand me putting my hand on my friend's back as an example of moral intentionality if what I did reflects that, in doing it, I tried to realise my conception of what it means to act well in that very moment, simply for virtue's own sake. This would be brought to light most clearly if I were to frame my intention in language,⁵⁴³ namely in such a way that conveys that my action was a direct response to a correct perception of the situation's ethical demands – for instance by saying: "I put my hand on my friend's back *because I saw how much he suffered.*" The reason I give is simply what I perceived, reflecting that I saw my friend's suffering as a compelling reason to act virtuously, namely to comfort him in a sensitive and gentle way. If I would, in addition, point to an external end to which my gesture was the means, this would undercut my having done it out of an ethical motivation.

While I, again, think that McDowell gets us further than Kant, two issues remain. As I discussed in chapter 2, firstly, someone's acting for the sake of her conception of virtue may reflect a genuine moral shortcoming, especially in situations in which one finds oneself face-to-face with another – and such are, after all, the kinds of situations around which McDowell's perception-centred understanding of virtuous action revolves. That is, while the McDowellian picture, especially in respect to what it means to lead a good life, seems to offer a decent characterisation of the kind of deliberative processes involved in trying to decide, say, whether one should stay at home to help one's elderly mother or leave her in order to fight for a pressing political cause⁵⁴⁴ – i.e. situations where one is removed from all direct claims and impingements

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Stephen Crowell: the "transition from the 'in order to' to the 'for the sake of'" is "a shift from concern [sic] with things in their interconnectedness to a concern for the meaning of things" ("Who is the Political Actor? An Existential Phenomenological Approach," in *Phenomenology of the Political*, eds. Kevin Thompson & Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 11–28, at 20). It should be added that the 'for the sake of' also differs from the 'from' in 'acting from duty' which indicates a causal relation (i.e. the causation of an action by pure reason alone.)

⁵⁴² McDowell, "Eudaimonism and Realism," 26.

⁵⁴³ Cf. the discussion of the centrality of language in McDowell's philosophy in chapter 2, section 1.a.

⁵⁴⁴ This is, of course, a reference to Sartre's well-known moral-existential dilemma described in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka & transl. Carol Macomber (Newhaven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2007), 30–9. Sartre holds that someone having to make that choice cannot seek recourse to any system of morality so as to tell him what to do and, thus, finds himself in confronting a genuinely existential decision. With McDowell, we can agree with Sartre's point, yet add to it that the one having to make such a decision will, if he is assumed to feel the call to virtue, nonetheless think about which route to take, indeed which route he *should* take, in a way in which morality, although not leading him as an external authority, will still enter his mind, namely in the form of his "conception of how to live" (McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 68–9) and of what it would mean to implement it at just the juncture at which he presently finds himself (ibid.). In the light of the discussion in chapter 2, however, it should be added that McDowell's thought is unable to accommodate the kind of moral-existential salience that certainly plays a central in Sartre's example.

of others and tries to get a sense of the ‘greater picture’ – it becomes morally increasingly problematic the closer the others, and their direct claims upon one, come. Especially (but not only) when in the immediate presence of others, focussing one’s attention on *one’s conception of what it means for one, here and now, to act virtuously* in response to what they say and do entails a shift of attention away from *them*.

This brings me to the second point, namely that McDowell, by seeking recourse to Aristotle in order to propound an understanding of morality that provides “ethical substance”⁵⁴⁵ to the moral formalism that is Kant’s heritage, in a particular and problematic way ‘de-absolutizes’ what for Kant – as for myself, though in a different sense – are the absolute demands of morality. So, while I do think that McDowell goes beyond Kant in various respects, there is at least one regard – which is of the greatest importance – in which I take McDowell’s moral thought to fall behind that of Kant, namely as regards its *moral radicalness*. Let me elaborate.

In the light of the discussion in chapter 2, it should not be contentious to rank McDowell among those philosophers of whom David Velleman says that they, unhappy with Kant’s transcendental idealism, seek to naturalise him all the while “preserving the moral and psychological richness of Kant.”⁵⁴⁶ McDowell’s approach to Kant is thus similar to that of Rawls who sought to make the “force and content of the Kantian doctrine” available within “the canons of a reasonable empiricism.”⁵⁴⁷ In this way, however, the McDowellian virtuous agent, though able to “project,”⁵⁴⁸ as Cavell would say, and thus to continuously transform her ethical outlook, nonetheless always already experiences reality through it in a way that gives a certain, rather than another, form to it. That is to say, talk of ethical outlooks is meaningful only when it entails the idea that there are certain limitations – even if indeterminate or flexible – to the ‘elasticity’ or ‘projectability’ of such outlooks, for otherwise it simply becomes empty. If *any* change of attitude is supposed to be explicable as a self-transformation inducing projection of

⁵⁴⁵ The expression is Hegel’s who famously sought to overcome Kant’s formalism by providing an account of *Sittlichkeit* (i.e. lived morality or ethical life) with a substance, i.e. *sittliche Substanz* – *ethical substance*. The expression is introduced in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 50–1. That McDowell seeks to go beyond Kant in a way similar to that of Hegel becomes apparent e.g. in *Mind and World*, 111, esp. in footnote 1.

⁵⁴⁶ David Velleman, *Self to Self. Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.

⁵⁴⁷ John Rawls, “The Basic Structure as Subject,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 159–65, at 165.

⁵⁴⁸ Cavell speaks of the ability to implement one’s conceptions into ever new situations in terms of “projection” in *The Claim of Reason* (cf. e.g. 192). In “Virtue and Reason”, 60–5, McDowell discusses (very favourably) a passage by Cavell in which projection is central, subsequently proceeding to develop his own, yet Cavell-inspired variation of what it means to project meaning. For a thorough discussion of Cavell’s projectionism, cf. Stephen Mulhall, “Stanley Cavell’s Vision of the Normativity of Language: Grammar, Criteria, and Rules,” in *Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 79–106, at 88–98.

one's ethical outlook, then it seems that there ceases to be a difference between what is inside and outside that outlook.⁵⁴⁹

At this point, the role of public recognition becomes relevant again. Take the example of someone who, raised in a deeply racist environment, has come to internalise the racism around her as her second nature. Imagine that this person comes across someone of the ethnicity she hates, someone who is in dire need. Normally she would simply move by or perhaps even exploit the other's misery – and not only because she feels like it but because it would be regarded as the proper thing to do in her community. This time around, however, she suddenly feels compelled to help the poor wretch – out of the blue, she comes to see him as a reason for helping, as it were. From a Kantian perspective, explaining cases like this is not an issue: regardless of what the prevalent mores are, we do always already necessarily conceive of one another as ends-in-themselves; in the racist community, this recognition has become repressed, probably due to a variety of highly complex socio-psychological dynamics. Hence, the one who suddenly helps the person of the hated group merely awakens to something she already knew, namely that it is her duty to promote the well-being of other rational beings. Here, practical reason comes in as force of radical *negation* of the prevalent mores.⁵⁵⁰

For McDowell, however, explaining the given example would pose a genuine philosophical difficulty. That is, it would not be problematic for him to account for the possibility of someone behaving in a way that goes counter to the mores, but rather the possibility of such an action reflecting moral worth. The point is that, in order to reflect moral worth, the action would, on the McDowellian outlook, have to appear as noble in the eyes of the others, of those who are “squarely placed within the tradition as it stands.”⁵⁵¹ Thus, the sudden display of help for a person of the despised group would, in order to count as noble, also have to “alter [the] prior conception of the very topography of [ethical] intelligibility”⁵⁵² of those who witness such help. In this way, however, McDowell ties moral worth back to general (public, communal) recognition and acknowledgment – an action manifests virtue if it is *generally* acknowledged to manifest virtue. But putting it that way seems to point to two false assumptions: firstly, it assumes that the audience of the novel way of acting is homogeneous, i.e. that they, perhaps with minor differences, share an ethical outlook. But I see no reason to

⁵⁴⁹ In making this point, I do not claim that the view I criticise is Cavell's. I do not know what Cavell's stance to the just sketched thoughts would be. I only wish to call attention to the limitations of the kind of projection-talk that he employs, especially in *The Claim of Reason* (cf. the previous footnote).

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. William W. Sokoloff, “Kant and the Paradox of Respect,” *American Journal of Political Science* 45/4 (2001), 768–79, at 776: “A distinctly human feeling of moral failure, respect reminds us that there is no secure position on which moral conduct can be based.”

⁵⁵¹ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 187.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 186–7.

assume that this would be so. People are very different, both as regards their ethical outlooks as well as regards their ways of relating to ‘moral novelties’.⁵⁵³ This points to the second problem: putting the question of whether a novel deed reflects moral worth or not at the mercy of the *public* reception falsely suggests that an *individual* spectator can *only* perceive said deed as reflecting moral worth if there *already* is a general consensus regarding whether an action of this kind actually does or does not display virtue. But that would turn matters upside down, for in order for such a general consensus to emerge, it requires that individuals are able to perceive the kind of action in question as displaying moral worth already beforehand.⁵⁵⁴ As Beehler succinctly puts it, it is not the case that “the individual’s moral judgment derives its sense from the moral practice to which it belongs. On the contrary, it is the ‘moral (social) practice’ which derives its sense from individual ‘judgments’.”⁵⁵⁵

Thus, McDowell’s naturalism ties the possibility of what may count as manifesting moral worth back to public recognition – the prevalent shared conception of what is noble – thus deflating the absoluteness of the demand of Kant’s moral law, an absoluteness that comes to the fore with particular clarity where doing the right thing is precisely at odds with the prevalent mores.

c. Reason & Reason-Giving

Let me turn to the third and final – and most weighty – passage of the conversation between my friend and me. Again, some time had passed between the scene examined in the last section and the one about to follow. As we continued talking, my friend grew more and more distraught and, proportionally, I grew more and more worried about him. This is the passage:

D: I could throw up, seriously, all this turns my guts upside down. She must know what it does to me. This is *breaking* me... (*He starts to rock back and forth on his*

⁵⁵³ For an illuminating discussion of the irreducibly personal nature of moral attitudes, cf. Lars Hertzberg, “Absolutely Personal: A Countercurrent in Moral Philosophy,” in *Ethical Inquiries after Wittgenstein*, eds. Salla Aldrin Salskov, Ondřej Beran, & Nora Hämäläinen (Cham: Springer, 2022), 105–21.

⁵⁵⁴ This ties the issue back to Cavell who, as Phillips poignantly puts it, holds “that conceptual elucidation, the telling of the grammar of a concept, is an appeal to a community”, an appeal by means of which the speaker is “showing where he stands”, so that “the extent of the response shows the sense, if any, in which he stands in a community of discourse” (D. Z. Phillips, “Critical Notice on Mulhall’s Stanley Cavell: Philosophy’s Recounting of the Ordinary,” *Philosophical Investigations* 19, no. 1 (1996): 72–86, at 73). In other words, shared sense is, on Cavell’s view, something which, if all goes well, *one arrives at*, it is not something presupposed. What is presupposed is, quite the other way around, the individual perceiving and experiencing something in a way that cannot be tied back to a pre-existing consensus, however vague or flexible, yet which is nonetheless relevant enough for her to share it with others to seek shared understanding. For an essay of Cavell’s in which this non-McDowellian side becomes particularly apparent, cf. “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” *Must we say what we mean?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 73–96, esp. in his discussion of poetry, 74–82).

⁵⁵⁵ Rodger Beehler, *Moral Life*, 31.

barstool, gazing intensely into the void) It is, I know it is. I won't come out of this, definitely not. You know, some things just ought not to happen, they are too much. *This* was too much. I won't get out of it.

I am shocked by his words and how he speaks them, they make me physically unwell. Intently listening to, and looking at, him, I try to understand what he means. Does he speak of 'not coming out of it' just in order to provoke pity? That would not look like him. But then again, he may simply not be himself in the current situation. Does he perhaps just say it in order to express his resentment and despair, his sense of the incomprehensibility of what had happened? But then again, could it not be that saying such things, especially in such an agitated state, may itself be part of him talking himself into a kind of dangerous and blind mania in which he might harm himself or worse? This is at least the sense I get. I, too, am agitated and unsure what to do. Some moments after he stops talking, I gather myself and say:

I: You remember my break-up three years ago, right?

D: Yeah.

I: And you also know in what kind of dismal state I was. It also messed *me* up, it also didn't make sense to *me*, and *I* didn't feel like going on anymore either. It sucks and it is fucking painful. It was my reality back then, now it is yours. Now *you* have to get through this – but as long as you keep going despite all the pain, you'll eventually get out of it, I have no doubt about it.

D (*listening intently, thinking for a bit, then shaking his head, smiling spitefully*): Yeah, but the thing is *your* story is *yours* and *mine* is *mine*. It doesn't help me now to hear that others have been in similar shit as I am now. (*He looks me in the eyes again, this time with anger.*) And neither does it help to hear that you just had to do this and that, bear the pain, continue walking, blablabla, and then you were fine again. *That's* why you think you should give me advice now – you think I should simply do what you have done, be as tough as you, and I will be fine again and a stronger person than before, and all that bullshit. (*His anger grows while at the same time he looks worryingly close to breaking down.*) Your advice doesn't do *shit* for me now! L left me. I loved her. I *still* do! I don't need a self-help lecture (*His anger and pain mix with desperation. He is visibly shaking*) I don't know, man... what am I supposed to *do* know? I cannot continue like this... This will be the end of me. I think I am fucking losing it.

I am stunned and shaking. I am disconcerted, both because of his exclamations and because of his demeanour: his look almost deranged, the small movements in his face and of his hands erratic. I feel that I am in the presence of someone who needs all of his energy to keep himself from falling apart but whose attempt is at a serious risk of failure now that he is in the process of opening up. Suddenly, a vehement nausea overcomes me when I am struck by the realisation that there seems to be a real risk of him taking his own life. After a few seconds, the feeling abates; I compose myself again and take a deep breath.

I (*calm and sombre*): I think you have to make a choice. Either you try to get through this or you don't. You have to decide for either yourself, your future, and for your life. Or you decide against all of this. You know how I hope you will decide. I would be heartbroken if you let this whole thing destroy you. But ultimately, no one else but you can make that choice.

When I spoke, I was entirely 'within the words', fully in present in them, in a way in which I have rarely been in my life. At the same time, I saw how he was hanging on my lips, his full attention on me. What I said – or perhaps the way in which I said it – calmed him down. When I stopped speaking, his gaze slowly drifted away, back into the void. We are quiet for a while. After a minutes or two, he begins to speak again, telling me about how the break-up unfolded and what had led up to it; I listen and ask, he elaborates. Although a lot of raw emotions would find expression over the rest of the night, it would not become as dramatic anymore as it had been up to this point.

I decided to make this passage longer in order to convey a sense of the dramatic nature and the urgency that pervaded the situation as well as of how the tension gradually built up until it reached its climax. This is important because, after all, we did not speak in an intellectual vacuum but in a real situation, equally tense and intense, an almost suffocating atmosphere that we partly created ourselves but that, in its turn, reflected back on us and on how we engaged with one another. This time, I want to look at two passages from the conversation – first, I will briefly discuss how I came to feel physically unwell when I realised that there was a real risk of him harming himself or worse; then I will turn my attention to, and discuss in more detail, the 'advice'⁵⁵⁶ I gave him.

⁵⁵⁶ I put advice into inverted commas because, while I think it would not be entirely false to describe what I told my friend in terms of an advice, I neither think that calling it an advice really does justice to it. I will return to this below. For now, I will keep using the term 'advice' for the sake of simplicity.

i. Being Awakened to the Importance of the Other

Already above, I expounded how emotions were part of the moral dimension of my response to my friend, intrinsic to my sense of his moral importance. This is illustrated in a different way in the visceral effect which his above described psychological decline as well as his ambiguous remarks regarding what he might do to himself had on me. Even before he had voiced his seemingly self-destructive thoughts, his erratic behaviour had begun to worry me; when he eventually *did* voice them, and I came to realise that he could actually mean them in the horrible way he seemed to insinuate, it turned my stomach upside down.

However, something more is required to shed light on how my visceral reaction can be understood as a response to the realisation what he might consider doing – after all, it could also be imagined that him disclosing his suicidal thoughts to me might have left me more or less cold (for instance, if I would have been in a deep depression at the time). I would say that I reacted in the visceral that I did because my coming to understand what he might do to himself at the same time roused in me a sense of how, to use an expression by Raimond Gaita, “infinitely precious”⁵⁵⁷ he was (or is). In the face of his possible demise, as it were, I was suddenly struck by what an overwhelming tragedy it would be if that would actually come to pass, simply because of what I now saw plainly: *his* unfathomable importance.

Now, saying that I was roused, or that I awakened, to his preciousness implies that this sense was already ‘somehow’ there, yet in some kind of state of slumber,⁵⁵⁸ as it is wont to be in the flow of mundane, everyday life. In our everyday dealings with one another, even with our closest friends, we are usually not concerned with how important we are to one another; rather, we do things together or simply *are* together, if all goes well in meaningful, fulfilling ways.⁵⁵⁹ In certain moments, however, especially those in which we realise that the other is in serious danger, our focus of attention tends to be directed away from what we do or speak about and towards the other so that we become filled with a sense of his moral significance.⁵⁶⁰ This

⁵⁵⁷ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xv.

⁵⁵⁸ In *The Fear of Openness*, 369–85 (& esp. at 372–4), Joel Backström discusses Gaita’s thoughts on remorse precisely in respect to how what remorse brings to light (cf. footnote 4 below) is something that is already there. According to Backström, this ‘already-there-but-obfuscated’ is repressed conscience. I will further discuss the notion of conscience in chapter 6, section 1. It should be added that *slumber* is not the same as *numbness*. Saying that this sense is in a state of slumber means that, in the flow of everyday life, we for the most part *live* our sense of the others’ importance without being concerned with it, simply because it does not become topical; speaking about it in terms of numbness means that, even when it does become topical – say, in the case of someone’s being in real danger – one still does not open one’s eyes to it.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 47–8.

⁵⁶⁰ This is not to say that one’s sense of the other’s importance will thus be the ‘object’ of one’s thought (e.g. “Now that I understand his life might be in danger, I realise how important he is to me!”); what I am after is rather the *experience* of the other’s importance as one finds oneself face-to-face with him and the danger he is in. If such an experience is absent, however, then this is itself a serious a moral issue, namely one tied to one’s not

may be reflected in all kinds of ways, such as in our worry or fear that something grave may befall him, in the terror that this something is about to, or is already, befalling him, in our desperation that we cannot do anything to change it, in our feeling remorse that we have not tried enough, or anything at all, to help him (or even in our having contributed to him being in such a bad predicament or of having otherwise wronged or harmed him) – but also in our sense of gladness and elation if he comes out unscathed, in our eagerness to tend to the wounds he might have suffered, physical or emotional, and so on.⁵⁶¹

In the case of me realising the possible implications of what my friend had just told me, I would say that it was a mixture of a sense of fear and worry. But once again: I did not ‘simply’ feel these emotions – I felt them *because*, coming to understand that my friend might be in serious danger, I was awakened to how unfathomably important he was (or is). Thus, the emotions I felt were part of how my sense of his importance, roused by my understanding of what he may do to himself, found expression.⁵⁶²

Now, this is not to say that one has to be overcome as I was by fear, worry, panic, and the like in order to then become motivated to make an active effort to subdue said emotions so as to help. It *is* to say, however, that if the realisation of there being a real risk of him taking his life would have not made me feel *anything*, then I cannot see how it could have filled me with

opening oneself to, of not letting oneself be touched by, the significance of the understanding that the other is in real danger. This is the main point of many of the writings by Joel Backström (e.g. *The Spirit of Openness*, 369–85 & “Unbearable Certainties,” in *Philosophical Perspectives on Moral Certainty*, eds. Cecilie Eriksen et al. (London: Routledge, 76–97)) and Hannes Nykänen (e.g. “Wittgenstein’s Radical Ethics”). The idea of opening up to the other (and failing to do so) will become central in chapters 4 to 6.

⁵⁶¹ In *Good and Evil*, Raimond Gaita describes remorse as a sudden and forceful “recognition of the reality of another through the shock of wronging her” (52), a reality bound up with a sense of said inalienable preciousness (ibid.). So, remorse, although it may be contemporary with harming the other, is logically subsequent to it and, in that respect, *backwards-looking* (i.e. “What *have I done?*” (ibid., xxi)). In contrast, the fear I came to feel for my friend was *forward-looking*: I was suddenly gripped and shaken by his reality and its inalienable preciousness with a view to what (self-inflicted) harm may befall him. Or, better: The fear of what he might do was the specific form which, on this specific moment, my sudden realisation of his preciousness took. So, when Gaita says that, apart from remorse, one may awaken to the other’s importance also by grieving (ibid., 52–3), then this, while true, would be misleading if it would be taken to mean that it is *only* via remorse and grief that such an awakening can take place. Losing someone, especially someone close, surely often rouses us to their significance in a powerful way, especially because of the stark rupture it creates between the often mundane everyday life one has shared with them and their sudden absence. Yet, it may merely be the prospect of such a loss or even of ‘just’ a serious harm that may befall the other – as in the example I am discussing – that creates a gripping sense of this importance. Indeed, I see no reason why it should not be possible to awaken to such a sense even in the absence of any threat to the other and/or one’s relation to him. Why should it be impossible for someone to be suddenly be struck by how infinitely dear another is when sharing a moment of unadulterated bliss with this other? (cf. Marina Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” 213–19). What makes the case of death stand out in this respect is, it seems to me, that it makes it impossible for one’s relationship to the deceased to relapse into the same old flow of everyday life and the concomitant forgetfulness of how important they actually are to one. I will discuss Gaita’s understanding of remorse at length in chapter 6, section 1.a.iv. & v., again with a view to the question of what possible limitations there might be to awakening to the other’s importance.

⁵⁶² Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 66–7.

a live sense of his unfathomable preciousness.⁵⁶³ And not only that – if I had felt, say, joy at hearing my friend’s suicidal thoughts or would have found them hilarious, then this would obviously not have been expressions of my love for him.⁵⁶⁴ In other words, I do think that emotions of the kind I felt are, in situations of the kind I found myself in, reflections of one’s loving concern for the other. If they would be radically different, they would, while still reflecting *some* concern for the other, not reflect a *loving* one; if they would be altogether absent, the prospect of the other being in serious danger would be of no concern to one at all – it, quite literally, leave one cold.⁵⁶⁵

So, it seems that in order for it to become understandable why I tried to defuse the situation and, thus, try to prevent my friend’s possible suicide, it has to be seen as growing out of a sense of my concern for *him*, a concern that has to be understood in connection to my friend’s presence having moved, indeed having shaken, me.⁵⁶⁶ *How* this moving will exactly look like, what exact emotional colouring it will have, cannot be determined outside of the concrete situation in which it comes to manifest, nor would any such determination be important – yet *that* there must be such a being-moved seems clear for otherwise I would remain unmoved and, accordingly, I would not even make the attempt to do something to improve the situation.⁵⁶⁷ Of course, I may also be moved by other things than my *concern for my friend* but, as the critical discussion of McDowell’s virtuous person and her acting out of a *concern for the noble* has shown, the source of one’s being-moved would then be morally compromised.⁵⁶⁸ In

⁵⁶³ This point is brought out clearly by Gaita when he critically reflects on Kant’s claim that even someone who has become so embittered that he has become unresponsive to the others’ suffering in the form of pity or compassion may still feel compelled to live up to the moral law. He claims that, on the one hand, “morality requires of such [embittered] people an attitude towards their hardheartedness; they must judge it to be a moral failing.” On the other hand, he also claims that “[p]rotracted sorrow, and certainly bitterness, undermine moral response because they undermine what nourishes it, which is not a purely rational will but a vital and nuanced capacity to attend to the different voices and tones of what claims us” (*Good and Evil*, 141).

⁵⁶⁴ This does not mean that I would therefore have no love for him. However, it is to say that this love would be seriously obfuscated, and in such a way that it would not find expression in forms adequate to it but indeed in forms standing in tension with, or even seriously undermining, it. For a development of this thought, cf. chapter 5, section 3.

⁵⁶⁵ This is a point I take to be neglected by Buber: Focussing on the claim that the emotional side of the response to the other has to be understood in relation to the underlying sense of loving concern for her – to which I would emphatically agree – he fails to address, or to see, that this does not mean that the nature of the emotions in which this loving concern finds expression in the respective situations is merely accidental, a mere ‘accompaniment’ (cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 66). That the relation between the loving concern for the other and the feelings in which it finds expression is more nuanced comes out e.g. in Strandberg’s *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 42–3 (footnote 32) & Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 120–6.

⁵⁶⁶ The kind of responsiveness I am after, and which I will examine under the description of *love* in the next chapter, is precisely this being moved by the other – in ways that are, while impossible to determine *a priori*, nonetheless far from random.

⁵⁶⁷ This line of thought become central in my discussion of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in chapter 5.

⁵⁶⁸ To recall: my point was that acting out of a concern for one’s *conception of the noble* is morally compromised in the sense that it shifts away one’s concern from *the other*. Furthermore, it was shown how a concern for one’s conception of the noble, whether more or less consistent, is bound up with one’s desire for the praise of others.

the case of Kant's moral theory, on the other hand, it remains notoriously mysterious how pure reason, the noumenal voice in us, is supposed to affect our empirical being in such a way as to make us do anything at all.⁵⁶⁹ And even if it were granted that pure reason can move us as the empirical beings we are, this being-moved would, as expatiated in chapter 1, be of a different kind than being moved by a concern for the other qua individual, let alone by a loving concern.⁵⁷⁰

ii. Moral Reasons

Now to the perhaps most important concept, namely that of *reason* and, accordingly, to the *giving of reasons*. As I have expounded in the two prior sections – as well as in the first two chapters – reason is of the greatest importance, both in moral philosophy and beyond, for ‘traditional’ philosophers like Kant and McDowell.⁵⁷¹ Only where there is reason involved is there subjecthood and, thus, an autonomous relation to the world. A reason-endowed, autonomous relation to the world, in turn, entails a responsibility to act as reason – and, hence, morality – requires. As such, reason conditions the possibility of both living up to one's responsibility and of failing to do so. If, on such an understanding of morality, it is to be shown that how I engaged with my friend in the given example reflects moral worth, it will therefore have to be shown that I acted towards him in a rational and, hence, morally responsible way. Let me thus once more turn to the ‘advice’ I gave to my friend at the end of the conversation snippet above (beginning with “I think you have to make a choice”) and ask: What was *my reason* for giving him this piece of advice?

It should be said from the outset that the plain and honest answer to this question would be: I do not know. That is to say, I cannot point to anything as *the* motivation for me to having responded to my friend as I did. This is, of course, unacceptable on the Kantian and McDowellian account because it puts into question my answerability and, thus, my responsibility – if I am really unable to offer a reason explaining why I did what I did, then this

⁵⁶⁹ What Kant describes as “causality through freedom” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 66 ff.) is discussed by him at length in chapter III of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, “On the Incentives of Practical Reason”. The problem, much discussed not only by Kant but also by Kant scholars, revolves around the question how the noumenal realm is supposed to exert an influence on the phenomenal realm. Although I cannot at present go into the problems of view presented by Kant, cf. William W. Sokoloff's “Kant and the Paradox of Respect” for a helpful discussion.

⁵⁷⁰ For an illuminating discussion of Kant's understanding of “acting from respect for the moral law”, critical but at the same time revealing the depths of Kant's thought, cf. Christopher Cordner, “Duty and Moral Motivation” (in *Ethical Encounter*, 86–103).

⁵⁷¹ The sense in which McDowell can be understood as a ‘traditional’ philosopher is developed by Hannes Nykänen in “This Thing with Philosophy”, esp. at 346. My discussion in section 2 below exhibits some structural similarities to Nykänen's discussion.

will either have to mean that I simply do not see the reason that I actually have (on some deeper psychological level which I seem to be unable to access) or it will, again, mean that it was not an action of mine at all but a mindless and, thus, purely heterogeneous reaction. Let me thus take a step back and once again follow Kant and McDowell as far as possible, that is, up to the point at which their respective accounts of my response break down.

If we look at what in the conversation preceded my giving the advice, it seems that we are immediately confronted with the perhaps best candidate for a reason explaining my response: my friend told me he ‘cannot continue like this’ and that he thinks he is ‘losing it’. So, my reason for giving him the advice, it could be said, was that I wanted to dissuade him from what I feared he might do, namely harm himself or worse. Now, this is certainly a possible reason I *could* have had – and it is a reason that reflects intentionality of the Kantian, i.e. the instrumental, kind: the reason for what I did is the end to which my action is the means – I gave my friend the advice *in order to* prevent him from harming or killing himself. Kant would probably share my sentiment that this is a very commendable end to set oneself; still, he would insist that if this were my reason for acting, it would not be a moral one.⁵⁷² This is so because, as already discussed, the motivation for my action would be my inclination for the end I set myself, meaning that I would not do it *because I would take it to be the right thing to do* but because I would *feel like doing it*. Giving my friend the advice *because I take it to be the right thing to do*, on the other hand, would, because it is not merely a negative abstaining but a proactive effort, mean that I acted from the positive duty towards him, that is, the duty to promote his will and, thus, rational nature in him.⁵⁷³

I already pointed out that, although Kant’s conception of moral action revolves around the claim that acting merely for the sake of an end is never morally satisfactory, no matter how welcome it may be, it is still bound up with precisely such a conception of action. So, just as above, the Kantian demanding from me to give a reason justifying why I gave my friend said advice could be rejected on the grounds that it presupposes an understanding of action that simply does not fit my response – my reply cannot, without distorting it, be made sense of in terms of an imposition of duty on what would otherwise be an instrumental action. The main issue with framing my reply to my friend in this way is that it supposes that I needed a reason, i.e. a special determining ground of a higher order, overriding my natural inclination. The Kantian account paints a picture in which I, out of natural self-interest, was inclined to do a certain thing but that then – on top of this self-interested motive, as it were – my sense of duty

⁵⁷² Kant, *Groundwork*, 13–4; cf. also Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 31–2.

⁵⁷³ Cf. chapter 1, section 1.b.

asserted itself over against my inclination, took over the steering wheel and, thus, saved the day (morally speaking).⁵⁷⁴ But I would say there was not even an inkling of any such tension within me at the time of my responding, yet that my response *still* reflected something of deep moral significance.⁵⁷⁵ If anything, I would say that I wholeheartedly *desired* being there for my friend (even though I am also somewhat uneasy about putting it this way) – yet not in the Kantian but in the Lévinasian sense of the word, namely as a desire which, in contrast to Kant’s inclination revolving around need, “lacks nothing,”⁵⁷⁶ a desire that is “overflowing”⁵⁷⁷ instead of craving for consumption. As I said, I had no particular end, such as comforting him or seeing him happy again, or something of the like. If, on the other hand, it would be suggested that *he* was my end, then this can be taken in two ways, both equally unsatisfactory: firstly, it may indicate that I wanted to ‘have’ him in some sense of the word – perhaps to ‘make him mine’ in the sense of make him fall for me or like me? to exert my power over him and control him? – which would obviously be highly immoral, or, secondly, it may again indicate that I made the promotion of his (rational) ends my end.

With this second option, we are back at the notion of positive duty and, thus, at a problem I have already pointed out in chapter 1, namely that the kind of reason which, on the Kantian account, would qualify as a moral one would actually strike one as morally seriously compromised because radically impersonal. For Kant, what distinguishes one’s motivation as moral cannot have anything to do with the particular individuality of those towards whom one acts, or with whom one engages, for this would bring inclination back into the picture. But if I

⁵⁷⁴ Lars Hertzberg addresses this for the most part uncritically assumed picture of ‘natural self-interest vs. rational-moral impartiality’: “There is an inclination to think of human conduct as governed by a conflict, or tension, between the things that we will naturally pursue, and the demands of morality that are somehow imposed on us from outside, say, in the form of social norms or religious commandments – a conflict between the self and morality. And so, it is thought, we need reasons for subjecting ourselves to the dictates of morality.” That this is a short-sighted view becomes apparent when we consider that it is manifestly possible that “a person may reject such a temptation [i.e. of giving in to an inclination although it conflicts with her conscience] off-hand, without pondering reasons for and against” (“Reasons to be Good?,” *Wittgenstein and the Life We Lead with Language* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), 159–75, at 162 & 165). In other words: it is conceivable that someone may simply do a good deed without any tension or conflict between inclination and reason.

⁵⁷⁵ According to Allen Wood, what Kant means when he speaks about morality and action done from duty is in many actions simply not at issue due to the lack of a tension arising between inclination and duty – but that this absence does not mean the absence of a good will. In the absence of such a tension, a sense of duty is simply not distinguishable from inclination (*Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 27–9; cf. also my discussion in chapter 1, section 1.b.). Apart from the fact that this is a quite contentious reading of Kant, however, Wood does not address what, in such cases, would motivate the will – would it be inclination-cum-duty? Some kind of reconciled unity between the two? Or something else altogether? I do not know any textual basis in Kant’s writings supporting the idea of such an amalgamation – and if it is supposed to be the same as the above mentioned ‘commendable inclination’, then it fails to address the problem already mentioned in chapter 1, namely that of a ‘deeper’ kind of selfishness, i.e. that of doing good deeds, even altruistic ones, because one ‘gets something out of’ them. For an excellent discussion of the latter kind of selfishness, cf. Christopher Cordner, “Altruism and Moral Meaning” (45–60) and “Altruism and ‘the Other’” (61–73) in *Ethical Encounter*.

⁵⁷⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, “The Trace of the Other,” 350.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

would, on being asked why I gave my friend the advice, were to reply that I did it because, at bottom, I cannot rationally will *not* to promote his will (and, thus, his rational ends,) then the absurdity of this reply would, I think, be bound up precisely with how adamantly it seeks to avoid making any reference to *him* and *his* significance, not qua instantiation of something universal but simply qua “unique and irreplaceable individual.”⁵⁷⁸ “The autonomous first-personal”, as Barabas fittingly puts it, “prevents [the moral subject] from being claimed by the other, from taking the other seriously.”⁵⁷⁹

As already stated, McDowell’s understanding of virtue is not caught up in Kant’s dichotomy between action determined by inclination for the particular and action determined by impersonal duty. On his account, the question “Why did you respond to your friend in the way that you did?” will, if it is to reflect virtue, neither be answered by offering a piece of instrumental reasoning – such as “I did it in order to comfort him” – nor by propounding an impersonal duty – such as “I did it because I am rationally obliged to promote rational humanity in him whenever possible”; rather, it will be answered simply by giving an account of what one perceived to be morally salient.⁵⁸⁰ Given that what I perceived as morally salient was obviously my friend’s misery and his worrying remarks, the answer I would give would thus be along the lines of: “I did it because he said something that made me worry he might harm himself or worse.” It would thus be no problem for the McDowellian to present what my friend said to me as my reason for replying in the virtuous way I did.⁵⁸¹ In other words, reference to the particular individual is no hindrance for one’s reason to reflect moral worth.

Let me expatiate why I think that, even on such a wide understanding of reason, the kind of response that I am after still cannot be accommodated. When McDowell states that we act as we do because we register what we perceive as reasons for acting, then he does not, in fact, put at centre stage the specific, concrete, and unique situations in which we find ourselves engaging with, and claimed by, concrete individual others but – and this is where McDowell is a Kantian – our answerability to inquiries into our motives for acting as we do.⁵⁸² When exercised, it is true, this answerability need not make reference to either ends or formal duty; the reference to what one perceives is enough to distinguish what one says as a reason. That, however, means that moral goodness – qua virtue – cannot be displayed where such reasons

⁵⁷⁸ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxii.

⁵⁷⁹ Marina Barabas, “Transcending the Human,” 198.

⁵⁸⁰ The notion of moral salience is thematised by McDowell in “Virtue and Reason,” 71.

⁵⁸¹ I will for now simply assume for the sake of simplicity that my reply was virtuous. This will be problematized below.

⁵⁸² Cf. John McDowell, *Mind and World*, xii.

cannot be given.⁵⁸³ In other words, it is essential that anyone whose deeds appear as virtuous must be seen *not only* as perceiving what they encounter in such a way that it elicits commendable responses but, moreover and more crucially, *she must at the same time appear as someone who is able to make reference to her own perception as constituting reasons for her to act as she does (i.e. virtuously).*⁵⁸⁴ Only if the seemingly virtuous person actually perceives what she encounters as constituting reasons for acting virtuously is it appropriate to describe what she did – be it by herself or by others – as an actual display of virtue; yet, the criterion for assessing whether what she perceives constitutes reasons for acting at all is her ability to make reference to this perception and to present it as such action-constituting reasons.⁵⁸⁵ This is central for McDowell because only in that way will the given person actually reveal herself as being *able* to perceive what she encounters as occasions for acting for virtue’s own sake, i.e. that she does, in fact, exercise acquired perceptual-practical capacities – or, as was said, her rational *response-ability*.⁵⁸⁶ If not, a given deed may certainly *look* virtuous; yet, it will not yield a criterion by means of which it can be assessed whether it is *actually* rooted in the capacities necessary for acting virtuously.⁵⁸⁷

Accordingly, the individual other is, on McDowell’s view, experienced as morally salient in a virtuous person’s perception of the given situation only to the extent she features in a morally salient way in the virtuous person’s perceived *reasons* for acting. As already expounded in chapter 2, there is thus no contact with the concrete individual other on McDowell’s outlook, let alone a morally salient one, apart from that in which the other is

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁸⁴ As already pointed out at an earlier point, McDowell states that even in the case of the virtuous person, this does not require intellectual sophistication. Even the simple-minded person, unable to “classify the behaviour he sees called for” (“Virtue and Reason,” 51) as falling under the description of a specific virtue, such as kindness, may display virtue: “It is enough if he thinks of what he does when—as we put it—he shows himself to be kind, under some description as ‘the thing to do’” (ibid.). But that amounts to saying that the ability to articulate reasons *is* vital for ascribing virtue, just not in a sophisticated way. For a critical discussion of this idea, central to McDowell’s thought, cf. Richard Rorty, “The Very Idea of Human Answerability to the World: John McDowell’s Version of Empiricism,” in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138–52; for McDowell’s reply to Rorty’s criticism, cf. “Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint,” 103–4.

⁵⁸⁵ This is what it means, in the context of ethics, to speak of answerability, i.e. one’s being able to answer when one’s motives for action are inquired into.

⁵⁸⁶ My peculiar way of putting my point above, i.e. in the form of a double negative (‘virtue cannot manifest where reasons cannot be given’), is connected to this point: although virtue may, on McDowell’s view, certainly appear even without the person in whose actions it appears giving any reasons, this is only possible when said person is perceived *as being able to produce a reason* if her motivation for acting as she did were inquired into. In other words, even where virtue appears without reasons, the reasons as it were ‘shine through’ in the seemingly virtuous action (Although being unable to give reasons due to an accident or illness obviously does not mean that one ceases to be responsible.)

⁵⁸⁷ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 114–5: “[I]t is only in the context of a subject’s ability to ascribe experiences to herself that experiences can constitute awareness of the world”. In contrast to a subject “standing ready to reassess what is a reason for what [...]”, “[a] mere animal does not weigh reasons and decide what to do.”

integrated into a reason for acting in this rather than that way. Although not as radically depersonalised as on Kant's account, McDowell's ethics thus gives rise to a picture in which the individual other, always already integrated in one's reasons for acting, has a status that could be described as semi-impersonal, or *public* – for reasons, even when they are not (yet) shared with others but are merely perceived, always have a public character.⁵⁸⁸ But why is the agent's ability to give an account of her responses supposed to be so central for holding that they are of moral worth, that they display moral goodness? Would it not seem that a given individual may display goodness without giving reasons for her deeds? Indeed, may her ability to give reasons, at least in some cases, not be entirely irrelevant in order to perceive her behaviour as virtuous? These thoughts point to an ambiguity regarding the notion of what a moral reason may be, an ambiguity that becomes particularly apparent in the thought of McDowell. Let me elaborate.

The first way in which the question “Why did you do that?” may be meant is, unsurprisingly, so to elicit an answer that lays out ‘the *because*’. Answering this question when meant in this way requires, and reflects, practical wisdom (*phronesis*), the ability to read situations in the right way, where ‘right’ means ‘in such a way that one knows what to do and why’.⁵⁸⁹ When the McDowellian asks for moral reasons, what she is after a display of *ability*: firstly, of the ability to make use of reason *at all*, thus distinguishing one as a reasonable and responsible being over against the merely “dumb animals”⁵⁹⁰ and, secondly, the ability to use reason *in an ethically excellent way*, thus distinguishing oneself as practically wise over against other people – an ethical exemplar.⁵⁹¹

What might a practically wise answer to the question at hand look like? It seems that it would bring together two things: on the one hand, it would entail describing what I perceived – namely my friend who was in a miserable predicament. Now, this may certainly satisfy the interlocutor; however, it need not, even if she shares my ethical outlook. For she may continue to ask: “Yes, sure, but why did you, being faced with your friend's misery, choose to give him advice? And why of this kind? And why did you put it this way?” And so on. In other words, while she may agree that the situation in which I found myself was one in which my friend's predicament was morally salient, she may not see my response to it as practically wise; therefore, she may ask me to explain my reasoning behind my responses, in the hope that she

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. Backström, “From nonsense to openness,” 269: “Most philosophers explicitly or implicitly identify ethics with culturally formed norms, language with public discourse, and moral understanding with the practice of reason-giving – a practice essentially cultural and public even when engaged in silently, *in foro interno*” (emphasis in the original). The issue of the depersonalised other in moral philosophy will become central in section 2 below; for the inherently public nature of reasons, cf. also chapter 1.a.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. chapter 2, section 2.a.

⁵⁹⁰ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 70.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. e.g. McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 31–3.

may come to see genuine virtue where, at present, she does not. In other words, while she may see *some* virtue reflected in my response, namely in that I saw the situation as calling for my help, she may still not see it as fully virtuous, precisely because that entails the ability to give an account of not only what one perceived but also of the nature of one's response – the ability to say *why* one did *that* and in just *that* way (rather than in *that* or *that* one.)

If *this* is how the question “Why did you do that?” (or any of its sub-questions) were put to me, I would not have a clear-cut reply. However, I *would* be able to point out various things, especially in respect to my knowledge of my friend and my experience with prior situations, that I take to having in one way or another *conditioned* my having been able to respond in the way I did.⁵⁹² For instance, I have come to know said friend as someone who not only hates to be pitied but who loathes it even more if others sugar-coat reality so as to spare him from the harsh truth. Even in painful situations – indeed, especially in such situations – he has a strong desire to look reality in the eyes, no matter how challenging. On top of that, I have more than once found myself in situations with him in which he had had self-doubts but in which he had overcome these self-doubts when someone else had buoyed him up, telling him that she believed in him and in his ability to do it by himself. It was almost paradoxical that he, in moments when he was uncertain about himself, needed others to tell him that he did not need any others. Without having come to know him as *this* person and without having developed just *this* relationship with him, I would not have been able to act in response to him in the way I did. Offering this kind of background knowledge of our friendship to the McDowellian interlocutor may (or may not) make her come to see virtue where before she had not.

Importantly, however, this knowledge does not *by itself* suffice to yield a satisfying – or indeed *any* – explanation of why I responded to him as I did. That is, it is no problem to imagine that I might have known all of this and nonetheless responded to him in a callous or mean way.⁵⁹³ So, we return to the question: why *did* I see the situation, and him in his miserable predicament, as morally salient? This brings me to the second way in which the question “Why did you do that?” may be asked, namely *not* in order to elicit the specifics of the *what* and *why* of my response but rather to what could be called its *spirit*.⁵⁹⁴ This inflection of the question

⁵⁹² The questions of the (supposed) conditions for morality, or indeed for ethical relationality, is of course a major issue, especially in critical theory. The idea is, roughly speaking, that whether, and if so how, morality is possible depends on conditions that, while shaping the individuals, have their roots in supra-personal socio-historical dynamics (for an example of this kind of thinking in connection to capitalism, cf. Estelle Ferrarese, ‘Precarity of Work, Precarity of Moral Dispositions: Concern for Others in the Era of ‘Emotional’ Capitalism’, *Women's Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 3/4 (2017): 176–192.)

⁵⁹³ Cf. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 408: “goodness is not about being knowledgeable” but, at least in situations of the kind I (and Backström) are discussing, “about wanting to help”.

⁵⁹⁴ The limitations of illuminating the moral quality of an action by reference to what someone did and why, together with the importance of the (moral) spirit of a deed is nicely brought out for example in R. F. Holland,

could be re-articulated along the lines of “Why did you respond to your friend as being of genuine moral importance *at all?*” That is, “Why did he, in the given situation, claim your attention and move you in such a way that you were awakened to the moral seriousness of the situation as well as to his absolute importance?”

If the McDowellian were to attempt to account for this dimension of moral salience, she would inadvertently distort it by portraying it as mediated by a “specific cultural inheritance.”⁵⁹⁵ In this way, she would make it seem as if my friend and his predicament mattering to me would be dependent on my cultural background. Likewise, it would indicate that she herself, sharing my sense that my friend’s predicament was morally salient, also shares my socio-cultural outlook. But that is confused. Of course, my and my friend’s cultural background would be *involved* even for things as supposedly basal as a break-up to be intelligible. If I would have been brought up in a social environment in which there were no relationships with romantic commitments (and no exposure to such practices from other cultures), then I would simply not understand what he would mean when he would tell me that he had just broken up with his partner – I would not understand *why* he would be so miserable.⁵⁹⁶ But that is not to say – and indeed it would be preposterous to suppose – that I would therefore be unable to see that he *is* miserable or to experience his misery as being of great importance.⁵⁹⁷ I would in such a case be dumbfounded as to what is the matter with him – but it would be only because he and his predicament would nonetheless matter to me that I could so much as ask him to explain the grounds for his misery to me and, thus, come to understand (more or less) what he is going

“Good and Evil in Action,” *Against Empiricism*, 110–125, esp. at 122–125. Already mentioned sporadically, the notion of *spirit* will play an important role in chapters 5 and 6. I will return to Holland on a similar issue below.

⁵⁹⁵ John McDowell, “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 37.

⁵⁹⁶ For a good discussion of the often overlooked nuances involved in intercultural understanding and what may stand in its way, cf. Lars Hertzberg, “What’s in a Smile?,” *Wittgenstein and the Life We Lead with Language* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), 202–214, esp. 209 (footnote 14).

⁵⁹⁷ This is close to the point I made in chapter 2 about the child’s moral understanding even before it is socialised into the cultural surrounds. The difference is that in respect to the example at hand it may be argued that it is precisely the culture, and the moral-practical outlook, into which I have *already* become enculturated that circumscribes where I will be able to recognise misery and where I will not. But if it is really the case that I am blind to another’s misery because of the culture I have been socialised into, I would say that it is precisely my culture that is, morally speaking, the problem. Raimond Gaita develops this point – although in my view conceding too much to society’s role in delimiting the reach of moral understanding – in ‘A Common Humanity’ (in *A Common Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 259–85). For a more radical view, cf. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 384. I will also return to this point in chapter 6, section 1.a.v., indeed in the form of a critical discussion of Gaita.

through.⁵⁹⁸ In other words, my *moral* understanding would underlie the development of an understanding of *the concrete socio-historical circumstances of his predicament*.⁵⁹⁹

As already discussed, the only kind of moral salience which the McDowellian could appeal to is tied to action and normativity – in the face of misery, you *ought to help*. However, the kind of experience of moral salience I am now discussing – i.e. that of actually caring about the other – lies beyond the scope of reason and, accordingly, that of rational action.⁶⁰⁰ As such, it also lies beyond the scope of the McDowellian understanding of ethics. In other words, no reasons can be given for why others are important to us, an importance experienced as being of a different order than everything related to our desires and preferences.⁶⁰¹ But then again, it is quite unimaginable that anyone would ever ask such a question in the first place, simply because we all *are* familiar with the experience of the distinct importance of others – even the gangster with a hardened heart is familiar with it, for his hardening was obviously a response, whether deliberate or not, to this experience, an attempt precisely to get away from it. And if someone would nonetheless be imagined to ask it, it seems that we would soon come to an end of what we would be able to say. That there has to be at some point, on some ‘bedrock’ level, a sense of moral salience that cannot be further illuminating by giving more reasons, is beautifully captured by Holland:

[O]nce, whether after little or much consideration and help of this or that sorts, I have been forcibly struck by the splendiddness or the dreadfulness of something I have seen and I register this by characterizing the action in one way or another according to its significance for good or ill, and I am then requested by someone to say what the good or the ill of it amounts to, and he does not mean this as a request to have any more details described to him or to be told about any further repercussions of what transpired, but he wishes to be told (so he says) what the good is or what the ill is in itself, or what the nature of it is: then I simply do not know what to reply. And my situation is a queer and perplexing one, in that I can see – as it would be natural for me

⁵⁹⁸ Something similar would also hold in relation to my interlocutor. If it is assumed that she would be unfamiliar with the cluster of practices revolving around romantic relationships – including the break-ups that go hand in hand with them – then she would not understand what I told her if my account would only make reference to such things. However, she would certainly understand it if I told her that my friend was ‘suffering greatly’ or that he was ‘in a miserable predicament’. Then, she could sympathise with him through my words and her sympathy may be the starting point for her to inquire into, and learn more about, romantic commitments, break-ups, etc.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. once again Beehler’s excellent discussion of this issue in *Moral Life*, 26–31.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. Joel Backström, “From nonsense to openness,” 257.

⁶⁰¹ That is, caring about the other is not to be captured in terms of the traditional dichotomy of the appetite (Aristotle, McDowell) or inclination (Kant) and the rational, be it qua virtuous (Aristotle, McDowell) or formally required (Kant). Cf. also the aforementioned reference to Lévinas’ distinction between a desire for the other rooted in lack and need and one that overflows without any purpose.

to say – I can see the good or the evil without difficulty: I see it in the action. I recognize quite clearly that it is there. But what it is I cannot for the life of me explain.⁶⁰²

Holland's point in this rich passage is that there must at some point come an end to what one can do by giving reasons for why a given deed manifested moral goodness (or evil.) Eventually, we simply come to a point where all we have left at our disposal is to try to direct the other's attention to the situation at hand and appeal to him "Don't you see?"⁶⁰³, a question which, in a case like the one at hand, of course reflects the disbelief and incredulousness of the one who asks: "How can you *not* see it?!"⁶⁰⁴ It should be added that, while Holland speaks about action, what he is ultimately after is not the action itself but what is reflected in it. If it would be about the action as such, at least in the sense that thinkers like Kant and McDowell conceive of it, then the cited reason *would* be the last and decisive instance for determining moral worth. But that is precisely the view Holland wants to distance himself from. What makes a morally good deed morally good is ultimately not the reason produced so as to describe the motivation that elicited it but the underlying attitude or spirit.⁶⁰⁵ It must be possible for this attitude or spirit to strike those who witness it as good even apart from any reason given – for if it does not, then no matter what reason *will* be given so as to distinguish the deed in question as excellent, it will not make it appear as morally good.⁶⁰⁶

So, it is not that I could not try to convey to others a sense of my loving concern for my friend, say, by giving further details of the way I perceived him and his suffering, by using evocative language so as to make it easier for others to put themselves into my shoes, or by

⁶⁰² R. F. Holland, "Is Goodness a Mystery?," *Against Empiricism*, 96.

⁶⁰³ This phrase is taken from McDowell's "Virtue and Reason," 65; the important difference between his notion of 'appealing to the other's perception' and mine will be discussed shortly.

⁶⁰⁴ This comes out in that Holland says in connection to same example: "...if someone were then to ask me what was so good about it I should think there must be something wrong with him" (ibid.).

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. also Lars Hertzberg, "Reasons to be Good?," 171–5, as well as "Moral Necessity," 113–4.

⁶⁰⁶ This comes out when reading the example at hand alongside the already mentioned example of moral goodness in "Good and Evil in Action" (i.e. esp. at 122–5). This being said, Holland's focus on action is problematic in that it makes it seem that, although the action themselves are not morally decisive but the spirit in which they are done, moral goodness can nonetheless appear *only* in action. But that would morally disqualify those who are, for whatever reason, practically incapacitated. Imagine, for instance, if I would have been fully paralysed and would have been unable to reply to my friend or even more my hand after he had told me about his break-up, but that my face would have nonetheless been filled with unreserved compassion and sympathy. Yet, even without manifesting in an action, such a response may have nonetheless reflected goodness, that is, the goodness of a wholehearted loving concern. This point of criticism is as much directed at Holland as it is against McDowell and any other thinker who conceives of morality as tied to action. This being said, there seems to be at least room in Holland's thought for decoupling goodness from action in the strict sense simply because Holland's notion of action is very wide (cf. "Good and Evil in Action", 113–8). Moreover, he does emphasise that "evil in response" – and hence presumably also goodness – "flows from a certain posture" (ibid., 114). In this sense, Holland's may be ready to recognise that being moved with compassion when listening to a heart-breaking story is, as such, a kind of action.

falling back on other rhetoric devices (although whether I should fail or succeed in doing so is another matter.)⁶⁰⁷ The point is rather that I shall thereby not provide them with my reason for acting as I did but rather try to rouse their moral sensitivity, awaken them to a sense of how I was struck by my friend's preciousness, as *my* moral sensitivity was roused when finding myself in his presence.⁶⁰⁸ If, however, anyone would in a seemingly serious manner express that she has no sense whatsoever of what I am after, and not because of any shortcomings in my description but simply because she does not see why tending my troubled friend in a loving way would be a good thing, then I would probably be as dumbfounded as Holland imagines himself to be in the above quoted passage.

Before continuing, let me address one last objection that was already adumbrated above, namely that the just sketched thoughts were too abstract, too much developed under 'philosophical laboratory conditions', so as to capture the reality of our actual practices of the giving of, and asking for, reasons.⁶⁰⁹ After all, hardly anyone who would ask me for a reason for why I responded as I did would do so for no other reason than to find out whether I display ethical excellence or not. Rather, inquiring into someone's motives and their apparent (lack of) moral quality usually hangs on there being a concrete occasion that provokes it. The perhaps most straightforward kind of occasion is simply that of someone's response appearing in a morally compromised way, so that the inquiry into the motive reflects the wish to have the respective person explain, and thus (attempt to) justify, what she has done.

So, let us look at the actual response that I gave to my friend and see what could occasion questioning my motive. It seems to me that a likely candidate for provoking an inquiry into my motive becomes immediately apparent: It appears that, by telling him "ultimately, no one else but you can make that choice", I basically left it up to my friend whether he would let the separation break him or not. This can readily strike one as morally problematic: Telling my friend that he alone has to decide for himself how to deal with the situation seems to be a way for me to abdicate my responsibility for him and, thus, appears to show that I do not really care about him. So, the interlocutor would actually have a good reason to ask why I replied to my friend in the way that I did, given that the 'advice' I gave him may indeed appear to be quite callous, uncaring, and irresponsible.

⁶⁰⁷ In fact, this is a substantial part of what I have tried to do in relation to you, the readers, up to this point.

⁶⁰⁸ This line of thought obviously echoes the discussion in chapter 2, section 3.

⁶⁰⁹ For a discussion of the complexities of reason-giving in actual interaction with others, cf. the essays of the "The Practice(s) of Giving Reasons", special issue, *Topoi* 38, no. 4 (2019), especially Sally Jackson's 'Reason-giving and the natural normativity of argumentation' (631–43) and Katharina Stevens' 'The roles we make others take: Thoughts on the ethics of arguing' (693–709).

I would be sympathetic to someone who would put forward such a worry because it would indicate a concern with whether I genuinely cared about my friend. However, I would indeed have something to say in reply to it, namely pretty much the same I already said above, i.e. that I had come to know him to be a certain kind of person (i.e. as someone who not only hates to be pitied but loathes it when others sugar-coat reality so as to spare him from the harsh truth) and that I had prior experiences of a similar kind (i.e. situations in which he had had self-doubts that had been overcome through the encouragement of others.) However, when I tell this to the interlocutor who is suspicious of my motive, then I do not seek to offer a reason justifying what I did;⁶¹⁰ rather, I try to make her come to see my response in a new light, that is, in the light of the nature of my overall relationship to my friend.⁶¹¹ In other words, I give an account of my relation to my friend in the hope that my interlocutor will come to see – where *see* is bound up with *understand* – that my response to him, although perhaps appearing as callous and irresponsible when looked at from afar, was actually a sign of my loving concern for him.⁶¹²

While trying to make others see something in a new moral light is, as was discussed in chapter 2, section 2.c., an integral part also of McDowell's understanding of our shared moral life, what he has in mind is importantly different from what I am after. The point is, once again, that for him, seeing something in a new moral light is tied to rational action: the one to whom reality is disclosed sees it as constituting reasons for him to act in response to it in a morally better way than he would otherwise have done. But that is not the picture that I tried to convey to my interlocutor when trying to give her a fuller picture of my relationship to my friend. That is, it would be misleading to say that obtaining the kind of inside view of my relationship with my friend is morally relevant, primarily or even exclusively, because it allows one to see that I did in fact find myself confronted with a reality that presented me with compelling moral reasons to respond to it in the way I did. Rather, making my interlocutor get a glimpse of my relationship with my friend is supposed to *abrogate* her desire for me to provide her with reasons in the first place – it is aimed at quenching her suspicion. Differently put, by making her understand what my relation to my friend is like, *I provide her with a background that hopefully makes her come to see that how I responded to my friend was simply an expression*

⁶¹⁰ That is to say: it is of course not in my power how the interlocutor will understand what I tell her – she might indeed think that I try to justify what I have done.

⁶¹¹ I here anticipate a central theme of chapter 6, i.e. the moral importance of coming to perceive something in the light of the love of others.

⁶¹² For helpful discussions of why giving reasons is not what is decisive when it comes to moral understanding, cf. Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Understanding*, 84–92 & Backström, “From nonsense to openness,” esp. at 265.

of my loving concern for him, i.e. that precisely *no* reasoning or reason-perceiving, let alone choice or deliberation, was required on my part to respond to him in the way I did.⁶¹³

Seeing someone in the kind of moral light in which I saw my friend is not the same as seeing him, or his predicament, as a reason for acting in a certain way (or, which is the same thing, as an *occasion* for exercising my moral-practical capacities.)⁶¹⁴ Likewise, making someone see an engagement of others in a new moral light need not mean making this someone come to see reasons for them to respond to one another in the ways they do, reasons one had hitherto failed to note; it may mean precisely coming to see that *no* reasons were required for them to engage with one another in the way they do, precisely because their engagement manifests a loving concern for one another.⁶¹⁵ This is the understanding of ‘coming to see something in a new moral light’ that McDowell’s moral philosophy cannot accommodate.⁶¹⁶

2. Kant and McDowell as Thinkers of I-It Relationality

In this last section of the present chapter, I will translate 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*. What I will show on the following pages is that both Kant’s and McDowell’s 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. Doing so will pave the way for the next chapter’s discussion of the alternative Buber offers, namely the first-second-personal relation between I and You.

In the course of introducing his distinction between what he calls the “two basic words”, or “word pairs”, namely “I-It” and “I-You,”⁶¹⁷ Martin Buber says the following in relation to the I-It:

The life of a human being does not exist merely in the sphere of goal-directed verbs. It does not consist merely of activities that have something for their object.

I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something. The life of a human being does not consist merely of all this and its like.

⁶¹³ This thought is discussed at length in Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 408–16.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Hannes Nykänen, *The ‘I’, the ‘You’ and the Soul* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002), 190–7.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, esp. at 190–3.

⁶¹⁶ Hannes Nykänen, “This Thing with Philosophy,” 346–50.

⁶¹⁷ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 53.

All this and its like is the basis of the realm of It.⁶¹⁸

Buber's reason for beginning with a negative point ("...does *not* exist...") is due to the fact that this is, to his mind, how thinkers usually conceive of the human being's relation to the world, i.e. as precisely at all times directed at some goal or another, where 'goal' is understood in the widest sense of the word of *object* and 'object', in turn, in the widest sense of the word of *something*, i.e. something that can be made reference to *as something*. In other words, Buber here takes issue with the predominant philosophical view that the distinctively human way of being in, and relating to, the world is that of always already being directed at some object, or objects.⁶¹⁹ What Buber is focussed on in the quoted passage, however, are not *the objects as such* as the various ways in which human beings *are able to relate to* the objects as well as to the world which they constitute. Given that *I* is necessarily bound up with something, the only way for this *I* to become manifest in the world is, so the established view, in virtue of activities signified by transitive verbs, i.e. object-oriented activities – *I perceive something, I think something*, and so on. That is the view which, as has been expatiated in chapter 2, McDowell has inherited from Kant. And it is just this view which, according to Buber, constitutes only one side of the coin – and indeed, the (in a way yet to be explained) problematic side⁶²⁰ – of what it means for man to exist in the world, the other side of which is the mode of relationality that he himself seeks to develop in *I and Thou*, namely the I-You relation.

Conceiving of man's relation to the world exclusively in terms of I-It relationality means that the *I* also relates to all others as to *Its* – or, rather, as to *Hes* and *Shes*. (That is, when Buber speaks of the *It*, he is not concerned with the personal pronoun but rather with *relata* in the third-person as such, regardless of whether *qua He, She, or It*.) That, in turn, means that *any* meaningful interpersonal relation – and, accordingly, the very possibility of interpersonal understanding – has to be conceived of in terms of subjects relating to one another mediated by (conceptualisations of) objects.⁶²¹ As Nykänen puts it: "The essential thing about this

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶¹⁹ While this view immediately brings to mind Kant's transcendental philosophy, Buber's main target was the phenomenology of his contemporary Edmund Husserl, as is brought out systematically in Michael Theunissen's *The Other*, especially parts 1 (13–166) and 3 (257–344). This being said, McDowell is certainly also to be joined into the ranks of the champions of objectivity, as becomes clear with texts such as "Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective" or "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity" (both to be found in *The Engaged Intellect*, the first 152–9, the second 204–24).

⁶²⁰ We can anticipate what is problem with I-It understanding with reference to Nykänen: The I-It – or, as he calls it, the Thing – "is a complex; an open-ended web of concepts that in their different ways repress I-You understanding" ("The Thing with Philosophy," 356).

⁶²¹ In this context, McDowell's speaks of *intersubjectivity*; cf. McDowell, "Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective."

Something” – that is, about the It⁶²² – “is that it involves the idea that human beings cannot understand each other unless there is something that mediates their understanding.”⁶²³ Which amounts to saying: “[o]bjectivity is taken to constitute a precondition for intelligibility.”⁶²⁴ For McDowell especially, as was shown, objectivity is intrinsically tied to language: “Something must ‘play the role of a medium’”, Nykänen expounds, “since it is impossible to imagine that human beings could understand each other ‘without benefit of anything like my appeal to initiation into a shared language and thereby into a tradition.’”⁶²⁵ The possibility of interpersonal understanding and the historicity of language are not among Kant’s philosophical concerns, yet he concurs with McDowell in that he adopts a representationalist outlook – and representation is, as will be developed in the next chapter, intrinsically connected to the I-It.⁶²⁶

This already gives us the first intimations as to how a Buberian assessment of Kant’s and McDowell’s moral philosophies may look like. Yet, much more is to be said. First off, Buber lived, and was philosophically active, more than a century after Kant and more than half a century before McDowell. Hence, he makes reference only to the former, not the latter. This said, Buber does discuss Aristotle – and although this discussion is short, it can help us to bring out the kind of reservation he would, it seems clear to me, also harbour towards McDowell’s thought, and towards his ethics in particular. Before turning to Buber’s more substantial relation to Kant’s moral philosophy, let me thus briefly examine his thoughts on Aristotle.

In “What is Man?,” Buber says of Aristotle⁶²⁷ that “with him man speaks of himself always as it were in the third person, is only a ‘case’ for himself, he attains of consciousness of self only as ‘he’, not as ‘I’.”⁶²⁸ And shortly after, he adds “it is not before Aristotle that the visual image of the universe is realised in unsurpassable clarity as a universe of *things*, and now man is a thing among these things of the universe, an objectively comprehensible species beside other species.”⁶²⁹ Aristotle is, as it were, the philosophical stock taker of the world; distanced from it, he gets everything – every (*some*)thing – into view as it stands in relation to everything else, and in such an encompassing way that he includes himself just as one more thing among

⁶²² Although he makes no reference to the I-It, his approach reflects clear parallels to Buber, both methodologically as well as in terms of the language he deploys – after all, he states that what he is after is “I-you understanding” (Hannes Nykänen, “This Thing with Philosophy,” e.g. 336).

⁶²³ Ibid., 346.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 348.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 359.

⁶²⁶ This paragraph is, as it were, a Buberian rephrasing of the discussions in chapter 1, sections b. & c. and in chapter 2, sections a.-c.

⁶²⁷ Buber attributes this point to Bernard Grøethuysen, a friend of Buber and another pupil of Wilhelm Dilthey. Yet, he is obviously in agreement with it.

⁶²⁸ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 150.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 151.

the others, distinguished first and foremost from the rest in his ability precisely of being said stock taker.⁶³⁰ This sounds almost like Buber's I-It relation – yet only almost. For by regarding himself as *just another* It, Aristotle's man is lacking, or has lost sight of, a genuine sense of himself as I, as the irreducibly first-personal locus from which the world emerges *as a world* in the first place. In other words, it is only in virtue of the I that a world-relation can be established, even the one which, paradoxically, third-personalises itself.

While I think that much of what Buber says about Aristotle resonates with the picture I have painted of McDowell on the preceding pages, it is clear that, for McDowell, the I *is* a crucial notion.⁶³¹ In order to get to it, a detour via Kant is required, however. It is clear that, although Buber fairly seldom directly refers to Kant⁶³² – with the exception of the just quoted 'What is Man?', dedicated to Kant's leading, yet unanswered, anthropological question⁶³³ – he shapes much of the background of Buber's thought.⁶³⁴ Yet, while Buber's philosophy is clearly indebted to, and shaped by, Kant, his own thought can be understood as an attempt to overcome Kantian transcendental philosophy.⁶³⁵ At the heart of transcendental philosophy, however, lies the notion of the I, conceptualising the world around as it is in turn shaped by what it thus conceptualises.⁶³⁶ So, while Kant's philosophy conceives of man also as the stock taker of the world, conceptualising and organising what he finds in it into an ever more complete whole,⁶³⁷ the decisive difference between him and Aristotle, at least in respect to Buber's interest in the two thinkers, is that, for Kant, the I arises as the conceptualiser and organiser and, as such, as something – or, rather, someone – who cannot simply be indexed among all the other things

⁶³⁰ I will not examine here whether what Buber says about Aristotle is factually correct or not (I think it is a fair characterisation but, given that it is a quite general gloss, I am sure the objection of simplification could be raised). What is of relevance to me is only the sense in which Buber's characterisation sheds light on what a Buberian stance on a moral philosophy of a McDowellian ilk would be.

⁶³¹ Although this transpires throughout his writings, it becomes especially apparent in e.g. "Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint."

⁶³² In *I and Thou* Buber only once mentions Kant explicitly, namely in critically discussing his understanding of the relation between freedom and necessity; cf. *I and Thou*, 144

⁶³³ Martin Buber, "What is Man?," esp. 140–9.

⁶³⁴ An overview of Buber's Kantian background is given in section 2, "Philosophical Influences" in Michael Zank & Zachary Braiterman, "Martin Buber," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/buber/>>. However, as Kantian themes and concepts reoccur often throughout Buber's writings, the impact of Kant on his thought becomes clear even without background knowledge.

⁶³⁵ For a perspicuous development of this claim, cf. Lawrence Perlman's "Buber's Anti-Kantianism," *AJS Review* 15, no. 1 (1990): 95–108.

⁶³⁶ As Maurice Merleau-Ponty poignantly puts it: "The consciousness of the world is not *based* on self-consciousness: they are strictly contemporary. There is a world for me because I am not unaware of myself; and I am not concealed from myself because I have a world" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 347).

⁶³⁷ Kant develops this idea in the introduction of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 3–24, esp. at 20–1.

within it.⁶³⁸ As a thinker of the transcendental I finding itself in a world of objects, Kant can thus be said to represent *the* philosopher of the I-It *par excellence*.⁶³⁹

That Buber seeks to overcome the conceptual framework of Kant's transcendental philosophy becomes apparent especially in how he speaks of man's *practical* relation to the world. For it is there – that is, in his moral thought – that Kant goes beyond I-It relationality in a peculiar way, namely a negative one. After all, Kant holds that what lies at the heart of morality is precisely the demand of *abstaining from* instrumentalising – or, to use Buber's term, *using*⁶⁴⁰ – the other as a mere means.⁶⁴¹ But using the other is, next to *experiencing* – its epistemological counterpart⁶⁴² – the primary mode of relating to the other qua It. So, by abstaining from using the other as a means, one also refrains from treating her as an It.⁶⁴³ However, that is not the same as relating to the other as a You in the distinctly second-personal sense that Buber is after because, although suspending the practical relation to the other as an It, Kant's dualism of phenomenal, empirical and noumenal, intelligible world stands in the way of the undivided, lived actuality of the encounter with the other.

As expounded in chapter 1, Kant's account of action puts the onus entirely on the side of the rational subject. This is unsurprising, given that for Kant, the encountered world is only ever the 'merely natural' – that is, the passive, experienced, used – world. Yet even those beings that alone form the exception, namely other subjects,⁶⁴⁴ are in the morally relevant respect passive: in relating to them, I subject them to my 'moral treatment', as it were – or, as I put it in chapter 1, they function as mere occasions for me to fulfil my moral duty.⁶⁴⁵ In contrast to this, consider Buber's understanding of what could be called 'relational-existential' action:

The You confronts me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is at once being chosen and choosing, passive and active. For an action of the whole being does away with all partial actions and thus also with all sensations of action

⁶³⁸ With the transcendental Ego, "[t]he whole system of experience—world, own body and empirical self—are subordinated to a universal thinker" through which "the world becomes the correlative of thought about the world and henceforth exists only for a constituting agent" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 241).

⁶³⁹ For a discussion of Buber as a critic of Kant's epistemology, cf. Micha H. Werner, "The Immediacy Of The Encounter And The Dangers Of Dichotomy: Buber, Lévinas And Jonas On Responsibility," in *The Legacy of Hans Jonas*, eds. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson & Christian Wiese (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 203–30, at 208–9.

⁶⁴⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, e.g. 65, 85, 88.

⁶⁴¹ The formulation 'mere means' is Kant's, not Buber's. This being said, 'means', both in the sense of *a means to an end* as well as in the sense of *medium*, is one of Buber's central concepts for distinguishing the I-It. This will be discussed below and especially in the next chapter.

⁶⁴² Usually, Buber speaks of using and experiencing together. Hence, the references are the same as in the footnote above: *I and Thou*, 65, 85, 88.

⁶⁴³ *I and Thou*, 63: "Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur."

⁶⁴⁴ It has already been discussed that Kant does not offer us any theoretical means via which to 'find out' which beings are, in fact, rational and which are not. But I will not address this issue here.

⁶⁴⁵ That was one of the central lines of thought that I explored in chapter 1.

(which depend entirely on the limited nature of actions)—and hence it comes to resemble passivity.

This is the activity of the human being who has become whole: it has been called not-doing, for nothing particular, nothing partial is at work in man and thus nothing of him intrudes into the world. It is the whole human being, closed in its wholeness, at rest in its wholeness, that is active here, as the human being has become an active whole.⁶⁴⁶

Buber, whose thought revolves around the insight that the individual cannot bring about relation *by itself*, holds against Kant a picture on which the starting point is a *meeting*. Thus, he replaces unilateral action with response, both active in that it requires someone who does the responding and passive in that the one who responds must first find himself addressed.

On Kant's account, as was said, the moral announces itself with an awareness of duty and the concomitant sense of some inclination that opposes this awareness; accordingly, genuine action⁶⁴⁷ requires overcoming inclination out of a sense of duty towards rational humanity. Once the basic set-up is conceived of in terms of address and response, however, this picture is fundamentally changed: what is decisive it is not anymore my sense of duty towards rational humanity, and whether or not this sense is the determining ground of my action, but whether I really live up to the other's address, whether I am fully present in my response to the other. And when I *am* fully present in my response, then I will not anymore – or not yet⁶⁴⁸ – find myself at the crossroads at which inclination besieges duty and at which duty seeks to assert itself against inclination; rather, my response will, in its immediacy, as it were, merge

⁶⁴⁶ *I and Thou*, 124–5.

⁶⁴⁷ 'Moral action' would be more to the point in the case of Kant; still, I chose 'genuine action' because it allows the connection to Buber (who does not speak of the moral). Apart from that, I think it is not at all wrong to speak of what Kant is after in terms of 'genuine' action – for him, the moral, as it were, *is* the genuine, i.e. the action that is genuinely mine qua autonomous subject. For a discussion of this idea, cf. Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution. Agency, Identity, Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25–6; for a more detailed discussion, cf. Katharina Bauer, "To be or Not to be Authentic. In Defence of Authenticity as an Ethical Ideal," *Ethic Theory and Moral Practice* 20 (2017): 567–80.

⁶⁴⁸ That is to say: unlike the McDowellian ideal of virtue in which inclination is wholly *overcome* so that no felt residue of 'ought' remains, responding to the You in a way that is not marred by inclination in a certain sense *underlies* the duty-inclination dichotomy. Differently put, wholeheartedly responding to You has no presuppositions, it requires neither an exercise of reason nor a habituation into virtue – it is always there at least as a possibility. (In this sense, I emphatically disagree with Hilary Putnam's reading of Buber as a Cavellian moral perfectionist (*Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life. Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 59) and, accordingly, of being concerned with what Putnam, following Cavell and Emerson, speaks of in terms of a striving for the "unattained but attainable self" (ibid.; the quote is taken from Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome. The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (La Salle: Chicago University Press, 1990), 12; Cavell takes the expression from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "History" (*The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1940), 125). Buber's dialogical thought is rather about getting into view a basal – and I would say: *morally* basal – dimension of our lives that is always already there anyway, and about how this getting-it-into-view may change our stance towards others and the world.

into the claim that addresses me – there is no residue of inclination pulling me hither or thither and, accordingly, no sense of duty up in arms against it.⁶⁴⁹ That is, I take it, what Buber means when he says that the action of the whole “comes to resemble passivity.”⁶⁵⁰ One of most well-known examples of this, striking in its simplicity, is offered by the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan in which the Samaritan helps a wounded, “half dead” man on the wayside simply because he was “moved with compassion.”⁶⁵¹ Finding himself addressed by the dying man’s presence, so the parable suggests, the Samaritan responded with a compassion that bore no trace of inclination and, hence, neither of duty. And of course, the parable is told so as to illustrate neighbourly love. I will provide a more in-depth discussion of the parable in chapter 5.

Now, as already said, overcoming Kant’s dualism of the ‘merely’ empirical and the ‘supernatural’ realm of the intelligible is also one of McDowell’s main concerns. The alternative he proposes is a “minimal empiricism,”⁶⁵² namely one that, by dissociating itself from the prevalent scientism, seeks to broaden the notion of nature so as to include reason within it. With respect to McDowell’s moral thought, this can be understood as an attempt to leave behind the noumenal side of Kant’s conception of morality – that is, the ‘access’ to pure

⁶⁴⁹ It is worth adding that, when Buber speaks of “an action of the whole being” doing away “with all sensations of action (which depend entirely on the limited nature of actions)”, then he means that the one who is fully present in her response is, while thus present, not at the same time concerned with herself as acting, that is, with her representing to herself what she does and why. This thought was already discussed at the beginning of this chapter in connection to the notion of goodness and will become relevant again in chapter 6, section 2.a.

⁶⁵⁰ This may suggest that Buber is a *dialogical thinker* to the extent that the I responds wholeheartedly to the You, yet a *Kantian* once this response becomes, as it were, interfused with the temptation of inclinations. Although Kantian motives are certainly present in what Buber says about ‘less-than-pure responsiveness’, putting it this way would be misleading. In a striking passage, Buber gives what could be called a poetical-phenomenological account of what it means to make a decision while caught up in temptation: “The fiery matter of all my capacity to will surging intractably, everything possible for me revolving primevally, intertwined and seemingly inseparable, the alluring glances of potentialities flaring up from every corner, the universe as a temptation, and I, born in an instant, both hands into the fire, deep into it, where the one that intends me is hidden, my deed, seized: now! And immediately the menace of the abyss is subdued; no longer a coreless multiplicity at play in the iridescent equality of its claims; but only two are left alongside each other, the other and the one, delusion and task. But now the actualization commences within me. Having decided cannot mean that the one is done while the other remains lying there, an extinguished mass, filling my soul, layer upon layer, with its dross. Only he that funnels all the force of the other into the doing of the one, absorbing into the actualization of what was chosen the undiminished passion of what was not chosen, only he that ‘serves God with the evil impulse’, decides—and decides what happens” (*I and Thou*, 101). For those who see through the colourful figurative language, a picture emerges which, firstly, captures the urgency as well as the overwhelmingness of what it means to be ‘lost in temptation’ and without guidance, endless possibilities luring one in various directions. The climax and turning point of one’s attempt to find orientation then simply *is* the decision – a decision which, as I read Buber, is unguided but still reconnects one to the (You-)world by re-establishing a sense of address to which one can respond. Crucially, Buber adds to this that the decision is not all there is but rather the beginning of a process into which one can, and indeed finds oneself compelled to, ‘pour one’s whole soul’, namely by channelling the energy one previously invested in weighing the benefits and drawbacks of the various possibilities that lay open to one into the one path for which one has decided.

⁶⁵¹ Cf. Lk 10.33 (WEB).

⁶⁵² John McDowell, *Mind and World*, e.g. xi—xii.

reason, its concomitant formalism and the notion of the end-in-itself⁶⁵³ – in such a way as to develop an understanding of ethics that is both able to account for the ‘positive’, i.e. the action-guiding ethical substance internalised by the moral agent, while at the same time retaining the Kantian emphasis on the I as the locus of critical reflection on her own ethical outlook.⁶⁵⁴ With this, the just restated radical negativity of Kant’s moral philosophy becomes, as it were, macerated: it is not anymore the negative which alone directs the moral agent (even to the extent that it becomes positive through a double negation); rather, it is her positive – internalised, acquired – ethical outlook that does the orienting, so that the negativity is demoted to the (secondary, subsequent) function of the critical rethinking of the putatively rational linkages constituting the space of ethical reason.⁶⁵⁵

With respect to concrete engagements with others, this means that, on the McDowellian view, the actual engaging must be understood to be guided by the agent’s respective conception of the noble in such a way that it is only afterwards, in subsequent reflection, that the critical negativity enters the picture. Just as the engagement with others is, on McDowell’s picture, mediated by the agent’s concern for living up to her (positive, substantial) conception of the noble, so, too, the (negative, formal) critical reflection that may follow is directed at the agent’s conception, not towards others. It is not they who bring the thought- and motivation-negating impulse into play; rather, thought is taken to be somehow able to do this by its own efforts – for the sake of consistency alone, as it were.⁶⁵⁶

But this means that, on a Buberian view, McDowell’s philosophy, as an attempt to adopt Kant’s legacy, is, at least to the extent that it aims to capture the ethical reality of interpersonal engagement, a step in the wrong direction. This is so because, although not straightforwardly identical to what Buber calls the I-It,⁶⁵⁷ it is nonetheless closer to it, and not simply in degree but in kind. The point is that the one respect in which Kant steps beyond the I-It is, as was said, the radical refusal that lies at the heart of his morality, namely that of accommodating the other into any positive, substantial conception of how he or she ought to be engaged with. True, Kant does say that the will, and thus the rational ends, of the other are to be promoted, yet that claim,

⁶⁵³ To my knowledge, McDowell never even uses the term ‘end-in-itself’. His de-transcendentalized and Aristotelianized version of Kantian morality is developed in “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?”

⁶⁵⁴ Although he does not connect critical reflection on the ethical space of reasons to Kant, McDowell seems to acknowledge, in a response to Rüdiger Buber, that post-Kantian philosophy is promising in this respect (cf. John McDowell “Responses,” *Reading McDowell. On Mind and World*, ed. Nicolas Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 269–305, at 296–7).

⁶⁵⁵ This idea was discussed above, in section 1.b.; cf. also McDowell, *Mind and World*, 125.

⁶⁵⁶ To my knowledge, McDowell never explains *why exactly* we are supposedly under the standing obligation to rethink the linkages that constitute the space of reasons.

⁶⁵⁷ I will explain below why this is so.

although bringing with it its own problems,⁶⁵⁸ is far too abstract to provide real guidance in a life shared with others, at least in the substantial sense that McDowell claims is provided by an ethical outlook.⁶⁵⁹ So, it appears that what guides McDowell's Aristotelian moral agent is *It* – namely her conception of the noble – whereas all the Kantian moral subject is given is the *not-It*, the prohibition of relating to the other as *It*.

But would it not be a stark misreading of McDowell to say that therefore, his moral agent *uses* those in relation to whom she does what she takes to be the noble? Deploying a language similar to that of Kant – at least as regards the I-It relation – Buber fails to account for the aforementioned distinction between Kant's means-ends intentionality and McDowell's for-the-sake-of intentionality, thus suggesting that engaging with another as *It* is restricted to the former. But let us recall what the actual difference was between Kant's instrumental action ('acting *in order to* X') and McDowell's phronetic action ('acting *for the sake of* X'): while the former aims at a concrete goal, predetermined in the subject's mind and entailing the practical knowledge of how to realise it, the latter, lacking such concrete, determinate knowledge, has to freely and intelligently implement in action what X *means*, here and now. Thus, the difference between the two is first and foremost epistemological.⁶⁶⁰ But that, in turn, means that the *It* that guides McDowell's agent – her conception of the noble – is simply less determinate than the *It* that guides Kant's inclination-driven subject – i.e. her particular purpose. This transpires in McDowell's the *prohairesis* talk of means and ends, yet in such a way as to do away with instrumentality.⁶⁶¹ Still, to the extent the I is guided by an end, however indeterminate and dependent on the agent's practical intelligence for its actualisation in concrete situations, it is, and must remain, an *It*. Hence, it seems that McDowell's 'acting for the sake of X' *can* be made sense of in terms of the I-It, albeit a peculiar one.

For Kant, particular ends cannot bring about moral action because of the nature of the motivation that underlies them – acting on inclination, we do what we do because we desire the end. On McDowell's Aristotelian account, 'we do because we desire the end' holds even in

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. chapter 1, sections b. and c.

⁶⁵⁹ That is to say: in the sense of practical *knowledge*. For Kant, morality can only in the rarest occurrences be a matter of knowing of what is to be done (cf. chapter 1, section 1.a.i); for McDowell, morality is *all about* practical knowledge.

⁶⁶⁰ That is not to say that it is *only* epistemological, far from it. It is precisely because no blueprint of ethics is given to us, that we, qua responsive individuals, are existentially implicated in our ethical (and political) doings (cf. Stephen Crowell (with reference to Heidegger), "Who is the Political Actor? An Existential Phenomenological Approach," In *Phenomenology of the Political*, ed. Kevin Thompson & Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 11–28, at 22). The point is merely that if such a blueprint *were* given, i.e. if we *would know* what is (ethically) to be done – as it is on Kant's account as regards the realisation of particular ends – then the whole existential issue would not arise in the first place.

⁶⁶¹ Cf. above, section 1.b.

regard to virtuous action: we act virtuously because we have learned to “admire and delight in”⁶⁶² acting for the sake of nobility. But that, in turn, means that, on the Kantian view, the desire to act nobly in the sense McDowell conceives of it simply is an end among ends, albeit, well, a (or rather *the*) noble one.⁶⁶³ The McDowellian would reject this by claiming that the desire for doing what is noble is a *rational* desire, not one of natural inclination. As was expounded at length in chapter 2, however, McDowell fails to address that the desire for doing what is noble is not a pure and innocent desire for acting rationally; rather, the desire for acting rationally in such a way that it reflects nobility is inextricably woven together with the desire to appear good in the eyes of others. So although McDowell is right to hold that Kant has no proper theory of second nature and of the possibility of the internalisation of rational demands, McDowell’s own position would, from a Kantian perspective, nonetheless appear as adulterated by inclination, namely the inclination to be praised by one’s peers.⁶⁶⁴ Yet even that seems too lenient an assessment given that impurification presupposes something that can be impurified, in this case a pure desire for doing what is rational, independent from desire for recognition that is part of the presuppositions of McDowell’s virtue ethics. For Kant, this purity is provided by the moral law, asserting its primacy again and again,⁶⁶⁵ and not *only* in the form of an inward-looking concern with the formal consistency of our maxims but *also* because the others around us, qua ends-in-themselves, demand it from us.⁶⁶⁶ Having rejected Kant’s ‘transcendental story’, McDowell’s conception of ethics offers us nothing that could be thus impurified in the first place.⁶⁶⁷ The others do not anymore function as the limits of any ethical outlook but are integrated into it.

Tying these thoughts back to Buber, it becomes more plausible to speak of McDowell’s virtuous person, oriented in his action by his desire for doing what, on his ethical outlook, is noble, as desiring to ‘do It’ (the noble) and, thus, to use the other so as to realise this end. Differently put, the virtuous agent’s conception of the noble is the medium (It) between herself

⁶⁶² John McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 31.

⁶⁶³ That ‘the noble’ is a category which, on Buber’s view, falls under the heading of the I-It is suggested when he writes: “... as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by means, the You becomes an object among objects, *possibly the noblest one and yet one of them*, assigned its measure and boundary.” (*I and Thou*, 68; my emphasis).

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 23.

⁶⁶⁵ Although Kant emphasises that we can never be certain whether we have, in fact, acted from duty or not – that is, whether the ‘purity’ of the moral law has actually coloured off on us or not (cf. *Groundwork*, 23).

⁶⁶⁶ As was discussed in chapter 1, section 3.a., for Kant, the formal (i.e. consistency in one’s maxims) and the material (i.e. the other qua end-in-itself) go hand in hand.

⁶⁶⁷ Another way of approaching this thought is that on the McDowellian picture, the pure is something which, although unreachable, can be approximated, namely by more and more silencing all non-virtuous incentives. The problem with this view, from a Kantian perspective, is that the non-virtuous incentives are already found at its roots, in coming to develop the very desire for doing what is noble, thus making it rotten at its core.

and the one with whom she engages and this “medium is,” as Nykänen puts it, “assumed to be ‘something’ whose intelligibility relies on the objectivity of objects.”⁶⁶⁸ In this way, the other becomes reduced to an It – or rather a He or a She – within said ethical outlook: “I ought to give *him* some harsh but heartfelt advice because *he* looks like *he* really needs it.”⁶⁶⁹ While for Kant, the other explodes the I-It relation in a radically negative way, McDowell’s rejection of the non-naturalist assumptions on which this negativism rests, together with his simultaneous holding on to “the inevitability and universal reach of [the Kantian] subject-object dichotomy,”⁶⁷⁰ distances himself even further from what Buber is after: the lived relation with the other, unmediated by some already acquired and constantly re-implemented ethical outlook.

This leads me to another Buberian assessment of Kant, yet one that leaves behind Buber’s own thoughts on Kant seeks to find out how far one can get by applying his notion of the I-It to Kantian thought. As was said, Buber holds that positing the other as a *relatum* in the third person singular⁶⁷¹, i.e. as an It, He, or She,⁶⁷² goes hand in hand with an instrumental relation to this *relatum*. As just shown, however, this is not the case – McDowell’s phronetic action is third-personal yet not instrumental. But what, then, about Kant’s action from duty? It is surely not a manifestation of the I-You, yet neither is it a straightforward I-It, at least not in the sense that Buber speaks about it, given that it is, as just stated, precisely about *not* using the other. The question that arises is, it seems, what the I *is* relating to when it is acting from duty – in my present case specifically when acting from the positive duty towards others. After all, *not* relating to the other as It does not say anything about what it *does* relate to, or, more generally, how this relation is to be understood. Obviously, the relation between the I and its reason, between the subject and the voice of objectivity within it, is central. But is that to say that, in promoting the other’s rational ends, I in fact – solely? primarily? – relate to the voice of reason within me?⁶⁷³ If that is so, then it would seem that, on the wider understanding of the I-It that I am suggesting, Kant’s moral relation to others is a manifestation of the I-It, and indeed

⁶⁶⁸ Hannes Nykänen, “This Thing with Philosophy,” 346.

⁶⁶⁹ This touches upon a complex and important issue, namely whether – and if so, how – the You (i.e. the morally charged relation to other) may shine through even in third-personal representations of the kind just presented. To anticipate the view I will develop: a moral concern for the individual other *can* manifestly shine through in third-personal representations, and hence in articulations of what one ought to and why – yet this is to say (to echo my preceding discussion of Holland) that it is not the description in third-personal terms that does the main work but precisely that which shines through in it.

⁶⁷⁰ Micha H. Werner, “The Immediacy Of Encounter And The Dangers Of Dichotomy,” 206.

⁶⁷¹ For the sake of brevity, I will not discuss the third-person plural relation, i.e. I-They. It would seem to me, however, that its logic is not fundamentally different than that of the I-It.

⁶⁷² This became apparent in the passage I quoted at the beginning at this section.

⁶⁷³ This is the view of Kant that Barabas outlines in “Transcending the Human”: “Heeding the command of Reason” – a command marked by “Reason’s *impersonality*” – “is thus *experienced* by the sensible I as moving away from the [merely empirical] self towards the *other*”, where the other, in turn, has to be thought “as an *autonomous Will*”, i.e. itself an instantiation of reason (197–200; emphasis in the original).

in a double sense: firstly, the I relates to the moral law, yet the moral law is impersonality par excellence – the law of laws. Secondly, the I, having come to understand what it ought to do in its communion with the moral law, then turns to the other and treats her, not as an It to be used, but as an It in the already highlighted sense of an *occasion*, i.e. the I's occasion for living up to its moral duty.⁶⁷⁴

Another way of reading what Kant is after, however, is that what the I does when it acts morally is not borne out of a *concern with duty* but rather as an *expression of* (one's sense of) duty. This, it seems, is the reading that the phrase 'acting from duty' invites – to use a visual metaphor: while on the first reading, duty is as it were 'in front of' the I, the object of its concern, standing in-between it and the other, the second reading situates the sense of duty, as it were, 'behind' the I, as that which elicits the action. This second reading was the one that transpires in Cordner's discussion of Kant, for instance when he states that "Kant's view is that to act in a morally good way is to be moved by what necessarily transcends consciousness and thus lies beyond the reasons one has,"⁶⁷⁵ meaning that "[t]o be 'governed' by the moral law, then, is to be governed by what cannot be contained by any representation or 'conception' of it."⁶⁷⁶ On Cordner's view, the moral law does not stand before the I and, thus, in-between it and the other, simply because the law cannot be represented. Menke goes one step further when he states that, for Kant, "[a]utonomous judging or acting does not consist in producing a law *by oneself*, but to give expression to *one's own law* [...]."⁶⁷⁷ On this picture, the moral law has not only ceased to be the focal point of the subject's attention; rather, it has become the hidden catalyst of moral action, working behind the scenes yet manifesting itself in the ability to produce reasons – laws of action – that testify to the subject's autonomy.

Understanding Kant's moral action as expressive of duty also seems better suited for conceiving (as Kant himself at times does)⁶⁷⁸ of the way in which duty's demand make themselves known in terms of *conscience*: conscience "is not directed to an object [It!] but merely to the subject (to affect moral feeling by its act), and so it is not something incumbent on one, a duty, but rather an unavoidable fact."⁶⁷⁹ If I overcome temptation, I act *from*, or *out of*, (a subjective feeling of) conscience, not *out of a concern for* conscience itself as if it were

⁶⁷⁴ Cf. chapter 1, section 1.c.

⁶⁷⁵ Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 98.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶⁷⁷ Christoph Menke, *Autonomie und Befreiung. Studien zu Hegel*, 26; my translation. Menke lucidly develops an expressivist reading of Kant's moral philosophy *ibid.* 22–26.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. e.g. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 529.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

an object. It would seem that this way of making sense of what Kant means by positive duty does indeed come very close to what Buber has in mind when he speaks of the I-You.

Unfortunately, however, it is not so easy. The key difference on Kant's account is that, what actually finds expression when one acts from one's sense of duty, where this sense *is* conscience, is ultimately *practical reason*: "conscience is practical reason holding the human being's duty before him for his acquittal or condemnation in every case that comes under a law."⁶⁸⁰ Understanding conscience in terms of an expression of practical reason is markedly different from understanding it in terms of an expression of one's concern for the other person in her unique individuality, however; after all, a rational conscience refracts one's attention towards *everyone*, to every rational being, be they present or related to only in thought, so that every action arising from it must manifest a respectful attitude towards everyone.⁶⁸¹ In acting from conscience-qua-reason, in other words, I am just as much concerned with myself – and indeed with everyone else, too, if only *in abstracto* – as I am concerned with the other. Take, for example, my putting my hand on his back in last section's central example: while I hope I was able to convey that I did it out of a (loving) concern for him, having done it *from reason* would have surely looked quite differently, namely as my positing myself as an autonomous subject in the very process of comforting him. In such a case, my deed would have been, it could perhaps be said, done with a distanced and balanced view to both him and myself, to both his well-being and my autonomy⁶⁸² – and not only that: it would have just as much required a view, if only an implicit one, to everyone else, both those in the bar and those absent.⁶⁸³

I am not sure how exactly to make sense of this just sketched reading of action done from duty by means of Buber's I-It/I-You dichotomy, however. Perhaps it cannot be done. What can be said with confidence, however, is that it is not a manifestation of the I-You. If anything,

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid; Kant's wording in this passage makes it seem as if, for him, conscience indeed entails, very much in contrast to have I just suggested, that one 'holds up' something – namely duty – before one. What I think he means, however, is that conscience, because it is only 'felt' where there is a tension between one's inclinations and one's duty, must entail 'holding duty before' (or above) one's lower inclinations. But given that, as just stated, Kant understands conscience as purely subject-directed and, hence, as a feeling, it seems that this 'holding up' should not be understood in the sense of a mental representation, a mental object. In this sense, I disagree with Backström when he writes that, for Kant, conscience is simply understood "in terms of the application of the moral law to concrete actions and situations" (*The Fear of Openness*, 143) – if that were the case, then conscience *would* have the law as its object.

⁶⁸¹ Cf. Micha H. Werner, "The Immediacy Of Encounter And The Dangers Of Dichotomy," 207–8.

⁶⁸² Cf. Christoph Menke, *Autonomie und Befreiung*, 24–5.

⁶⁸³ That is not to say that what I did in putting my hand on my friend's back out of a concern *for him* was not reasonable – I would surely hold that it was. As was shown in my above discussion, the plain and simple ways in which we are concerned with, and care about, one another are that which moral reasoning, including of the Kantian categorical kind, must fall back upon, its 'last instance', as it were. For another interesting exploration of this line of thought, cf. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 385–400.

I would say that it is to be understood as an intellectualisation, and thus a corruption,⁶⁸⁴ of the I-You: not satisfied with understanding morality in terms of a response to the other, Kant sought to formulate a morality of universal *justice*. On this conception, moral action is defined in terms of action that breaks the claim of the particular other, or others, in order to do justice to each and every one at the same time, including the I itself. Understood in this way, the I-You would be implicated in the action done from duty, yet at the same time deserted so as to try to treat everyone in an equally respectful way. This point is also made by Lévinas, yet in an, as it were, reverse approach: starting with the absolute moral claim the other exerts on one, he holds that it is with ‘the Third’,⁶⁸⁵ as well as with the social world in its tow, that the notion of justice and, thus, of comparison between others, is introduced: with the Third and the demand that *everyone* is to be given their due, the moral relation to the particular other.⁶⁸⁶ Although no doubt more has to be said about this point, doing so would lead me beyond my present purpose – namely to understand Kant’s and McDowell’s moral philosophies in terms of Buber’s I-It relation – and into the wide debate on the relation between love and justice.

Let me recapitulate: on the wider understanding of the I-It I have proposed, the It has more ‘vestments’ than is suggested in Buber’s own discussion. When Buber speaks about the It, what he mostly has in mind is the *encountered* It – the stone, the tree, the animal, the human being. As soon as one attempts to make sense of traditional moral philosophy of the Aristotelian-Kantian bent by means of the I-It, however, it becomes apparent that also that by means of which moral action becomes possible, i.e. the criterion of morality (be it rational consistency or the noble), is, structurally speaking, an It, at least to the extent that the relation to the other is mediated by a (however implicit) relation to said criterion. A third, concomitant way in which the It enters moral philosophy is in terms of the respective individual’s conceptualisation of the situation in the light of what she takes the criterion of morality to be. In short: I can relate to him or her (It), I can relate to my conception of what I ought to do (It), and I can relate to the criterion of morality (It).

⁶⁸⁴ That is to say: a *corruption* of the I-You precisely in being an *intellectualisation* of it – for, after all, it is with the adoption of an intellectual – removed, distanced, impersonal – standpoint that the direct relation to the other is ruptured.

⁶⁸⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 157 ff.

⁶⁸⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, transl. M. B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press 1999), 97ff.; a good discussion of this thought can be found in William Paul Simmons, ‘The Third: Lévinas’ theoretical move from an-archival ethics to the realm of justice and politics’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25, no. 6 (1999): 83–107, esp. at 93–4.

3. Conclusion

In this third chapter, I proceeded to pave the way for the second-personal understanding of moral relationality that I will continue to develop for the remainder of the present dissertation. In the chapter's first, longer section, I propounded an extensive example of a morally charged meeting of two persons and subjected it to a philosophical analysis that brought to light the limitations of the moral thought of both Kant and McDowell (and, as a critique of the 'language of practical reason', cast a critical light on reason-centred moral philosophy as a whole). The analysis proceeded in three steps: in the first step (sub-section 1), I showed that the relational dynamics portrayed in the example could not be explained in terms of deliberation and decision without distorting it; in step two (sub-section 2), I began by expounding that Kant and McDowell are unable to capture the significance of the emotional dimension involved in interpersonal engagements before, secondly, showing up the limitations of the concept of (rational) intentionality; in the third step (sub-section 3), finally, I reflected on the significance of what it means to awaken to a sense of the other's importance and then concluded the analysis by expounding that moral understanding is, at its most basal, not a matter of reason-giving. In the chapter's second section, I then proceeded to translate the (moral) thought of Kant and McDowell into Buber's terminology, showing that both can be classified as I-It thinkers – or, more precisely: that neither is a thinker of the I-You. After all, it was shown that, considered from a Buberian vantage point, Kant is one (decisive) step ahead of McDowell, given that he, while failing to capture the You, nonetheless realised that moral relationality must be a relation to the other as *not-It*.

Chapter IV: The Second-Personal Relation in the Thought of Martin Buber

In what follows, I will elucidate how Martin Buber's I-You relation can be of help to further develop and clarify the understanding of moral relationality that I illustrated in my discussion of the last section's example as an alternative to the views I presented in the first two chapters. What has begun in the last chapter as the 'translation' of the philosophical register deployed by thinkers like Kant and McDowell – what I have called the language of practical reason – into a *pronominal* one will now be continued by juxtaposing to their third-personal approaches to morality a second-personal one. To this end, I will turn my attention to Buber, and especially (yet not exclusively) to his main work, *I and Thou*. This means that the following pages, like the first two chapters, will be rather exegetical; yet, just as in the first two chapters, the exegetical work will not be done for its own sake but will be guided throughout by my central question: *how can a better understanding of interpersonal togetherness help us to get a better understanding of morality?*

I begin the chapter with a brief reflection on how I position my own, moral-philosophical endeavour in relation to Buber's religious thought. I then continue where I ended the last chapter, namely the thought that the relation between I and You is not mediated by any It. This leads me to the relation between I, You, and I by differentiating between two forms of 'spokenness,' namely speaking-with and speaking-about. I proceed to address an objection of an imagined McDowellian and, in a final discussion of his thought, reveal thought, although subtle, it does not yield to us the notion of the You. I then turn to Buber's phenomenology of the encounter with the You, both discussing its temporal and spatial dimension. These insights then help to answer the question that it means for an I and a You to encounter one another in the real, socio-historically shaped world, a discussion in which Buber's notions of *ego* and *person* will become central. I then eventually turn to the specifically ethical dimension of Buber's thought, first reflecting on the relation between will and grace, before concluding with an examination of Buber's notion of conscience as the key to reading him as a moral philosopher.

1. Morality, Religion, and Relation

Developing an answer to this central question will by itself already point beyond Buber given that Buber does not conceive of his own thought as *moral* thought. In a brief reflection on the

relation between religion and morality, he states that “when religion does itself justice and asserts itself, it is much more dubious than morality, just because it is more actual and inclusive.”⁶⁸⁷ The actuality of religion that does itself justice is *dialogical* actuality⁶⁸⁸ – its “reality”⁶⁸⁹ is that of “the unconditioned being of the demander,”⁶⁹⁰ a being which cannot be taken into account by morality because its reality is merely that of “the demand of the demander.”⁶⁹¹ To this, however, Buber adds that “behind both [i.e. religion and morality] there lies in wait the—profane or holy—war against the situation’s power of dialogue, there lies in wait the ‘once-for-all’ which resists the unforeseeable moment.”⁶⁹² As a champion of precisely this “unforeseeable moment”⁶⁹³ of the lived, actual relation, Buber thus positions himself over against not only the kind of morality which, in its preoccupation with the demand, “hide[s] the face of our fellow-man,”⁶⁹⁴ but also with religion in its tendency to “hide from us as nothing else can the face of God.”⁶⁹⁵ His alternative can be described as a wedding of the religious and the ethical in the dialogical encounter: “as the ethical cannot be freed from the religious neither can the religious from the ethical without ceasing to do justice to the present truth.”⁶⁹⁶ For Buber, the present truth, in contrast to the truth of the ordered world of the I-It, is, as will be explored in more depth below,⁶⁹⁷ always the “truth of the relation”⁶⁹⁸ in which I is encountered by, and responds to, You.

In the light of this outline, it may seem problematic that I will not address the religious side of Buber’s thought. My reasons may appear equally unsatisfying, namely, that doing so would, firstly, be beyond the scope of the present work and, secondly, that I have never found

⁶⁸⁷ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 21.

⁶⁸⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 62: “All actual life is encounter”. It should be noted that the German adjective ‘wirklich’ can be translated as ‘actual’ and ‘real’. This is due to the fact that the German word combines both meanings: Just as *Wirklichkeit* is *reality-as-actualised*, as it were, so *wirklich* is *real-qua-actual*. So, although reading the ‘actuality’ of the I-You in terms of the actualisation of a potential is not misleading – Buber himself at times speaks about it that way (e.g. *ibid.*, 113) – the emphasis of *Wirklichkeit* (and all of its inflections) is that of reality as it is actualised, effected, in-between I and You. This should be kept in mind when I quote Buber from the English translation.

⁶⁸⁹ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 21.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*

⁶⁹³ The importance of the unforeseeable, the surprise, was already briefly discussed in chapter 3, section 1.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. also Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 51

⁶⁹⁵ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 21.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶⁹⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 82.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

myself encountering God⁶⁹⁹ (which, for Buber, is the only way of relating to God.)⁷⁰⁰ If I lack the phenomenological basis, would it not be better if I would avoid Buber altogether and seek support elsewhere? I do not think that this is necessary. Although Buber would presumably hold, and perhaps rightly, that one cannot get a grasp of the whole of his thought by suspending God, his approach is nonetheless one which, very deliberately, does not begin by presupposing God and illuminating human (and other ‘sublunary’⁷⁰¹) relationality in His light but, reversely, by elucidating human relationality without any presuppositions and then, from there, the common ground of all human beings, lead towards God. This is crucial in that God, although ultimately the one who allows us to fathom the ‘greater whole’, can only be encountered in and through the relation to the sublunary You.⁷⁰² Fathoming the truth of the relation to the sublunary You is thus something that is open to every human being, whether they have found themselves encountering God or not. Accordingly, the first two out of the three parts that make up *I and Thou* are dedicated respectively to the relation between the individual I and the individual You (part 1) and to the relation of I and You as part of a social and historical world (part 2). It will be these two parts that I will focus on – although interlaced with sporadic references to the third – as a philosophical repository for rethinking morality in the light of second-personal relationality.

In a sense, my undertaking can thus be described as running parallel to that of Buber’s: while Buber seeks to trace back religion, as it has become rigid and dusty, to its “living, active center”⁷⁰³ in the encounter with the You, so I seek to trace morality, as it has become depersonalised and concerned with the demand as abstracted from its demander, back to its point of origin, namely the encounter with You as you address me and rouse my responsibility for you.⁷⁰⁴ So, while Buber’s and my starting points differ, our basic concern is the same,

⁶⁹⁹ That is not to say that it may not be possible that if I were to describe some of my encounters to Buber, or someone with a similar understanding of God, they would say that they *were* encounters with God and that, accordingly, I simply failed to see them properly for what they were. Yet, whether such descriptions would or would not retroactively alter my experience cannot be determined in advance, i.e. before having been confronted with such descriptions. Up to this point, in any case, I have never felt myself in the presence of an all-inclusive and eternal You “in which the lines of relation, though parallel, intersect” (*I and Thou*, 84).

⁷⁰⁰ Martin Buber, Introduction to *Between Man and Man*, xvi: “I know God only in dialogue.”

⁷⁰¹ I say ‘sublunary’ because, although not divine, the You we encounter in flesh and blood is nonetheless not a natural being surrounded by other natural beings. This thought will be explored in more detail below.

⁷⁰² Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 65: “I am forbidden to speak essentially only with God and myself.”

⁷⁰³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 94.

⁷⁰⁴ This approach to Buber is also reflected in e.g. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 22–5, and Christopher Cordner, “Vision and Encounter in Moral Thinking,” in *Reading Iris Murdoch’s Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, edited by Nora Hämmäläinen & Gilian Dooley (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 209–25, esp. at 210–3. It should be noted, however, that Cordner somewhat carelessly states that “Buber’s key idea is that the fundamental moral relation is an I-Thou Relation” (*ibid.*, 210). Already shown to stand in need of refinement, the following reflections will hopefully further clarify that the relation between the I-You and morality is less straightforward than Cordner suggests.

namely the laying bare of what it means to be responsive to a You. The resulting phenomenology of the second-personal relation leads Buber ultimately back to a concern with our relation with God, the eternal You, while it leads me to a development of the basic outlines for a re-conceptualisation of morality.⁷⁰⁵

2. The Unmediatedness of the I-You

Let me continue where I concluded the last chapter, namely with the peculiar negativity of the I-You when looked at from the vantage point of the I-It. Towards the beginning of *I and Thou* Buber writes:

The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness. No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.⁷⁰⁶

The notion of *unmediatedness* is crucial, not only for Buber but also for my present purposes, given that central to my efforts in the present dissertation is to reveal how thinkers like Kant and McDowell distort the moral dimension of togetherness by presenting it as mediated by practical reason, be it formal (Kant) or substantial (McDowell). Yet before I return to morality, let me first take a closer look at what *Buber* means when he speaks of the unmediatedness of the I-You relation.

So, what exactly is it that, on Buber's view, does not mediate the relation between I and You? The first thing to note is that in the quoted passage, Buber obviously does not mean to offer a comprehensive list of what does *not* mediate the relation of I and You. Other aspects could easily be added, such as 'the linguistic system' or 'social roles'. Still, I think that briefly going through what Buber does mention will point us in the right direction.

Let me first look at the notion of *unmediatedness* as such. It is manifestly a negation of *mediatedness*, that is, of something's being mediated. Being mediated, in turn, means that two

⁷⁰⁵ As will hopefully become clear in what follows, it thus seems apt to say of my approach what Barabas says of Raimond Gaita and other 'Christianity-inspired-yet-not-Christian' thinkers, namely that 'despite my closeness to Christianity, neither my 'material' nor my methodology is 'religious'' ('In search of goodness,' 101).

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

relata are connected through a third, a medium – a mediated relation.⁷⁰⁷ Now, within the It-world, sketched in the last section of the previous chapter, every relation is mediated because in order for any relation between I and It to be established, recourse to a third – indeed, to the whole totality of Its – has to be sought.⁷⁰⁸ This is implicit in Buber’s remark that “It is by virtue of bordering on others”:⁷⁰⁹ if I would relate to It in isolation from the conceptual structures that imbue it with meaning (i.e. the other Its) and, thus, make it what it is, I would relate to nothing. So, it is not merely the case that without such mediation, the individual Its would exist standing apart from one another, in isolation; rather, their very existence as the Its they are depends on their being related to one another.

That the I-You relation is not mediated in such a way is crystallised in Buber’s first observation that “nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You” – following Kant and the post-Kantian tradition, Buber understands conceptualisation precisely in terms of representation of something (It) as part of an It-world.

With the dismissal of the conceptual, the rest follows. The means and the purpose of which Buber speaks, firstly, are disqualified as possible mediators of the relation, given that they, too, are part of the I-It logic:⁷¹⁰ *I can use the other, but if I do, she is no longer You but It.* The same goes for knowledge and imagination. Knowledge is always a knowledge that ‘X is so-and-so’ and, hence, a knowledge *about* something, some It. Imagination, on the other hand, is the individual’s ability to picture – represent before its mind’s eye – that ‘X is so-and-so’.⁷¹¹ The difference between knowledge and imagination is that only the former needs to retain a connection to reality, albeit often an abstract one, which it must be possible to lay bare – in the

⁷⁰⁷ *Mediation* is perhaps the central notion of Hegelian philosophy (cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to Dialectics*, transl. Nicholas Walker, ed. Christoph Ziermann (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), for an especially comprehensive development of this idea). Although I will not be able to explore the relation between the thought of Buber and that of Hegel within the confines of the present work – which, it seems to me, would be a both very promising and very challenging endeavour – it should be noted that Buber discusses Hegel in some of his lesser known texts, especially in “What is Man,” 163–9). In these discussions, he takes issue with Hegel in a way that anticipates Lévinas’ much more thorough critique of Hegelian philosophy, namely by presenting his thought as the consummation of I-It thinking: “undisturbed by any kind of adulteration by actuality” (ibid., 169), the “Hegelian house of the universe is admired, explained, and imitated; but it proves uninhabitable” (ibid., 166).

⁷⁰⁸ Once again recall Spinoza’s ‘omnium determinatio negatio est’.

⁷⁰⁹ *I and Thou*, 55; a longer version of the passage was already quoted in the previous chapter, section 2.

⁷¹⁰ This was already discussed at the end of the last chapter. It should be noted, however, that the original German word Buber uses here for *purpose* is *Zweck*, also translatable with *end*. This may be an indication that he regards thinking of the other as an end-in-itself (*Zweck an sich*) also as a form of turning her into an It. Yet, what Buber says elsewhere is ambiguous regarding this point – as already pointed out, Buber presents the I-It relation as a relation of use, which is expressly not the relation to the other qua end-in-itself. On the other hand, however, he also makes clear that the dialogical I is not to be conflated with the “I-in-itself” (*I and Thou*, 65), not specifying, but at least suggesting, that his target here is Kant.

⁷¹¹ The reason for Buber to banish knowledge and imagination so thoroughly to the realm of the It is that they are not intrinsically connected to the encounter with reality. I may know the rough shape of Africa and I may imagine Aristophanes’ spherical people without having ever ‘encountered’ either.

last instance, by showing and pointing to the world around us.⁷¹² In contrast to knowledge, imagination thus need not be answerable⁷¹³ – it makes no claim regarding how matters stand but is what it is simply in virtue of being conjured up before the mind’s eye.

Both knowledge and imagination share with anticipation – that is, the imagining, perhaps with good reason, that ‘X will (perhaps, probably, or certainly) be so-and-so’⁷¹⁴ – the lack of an intrinsic connection to the encounter with reality. This is different in the case of memory, that is, the knowledge of something one had experienced or encountered in the past. So, while memory, too, has a third-personal form – i.e. that ‘X was so-and-so’⁷¹⁵ – it has this form in virtue of a real experience that has become ingrained into one’s mind. Despite the given event already having passed, remembering it may plunge it “from particularity into wholeness,” namely when what was past become alive again here and now and in such a way that one remembers not merely *some particulars about it* but the event *in its wholeness*. In this way, what is remembered, while not a full-fledged I-You relation, nonetheless goes beyond the I-It. Most, if not all, of us are familiar with one’s memory resurging and enveloping one – one of the great literary monument erected in the name of these sometimes so overwhelming, meaning-filled moments is Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.⁷¹⁶

In chapter 2, section 2, it was shown that, in their intentionality, the human emotions and appetites are also tied up with objects, with Its – I crave for something, I fear something, I am disgusted by something, etc.⁷¹⁷ Similarly, the above mentioned greed is always a greed for

⁷¹² Kant offers the helpful distinction between “productive imagination”, involved in the production of mental representation alongside sensibility and understanding, and “reproductive imagination” which uses that which it has already synthesised – forms, colours, textures, sounds, living beings, and so on – so as to produce its own creations (cf. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic View*, transl. Robert B. Loudon, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller & Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 278); as regards the above of Buber, it should be added that, in the quoted passage, Buber is talking about *prior* knowledge, in contrast to the encounter here and now, to which showing and pointing is at least related.

⁷¹³ Conceptualising knowledge in terms of our answerability to our experience of reality is one of the central themes of McDowell’s *Mind and World*. It will become topical once again in section 4 below.

⁷¹⁴ That is not to say that anticipation is therefore less caught up in the past than other modes of the I-It. Theunissen makes this clear when he writes that, for Buber, “the anticipated and planned future belongs to the sphere of the It, to the means and mediations of objectifying experience. Accordingly, it is nothing other than the extension of the past.” And further: “In reckoning out in advance, I draw out the lines of the past by determining the not-yet-existing out of the determinateness of that which already exists.” (*Der Andere*, 296; cf. also *The Other*, 310. An additional remark: when quoting from Theunissen’s *Der Andere* – which I will do often, given the quality and the thoroughness of its analysis of Buber – I will indicate where the passage is found both in the German original as well as in the English translation. The reason is that, although having provided a helpful tool, the English translation is often inaccurate and sometimes even misleading; accordingly, I decided to translate the required passages on my own, yet often with the English translation as a starting point.)

⁷¹⁵ For a sharp criticism of such an understanding of memory, in a way which shares some similarities with Buber’s remarks, cf. Norman Malcolm, *Memory and Mind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), esp. chapter 5, “The Picture Theory of Memory,” 120–64.

⁷¹⁶ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, 4 Vol. London: Everyman’s Library, 2001.

⁷¹⁷ This naturally raises the question what, in contrast, it means to fear, or be disgusted by, *You*. The answer that will be developed in section 2e. of the next chapter, primarily via the example of hatred, is that one can fear or be disgusted by *You* not in virtue of your ‘whole being’ but in virtue of something (or many things) *about you*.

something, some It. And longing, a “dream” as long as it is still the as-yet-unattained He, or She that one longs for, the ‘object of one’s desire,’⁷¹⁸ undergoes a radical shift when one stands unreservedly in the presence of the one longed for: in the face of your addressing me, my response to You will be the way in which my longing for you manifests, actualised at the same time as it is felt, fulfilling me instead of driving me yonder. In your presence, I am still filled with longing, yet not for something or someone but for You who are already there.⁷¹⁹

In all of these and other respects, the I-You is not mediated by the various forms of the I-It. The removal of mediation, however, brings to light its positive counterpart, namely the freedom of the other and its address: “As independence from my conception [Entwurf], this unmediatedness is suitable, within certain boundaries, [to describe my relation] to every other” because “the action of the partner [i.e. said other] that is the fulfilment [Vollzug] of his freedom cannot be conceptualised by me.”⁷²⁰ The other’s freedom that is laid bare to me by my refraining from representing and utilising it, in other words, is that of her freely addressing me with her whole being.⁷²¹ (And while I will focus on relations between human beings, it should be noted that this freedom is not the freedom of autonomy and, hence, of reason – that is, the particularly human freedom to decide, act, and think – but the freedom intrinsic to the address of any being that I may encounter as You. It is, one could say, the freedom of what I encounter claiming me in its own peculiar manner, here and now, in a way that is not obstructed by some It, neither from my side nor that of the other.)⁷²² Yet that is only one side of the coin, for by responding to your address in such a way that leaves you free, I at the same time also actualise my own freedom. For Buber, freedom – in the sense of being who one really is, with one’s “whole

⁷¹⁸ Talking about emotions and appetites as connected to the ‘objects of desire’ raises another crucial point which will be discussed in the next chapter (section 1.a.): to the extent that the emotions and appetites are intentionally directed to objects, they are also bound up with our subjective inclinations, our individual psychological make-up. They have their roots, to put it in Buber’s terms, ‘in’ us, not ‘between’ us (*I and Thou*, 66).

⁷¹⁹ This echoes Lévinas’ notion of the desire for the other (cf. chapter 3, section 1.c.ii.). Cf. also Simone Weil, *Simone Weil. An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 293: “Only desire without an object is empty of imagination” and “Every desire for enjoyment belongs to the future and the world of illusion, whereas if we desire only that a being should exist, he exists: what more is there to desire?”

⁷²⁰ Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 285; *The Other*, 299. It should be noted that the word ‘action’ is precisely not used in the way the transcendental philosophy uses it but in the sense of Buber’s “pure action” (*I and Thou*, 92; cf. my juxtaposition of Kantian and Buberian action in section 2 of the last chapter.)

⁷²¹ This is, again, not to say that the freedom of the other’s address is something she brings about intentionally. When my friend tells me he wants to be left alone but I see in his overall comportment that he is on the verge of a mental break-down, it is his overall comportment in which his free and “actual being” is disclosed to me. Here, it is precisely his intentionality which “holds down what is tied into it [i.e. into the It-world]” (*I and Thou*, 90) and, thus, stands in the way of his own freedom.

⁷²² Cf. Buber, *I and Thou*, 57–9 & 144–5.

being”⁷²³ – is actualised only in the encounter of I and You, in togetherness.⁷²⁴ This thought and its implications will guide the remainder of this chapter.

3. Two Kinds of Speaking

Just a few lines into *I and Thou*, Buber states: “The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one’s whole being.”⁷²⁵ The important point is obviously the one concerning the speaker’s *being* and its (lack of) *wholeness*; developing a sense of what Buber might mean by that will require a detour, however. Let me thus begin with another issue: when Buber says that the basic words – i.e. the word pairs I-You or I-It – are “spoken”, he does not mean ‘spoken in language’, that is, in words synthesised into sentences according to grammatical rules (etc.)⁷²⁶ but rather two ways of being, two ways of relating to what one encounters. But then why does he refer to them as two ways of *speaking*? For Buber, both the I-It as well as the I-You are closely bound up with spokenness,⁷²⁷ yet in two different ways (none of which require actual articulation in language, audible or readable): the It, on the one hand, is ‘spoken’ in the sense that the one who “stands in it”⁷²⁸ is able to *speaking about* what she experiences or uses⁷²⁹ – recall the Kantian/McDowellian emphasis on the subject that conceptualises the world around (and within)⁷³⁰ it in such a way that it *represents*

⁷²³ Ibid., 54.

⁷²⁴ In the world of relation, “I and You confront each other freely in a reciprocity that is not involved in or tainted by any causality; here man finds guaranteed the freedom of his being and of being” (ibid., 100). A similar thought, yet with a different (i.e. political) accent is found in Arendt’s *Between Past and Future*, 148. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean that the freedom of I and You is co-dependent, so that I can only be free if you are and vice versa. The idea is rather that I cannot be free by myself, without relating to You. Jesus surely related to his tormentors as You, yet they did not answer his address in the same spirit.

⁷²⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 89: “even as verbal speech may first become word in the brain of man and then become sound in his throat”, Buber states, “both are merely refractions of the true event because in truth language does not reside in man but man stands in language and speaks out of it.” Hence: “The linguistic form proves nothing. After all, many a spoken You really means an It to which one merely says You from habit, thoughtlessly. And many a spoken It really means a You whose presence one may remember with one’s whole being, although one is far away” (ibid., 111). In short: one may say ‘You’ and mean It just as one can say ‘It’ and mean You. Hence, Buber concludes: do not focus on linguistic signs and their grammar (their syntax, semantics, or pragmatics) if you want to learn about the I-It and the I-You; although part of it, what is essential – i.e. the ways of relating that find expression in them – happens ‘behind the scenes’. In a similar spirit, Weil writes: “The same words (e.g. a man says to his wife: ‘I love you’) can be commonplace or extraordinary according to the manner in which they are spoken. And this manner depends on the depth of the region in a man’s being from which they proceed without the will being able to do anything” (Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 295).

⁷²⁷ Following Buber (*I and Thou*, 175), I will use the word ‘spokenness’ (*Gesprochenheit*) to refer to both speech articulated in language and ‘sub-linguistic’ speech.

⁷²⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 83–4: “It is only *about* [the It-world] that you can come to an understanding with others” whereas you “cannot come to an understanding *about* [the You-world] with others” (emphasis in the original).

⁷³⁰ Buber makes it clear (*I and Thou*, 56) that representing one’s on inner states are just as much a matter of the I-It as representing the things around one. This echoes the already mentioned Kantian distinction between inner and outer sense.

it and is, hence, ‘answerable’ to what it experiences and does. In this sense, one could say that the spokenness of the It consists in its being linguistically pre-formed, a preformation the criterion of which is, again, its articulability.⁷³¹ The You, on the other hand, is ‘spoken’ in the sense of its being addressed, or *spoken to* (or perhaps even better: *spoken with*) – and not only that, the relation between I and You also entails *my* being addressed, and spoken to, by You and, accordingly, it also entails *my* response to your address.⁷³² This is a mode of spokenness that, although possible to articulate in language (e.g. simply by using the word You)⁷³³, need not find expression of such a kind. It may also be done non-linguistically⁷³⁴ or in such a way that the linguistic and the non-linguistic intermingle – consider how, for instance, a mere glance, perhaps (but not necessarily) accompanied by a grunt, can address one as the You of another. The linguistic form is merely accidental to “the unformed, undifferentiated, prelinguistic word”⁷³⁵ of the address. Thus, it is the speech of the I-You that first “establishes the world of relation”⁷³⁶ – without I and You, there is no relation and, hence, no language. As that which establishes relation and, thus, the very condition of the possibility of language,⁷³⁷ it cannot itself be linguistically formed.

⁷³¹ In other words: one can only speak about what one encounters in the form of the It because one has already experienced the world in a pre-formed way, just as one has to conceive of oneself as already experiencing the world in a pre-formed way because one is able to articulate it in the form of the It. This, I take it, is McDowell’s Kantian conceptualism in a nutshell (as he develops it mainly in *Mind and World*).

⁷³² As Theunissen aptly puts it: “The speaking of the basic word I-You is the addressing [das *Ansprechen*, literally ‘speaking-to’], that of the basic word I-It the bespeaking [das *Besprechen*, literally ‘speaking-about’]. Accordingly, the sphere of speech is about the twofoldness of addressing and bespeaking.” (*Der Andere*, 283; *The Other*, 295–6; emphasis in the original).

⁷³³ Even if it is articulated in language, its place is fundamentally different than all else in it, namely in its relation-establishing and –sustaining vocative voice. Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 286, footnote 12 (this footnote is missing in the English translation). See also Bernhard Waldenfels. *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 261–2; in what follows, I will always provide my own translations of Waldenfels.

⁷³⁴ Indeed, only “silence toward the You [...] leaves the You free and stands together with it in reserve where the spirit does not manifest itself but is” (Buber, *I and Thou*, 89). According to Theunissen, this means the “Thou addressed is most present [...] at that moment when nothing is spoken about [...]” The Thou “drives from out of itself beyond speaking[-about]. Which means: it drives into silence. Silence is thus the consummating end [in the sense of ‘endpoint’] which speaking[-about] is not”. Hence, dialogical silence “does not essentially lie before but after speaking[-about]” – “Only who can speak can also be silent” (*Der Andere*, 287; *The Other*, 300).

⁷³⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷³⁷ Although Buber himself seldom deploys transcendental formulations such as this one, there are passages in which he resorts to them – yet whenever he does, it is in order to fathom the *a priori* of the situation or of the relation (cf. e.g. *ibid.*, 78–9).

On Buber's picture, the representational – or, as he puts it, *the experiential*⁷³⁸ – character of the I-It is marked by a superficiality concomitant with “remoteness,”⁷³⁹ “discreteness,”⁷⁴⁰ and “detachment.”⁷⁴¹ In a passage the connotations of which are lost in the English translation,⁷⁴² Buber states that in experiencing, “[m]an goes over the surface of things” and “brings from them some knowledge of their condition,” thus experiencing what “there is to things”.⁷⁴³ In this way, It is taken account of as a “loose bundle of named qualities,”⁷⁴⁴ located in the “system of coordinates”⁷⁴⁵ that is the world of time and space, “bordering”⁷⁴⁶ on other Its. Those who relate to what they encounter in this mode of taking account – or, as I have put it in the last chapter, in this mode of ‘taking stock’ – of what there is around them do not “participate in the world”⁷⁴⁷ because “the experience is ‘in them’ and not between them and the world.”⁷⁴⁸

None of this holds when it comes to the relation to the You. Theunissen remarks that “as certain as it is that the It is the representative of what is present, it is just as clear, on the other hand, that the talking-to [i.e. the I-You] has no representational function.”⁷⁴⁹ In addressing, and responding to finding oneself addressed, one does not represent – rather one is *in the present with*, and *in the presence of*, the You. The representing concomitant with the It thus becomes secondary, a subsequent step: “what is talked about [and represented, i.e. the It] is, as such, not the present thing to which it is related, but it represents the latter as it presents itself. [...] To put it formulaically, one could say: the talking-about is the *conclusive making-*

⁷³⁸ A clarificatory remark: when, in this chapter, I use the word ‘experience’ in such a way that I attribute it to Buber, or use it to describe Buber’s thought, I will use it in his restricted technical sense. In other contexts, I will take the liberty and be more lenient in how I make use of it. As the next paragraph shows, Buber uses the term experience in the sense of *objectifying* experience and, hence, as intrinsically tied to the I-It.

⁷³⁹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 60.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 82.

⁷⁴² The passage is this: “Der Mensch befährt die Fläche der Dinge und erfährt sie.” (Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), 5). Kaufmann offers a helpful analysis of the issue: “Both *erfährt* in this sentence and *erfahre* in the preceding paragraph [i.e. ‘Man sagt, der Mensch erfahre seine Welt. Was heißt das?’ (ibid., 4)] are forms of *er-fahren*, the ordinary German equivalent of the verb, to experience. The noun is *Erfahrung*. These words are so common that it has hardly ever occurred to anyone that they are closely related to *fahren*, an equally familiar word that means to drive or go. *Befahren* means to drive over the surface of something. The effect of the German sentence is to make the reader suddenly aware of the possibility that *erfahren* might literally mean finding out by going or driving, or possibly by traveling. But by further linking *erfahren* with *befahren* Buber manages to suggest that experience stays on the surface” (*I and Thou*, 55, footnote 4).

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 303; *The Other*, 317.

*present of the presence that has already been present.*⁷⁵⁰ Relating to It, in other words, is a re-presenting of what has been present in a non-represented way when it still unfolded in the presence of the other.

4. The Dialectics of (It-)World and Reality

But can the threat of representationalism really be overcome simply by invoking the notion of *presence* in this way? Let me venture one more time into the thought of John McDowell so as to anticipate a final attempt on the part of the representationalist to show that the relation between presence and representation need not be conceived of in the Buberian fashion. After all, it is one of the main philosophical efforts of *Mind and World* to expatiate that experience – a term which, for McDowell, simply denotes *the* human being’s minded way of being in the world and, thus, does not have the pejorative connotation it has for Buber – must be thought of as being “answerable to the world”⁷⁵¹ which, in turn, may mean being unable to produce a satisfying answer. And if so, one will find oneself compelled to alter the conceptual structures that govern one’s experience.⁷⁵² In other words, the world as it is experienced may at any moment reveal itself to be different than hitherto thought of so that the respective *new* experience will oblige us to “rethink”⁷⁵³ some of the “putative rational linkages”⁷⁵⁴ of the conceptual whole that is the world as it is conceived of.⁷⁵⁵ In its indeterminacy and unpredictability, the world may thus demand that we transform our representation of it – lest we end up with a theoretically unsatisfying picture on which our experience finds itself in a predicament that McDowell poignantly describes as a “frictionless spinning in the void.”⁷⁵⁶

Taken together with his Aristotelian account of ethics expounded in chapter 2, it would seem that the idea of reality demanding us to rethink our concepts of it can also be used to explain – although McDowell himself does not – how it can be possible for us to suddenly have a radically different perception of *someone else* and her moral salience.⁷⁵⁷ If, say, the selfish

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. (302 in the German version); the original German sentence is: “Formelhaft könnte man sagen: Das Bereden ist das *abschließliche Hervorkommenlassen des schon vorgekommenen Vorkommenden*” (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁵¹ McDowell, *Mind and World*, xii.

⁷⁵² McDowell offers a perspicuous development of this idea in the Introduction of *Mind and World* (xi–xxiv).

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 186.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ What follows is a continuation of a discussion that I already began in chapter 3, section 2 b. & c.

⁷⁵⁶ McDowell, *Mind and World*, e.g. 11.

⁷⁵⁷ The closest McDowell comes to making such a point himself is, as already noted, when he speaks about the possibility of people trying to make one another see something in a new, ethical light (e.g. “Virtue and Reason,” 65 & “Are Moral Requirements Categorical Imperatives?,” 85–6). It is quite telling, however, that even in such examples the focus is on *what people say to one another* in order to make one another perceive something

and greedy banker suddenly perceives the beggar (whom he up to that point only saw as a nuisance that should be removed) as someone to whom he should give some money, perhaps even in such a way that all other practical alternatives become silenced, then this will be understandable, it seems, as a new experience in which reality is revealed in a new, more lucid way.⁷⁵⁸ Hence, it is not only the I that “appropriates”⁷⁵⁹ the world, as Buber puts it, but reversely also reality that challenges the I – in some cases the reality of a particular other person. Just as mind and world co-constitute each other, so they also co-transform each other.

A dialectical representationalism of the McDowellian kind finds expression in Bertram and Bertinetto:

Novelty and unpredictability [...] are not opposed to norms as guiding criteria and [...] habits [but are essential elements] of how human practices work normatively, which is to say, by coping with the specific reality of concrete situations. Norms only work (are applied and enforced) if they can be (creatively) changed, which is to say, if their sense and/or their normative power can be (trans)formed through interactions between individuals and through confrontations with a changing reality. And norms are again and again opened to the new because only in this way can they guide practices (in their ever-changing situations) and be effective as norms.⁷⁶⁰

Novelty and unpredictability is not something that the McDowellian must struggle to place in his outlook; on the contrary, the outlook depends on them in order for its normativist premise not to collapse into some kind of quasi-mechanical picture of human action.⁷⁶¹ But if that is McDowell’s view, then does what Buber says against representationalism with his pejorative notion of *experience* not miss its target? On a superficial level, it does – that comes out precisely in Buber’s speaking only about the I’s appropriating the world, not about the world challenging the I’s appropriation. His criticism does not address the more subtle, dialectical representationalism of McDowell.⁷⁶² On a deeper level, however, the thrust of his criticism still

differently – it is never simply *in virtue of their presence* that one of the protagonists in McDowell’s examples comes to see ethical reality more lucidly.

⁷⁵⁸ This would, of course, not suffice for a proper display of virtue given that virtue requires constancy and reliability (cf. McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 51).

⁷⁵⁹ *I and Thou*, 113.

⁷⁶⁰ Alessandro Bertinetto & Georg W. Bertram, “We Make Up the Rules as We Go Along: Improvisation as an Essential Aspect of Human Practices?,” *Open Philosophy* 3 (2020): 202–21, at 212; although McDowell himself does not expressly develop ‘the dialectics of the old and the new’, it becomes clear especially in *Mind and World*’s ‘Postscript to Lecture VI’ (186–7) that the just quoted passage is in line with his view.

⁷⁶¹ This picture – in which rule-following is portrayed as the workings of a ‘super-rigid machine’ – is incisively criticised McDowell in “Wittgenstein in Following a Rule.”

⁷⁶² This being said, there are some remarks of Buber that point in the direction of him being well aware that it is not only the I that appropriates the It-world but that, reversely, the It-world also appropriates the I – yet without

holds. The first point to be made, already raised in chapter 2 (section c.), is that, however great a transformation is provoked by one's experience of the world, it is always a trans-formation of an already formed conceptual outlook – a re-experiencing of a reality already experienced. To this, however, the McDowellian may retort that this is all it needs – why embrace the notion of some ephemeral You, apparently beyond and above all that we encounter within the world, if the kind of dialectical representationalism he offers suffices to explain how the presence of someone else may bring about even substantial changes in one's conceptual outlook, be it in ethical or other respects?

Given that Buber does not address this point, let me formulate what I think is a reply in a Buberian – and certainly in a dialogical – spirit:⁷⁶³ on the McDowellian picture, even what appears to be a radical shift of attitude, a genuine change of heart⁷⁶⁴, has to be made sense of in terms of a continuity between how one understood before and how one understands now, so that the old understanding that one already 'had' builds the basis for the given challenging experience to transform it into one's new understanding. The question which here arises, however, is: from which position is this claim about continuity made? Replying "From that of the McDowellian" is not a satisfying answer because I precisely put into question whether this is a privileged position – not because it is a *McDowellian* making it but because it is made from the position of an unengaged theoretician. Yet I would say that, in cases such as this, the authority does not lie on the side of the unengaged theoretician but on the side of those who are directly involved – that is, those who actually underwent a radical shift of attitude or those who find or found themselves in the presence of someone who underwent such a shift – and try to convey a sense of it to others. So, what *would* the McDowellian reply to someone who would describe her own change of attitude emphatically as *not* a transformation of a prior conceptual outlook but as some kind of revelation or conversion? It would seem that if he were to reply in a way that were consistent with his own theory, he would have to hold that whoever would describe her change of attitude in that way would be mistaken on some level, simply because such a change is impossible. Indeed, it would be strange if he would *not* think of her description as misconceived, given that the mere possibility of the kind of shift of attitude at stake puts

it making any substantial difference to his account. In section 2 of *I and Thou*, for instance, he often speaks of the particular – yet 'cold' and 'lonely' – wealth of the ever proliferating It-world, resulting in an "improvement of the ability to experience and use," (ibid., 92) thus suggesting that the It-I also changes as its It-world evolves. Unfortunately, however, Buber does not address the issue at length.

⁷⁶³ This is, once again, due to the fact that Buber does not address this issue; hence, I will make use of his thought and see how far we can get by applying it to the just sketched McDowellian conception of the mind-world relation.

⁷⁶⁴ Such a 'language of the heart' – of half- and whole-heartedness, of warm- and cold-heartedness as well as of changes of heart – will become a more prominent theme in the next two chapters. At present, suffice it to say that it points to a marked shift from an I-It to an I-You stance or vice versa.

wholesale into question McDowell's naturalism – if it is granted, then it is also granted that the totality of what can be experienced in the natural world is not all there is.

Yet, some people *would* speak in such a way. On the McDowellian outlook, however, those who do must be assumed to have adopted some variant of what he calls “rampant Platonism,”⁷⁶⁵ i.e. the view that there is a transcendent realm of reason separate from ours – a view which, regardless of whether it appears in a religious raiment or not, is flawed in that it is unable to explain how we, qua natural beings, are supposed to be responsive to supernatural reason.⁷⁶⁶ But does speaking about a shift of attitude or a change of heart in the way I have suggested that some people may feel themselves compelled to require embracing such an irrational outlook? If it is assumed that proceeding phenomenologically – which, it seems, McDowell seeks to do⁷⁶⁷ – means developing a first-personal account of one's experiences (in the wide sense, including ‘relational’ experiences), then it would seem that this cannot be taken for granted *a priori*. For then, whether the prospect of a relation inexplicable in natural terms is meaningful, reflecting how we actually find ourselves in the world, is a question that can be answered only by understanding it as an appeal to others – that is, as an appeal to everyone concerned – to ask themselves whether they do not find the offered description of said prospect to present a truthful reflection of their experience. McDowell seems to assume that today, the only sensible phenomenological approach to ethical matters just *is* the naturalist one⁷⁶⁸ – yet whether that is so or not ultimately hangs on whether those to whom he offers his description see it as an authentic description of their ways of being in the world.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁵ McDowell, *Mind and World*; the term is first introduced on 77.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 83. It cannot be checked-up on because it lies beyond the realm we are able to intuit and because “thoughts without content are empty” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 193–4).

⁷⁶⁷ As Schear puts it, McDowell's “effort to make [his] teaching safe is offered in the name (following David Wiggins) of a ‘careful and sensitive moral phenomenology’” (Joseph K. Schear, “Are we essentially rational animals?,” *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World. The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, 2).

⁷⁶⁸ This comes out in remarks such as “what is specifically human is surely natural (the idea of the human is the idea of what pertains to a certain species of animals)” (McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77). In a sense, this is an analytically true point, namely if ‘specifically’ is taken to refer to ‘natural species’. Saying that human beings may fulfil us with an overwhelming sense of their preciousness is another matter, however. And both claims are not the same as *actually being overcome* by a sense of *your* preciousness, i.e. that of the unique individual in whose presence one finds oneself (cf. Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 263ff.).

⁷⁶⁹ McDowell thus seems to find himself in a genuine pickle. On the one hand, it seems that, regardless of whether one regards him as adopting a phenomenological or a late-Wittgensteinian ‘ordinary language’ approach to questions such as these, he would have to be committed to refraining from attributing to philosophy a prescriptive role – in this case, a refraining from telling people that their ways of describing some of their experiences of revelation or conversion as radical ruptures are flawed. On the other hand, however, he is forced, in virtue of his own theoretical commitments, to wholesale reject any attempt of people making sense of their lives in terms that pose a threat to his naturalistic outlook. But why adopt such a naturalistic framework in the first place? In the case of McDowell, it seems that he found himself faced with two equally unsatisfactory alternatives: either the already mentioned ‘rampant Platonism’ or the ‘bald naturalism’ outlined at the beginning of chapter two. But if that is so, then it would seem that it cannot be determined *a priori* that it is impossible for there not to be further alternatives apart from those two that McDowell saw himself compelled to reject. This being said, it should be noted to McDowell's credit that, at least in *Mind and World*, he does not present his

The most important point, however, is that the You is not encountered primarily through some kind of conversion or revelation experience, that is, as an experience with something radically new; rather, it is something that – or *someone who* – is always already there, the concrete individual(s) with whom we are always already bound up in relation and, hence, those whose presence we, at most, may come to disregard.⁷⁷⁰ In other words, we may neglect or lose sight of You but – as will be expatiated further in section 5.b. below – we cannot entirely lose touch with it lest we also lose touch with ourselves and the world. If that is so, however, then the encounter with the other that strikes one as revelatory is better understood in terms of an opening of one’s eyes, a (re-)awakening to the other’s presence.⁷⁷¹ Of course, the more one is caught up in a naturalistic (or some other kind of) world-view, the more will a sudden, exceptional encounter with the You strike one as ‘otherworldly’ or ‘supernatural’, but only because, up to that point, ‘a picture had held one captive.’⁷⁷²

McDowell’s thought, however – unlike that of Gaita or Weil, for instance⁷⁷³ – makes no room for the non-natural, not even in the form of the experience of a rupture, an encounter with ‘the Other’ of naturalism. The view he opposes (next to a scientific ‘bald’ naturalism, that is), is a variant of Platonism in which the supernatural realm of reason appears to be structured *just like* the naturalised space of reasons for which McDowell advocates. In that sense, McDowell conceives of the supernatural as *just another kind* of I-It realm. As such, however, the Platonist’s transcendent realm of reason is, at least from a Buberian vantage point, still far too close to McDowell’s own, naturalised realm of reason. Both are variants of the I-It – in neither is room for the You. McDowell rejects the rampant Platonist’s transcendent I-It world and embraces his natural one. Within this I-It world, however, no amount of dialectical transformation, of a re-alignment of our perception with reality, gets us even an inkling closer to the You.

approach as *the* one and only approach but rather presents it as *a* possible way (a “diagnosis with a view to a cure”; *Mind and World*, xvii) for ‘us’ to overcome a prevalent “philosophical anxiety” (ibid., xiii–xiv), namely precisely that of being stuck between two unsatisfying metaphysical alternatives. (For a good discussion of this issue in a refreshingly critical spirit, cf. Thomas Wallgren, ‘Mind and Moral Matter’, in *Moral Foundations of the Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Joel Backström, Hannes Nykänen, Niklas Toivakainen, Thomas Wallgren (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 31–84, esp. at 46–51). In any case, I would say that dialogical philosophy of the Buberian kind is another and better alternative, both in terms of diagnosis and ‘view to a cure’. While I cannot go further in to the subtleties of this dimension of the relation between McDowell’s dialectical representationalism and Buber’s wholesale rejection of representationalism, I hope that the remainder of this dissertation will simply *present* the latter as a genuine alternative.

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. Waldenfels, *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 291–3.

⁷⁷¹ This was already discussed in chapter 2, section 1 a. & b.

⁷⁷² Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §115: “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.”

⁷⁷³ I will discuss this side of Gaita’s thought at length in chapter 6, section 2.b.i. In the course of this, reference will also be made to Weilian motives.

5. The Phenomenology of the Encounter

In the light of McDowell's failure, despite his thesis of the mind's "openness"⁷⁷⁴ to the world, to accommodate the notion of the You, let me thus once again return to Buber's own 'dialogical-phenomenological' account of the I-You relation. The starting point will, once again, be the I-It – yet, this time, the I-You will not be presented primarily as the *not*-It but as 'something' in its own right. The two dimensions to examine are that of time and space. When Buber first addresses them, it is still in a primarily negative manner: "When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, [...] He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time [...]"⁷⁷⁵ That the You is not an It among Its has already been discussed – but that it does not appear within time and space? That seems a ludicrous claim – after all, You are *there*, right in front of me and our engagement obviously abides in time. In one sense, Buber would agree to this; the question for him is, once again, in which sense the terms time and space are meant. That is, his point is not that the encounter with You is not temporal or spatial but rather that its temporality and spatiality are of a different kind than the temporality and spatiality of the I-It. Let me, for the sake of simplicity, refer to the time and space of the I-It world as 'represented' time and space. To conceive of someone in represented time and space is to place her as "a dot in the world grid of time and space", that is, to represent her as something that endures in time and is situated at some places in space.⁷⁷⁶

a. The Future-Directed Presence of You

Let me quote at length the decisive passage in *I and Thou* in which Buber sets off the temporality of the I-You from that of the I-It:

The present—not that which is like a point and merely designates whatever our thoughts may posit as the end of 'elapsed' time, the fiction of the fixed lapse, but the

⁷⁷⁴ McDowell speaks of the mind's openness to the world throughout *Mind and World*; the term is introduced on 26.

⁷⁷⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 59.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59. In line with the account Kant develops in his First Critique, the picture Buber presents suggests that he holds that time and space stand in a relation of co-dependency with the empirical entities, the Its, that populate it – empty space could not be conceived of as space while time in which there would be no change would not be time (cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 172–92).

actual and fulfilled present—exists only insofar as presentness, encounter, and relation exist. Only as the You becomes present does presence come into being.

The I of the basic word I-It, the I that is not bodily confronted by a You but surrounded by a multitude of ‘contents’, has only a past and no present. In other words: insofar as a human being makes do with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no presence. He has nothing but objects; but objects consist in having been.

Presence is not what is evanescent and passes but what confronts us, waiting and enduring. And the object is not duration but standing still, ceasing, breaking off, becoming rigid, standing out, the lack of relation, the lack of presence.

What is essential is lived in the present, objects in the past.⁷⁷⁷

In the first sentence, between the two hyphens, Buber’s understanding of represented time is spelled out in more detail: the represented present is “a point” that “merely designates whatever our thoughts may posit as the end of ‘elapsed’ time”. In other words, representing the present requires one to stand back and, well, represent that which was present to one a moment ago.⁷⁷⁸ But that means that represented present is not in the present anymore but subsequent to it; looking back at it, it has become frozen as a point that was present but has already become past. Thinking that one has thus gotten a ‘grasp’ of the present is, accordingly, “the fiction of the fixed lapse.” To this, Buber adds a point which was already discussed, namely that whatever is represented in time thus conceived, is represented as “surrounded by a multitude of ‘contents’”, that is, as part of a conceptual outlook one already has. In this way, one perceives the represented present in terms of the past. This thought is given a further edge by Buber when he adds that “objects consist in having been” – that is, already when they are first formed as the abstract entities they are, namely in the emergence and refinement of a conceptual outlook, objects are caught up in the past in that the very process that leads to their emergence is one of distancing oneself from the lived present.

Taking the two points together, we could say that in representing the presence of another, one takes a snapshot⁷⁷⁹ that freezes her in “a point” in time between past and future.

⁷⁷⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 63–4.

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 294 (*The Other*, 308): “The concept ‘past’ characterises the concrete way in which I live objectivity intentionally.” This is so “because, already before its being talked about, it is the object of my knowledge”. Accordingly, “[e]ven if it is present right now or has yet to make its appearance, it is, as what is talked about, experienced in the mode of the past.”

⁷⁷⁹ The German word that suggests itself here but which unfortunately cannot be translated in a straightforward way is ‘Bestandsaufnahme’. Its literal meaning is ‘inventory taking’ or ‘stock taking’ (an expression I have

Thus, the organic, lived relation to it comes to a ‘stand-still’ and ‘becomes rigid’ so as to be dealt with practically. “The living present [Gegenwart] empties itself into the fleeting now-point [Jetztpunkt]”, as Waldenfels puts it, “only when we hold on to that which is present [Gegenwärtige] which, once having-become, has already passed.”⁷⁸⁰

To the represented present, Buber adds a phenomenology of the present as it is lived *in* the present.⁷⁸¹ First of all, he states that “[t]he present [...] exists only insofar as presentness, encounter, and relation exist.” For Buber, the present is always relational and, hence, the present of the encounter, of lived reality. Accordingly, there is no lived reality where the individual is isolated because isolation, unless it is total (in which case it amounts to self-annihilation), only leaves room for *self*-relation.⁷⁸² Yet, relating to oneself means relating to one’s own conception and, hence, to the It-world – and as the temporality of the It-world is, as was shown, the past, it can be said that, to the extent that we abide in self-relation, we abide in the past. (This is, as was already mentioned, not to say that one cannot find oneself in lived reality when being alone. Even in remembering, or thinking about, others, one can suddenly find oneself addressed by them in a way that pulls one out of one’s enclosed self-relation. Nor is it to say that there can be something like a complete stepping out of lived reality as even the most self-contained, detached thought can be traced back to some encounter (or perhaps a multitude of them) that was its point of inception and to which it is the (however detached and alienated) response.)⁷⁸³

The second point Buber makes is that “[p]resence is not what is evanescent and passes but what confronts us, waiting and enduring.” The lived present is precisely not that of the snapshot in which I take stock of what is or ought to be done but that of the continuous flow of being-in-relation to what approaches me and, thus, what I encounter. Elsewhere, he elaborates on this thought in the following way:

already deployed above) yet it can be used in a broader way, i.e. to describe any activity in which one registers and places in a greater whole the facts and states of affairs at hand.

⁷⁸⁰ Bernhard Waldenfels, *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 262.

⁷⁸¹ In passages such as this, it becomes particularly clear why Buber’s sometimes poetic and metaphoric language is neither simply a personal penchant nor a plain shortcoming. Rather, it is intrinsic to what he wants to bring to light, i.e. nothing short of lived reality. Lived reality can only be ‘accessed’ by representing it, however, and *this* – or rather the life-draining detachment of representation from the present – is precisely what Buber sees as the problem. Hence, he writes in such a way as to point our attention to, and awaken us to our sense of, how we ourselves live in the here and now, in the flux of reality, at times more present than others. A similar point is raised by Theunissen, cf. *Der Andere*, 258; *The Other*, 269–70.

⁷⁸² This point will be further discussed in section 6 below.

⁷⁸³ This point is nicely elucidated by Waldenfels when he expounds how the life of a human being is always and at all times bound up in a flow of a manifold of I-You relations, blending into one another and following one another but which can never be fully stepped out of; all that can happen is, as already stated in the previous section, is that one becomes alienated from this basic relational state of being – but being alienated from it does not mean that one has stepped out of it but, rather, that one has come to develop a mistaken conception about one’s own existential predicament; cf. *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 291–3.

The You appears in time, but in that of a process that is fulfilled in itself—a process lived through not as a piece that is a part of a constant and organized sequence but in a ‘duration’ whose purely intensive dimension can be determined only by starting from the You.⁷⁸⁴

The You has its own temporality, one with a “purely intensive dimension” accessible only by immersing oneself in the lived encounter with You. This is lived reality in the emphatic sense of ‘being throughout’, ‘flow,’ or “continued existence”⁷⁸⁵ – whether we want it or not, we are in it⁷⁸⁶; all we can do⁷⁸⁷ is either withdraw into our snapshots of it (i.e. into the It) or face it in its instable and indeterminate enduring (i.e. by opening up to the You). In this sense, the I-It can be understood as a stepping out of real, lived time in order to behold it as what it is, thereby invariably distorting it.

The central notion of the just quoted passage, however, is the present’s “waiting” for the I. This leads us to what lies of the heart of Buber’s notion of relational presence, namely address and response. First of all, it is important to note that for Buber, not unlike for Lévinas, the relation to You is marked by a phenomenological asymmetry:⁷⁸⁸ in encountering You, what

⁷⁸⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 81.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷⁸⁶ Lévinas also makes the point that time itself refers to the face-to-face with the Other. Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, in *Time and the Other, and Other Essays*, transl. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 29–94.

⁷⁸⁷ The way in which this ‘can do’ is meant will be examined below, in sections 7 & 8 as well as in the next chapter, section 1.b.

⁷⁸⁸ This asymmetry is central for Lévinas’s understanding of the relation to the Other (cf. *Totality and Infinity*, esp. at 216–7). Lévinas himself misreads Buber on this point, a misreading which, it seems to me, lies at the roots of much of his criticism. Although I cannot go into detail here, I want to briefly mention two issues: firstly, Lévinas’ claims that Buber’s I-You relation is symmetrical in the sense of reciprocal and, thus, reversible – my relation to you mirrors your relation to me; in this way, Lévinas holds, Buber reduces the relation to the other to the sphere of sameness, thus bereaving it of its radical potential. However, Buber’s notion of the I-You relation is not symmetrical in the sense Lévinas claims it is, for if it were, it would only manifest were two individuals turn towards one another, both attending and being attended to by, the receptive other. Yet that is not so – obviously, the wounded man was You to the Good Samaritan, namely because he did not actually have to say or do anything, or even be conscious, in order for the Samaritan to find himself addressed by him. Perhaps there is a point in saying that the *consummate* I-You relation is reciprocal; yet that is not to be taken to mean that the less-than-consummate I-You is less of an I-You relation. The root of this problem is, I think, that Lévinas construes – and, thus, misconstrues – Buber’s I-You as an *intersubjective* relation. But, as I am in the course of showing, I and You are not two subjects (cf. especially section 6 below). Secondly, Lévinas’ own conception of the relation to the Other is, to my mind, quite problematic, indeed *morally* problematic. The problem I see with it is that, by putting such a crass emphasis on the primacy of the Other, Lévinas offers an account of relationality that is apt to describe some engagements, while seriously distorting the (moral) reality of others. So, while his philosophy provides a good analysis of what it means to be in the presence of someone who is in urgent need, it becomes problematic whenever this is not the case – for instance, when it is *I* who is in urgent need and feel compelled to share my pain and suffering with the Other. Thinking that, even in such situations, I am “the hostage” (Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being*, .e.g. 59) of the Other, that the Other is my master, is sure to do more harm than good. I will develop the second point in the next chapter, section 2.d.

is primary is *my finding me addressed by You*, not *my addressing You*.⁷⁸⁹ This is so even if, in encountering You, You do not *say* anything to me, indeed even if You do not turn your attention towards me – it is simply your presence that addresses me and calls upon me to respond to you. In this sense, it can be said that I encounter You as *waiting* for me, that is, as waiting, indeed as *inviting* me, to respond to You, in virtue of your presence alone.⁷⁹⁰ That is why my address of You is a re-sponse, a re-ply – my address is always already a re-address, as it were.⁷⁹¹ Here, the cleft between the articulated word and the word that is ‘spoken with one’s being’ becomes important again, for it is, of course, possible that, in relating to You, I *speak* first; indeed, I might be the only one to speak. But even so, whatever I say will be a response to You, my answering to your presence. Reversely, whatever you may ultimately end up saying to me in articulated language – if you say anything at all, that is – will be just a part of the whole address with which you confront me simply by being present before me. This is why there may arise tensions between what you say and how you ‘body forth’⁷⁹² before me. If, say, my heartbroken friend would have told me that he does not need any help or support despite appearing to be on the brink of collapsing, then, however I would have responded (and whether in articulated language or not), it would have been a response to *him*, that is, to his “whole being” of which his words would only be one aspect. Again: it is his presence, his whole being, that first addresses me and to which I respond. Accordingly, a response that only replies to the words that the other has spoken, not to the way in which she speaks them along with her overall demeanour, is not a response to her whole being.⁷⁹³

Describing my response to You as a response to your whole being means that I get this *whole* being into view, that I am open to You in your wholeness, instead of being caught up with particularities (specific Its) or their total sum (the totality of Its).⁷⁹⁴ This openness can be

⁷⁸⁹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 62: “I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You,” & *ibid.*, 80: “Man becomes an I through a You.” For a critical (quasi-Buberian) discussion of the ‘primacy of the I’ in Husserl’s philosophy, cf. Waldenfels, *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, chapter 1, “Egocentricity and Transcendental Solipsism” (1–63).

⁷⁹⁰ Reversely: if I would not find myself called upon by your presence to respond to You, I would not encounter You as waiting for me. Speaking about your waiting for me, in other words, already entails that I understand that I am called upon to respond.

⁷⁹¹ Waldenfels, *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 261 & 291.

⁷⁹² This expression is taken from Ronald Gregor Smith’s first translation of *I and Thou* into English: “In bodying forth I disclose” (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 66. Although a poor translation of the German original – “Indem ich verwirkliche, decke ich auf” (*Ich und Du*, 11) would be better translated with *In actualising* (or *in realising*; cf. footnote 1 above) *I uncover* – what distinguishes Smith’s peculiar choice of words is its highlighting of the role of the body, and hence of the presence, of the I in its response to what it engages with. As becomes clear in *I and Thou*, Buber conceives of the I-You – at least in its most basal manifestation – as a face-to-face, embodied meeting (e.g. *I and Thou*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, 115 & 161).

⁷⁹³ Of course, what he says, does, etc. might influence *how* I respond to him, but *that* I am addressed by him and called to respond is a result of his presence, not of specific facts about him.

⁷⁹⁴ The latter would be, for instance, your character. If I would have come to know You as, say, a person with a deeply despicable character, someone in whom I see nothing positive, and I would then respond to You as if this character were all that there is to You, then I would not respond to your whole being – to You – but to all there is

understood as a stance of waiting, that is, of waiting *for You*.⁷⁹⁵ Yet, waiting for You also in a certain sense implicitly entails a waiting *for me*, namely in that, in waiting for You, I also wait for how your presence, addressing me, will claim me in response. This is not to say that I simply wait for what your effect on me will be, for what ‘you will make me do’. Waiting for the response that your presence will claim from means that I will not just go ahead and ‘take matters into my own hands,’ that is, try to ‘deal’ with the situation, say, by getting an overview of it – a snapshot – that I may use to deliberate and act, be it on some inclination or on the basis of what I take to be demanded on some conception of morality I have *already* adopted and merely *implement* in the present.⁷⁹⁶ In the language of the senses, my waiting for You, for how You claim me in response, can be described as a stance of listening and looking,⁷⁹⁷ in intimate encounters also of touching, smelling, and tasting,⁷⁹⁸ where all these sensuous activities have to be understood in an emphatic sense – as an opening up of the senses in the direction of the other, of welcoming her presence. In this sense, the present of the I-You is an ‘anticipatory present’⁷⁹⁹ in which I suspend my concern with It as I simultaneously open myself to what may touch me from out of the future from which You approach me.⁸⁰⁰ Accordingly, You who approaches me are encountered as a gift⁸⁰¹ that I welcome and for which I am grateful.⁸⁰²

(or seems to be) to You – i.e. It. This thought will be more expounded in more detail in the next chapter, in section 2.c. & d.

⁷⁹⁵ Framing the relation to the You in terms of waiting bears close similarities to Simone Weil’s understanding of attention (*Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 7–8, 91–2 & 231–7), the French *attendre* meaning both *to attend* and *to wait*. As Cordner sums up nicely, “[t]he idea is of ‘attendance on’ someone or something, a ‘waiting on’ what will authoritatively shape one’s response” (*Ethical Encounter*, 133).

⁷⁹⁶ Another way of putting this is that, in encountering you waiting for me, I respond by waiting for you, for you to present yourself more fully, in turn. This is of course not to say that I and You merely dwell in one another’s presence – although, as will become clear below, Buber does hold that this is as it were the pinnacle of the I-You – but rather that the I bides in the stance of waiting until its You addresses it in such a way that claims it to become more active. (I say ‘more active’ because also waiting, listening, and looking are, on the Buberian account, highly active (cf. *I and You*, 77) – or rather: the very distinction between active and passive does not get a hold on how we respond to one another (cf. *I and You*, 62 & 124–5).

⁷⁹⁷ In this connection, Waldenfels speaks of the “participating glance which takes part in the other’s movements and the questioning glance which searches for the other” (*Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 264). Elsewhere, Buber speaks of “Beachtungsblicke” (*Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen*, in *Werke*, 1. Band: *Schriften zur Philosophie*. Lambert Schneider GmbH: Heidelberg, 1962), 271), which can be translated as ‘glances of regard’ or ‘attending glances’.

⁷⁹⁸ The prominence of these more intimate senses for the small child in its relation to its caretakers, especially the haptic, is well illustrated by Christopher Cordner, “Vision and Encounter in Moral Thinking,” 218–20.

⁷⁹⁹ Waldenfels describes this as “zukunftssträchtige Gegenwart” (*Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 261) literally a present that is pregnant with the future.

⁸⁰⁰ Following Griesebach, a lesser known dialogical philosopher, Michael Theunissen remarks that the German word for future, ‘Zukunft,’ already carries an, as it were, dialogical germ cell within it – after all, the literal meaning of Zukunft is, roughly, ‘That which comes towards me’ (*Der Andere*, 301; the passage is missing in the English translation).

⁸⁰¹ In this sense, there may yet be some philosophical substance to the kitschy saying “Today is a gift – that’s why we call it ‘The Present’.” (Although perhaps a different one than Eleanor Roosevelt, who supposedly coined it, saw in it.)

⁸⁰² Simone Weil goes so far as to describe this ‘feeling’ as joy: “joy and the sense of reality are identical” (*An Anthology*, 292).

Lastly, it should be noted that, because the response to your address is not to be understood as a snapshot, the picture of reciprocity I am sketching is not one of alternation, i.e. one on which response follows response as in a game of ping pong, a series of my and your respective snapshots of one another. Your addressing me and my response are always already bound up with one another: just as your address continually elicits, and redirects, my response, so my response continually re-modulates your address.⁸⁰³ Yet, your being You to me requires my response to You – once it breaks off, You cease to be You and either become He, She, or It, or vanish altogether from my field of attention. The You is who it is only “in the moment of attending”⁸⁰⁴ – or perhaps better: *for the duration* of attending.

b. The Spatial Foregroundedness of You

In its not being *represented* but present, ‘bodying forth’ before the I, the You cannot be placed among the totality of spatial relations that constitute the world of the It. In continuation of the passage revolving around ‘the sphere of transitive verbs’ I discussed in the last chapter, Buber writes that “[...] every It borders on other Its; It is only by virtue of bordering on others. But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders. Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation.”⁸⁰⁵ That You is not a something (nor composed of things) and, in this sense, nothing – no thing – should have become clear by now.⁸⁰⁶ But what does it mean to say that “You has no borders”? Elsewhere, Buber elaborates on this point by stating that the You “appears in space, but only in an exclusive confrontation in which everything else can only be background from which it emerges, not its boundary and measure.”⁸⁰⁷ So, Buber is not to be taken to mean that whoever relates to a You is so ‘filled’ with its presence that she is not aware of anything apart from that You, for that were to say that the encounter with the You were on the same level of the It, simply replacing the totality of the It-world with a new one. It would, in other words, amount to the claim that the You could be

⁸⁰³ Again: this is not to say that my responding to you will have to change how you perceive me, interact with me, or speak with me. Even if you are, say, unconscious, my responding to you will change how you address me. If you lay unconsciously on the floor, my worry and my desire to help may be mixed with the sense that how you lie there is somehow pitiful; if I then proceed to heave you onto a couch or bed, I may feel that, although still in a bad predicament, I may not anymore be struck by your pitifulness. And so on.

⁸⁰⁴ Waldenfels, *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 294.

⁸⁰⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

⁸⁰⁶ This thought is developed in detail by Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 301–7; *The Other*, 315–21.

⁸⁰⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 81.

compared with, and stand in a relation of rivalry with the It, either replacing It or being replaced by It – which, of course, would degrade it to the status of just another It.⁸⁰⁸

What Buber means when he speaks of the You as borderless comes out in another passage part of which I already quoted:

When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. [...] Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in his light.⁸⁰⁹

Theunissen offers an illuminating re-description of Buber's point:

The individual Thou neither excludes all other beings so that the latter exist independently alongside it, nor does it include them in such a way that they exist in it. Rather, [the other beings are], so to speak, attached to it as the court that the Thou gathers around itself. The Thou is not itself the other [beings] and is nevertheless everything insofar as everything gathers around it and its presence permeates everything.⁸¹⁰

Following Theunissen, the spatiality of the You is to be understood as of a different kind than that of the It. Hence, it is not the case that where there is the “real relation” with the You, there is nothing else, no It. It will not be *beside* or *around* You – let alone *before* it in such a way as to cast its shadow upon it – but it will be *behind* it, as it were. In this way, the It can be imagined to appear as the court gathered in the background of the You⁸¹¹. This is why the I relating to You can be said to ‘have nothing’ – the It may be there in view, perhaps as something I and You speak about, yet not as something the I *has*. Accordingly, it can be said with Buber that I encounter the You not “as a thing in the nexus of nature and culture [Natur- und Kulturzusammenhang]” but as “something which must be seen in its own light, *abschattungslos*.” Being “*abschattungslos*”⁸¹² – that is, not subject to the perspectival

⁸⁰⁸ Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 311, *The Other*, 325: “If one takes the Thou to be something present at hand [etwas Vorhandenes], its exclusiveness receives a sense that is only adequate to the It: ‘disengaged, prominent’, then means: isolated alongside other present things in such a way that, with the disengagement, the delimitation of the Thou through beings remaining over would be given. Even this would be exclusiveness, but that of the It and not that of the Thou.”

⁸⁰⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 59.

⁸¹⁰ Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 312; *The Other*, 326.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid*, 327.

⁸¹² Bernhard Waldenfels, *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 260; it should be added that Waldenfels here appropriates “*abschattungslos*”, a term originally used by Husserl. In Husserl's thought, “*Abschattung*” (“adumbration” or “profile” in the English translation) refers to the change of appearance of an object depending

modifications in the ways that objects are – it is the You who reversely sheds its light on the court of the It-world gathered around it.

The notion of light that Buber deploys is not supposed to be a merely neutral or distanced description of how one perceives the You, however. Just as in the case of the address of the You that reaches one from out of the future, the light in which it appears is intimately bound up with the I's responsiveness to It.⁸¹³ In other words, your light is precisely what addresses and rouses me – or, to inflect the metaphor in the direction of fire: the light which kindles me and fills me with the warmth of life as it is lived in uncompromised actuality.⁸¹⁴ Yet, it is the kindling of this 'spark' that at the same time illuminates all that gathers as your 'court' in such a way as to imbue it with significance.⁸¹⁵

This also means that if the It becomes dominant, then it will not simply be the case that, instead of You casting your light on It, It will then cast its light on You; rather, the empowerment of the It at the cost of the You amounts to an overall darkening, a loss of actuality and, thus, of life.⁸¹⁶ Buber describes this darkening as “the relentlessly growing It-world”⁸¹⁷

on the perspective from which it is perceived; accordingly, “abschattungslos” is reserved by Husserl for the perceiver of the objects, i.e. the transcendental subject, the I. In this sense, Waldenfels, as it were, turns the Husserlian picture on its head. This becomes clear in the sentence preceding the one from which I quoted above: “If there is one person who evinces itself *expressly* as itself, then it is only the second person” (ibid.).

⁸¹³ In a sense, one could say that the words ‘address’ and ‘light’ have the same function, namely that of conveying a sense of the reality of the encounter with the You. The important difference, however, is that light reaches not only the one who sees it but also illuminates the surrounds – recall Weil’s light bulb metaphor that came up in the previous chapter. This notion of light will become central in the next two chapters.

⁸¹⁴ It is important to note that light, although helpful, is a limited metaphor for getting a proper sense of the spatial dimension of the encounter with the You given its heavy emphasis on the visual sense (cf. Christopher Cordner, “Vision and Moral Encounter,” 213 ff.). Warmth, although related to light, inflects the metaphor towards what is felt on a more immediate bodily level. Moreover, it adumbrates the (possible) haptic dimension of the I-You – for which being cradled, feeling safe, or the German *Geborgenheit* may be suitable. Buber emphasises the latter dimension of relationality when discussing infancy; coincidentally, “feeling *absolutely safe*” is also one of the examples Wittgenstein resorts to in his ‘Lecture on Ethics’ (*The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (1965), 3–12, at 8) of a judgment of absolute value. For a good discussion connecting Wittgenstein’s talk of feeling absolutely safe, love, and the religious – thus approximating in the direction of Buber and, accordingly, of the present discussion, cf. Camilla Kronqvist, “The Promise That Love Will Last,” *Inquiry* 54, No. 6 (2011): 650–668, esp. 662 ff.).

⁸¹⁵ In discussing Kierkegaard’s Works of Love, Rick Furtak develops a very similar line of thought, revolving around the notion of love (which I will also proceed to do in the next chapter; cf. Furtak, Rick. *Why Love is Edifying*, YouTube Video, 25:56. Posted by “Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University.” December 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgfJ8O1Wk4Q&t=1141s&ab_channel=HumanFlourishingProgramatHarvardUniversity) Thus, he states, for instance, that “the heightened attention and concern that a loving disposition brings, he or she finds that it is not neutrally valenced but permeated with tangible significance” (ibid., 13:11–13:21). Accordingly, “if we did not love anything, then no aspect of the universe would stand out as salient and elicit our attention” (ibid., 9:08–9:14). It should be noted, however, that, for Kierkegaard, the love in question is, first and foremost, God’s love. While God’s love is certainly also important in Buber’s ‘greater picture,’ recourse to Him is, as was said, not necessary in order to make sense of the light which the sublunary You casts upon the world. Buber critically discusses Kierkegaard’s in this respect in “Question to the Single One” (in *Between Man and Man*, 58–67, esp. at 65).

⁸¹⁶ Rick Furtak, “Why Love is Edifying,” 14:58–15:02: “The blindness is all on the side of the detached observer” – a thought which Furtak, though ascribing it to Scheler, wholeheartedly agrees with.

⁸¹⁷ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 96.

that overgrows You “like weed.”⁸¹⁸ If, thus, the You is imagined like a protruding beacon – or, a bit more modestly, a street lantern – illuminating its surrounds in its light so as to make them stand out (both visually as well as in terms of salience), then the repression of the You by the It can be imagined like weeds growing over the lamp so as to quench its light. The result will be, firstly, that the light is still there, yet covered over and barely able to cast its light on what is around it. For now, the second point is more central, namely that, in proportion to how much it quenches the light of the You, it also becomes darkened itself. And as this darkening is to be understood in terms of a quenching of responsiveness, a growth of detachment and indifference, the It, in overpowering the You, plunges itself more and more into obscurity up to the point of self-annihilation.⁸¹⁹ This is the reason why, ultimately, the It depends on the You – without its light, i.e. the light (or address) that summons me to respond to it – it fades into indifference. And this is why Buber can say – in a discussion that will be central in the next chapter – that “whoever hates directly is closer to a relation than those who are without love and hate.”⁸²⁰ A pure I-It relation is impossible; it must always be, as it were, parasitic upon the light of some or other You.

6. The In-Between

The preceding characterisation of the I-You may provoke the objection that it paints a highly idealistic, indeed an unrealistic, picture, for it makes it seem as if I and You encounter one another in some sort of relational vacuum – apart from “the nexus of both culture and nature,” as it was put above – in which the manifold ways in which we have always already been shaped by our socio-historical-cultural environments are simply neglected, or perhaps even wilfully ignored.

This would be a misreading of Buber, however. The first indication of this is Buber’s emphasis on the embodied nature of the encounter of I and You.⁸²¹ Although not spatio-temporal phenomena among others, I and You encounter each other primarily⁸²² as bodies and via their bodily make-up. Hence, the one who is deaf will find herself addressed by, and respond to, her You in different ways than the one who can hear, just as the infant, as yet unable to

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ This point will become central in chapter 6, section 1.b.iii.

⁸²⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 68.

⁸²¹ Ibid., e.g. 61: “the It-humanity that some imagine, postulate, and advertise has nothing in common with the bodily humanity to which a human being can truly say You.”

⁸²² Buber is clear that, although the embodied encounter is where we first meet the You and form an understanding of it, there can also be an I-You relation to the absent other: “many a spoken It really means a You whose presence one may remember with one’s whole being, although one is far away” (Ibid., 111).

properly see, will relate to those around it in a way in which touch and smell are far more prominent.⁸²³ Yet, although manifestly embodied and sensuous, the encounter of I and You cannot be *explained by* recourse to, let alone *reduced to*, embodiment and sensibility – or differently put: although the ways in which the respective I-You encounters manifest are conditioned by the participants’ embodiment and sensibility (among other things), the nature of these encounters is more, and indeed of a different kind, than just its conditions.⁸²⁴

In order to understand how the I-You relation is (and is not) conditioned not merely by the bodily but also by the socio-cultural, a brief detour has to be taken, however. According to Buber, the journey that is the life of the human being – both as an individual and as a species – begins in a state of being submersed in “the *a priori* of the relation; the *innate* You.”⁸²⁵ This innate You is distinguished by its unreflective submersion in the relation and a craving for reciprocity and tenderness, yet in such a way that it has not yet come to be set apart from the I-It.⁸²⁶ It is in and through this mode of proto-relationality and its flux that “the consciousness of the constant partner, the I-consciousness”⁸²⁷ of the human infant gradually emerges – and, along with it, the I-It. At this point, the I is “reduced from substantial fullness to the functional one-dimensionality of a subject that experiences and uses objects—and thus approaches all the ‘It for itself’, overpowers it and joins with it to form the other basic word.”⁸²⁸ With the emergence of the I-consciousness, in other words, the I begins to posit itself over against the world, as the one who surveys it and acts within it as she seems fit. This is, while unavoidable,⁸²⁹ not unproblematic because it is the process of the I’s imposing itself on the world by virtue of its ability to do so, the appropriation of reality on the part of the I. The I that thus emerges is the I that, in relating to It, simultaneously relates to itself – the self-reflective I, at the same time self- and world-conscious.⁸³⁰

While Buber’s description of the process of the emergence of the subject is, disregarding the problematising tone, close to that of McDowell, the difference of the Buberian account is that it does not regard as decisive the difference between first and second nature but that between I-It and I-You.⁸³¹ For McDowell, the human being, although never fully leaving behind

⁸²³ Cf. Cordner, “Vision and Moral Encounter,” 218–20.

⁸²⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 78.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 145–6.

⁸³⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 347.

⁸³¹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 63.

its animal side,⁸³² develops from its first into its second nature, from a pre-I-It stage, as it were, to an I-It stage. It is a development from mindlessness to mind, indeed to an ever more proliferating, because critically self-assessing, mind and, as such, a growth also towards an ever more refined and rationally consistent ethical outlook. Buber, on the other hand, regards this development with “melancholy”⁸³³ because it is, while the mark of the “greatness”⁸³⁴ of man, it is also that of his detachment from the world, the loss of actuality and of relation lived with one’s whole being.⁸³⁵

As was shown at the end of the last section, however, Buber does not conceive of this detachment as total – by becoming an It-I, the human being thus does not forsake the You-I.⁸³⁶ Even in the one who becomes submerged in the I-It, the I-You remains in a state of latency,⁸³⁷ a potentiality that may be re-kindled at any moment: “Ever again, the object shall catch fire and become present, returning to the element from which it issued, to be beheld and lived by men as present.”⁸³⁸ But how, then, is it supposed to be possible for us who already have developed an It-I and who have become immersed in the It-world to once again turn to another as a You? Let us once again illustrate what Buber is after by means of the example that suggests itself readily, namely *language*, as it is spoken by I and You.

For Buber, language, be it spoken or written, is inextricably connected to the It for it is *the* mode of relating to the particular in the form of instances of the general:

... once the sentence ‘I see the tree’ has been pronounced in such a way that it no longer relates a relation between a human I and a tree You but the perception of the tree object by the human consciousness, it has erected the crucial barrier between subject and object; the basic word I-It, the word of separation, has been spoken.⁸³⁹

In line with this reflection, he concludes: “All [articulated] response binds the You into the It-world,”⁸⁴⁰ so that, accordingly, “[o]nly silence toward the You [...] leaves the You free and stands together with it in reserve where the spirit does not manifest itself but is.”⁸⁴¹ It is only

⁸³² McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism,” 39: “something that we can appropriately conceive as second nature surely cannot be in all respects autonomous with respect to first nature.”

⁸³³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, 89–90.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113: “the I that steps out of the event of the relation into detachment and the self-consciousness accompanying that, does not lose its actuality. Participation remains in it as a living potentiality.”

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the silent response, in other words, that actualises the spirit – i.e. the living responsiveness of human beings to one another – in a ‘pure’ way because whenever language is involved, the It is also part of the relation. Only in such a state – that is, when I and You are concerned with nothing but one another, fully attentive to the respective other – the spirit merely *is* without manifesting in any concrete form, bound up with the It-world.⁸⁴² Yet, the shared life of human beings is not all about consummate silence that reflects the I’s entirely unreserved being-with-the-You⁸⁴³ but about lived relation in all of its joint activities, conversations, tensions, misunderstandings, and reconciliations:⁸⁴⁴ “What is decisive is whether the spirit – the You-saying, responding spirit – remains alive and actual.”⁸⁴⁵ So, the manifestation of the spirit does not simply turn the I-You into an I-It – an engaged conversation, say, is certainly not to be understood as an example of an I-It relation. It will, as it were, ‘stand in touch’ with the It, simply by virtue of being conducted in language – but the presence of language as such is not what is decisive in whether an engagement has the form of I-It or I-You. As already mentioned above, individuals may speak with one another, in articulate language or non-verbally, yet relate to one another as I and You (but, of course, they need not – just as, reversely, two individuals may be silent with one another and still relate to one another as It.) Nonetheless, it is the living, articulate spirit – that is, the spirit that manifests not only in being-with the other but at the same time in being-about something – in which the social and cultural is also always already present.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴² Cf. Theunissen, *Der Andere* 291; *The Other*, 304: “The Thou addressed is most present [...] at that moment when nothing is discussed and the discourse [Rede] itself disappears into the one word ‘Thou’. In that the Thou transcends the matter at hand, it also abandons discourse. It reaches out from itself beyond discourse. That means that it reaches into silence. Silence is, therefore, the finalizing end [das vollendende Ende] that discourse is not [...]” Thus, “it lies essentially not before but after discourse and is itself, for this reason, ‘articulate’ silence [beredtes Schweigen].” And: “Only someone who can speak can keep quiet.”

⁸⁴³ This is neither to say that such a mutual immersion is not important nor that it is not, at least in the sense Buber describes it, one of the ‘crowning moments’ of our shared existence – consider the lover’s unreserved being fully absorbed into one another or the parent’s and child’s blissfully smiling at one another with no other care or concern standing in-between them. This being said, the stress Buber puts on silence is not primarily to highlight such crowning moments but rather on its liberating effect, i.e. its liberating us, perhaps only momentarily, from the entanglements of the It and of the formed spirit. This is illustrated beautifully by Buber (“Dialogue,” 3–5) in his description how the silent encounter with a stranger removes a deep barrier in an emotionally withdrawn person so that “[u]nreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbour” (ibid., 4).

⁸⁴⁴ Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 114: “If the tensions between what each [of the dialogue partners] means by the concept [they are discussing] becomes too great, there arises a misunderstanding that can mount to destruction. But below the critical point the tension need by no means remain inoperative; it can become fruitful, it always becomes fruitful where, out of understanding each other, genuine dialogue unfolds. From this it follows that it is not the unambiguity of a word but its ambiguity that constitutes living language [...]”

⁸⁴⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 99.

⁸⁴⁶ As Theunissen rightly remarks, „language [*Sprache* in Buber’s sense of lived spirit] undercuts the ‘sphere of subjectivity’ with which the model of intentionality [i.e. that of transcendental philosophy shared by non-dialogical phenomenology] stands or falls” (*Der Andere*, 282). In other words, once language is understood not anymore in terms of the subject-predicate-object logic that lies at the heart of transcendental philosophy and

For Buber, the social world that forms the background to, and can in this sense be said to ‘condition’ our engagements with one another, is complex. On the one hand, it comprises the objective forms in which the It-world has become crystallised. As already said, Buber takes these forms to be ever proliferating, more and more enveloping the human world and penetrating into ever smaller crevices of our lives.⁸⁴⁷ Buber refers to these forms as *institutions* – institutions are “out there,”⁸⁴⁸ organising shared human life in objective forms, they do not know “person or community,”⁸⁴⁹ and they “yield no public life.”⁸⁵⁰ On the other hand, Buber also emphasises that the human world, qua living culture, is a sedimentation of I-You relations – the relations of those who came before us, especially those that left their mark on the world scene, also shaped the culture as it is today,⁸⁵¹ and not only that: it is also possible for us to find ourselves in the dialogue with the voices of the past, at least with those voices have been immortalised in writing (or some other medium).⁸⁵²

Here, Buber’s separation between *ego* (*Eigenwesen*⁸⁵³) and *person* becomes relevant.⁸⁵⁴ For Buber, ego and person are two poles on a continuum; the more an individual relates to others as an ego, the more it is entangled in the I-It, the more it relates to others as a person, the more it is free from such entanglement.⁸⁵⁵ However, “[n]o human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold I,”⁸⁵⁶ yet with a gravitation either towards the side of the ego or towards that of the person.⁸⁵⁷

phenomenology but as something that is primarily spoken by individuals in the open, indeterminate, lived flow of dialogue, the conception of intentionality that accompanies the former collapses.

⁸⁴⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 87–8.

⁸⁴⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 93.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 115–7; the three examples that Buber offers are Goethe, Socrates, and Jesus. It should be added, however, that individuals may also impact the world in the other direction, that is, as ‘avatars of the I-It’. Buber takes as an exemplar of such an individual Napoleon who, as Buber puts it, was “the demonic You for the millions and did not respond; to ‘You’ he responded by saying It” (*ibid.*, 117); thus, he “spoke without the power to relate” (*ibid.*, 118).

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 174–5.

⁸⁵³ Ego is not a satisfying translation of *Eigenwesen*. The latter means something like ‘One’s-own-being’. As Kaufmann notes, Buber himself clarified in a letter that he meant *Eigenwesen* to denote “a man’s relation to himself” (*I and Thou*, 112, footnote 7). For the sake of simplicity, I will stay with Kaufmann’s translation; please bear in mind, however, that ego is not to be understood either in the psychoanalytical or in everyday sense of the word.

⁸⁵⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 111–5.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 112–4.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; when I henceforth speak of ego and person, I will, unless stated otherwise, do so, however, in an ‘ideal type’ manner, taking the ego to be the ‘pure’ ego and the person to be the ‘pure’ person. After all, I want to spell out what two types of human being the continuum is between.

Now, the important point is that both ego and person have been enculturated and socialised, both have a knowledge of the (It-)world, of the You-relations that have become sedimented in our living culture, and both have all kinds of abilities and skills – all of this conditions any relation that either the ego or the person may establish or sustain.⁸⁵⁸ However, the meaning of ‘condition’ is markedly different in respect to the two, ego and person. For it is the hallmark of the ego that she, in relating to others, first relates to herself.⁸⁵⁹ This relating to oneself need not be spelled-out in thought, let alone in some kind of (inner or articulated) monologue; rather, it describes the ego’s way of perceiving what is around it, namely as reflecting – although perhaps in a way that brings with it challenges and tensions – the ego’s own worldview. To put it with Wittgenstein, one could say that what distinguishes the ego is that ‘pictures hold her captive’,⁸⁶⁰ that is, pictures of the world being thus-and-so, be it in terms of states of affairs and facts or in terms of norms and practices. Another way of putting the matter is that the ego *first* takes an account of the situation she finds herself in, usually implicitly and instantaneously, and only *then* engages with others in virtue of what, on said account, appears to be ‘the thing to do’. The ego’s relation to the world is *conditioned* by her language, culture, societal norms, skills, abilities, and so on, in the sense that she first relates to *them*, and then, through this ‘objectifying move’, turns to, and engages with, *others*. (I hope the parallels to McDowell have become apparent.)⁸⁶¹

The person, on the other hand, does not relate to herself before relating to others. This does not mean that she has no habits, no knacks or preferences, no knowledge or history. For her, however, all of this constitutes merely the background – her *personal* background – before which, and from out of which, she enters and lives the relation with the other.⁸⁶² It is in this sense that past, society, culture, character, and so on, *condition* her engagement with the

⁸⁵⁸ That also the person is to be understood as a someone who has already undergone a process of socialisation becomes clear in that the person is “conscious of itself” and that she understands herself “being-that-way.” But that requires having undergone the process of development, and the concomitant juxtaposition of self- and world-consciousness that I sketched above. Hence, infants or animals are not persons thus understood.

⁸⁵⁹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 114.

⁸⁶⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §115.

⁸⁶¹ Cf. Buber, *Pointing the Way. Collected Essays*, transl. & ed. Maurice Friedman (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1957), 104: “Certainly what one believes is important, but still more important is how one believes it. This ‘how’ is no aesthetic nor even an ethical category. It is a question of reality in the most exact sense, of the whole reality, in relation to which the categories of the aesthetic and the ethical are only abstractions. Does a worldview dwell in the head or in the whole man?” – needless to say that the man who lives his world-view puts it at the frontier of the lived engagement with the others.

⁸⁶² That even the kind of habituation into virtue of which Aristotle (and with him McDowell) can be understood to be part of this background comes out when Cordner writes: “In many contexts [the various virtues of character] form part of the background against which the resolution of self by what is disclosed in encounter, involved in reflective judgement, takes shape. But as the poet’s ‘genius’ leads him beyond the hitherto accepted poetic limits, so in our encounter with another we can be led beyond what is ascribable to those virtues of character” (*Ethical Encounter*, 133).

other, namely as that before which she ventures out into relation. So, just because the ego is preoccupied with its own being-that-way, Buber observes, this “does not mean that the person ‘gives up’ his being-that-way, his being different; only, this is not the decisive perspective but merely the necessary and meaningful form of being.”⁸⁶³ One could thus say that the person, in contrast to the ego, lays bare and offers all that she is in her response to her You, freely putting herself – her knowledge, habits, preferences, and the like – at the mercy of the dialogue.⁸⁶⁴ So, while new perspectives and understandings have to forcefully break into the more or less fortified worldview of the ego,⁸⁶⁵ the person is open to seeing matters in a new light. When she asks questions, she does so in a “more questioning”⁸⁶⁶ way than the ego, meaning that the answers – which are not exhausted in the articulated replies she gets but will also entail “the being and the ego”⁸⁶⁷ of the one who replies – she receives will all the more decisively bring her into contact with “the new, the sudden, the unexpected”.⁸⁶⁸ The person, it can thus be said, has already gone through the manifold and continuous process of detachment and separation that has constituted herself as an It-I and her world as the It-world,⁸⁶⁹ yet she is not entangled in them, they are not the ‘spectacles of the past’ through which she apprehends the given reality. Re-kindled with living spirit, they rather give form to how she enters, and sustains, the relation to her You. This does not stand in the way of the person relating to herself – yet, unlike the ego, her self-relation will not be what comes before relation but something within it. So, when “the person beholds [her] self”⁸⁷⁰, she does so together with her You.⁸⁷¹ As such, the various social and cultural forces that have come to shape her and may be said to condition her are not simply *given*; rather, how they appear depends on the role they play (if any) in the engagement between I and You.⁸⁷²

In thus relating to the other, moreover, the person relates to the other as a person, too – that is, even if the other is caught up in an ego-ic mind-set, the person will not respond to her as if she were *just* ego but to her whole being, her person: “Persons appear by entering into

⁸⁶³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 114.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 285; *The Other* 298–9.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (*The Other*, 299)

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁹ Again, consider the above account of the development of world- and self-consciousness.

⁸⁷⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 114.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸⁷² This thought bears similarities to Strandberg’s discussion of the question of whether there may be conditions for forgiveness, showing that the very questions of whether there are any such conditions (and if so, what they look like and what role they play), cannot be answered in isolation from the relations in which these questions arise (cf. Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 109–39).

relation with other persons.”⁸⁷³ Reversely, it is the sign of the ego to relate to others as egos, too, even if they are much more person than ego. Speaking from the standpoint of the ego, the person, in relating to another, thus de-centres herself, moving out of herself – her ‘proper home’. For the ego, the person is thus wont to appear imprudent, as someone who immerses herself into the situation without having made up her mind.⁸⁷⁴ The most other-oriented, loving and caring person will thus be perceived and made sense of by the ego as another ego, yet one that is not really true to itself, someone who loses herself in the situation and in the face of the other. Speaking from the standpoint of the person, however, the ego who relates to others leaves the “living center”⁸⁷⁵ of the relation – the in-between where You and I meet and become actual – and withdraws into herself in such a way that every reaching-out to others is subsequent, mediated by her already made-up view of the situation. This is where Theunissen locates the central idea of Buber’s thought: while transcendental philosophy (mistakenly) conceives of the relation between I and You as an adding up of two independently existing *relata*, two self-standing Is, Buber shows that it is the relation between them that precedes, and constitutes, the two *relata*, I and You.⁸⁷⁶

While Buber identifies the stance of the ego with the *subject* that finds herself in the world of objects (some of which are Hes or Shes, the aforementioned odd subject-object hybrids), the person’s stance is that of *subjectivity*, formless yet actual, created and sustained by being together with a You.⁸⁷⁷ And while any subject can change its ‘aggregation state’ and become fluid, relational subjectivity again,⁸⁷⁸ the great threat is the lure of the It to make oneself at home in it and its world, orderly and secure, its future predictable precisely in its being cast in the consistent terms of the past. Thus, it tempts us: “Since one must after all return into ‘the world’ why not stay in it in the first place? Why not call to order that which confronts us and send it home into objectivity?”⁸⁷⁹ The one who succumbs to it seeks to fill “every moment with experiencing and using”⁸⁸⁰ so that “it ceases to burn”⁸⁸¹, thus giving up on his actuality, of reality, altogether. If successful, he becomes “the man who has become reconciled to the It-

⁸⁷³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 112.

⁸⁷⁴ These reflections are not found in Buber but continue line of thought.

⁸⁷⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 94.

⁸⁷⁶ While for transcendental philosophy, “the ontological condition of disconnectedness [is] the pre-existence of the *relata* before the *relatio*” (Theunissen, *Der Andere*, 271; *The Other*, 283), dialogical philosophy holds that “the beginning of the person is [...] the reality of the in-between” (ibid., 273/285). For Buber, the self has its Being “only in the relation,” meaning a), “that there ‘is real relation only between real persons’” and that b), “the relation qua encounter first actualises the persons that encounter one another” (ibid., 272/284).

⁸⁷⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 111–2.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid. 113.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid.

world”⁸⁸², refusing to acknowledge that it is the “meaning and destiny”⁸⁸³ of every It to become filled with spirit again by being put at the mercy of the lived encounter with You.

7. Will and Grace

The above analysis of Buber’s understanding of living, spirit-filled encounter, not of two individuals in a dialogical vacuum but as orienting first and forward *towards one another* and not *towards some understanding or view that each of them might already have*, may raise another reservation, namely that of moralism: according to Buber, it may be held, the kind of open, unreserved engagement he describes is *good* and, accordingly, engaging with others in distanced and reserved ways is *bad*. Hence he (and his patrons) hold, the objector may continue, that people *should* take up an I-You stance – and if, or to the extent that, they do not, they are in some sense *at fault*.⁸⁸⁴ This may be accompanied, moreover, by the dialogical-philosopher-moralist’s reflections assuming an air of superiority: having penetrated how matters stand, she naturally assumes herself to speak from the vantage point of the pure I-You, thus talking down to all those who appear to her as egos in a patronising and holier-than-thou manner.

Setting straight the misunderstanding that underlies this reading of Buber will require some steps; the first is to turn to Buber’s notions of *will* and *grace*. For Buber, the relation of I and You becomes actual “when will and grace are joined”⁸⁸⁵ and the “the relationship is at once being chosen and choosing, passive and active.”⁸⁸⁶ If it were possible to decide to abandon the I-It stance of the ego so as to posit oneself as a person who wholeheartedly relates to others as persons and, thus, to unreservedly step into the basic word I-You, then the issue which of the two stances we *would* adopt would be a matter of which we *could*, and *wanted* to, adopt. In other words, it would then be a matter of the will: finding ourselves over against two possible stances, we could choose one and to try to adopt it. I say ‘try to’ because, of course, the will

⁸⁸² Ibid., 90.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 102

⁸⁸⁴ This is a worry that is also shared by Hilary Putnam. However, Putnam’s answer is far less than satisfying. In a nutshell, Putnam’s point is that, for Buber, some I-You relations are good while others are bad, and that the same holds for I-It relations (cf. Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*, 62–4). But apart from the fact that I think that this is plain false – the example Putnam gives of an example of a ‘bad’ I-You is that between Napoleon and the French people (ibid., 62), yet Buber makes it clear that this is not a real I-You relation at all (cf. *I and Thou*, 118–9) – the main problem with Putnam’s reading is that he approaches it in a similarly moralistic categorical apparatus. That is, he seems to think that the only way in which I-You relationality may be said to be good is as a *telos*, as something that we ought to strive for as a goal (cf. Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy*, 63). But I think – and hope to show in what follows – that this is precisely the wrong way to connect the I-You with the moral.

⁸⁸⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 58.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid, 124–5.

could be frustrated by a lack of practical capacities, by limits to what one can do by one's own power and, hence, to the scope of the ends one would like to set oneself.⁸⁸⁷ The selfish, greedy banker who becomes aware of, and develops a bad conscience regarding, his selfishness and greed, for example, might simply not be able to step out of the I-It and into the I-You because he is caught up in his greed and selfishness. If so, however, his task would be to do what he can do in order to overcome his greed and selfishness. In that way, it would be held, he would be able to become less of an ego and more of a person.

While there is certainly some truth to the just outlined attempt to overcome one's egoic mode of relating to others so as to open oneself to them, it gives a one-sided and, hence, distorting picture of what Buber is after. According to Buber, the very encounter with the You cannot be brought about by the I itself, that is, by setting its will to it and deploying its practical capacities. As Buber succinctly puts it: the You "cannot be found by seeking" for it "encounters me by grace."⁸⁸⁸ Grace is, of course, an ultimately religious notion⁸⁸⁹ but, again, its phenomenology can, I think, be spelled out quite well even without recourse to the religious: encountering the You means encountering it as approaching me from beyond myself, and not merely in the sense of 'another being in the order of natural the world'⁸⁹⁰ – for that would precisely keep it bound to a conception of the world. Encountering the other as from beyond any conception of the world means encountering it, as Cavell puts it, as "other to [my] one."⁸⁹¹ In encountering You, I thus experience a reality that is radically independent of me, which I have not produced, not even in the sense of having conceptualised it, but which nonetheless addresses me and invites me to respond to it.

However, it would be mistaken to assume that one may only sometimes, in some exceptional moments, get in touch with this radical otherness of the You and that we, for the rest of the time, are severed from it, at most dimly aware of it as a distant possibility. On the contrary, in every relation to another, no matter how caught up in the mode of the I-It, the other's 'whole being' shines through – for if that were not the case, we would relate to her *just like* as we would to a thing. But however callously we instrumentalize the other, we do not relate to her simply as an instrument – if we would, we would not have to instrumentalize her. And however cold-heartedly someone may exploit another, her doing so shows that she does

⁸⁸⁷ For a discussion of this issue, cf. chapter 1 section 1.a. & b.

⁸⁸⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 58.

⁸⁸⁹ This is also the case in Buber's philosophy. This comes out, for instance, in Buber's discussion of Kierkegaard in "Question to the Single One" (*Between Man and Man*, 46–97); however, even where Buber connects grace most intimately to the divine, it becomes clear that he regards grace as something that is relevant in our sublunary relations to one another (cf. .e.g. *ibid.* 81, as well as *I and Thou*, 124).

⁸⁹⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 58.

⁸⁹¹ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 376.

not wholly relate to an It, for that which is nothing but It cannot be exploited.⁸⁹² (This line of thought will lie at the heart of the next chapter.)

To this it might be replied that, if we all know what it means to encounter a You, indeed, if the You is ‘somehow’ present in all of our relations to one another, even in the most depersonalised ones, then it seems that we can also choose to (try to) relate to others as You instead of as Its. This seems to be buttressed by Buber when he says that “[t]he You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship with it”⁸⁹³ – “that I *can*, and *should*, enter it so that, if I do *no*, I am to blame,” our objector may add in line with her already propounded reading of Buber. That this is not what Buber means becomes clear in the sentence right before the just quoted passage. There, he states that, although the “You encounters me by grace,”⁸⁹⁴ my speaking the basic word I-You in response to her “is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed.”⁸⁹⁵ Here, finally, we pick up the thread that I left at the very beginning of the present chapter. It is crucial that what Buber has in mind here is not the deed in the sense of *action* as it is conceptualised by the already discussed philosophers who highlight reason and will. For them, I should do what is right to do, here and now, in virtue of what reason demands of me. Yet, my responding to You is not my heeding the call of reason – it is my responding to *your* call. Whether or not I will thereby act in a way that, from someone else’s vantage point, appears rational or not is secondary – it may or it may not.

Now, what Buber calls the essential deed – that is, the deed done with one’s whole essence or being (*Wesen*⁸⁹⁶) – is the I’s responding to You in a way in which inclination and rationality are not – i.e. not yet or not anymore – abstracted, in which the opposition and tension between the two has not arisen.⁸⁹⁷ This opposition, however, is requisite for the I being able to opt for one of them, the one she ought to opt for and the one she ought not to.⁸⁹⁸ With this opposition being absent, therefore, however the I’s “choosing” the relationship to its You is to be understood, it cannot be understood in terms of her opting between different paths that are laid out before her. Yet that means that failing to choose the path that leads more fully into the

⁸⁹² This is another common misreading of Buber. In “Transcending the Human,” e.g. Barabas states that, for Buber, “the second person is all that’s needed for a proper, moral relation”, a mistaken view because “[m]ost forms of evil [...] require relating, however perversely, to the other as you [...]” (227). What Barabas fails to see is that relating to the other as an It does not mean not (at all) relating to her as a You, precisely because the It can, at least in relation to others, only be understood as a perversion of the You.

⁸⁹³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁶ At a later point in *I and Thou*, he describes it as the “pure action, the act that is not arbitrary”, distinguished by the I’s responding to You “with its life” (92).

⁸⁹⁷ This point was discussed in the last chapter, section 2, in my juxtaposition of Buberian and Kantian action.

⁸⁹⁸ This was discussed in chapter 2, section 2.a.

relationship is nothing that she could have averted in virtue of her practical powers. But if that is so, how come that Buber himself states that the fully actual relation between I and You is one in which grace is to be met with *will*? That, after all, suggests that there *is* something which the I *can* do, namely to choose and, thus, enter the relation to the You that encounters it by grace.

8. Conscience & Responsibility

The key, I think, lies *within* the relation of I and You, more precisely in the nature of the realisation of having somehow answered to the other in a way that does not live up to the claims she makes upon me in addressing me with her presence. What I mean is not the realisation of my having *acted* in a way that one ought not to have acted because it was irrational but of my not having *responded* to her address as I ought to in virtue of nothing but the nature of that address itself. This realisation can be aptly described as *the pang of conscience* or *the call of conscience*.⁸⁹⁹ Of this pang or call of conscience, Buber says the following:

If a form and appearance of present being move past me, and I was not really there, then out of the distance, out of its disappearance, comes a second cry, as soft and secret as though it came from myself: ‘Where were you?’ *That* is the cry of conscience. It is not my existence which calls to me, but the being which is not I. Now I can answer only the *next* form; the one which spoke can no longer be reached.⁹⁰⁰

The cry – that is, the pang or call – of conscience is, according to Buber, the cry of the neglected other, of the one “to whom I was not really there”, reaching me in the aftermath of the passed encounter. This other’s cry is of course not to be understood as a cry that literally formed in her throat and left her lips, nor one I imagine she would produce when facing me; rather, it is the cry of her ‘whole being’, albeit one that reaches me – my ‘whole being’ – in her absence. How that happens is mysterious⁹⁰¹ – and perhaps not all that relevant – but *that* it happens is something which all of us are familiar and take for granted.⁹⁰² If, for instance, in the modified

⁸⁹⁹ For two thorough explorations of (bad) conscience along similar lines, cf. Hannes Nykänen, *The “I”, the “you”, and the soul*, 318–25, and Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 318–29.

⁹⁰⁰ Martin Buber, “What is Man?,” 197.

⁹⁰¹ Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 340 & Hannes Nykänen, *The “I”, the “you”, and the soul*, 321.

⁹⁰² Despite the different understanding of conscience (cf. chapter 3, section 2), this is also expressed by Kant: “Every human being has a conscience [...] It follows him like a shadow when he plans to escape. He can indeed stun himself or put himself to sleep by pleasures and distractions, but he cannot help coming to himself or waking up from time to time; and when he does, he hears at once its fearful voice. He can at most, in extreme depravity, bring himself to *heed* it no longer, but he still cannot help *hearing* it” (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, 560); cf. for a discussion of this passage, as well as of the indispensability of conscience, cf. Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 320 ff.

version of my conversation with my heartbroken friend, I would have heeded his words and left him to himself, upon which he would have harmed himself or even taken his own life, then the cry of conscience that would have reached me⁹⁰³ would have been the cry of his whole being reaching and rousing me (– *not* the last words he spoke to me.)

As discussed, Kant accommodates conscience, yet in a way that is very different from how Buber conceives of it. For Kant, it was said, conscience is the ‘cry of reason’ – a cry which, while retaining the necessary distance a respectful relation requires, is unable to capture its positive, dialogical dimension. McDowell, on the other hand, does not thematise conscience at all. If the attempt would be made to accommodate the notion in his thought, it would, it seems to me, never amount to more than the ‘cry of one’s conception of virtue’ as it makes its demands heard in the given situation. It is socio-historically accumulated moral wisdom – “the repository of tradition”⁹⁰⁴ – internalised by the moral agent, amended through ongoing critical reflection, and implemented by virtue of her *phronesis*, which can alone serve as the authoritative instance of conscience on his view. Yet that is, on Buber’s view, merely the “routine conscience”⁹⁰⁵ and the “play-on-the-surface conscience”⁹⁰⁶ to which he juxtaposes the “unknown conscience in the ground of being, which needs to be discovered ever anew, the conscience of the ‘spark’, for the genuine spark is effective also in the single composure of each genuine decision.”⁹⁰⁷ In another text, he develops this juxtaposition by stating:

The extent to which a man, in the strength of the reality of the spark, can keep a traditional bond, a law, a direction, is the extent to which he is permitted to lean his responsibility on something (more than this is not vouchsafed to us, responsibility is not taken off our shoulders). As we ‘become free’ this leaning on something is more and more denied to us, and our responsibility must become personal and solitary.⁹⁰⁸

In a critical remark that finds a target in both Kant (“law”) and McDowell/Aristotle (“traditional bond”⁹⁰⁹), Buber contends that it is the sign of the person’s maturing more and more into

⁹⁰³ For a more thorough discussion of what it means to open oneself to, or close oneself off from, the cry of conscience, cf. chapter 6, section 1.a.iii.

⁹⁰⁴ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 126.

⁹⁰⁵ Martin Buber, “The Question to the Single One,” 81.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*; as Kaufmann notes (*Between Man and Man*, 248), the ‘spark’ to which Buber makes reference here is Meister Eckhardt’s “Seelenfünklein”, the *soul spark*: “the soul has something in it, a spark of speech (*redelicheit*) that never dies” and “which is untouched by time and space” (*Meister Eckhart*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1857), 39 & 193).

⁹⁰⁸ Martin Buber, “Education,” *Between Man and Man*, 109–10.

⁹⁰⁹ McDowell’s bringing in critical reflection on tradition does not make him immune to Buber’s attack because not only will even the most critical reflection still have to ‘lean on’ tradition but also will he, even when having become quite far removed from the prevalent mores, still have to rely on *his own* ethical outlook. As was said,

freedom that her sense of responsibility becomes detached from other ('objective') instances, such as law and tradition, that may give support to it – yet that the thus emerging “solitary” responsibility is not, as we were just told, “*my* existence which calls to me” but that of *the other*. Dialogical conscience, as it might be called in demarcation from Kant and other reason-centred moral philosophers, can thus be understood as the pained understanding of the gap that was there between, on the one hand, the address of the You and the claim intrinsic to it and, on the other, how one has response to that claim. In that sense, there need not be any point of reference outside the engagement of I and You for dialogical (bad) conscience to latch onto – it is, one could say, endemic to the relation. On Buber’s view, dialogical conscience is no doubt the only actual or authentic form in which its pangs may be felt because this being felt is not in virtue of some third, i.e. some law or tradition,⁹¹⁰ but rooted in the “ground of being”, illuminated by the “genuine spark” – that which can be located nowhere but in-between I and You.⁹¹¹

With this in mind, we can return to the example in which the greedy and selfish banker finds himself unable to overcome his entanglement within the ego-ic mode of the I-It. In the example as I sketched it, it is in the wake of him being gripped by a bad conscience for how he normally engages with the poor people on the streets that he first comes to awaken to a sense of himself being greedy and selfish. That is to say that already beforehand, he may have thought, or even talked about, himself as greedy and selfish. Yet if so, it was in a superficial way, dissociated from the seriousness of these flaws – so that, when being gripped by his bad conscience, he finds himself awakened to precisely this seriousness.⁹¹² If we take his bad conscience to be genuinely relational, his being moved by the belated cry of the other in her whole being – in his case presumably a beggar or homeless person whom he encountered – then the very fact of him having a bad conscience *at all* is indicative of him having come into touch

there is no contact with the individual other in McDowell’s thought and, hence, neither the possibility to be haunted by that other in the form of a bad conscience.

⁹¹⁰ In response to Anscombe’s claim that “a man’s conscience may tell him to do the vilest things” (“Modern Moral Philosophy,” in *The Definition of Morality*, ed. G. Wallace & A. M. D. Walker (London: The Camelot Press, 1970), 211–34, at 212), Backström points out that Anscombe’s “objection appeals to our knowledge that certain things, which *some claim their consciences demand of them*, are ‘vile’”, yet that this “entitles us to ask what the source of this knowledge is, if it is not conscience?” (*The Fear of Openness*, 327–8; my emphasis). In other words: it can only be conscience by means of which ‘conscience’ can be judged to demand vile things from us, thereby revealing that ‘conscience’ is not *actual* conscience at all. I would say that, at least very often, ‘conscience’ of this spurious kind is the product of an internalisation of socio-cultural mores. ‘Conscience’ may tell the religious fundamentalist to kill all non-believers because that is what he has come to internalise through the company he kept and through the ‘education’ he underwent; it is not the kind of conscience the pangs of which he feels after having killed a non-believer – indeed, it is the latter in virtue of which the former is judged and exposed as ‘vile’.

⁹¹¹ The distinction between ‘genuine’ and ‘spurious’ conscience will become central in chapter 6, section 1.a.ii.

⁹¹² Although the notion of conscience is not prominent in the thought of Raimond Gaita, the kind of here sketched awakening to seriousness – one’s answering the “call to [moral] seriousness” (*Good and Evil*, 151 & 273), as he puts it – is a central theme in his writing (cf. *ibid.*, e.g. 33).

with the other in a way that has gone beyond the mode of the I-It.⁹¹³ So, although he may up to that point have always been cold and callous towards the poor people lingering around and asking him for money, and although he may find himself unable even in the future to get out of his greed and selfishness, his bad conscience nonetheless testifies to the openness and unreservedness of his response to those whose cry he hears.⁹¹⁴ Accordingly, he feels responsible for not having fully been there in his encounters with, and in his overall way of relating to, the homeless and the beggars – and although he cannot change his attitude up until that point, he will now see it as his responsibility to answer in a more wholehearted way to “the *next* form.”⁹¹⁵

Now, this by itself does not yet answer the question in which sense, and to which extent, the I ‘*can*’ step out of the I-It and into the I-You – but it brings us a step closer. For now we have a businessman who – at the very least – responds to the beggars and homeless persons differently in thought, namely as those towards whom he acts coldheartedly and callously and, accordingly, as those to whom he *should* relate better than he does.⁹¹⁶ Yet if that is the case, then the extent to which he listens to his bad conscience is the extent to which it finds expression in how he relates to them when he finds himself face-to-face with them. While this does not mean that he will therefore engage with them in an entirely unreserved and loving manner, even a mere irritation in how he engages with them already indicates a certain movement from It towards You – where beforehand, he would just shrug them off with a disgusted look on his face if they would approach him and ask for money, he is now somewhat taken aback, perhaps still stiffly walking by, but in a way that reflects that their presence touches him in a way it had not before.

The businessman will presumably find that he still does not yet respond to those who thus approach him in a way that lives up to the claims intrinsic to their addresses. Yet the question is as what kind of problem he sees this. If he sees it as a shortcoming on his part, some flaw to be overcome, then the ego-ic mode still keeps him in check, for he sees the I-You as something, an It, to be mastered. If, however, he regards it as another road to be followed –

⁹¹³ This thought – or more precisely that conscience is (a manifestation of) love – is developed in-depth by Nykänen, *The “I”, the “you”, and the soul*, 326–44. I will return to it in the last chapter.

⁹¹⁴ Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 327: “Conscience itself does not, however, tell me to do this, or any other thing in particular, it simply *opens me* to my neighbour.”

⁹¹⁵ That also entails the possibility that if he comes to re-awaken to the reality of the homeless people for a second or a third time, that is, after having sunken back into his prior numbness towards them, then he may feel doubly bad, i.e. firstly for having been numb to them and, secondly, for having relapsed into numbness after having awakened to their presence. If this, however, means that he feel come to feel guilty or ashamed rather than remorseful, then this will add yet another layer of moral obfuscation to his response. This thought will be developed in chapter 6, section 1.a.ii.-iv.

⁹¹⁶ A similar thought finds expression in Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 21. I will return to in my discussion of Gaita in the last chapter.

namely one that, although without a reachable destination, leads him ever more fully to the You at the same time as it leads him out of his entanglement in his ego – then this understanding by itself already indicates one such step out of it. With Iris Murdoch, one could say that he may understand himself as “in pursuit of the individual,”⁹¹⁷ i.e. the individual other, You, which, for her, means “apprehending a magnetic but inexhaustible reality.”⁹¹⁸ In this sense, entering ever more fully into the I-You is not unlike, say, improvising when playing music with others – thinking about how to do it, how you *can* do it, will only ever get you so far; indeed, it may be precisely what holds you back from *simply doing* it.⁹¹⁹ Presumably you will be held back in all kinds of way when you first try it, yet that is secondary. The question is whether you then step back in order to devise plans regarding how to best improvise in the future – which would precisely bereave what you do of its genuinely improvisational element⁹²⁰ – or you would simply do it again and again. At some point, you will probably come to the point at which you will come to shift your attention away from your analysing gaze and in the direction of those with whom you play and to what happens between you and them. This does not mean that you will lose yourself in the faceless mass that is the group of musicians; rather, it means that you will be unreservedly together with them.⁹²¹ The crucial difference between being unreservedly together with others in something as specific as making music and being together with them ‘just like that’ is that the former requires skill while the latter does not.⁹²²

In this last section, my aim was to develop an account of what it means for someone to move from a distanced, depersonalised relation to the world to a more unreserved, personal one, and I hope I have more or less succeeded in doing so. I also hope that I did not fall into the trap of moralism – after all, I did not try to give general answers as to what is morally good or bad but simply outline how we, qua individuals, may experience our own responding to others in ways that are, or have been, ‘not good enough’ and that we, accordingly, seek to overcome. I do not claim that I am beyond such experiences or that I am on the whole ‘further’ than others,

⁹¹⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge, 2014), 41.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ And not only that: even if, in your thoughts, you think to yourself “I should not be concerned with how I ought to do it! I should turn to the other!,” you will remain caught up in your own self-relation and not (yet) turn, and open yourself, to the other.

⁹²⁰ For a discussion with interesting observations on the nature of joint improvisation – although with misleading focus on its normative dimension – cf. Georg Bertram, “Improvisation as a Normative Practice,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts*, ed. Alessandro Bertinetto & Marcello Ruta (London: Routledge, 2021), 21–33.

⁹²¹ For a similar point, cf. also Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98–100.

⁹²² This is not to say that only specific ‘styles’ of music, such as Rock, Classic, or Jazz, require skill. Even some children coming together and drumming on the kitchen equipment requires a certain kind of basal skill which simply sympathising with someone who is in pain does not.

far from it – comparing myself with others is not my business here. This being said, I hope to evade the hypocrisy of stating one thing while at the same time not living up to it – which is to say: I do hope, and think, that the thoughts developed here are addressed at you, the readers, by me in a more or less second-personal spirit. Does speaking in this way reflect a patronising, holier-than-thou attitude? This, it seems to me, is not up for me to decide – it involves you, the readers, as much as me.

9. Conclusion

In this fourth chapter, I expounded a philosophical outlook which I think can help us to overcome the limitations that were shown to inhere in the reason-centred moral philosophy of thinkers such as Kant and McDowell: the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber, revolving around the second-personal relation between I and You. After initially situating my own philosophical undertaking vis-à-vis that of Buber, especially regarding the question of the relation between the moral and religious (section 1), I examined one of the central notions of Buber's thought, namely that of the *unmediatedness* of the relation between I and You: instead of being mediated by the conceptual, I and You relate to one another with their *whole being* (section 2). Seeking to illuminate what this means, I turned to the two (interconnected) ways in which, for Buber, speech may enter the I-You relation, namely in the form of a *speaking-with* and a *speaking-about*, as well as to the concomitant distinction between *present* and *representation* (section 3). This discussion provoked the objection of an imagined McDowellian who sought to show that even the present must always be a represented present – and that, on a proper, dialectical understanding of the mind-world relation, contact with reality is sufficiently accounted for. Revealing that, despite its subtlety, this picture does not get us an inkling closer to the You (section 4), I then turned to Buber's own phenomenology of the I-You relation, revolving around the notions of *address*, *response*, and, again, the 'whole being'. I proceeded to expound that the You a) radically stands out from its surrounds, both temporally as well as spatially, and b) that it casts its light on these surrounds, imbuing them with salience (section 5). With this, I then turned to the question of how the I-You plays out in the 'real world' shaped by historical and cultural forces. In doing so, I focussed on Buber's distinction between *person* and *ego*: while both are shaped by the socio-cultural environment, it is only the ego who defines itself in terms of who it has become in and through its environment, relating to others primarily via a preceding self-relation; for the person, the social and cultural only serves as the necessary background, a background which only becomes of relevance (if it does) *within* the

engagement with others (section 6). Anticipating the charge of moralism, I then turned to the ethical implications of this picture. Beginning with an analysis of the interconnectedness of *will* and *grace* which showed that relating to the other is not a matter of practical power (section 7), I concluded the chapter with bringing to light how the notion of *conscience* reveals the moral dimension of Buberian philosophy and, more specifically, of the I-You relation (section 8).

Third Part:

A Second-Personal Conception of Moral Togetherness

Chapter V: Love and the Second-Personal Relation

0. Introduction

In this chapter, I will use the understanding of I-You and I-It relationality I developed in the last two chapters to propound a different way of conceiving of interpersonal relationality than that offered by reason-centred philosophy, namely one revolving around the notion of love (or as I will call it in what follows *lovingness*).⁹²³ Taking on this task entails bridging the gap between, and developing an understanding of the manifold intertwinements of, what Buber presents as the two basal modes of human relationality, i.e. the second- and the third-personal. In a nutshell, my aim is to show that I-You relationality simply *is* love (i.e. qua lovingness), so that, correspondingly, the obtrusion of the It between I and You can be understood – in many different ways depending on the concrete example – in terms of a loss, corruption, or lapse of love (i.e. unlovingness).

This chapter stands out from the other chapters of the present dissertation in that it does not explicitly address and discuss moral issues but rather prepares the ground for such a discussion in the next, final chapter. This being said, morality is far from absent even in this chapter – on the contrary, it is latently present throughout most of what I will say about relationality and love on the following pages. This, however, will only become fully clear in the next chapter. In short, the idea is the following: The point at which the relational and the moral meet – or, more precisely: at which the moral announces itself from out of the relational – is the notion of *conscience* with which I have concluded the previous chapter: the I's

⁹²³ While my approach bears significant similarities to those of Joel Backström (especially in his *The Fear of Openness*) and Hannes Nykänen (especially in his *The "I", the "You" and the soul*) – both of whom had a noteworthy influence on the present dissertation – one of the key differences between their treatment of love and mine is that I place a greater emphasis on the distinction between 'love here-and-now' (lovingness) and what is usually called love, i.e. the exceptional bond that exists in some relationships. Although connected to one another, *being loving towards someone, here and now*, is not the same as *loving someone*. (As the term I reserve for the former, *lovingness*, strikes me as rather cumbersome in some contexts, however, I will at times take the liberty to use term *love* in its stead, yet only when it is clear that it is *present-oriented, relational* love that I speak of).

realisation that there is a gap between how it is claimed by the other, the You, in (loving) response and the way in which it, the I, answers to that claim, accompanied by the experienced authority of the claim compelling the I to try to live up to it more fully. In other words, love becomes a moral-existential task to the individual who finds itself responsible for (re-)creating⁹²⁴ a loving responsiveness where that is (or has become) obfuscated in some way or another. Where that happens, the relation to the other – which may up to that point not have raised any moral questions at all – will come to appear in a moral light, i.e. the light cast on it by conscience, and thus reveal itself as having been *latently* morally charged all along.⁹²⁵ So, love emerges as something of moral significance precisely where it fails to do justice to its *own* claims – and not those of rational consistency or virtue.

The present chapter's discussion of relationality and love reveals its moral charge especially where what I expound is not loving, but *less-than-loving*, or even *unloving* responsiveness. Yet as already said, I will not for now venture into how such unlovingness may be experienced in the form of a call of conscience but, instead, delimit myself to a phenomenological sketches of what, in various situations, it may mean to respond lovingly or to fail to do so.

The starting point of my discussion will once again be provided by Martin Buber, both because I find his thoughts on love insightful and because it facilitates the transition from the previous chapters' discussion of the I-It and the I-You. This being said, this chapter focusses less on Buber and his thoughts on love and its relation to the second-personal relation but gradually widen its outlook so as to create a dialogue with a particular strand in moral philosophy rooted in the thought of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein. Originally known as the Swansea School⁹²⁶, this tradition – or perhaps better: this approach to⁹²⁷ – moral philosophy has spread out far beyond Swansea since its inception in the 1970s surrounding figureheads such as Rush Rhees, D. Z. Phillips, Peter Winch, and R. F. Holland.⁹²⁸ The hallmark of the

⁹²⁴ Bracketing the 're-' is supposed to indicate that what I am after cannot be properly framed in temporal terms, i.e. that for each of us, and in all contexts, there must have *first* been some kind of state of pure lovingness that *then* become corroded.

⁹²⁵ While this thought will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, section 1 below, a good discussion of this theme can be found in Hugo Strandberg, "Psycho-Analysis and the Morally Charged Nature of Personal Relations."

⁹²⁶ For a good overview of, and introduction to, Swansea School philosophy, cf. Mario von der Ruhr, "Rhees, Wittgenstein, and the Swansea School," *Sense and Reality: Essays out of Swansea*, ed. John Edelman (Frankfurt a. M.: Ontos Verlag, 2009), 219–35.

⁹²⁷ It seems that the 'Swansea School' may be not only too young but especially too loose to be considered a tradition, held together by a certain spirit in which its proponents approached late-Wittgensteinian thought rather than a specific theory, let alone a system.

⁹²⁸ Out of these four, only the latter two play a more prominent role in the present dissertation. Other notable Swansea School philosophers (some of which have been, or will still find, mention in this present dissertation) are Norman Malcolm, Howard Mounce, İlham Dilman, R. W. Beardsmore, and J. R. Jones. Having been a rather

‘Swansea approach’, especially in one of its present appropriations⁹²⁹, is that it sees in Wittgenstein’s late philosophy the attempt to develop an emphatically dialogical understanding of philosophy; unlike Wittgenstein, however, these thinkers do engage with moral issues in a forthright and outspoken manner while at the same time attempting to retain, and indeed build on, the dialogical character of the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein. One of the – if not *the* – central notion in this discourse is the notion of love.⁹³⁰ Motivating a dialogue between Buberian dialogical philosophy and Swansea School moral philosophy, it is the aim of the following chapter is to develop a relational understanding of love that draws from and thus hopes to enrich both strands of philosophy.

In the first part of this chapter, I will begin by presenting and developing an understanding of love that takes as its starting point Buber’s connection of the I-You to love yet which then goes beyond Buber in applying it to the complexities of the lived engagement with others. To this effect, I first look at a central passage in *I and Thou* and demarcate the notion of love that Buber develops from love understood both as a *feeling* and a *life-shaping relationship*. In doing so, I introduce the notions of a *loving attitude* and of *lovingness*. In the second section, I proceed to show in which sense I-You relationality can be understood in terms of a loving engagement with the other and, accordingly, the I-It as that which interrupts, inhibits, or obfuscates this lovingness.⁹³¹ In section 3, I take a closer look at some issues that arose in section 2 regarding how the Buberian present-oriented, relational notion of love – i.e. *lovingness* – is related to love understood in terms of a relation that extends into past and future and in which the lovers are connected by a deep bond: a *love relationship*. This will raise the question how the past comes to shape present lovingness – a question which, as will be shown, cannot be answered without taking into account the spirit of the conversation in which it is raised.

loose bundle of thinkers from its inception, it is even harder to tell whether there is such a thing as *contemporary* Swansea School philosophy. While Lars Hertzberg, David Cockburn, Marina Barabas, and Raimond Gaita may perhaps still be counted to the Swansea School – or to do philosophy in a ‘Swansea spirit’ – due to their direct connections to the aforementioned thinkers, it becomes less clear in the case of those who ‘inherited the heirs’, as it were, such as Joel Backström, Craig Taylor, or Hugo Strandberg.

⁹²⁹ Here, especially Joel Backström, Hannes Nykänen, Camilla Kronqvist, and Hugo Strandberg are to be mentioned.

⁹³⁰ Cf. e.g. Camilla Kronqvist, “A Passion for Life: Love and Meaning,” or Joel Backström, “Love and Capital,” Jonas Ahlskog & Hugo Strandberg (eds), *Philosophy as a Form of Life: Essays in Honour of Olli Lagerspetz on His Sixtieth Birthday*, 100–16.

⁹³¹ In order to prevent confusion, it may be worth repeating that relating to something, some It, is not as such problematic. It only becomes problematic if it becomes that which “wears the pants” in one’s relation to the world. Obviously, You and I will also often be concerned with something – the question then becomes if the It will stand between us like some kind of (however elusive and internalised) barrier or whether it will be in the light of our open responsiveness to one another that we shift our concern to It.

1. Love and the Second-Personal Relation

In a central passage in the first part of *I and Thou*, Buber states:

The essential act that here [i.e. in relation to the human-You⁹³²] creates immediacy is usually understood as a feeling, and thus misunderstood. Feelings are ‘had’; love occurs. Feelings dwell in man; but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality [Wirklichkeit]: love does not cling to the I, as if the You were merely its ‘content’, its object; it is *between* I and You.⁹³³

In this first part, I want to take a closer look at what Buber has in mind when he speaks of love in this way. To this end, I will first look at his distinction between love and feeling and then proceed to develop what he means by speaking of love as “the essential act”.

a. Love and Feelings

The first distinction Buber makes in the above-quoted passage is between love and feeling. To understand love as a feeling means, Buber holds, to assume that it “dwells in man” and to thereby situate it *inside* the respective individual, i.e. the lover, who relates to the beloved as to the “content” or “object” of her love. In this way, love is conceived of as a psychological phenomenon.⁹³⁴ Now, I would say that in a *certain* sense, even love in the second-personal sense can be understood as a psychological phenomenon – on the obvious condition, however,

⁹³² Buber’s wording here suggests that ‘love’ is the name *only* of the relation-establishing act between human beings, implying that relations to, or among, non-human beings cannot be relations of love. Yet, whether this is actually Buber’s point is not clear given that the discussion in which he makes this claim is one in which he seeks to distinguish the immediacy-creating act in *between human beings* from both that *between artist and the artwork* and that *between the human being and the spiritual realm* (*I and Thou*, 65–7). This suggests that Buber is not primarily after the relation specifically of *human* beings but rather of *living* beings, over against the relations between *human being* and *lifeless matter* as well as *the divine*. On the other hand, however, Buber speaks of love (as far as I know) *only* with respect to human relations. In case Buber does indeed reserve love for inter-human relations, I would put into question his erecting such a rigid border between such relations and the relations to, or among, animals – not because the relations to, or among, animals are not in many significant respects very different to those among us humans but because I do not think that, when describing relations to, or among, animals in terms of love, we must mean something *essentially* different than when we do in the case of human beings, something in which the notion of love has no place whatsoever. Unfortunately, discussing this issue in more detail lies beyond the scope of the present dissertation. For an illuminating discussion questioning the rigid separations that philosophers are wont to make between how we respond to human beings and to animals, see David Cockburn’s “Human Beings and Giant Squids”.

⁹³³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

⁹³⁴ To conceive of love as a psychological phenomenon is commonplace in the contemporary debate. This goes without saying for naturalists, especially those who are of a scientific bend (cf. e.g. Arina Pismenny & Jesse Prinz, “Is Love an Emotion?,” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love*, ed. Christopher Grau & Aaron Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199395729.013.10), yet also many who are not committed to a naturalist outlook embrace a psychological understanding of love without any further ado (cf. e.g. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 46–8 & 74–7; these passages will become central in the next chapter, section 1.b.iii.).

that one deploys a correspondingly dialogical conception of psychology⁹³⁵. The kind of conception of psychology that Buber has in mind, however, namely the one that was prevalent in his days⁹³⁶ (and, indeed, unfortunately still today)⁹³⁷ is un-dialogical in that it construes the ways in which the respective individual relates to what it confronts as a result of what has *already* accrued in its psyche. What is presented as a matter of the psyche is attributed to the individual as its ‘mental possession’, as it were – *I have* representations, *I have* thoughts, *I have* certain feelings, etc.⁹³⁸ And while my thoughts and representations determine the *objective* horizon within which I may make sense of, and act in, the world, including others and myself – recall Buber’s *experiencing* and *using* – my feelings are merely the subjective reflections of this experience-and-use relation with the world.

Here it is worth noting that Buber’s main target is not the academic psychology that was prevalent in his days but Husserl’s theory of feeling. Without being able at present to go into the ramifications of Husserl’s theory of feeling, it should suffice to say that for Husserl, feelings are not caused by the objects which the subject’s intentional acts are about.⁹³⁹ Rather, feelings have noematic objects in their own right, i.e. they are *about* something and, hence, they form a *sui generis* type of intentional act: “Joy has enjoyableness as its intentional object, fear has

⁹³⁵ A properly dialogical psychology would, as Cavell puts it, “undo the psychologizing of psychology” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 91), i.e. it would entail a dethroning of empirical science as *the one* approach to psychology that is considered legitimate. Cavell is one of the late-Wittgensteinian philosophers in whose writings a dialogical spirit, and the concomitant interpenetration of psychology and philosophy, certainly shines through (ibid., 91ff.) A text that makes a particularly strong case for dialogical understanding, not only of philosophy but language and meaningfulness as such, is Lars Hertzberg’s already mentioned “On The Need for a Listener and Community Standards”.

⁹³⁶ Buber presents the view of psychology from which he distances himself in Martin Buber & Maurice Friedmann, “Guilt und Guilt Feelings” (*CrossCurrents* 8, no. 3 (1958): 193–210.)

⁹³⁷ In “Dialogical Self System Development: The Co-construction of Dynamic Self-Positionings Along Life Course” (Angela Uchoa Branco, Sandra Ferraz Dourado Castillo Freire, and Monica Roncancio-Moreno, published in *Psychology as a Dialogical Science*, eds. Maria Cláudia Santos Lopes-de-Oliveira, Angela Uchoa Branco, Sandra Ferraz Dourado Castillo Freire (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 53–72), for example, the authors champion dialogical psychology, yet from a quasi-bird’s eye perspective, thus effectively in a manner which, from a Buberian perspective, appears very much un-dialogical.

⁹³⁸ It is less unambiguous in the case of those states that are said to be constitutive of what the individual (or its current psychological state) *is* – *I am* irritated, *I am* pleased, *I am* charmed, etc. Here, more needs to be said in order to dispel the ambiguity. Take ‘*I am charmed*’ – on the one hand, it may be understood as an outgrowth of the kind of psychological set-up that Buber refers to (say, when my being charmed by the beautiful lady in front of me is taken to be a result of my biochemistry or of the socio-normative values that I have come to internalize). On the other hand, however, ‘*I am charmed*’ need not be understood as something that is explicable simply in terms of ‘psychological set-up + present situation’ – it may also be understood as something becomes actual here and now, perhaps even in stark contrast to my supposed psychology. I may, for instance, find myself charmed by the beautiful lady in front of me despite the fact that I am a very bitter and deeply cynical gay man. In such a case, an explanation of how I relate to the lady will make reference not only, perhaps not even mainly, to my already existing psychological set-up but rather to the situation in which I find myself – and central to *that* will be the individual other with whom I am engaging. For insightful discussions of the relation between having and being, cf. Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, ed. Ruth Nandna Anshen (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) and Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, transl. Katharine Farrer (Glasgow: Robert MacLehose & Co. Lt., 1949).

⁹³⁹ Cf. Quentin Smith, “Husserl and the Inner Structure of Feeling-Acts,” *Research in Phenomenology* 6, no. 1 (1976): 84–104, at 84.

fearfulness as its object, pity has pitifulness as its object, and desire has desirableness as its object.”⁹⁴⁰ However, the intentionality of feelings nonetheless presupposes *cognitive* objects produced by what Husserl calls presentive acts: “These affective objects [i.e. the enjoyableness of joy, etc.] appear in and through the acts of feeling; they are objects that appear, as it were, ‘on top of’ the objects of the presentative act.”⁹⁴¹ To the extent that someone’s love is a matter of feeling, it is thus a ‘love’ that is necessarily bound up with an object of love – “[P]leasure without anything pleasant is unthinkable”⁹⁴², as Husserl puts it – no matter how broadly ‘object’ is understood and no matter how noble this object may be.⁹⁴³ Accordingly, loving this or that object signifies a feeling in the subject that supervenes the subject’s presentation of the object. This is the sense in which feelings, on the Husserlian view that Buber attacks, are merely reflections of the objective – they have their own domain, i.e. that of the ‘inner’, yet this inner merely supervenes on the outer, i.e. the world as it is (re-)presented. Furthermore, to the extent love is phenomenologically describable (that is, in the way Husserl conceives of phenomenology), the phenomenon of love is arrived at through the phenomenological epoché, which means that it must be possible for the “object” of love – however that is exactly to be understood – to be described without recourse to anything but consciousness itself.⁹⁴⁴

What Husserl has in common with the (then) contemporary mainstream, in any case, is that ‘feeling love’ for someone – whatever that feeling may qualitatively ‘feel like’ – means relating to her as the object of one’s desire (and, accordingly, to oneself, the ‘lover’, as the loving subject). To the extent that we think of love in terms of feelings, it therefore does not make a difference whether one speaks about a temporary feeling of happiness when seeing one’s beloved or the life-encompassing desire to be with her. Now, as with anything else that is part of the psyche, feelings are natural phenomena and, thus, vulnerable to change.⁹⁴⁵ Whatever I may feel towards something or someone right now may change, or disappear, the

⁹⁴⁰ Cf. Quentin Smith, “On Husserl’s Theory of Consciousness in the Fifth Logical Investigation,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 37, no. 4 (1977): 482–97, at 493–4.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 494.

⁹⁴² Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Band. Erster Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. U. Panzer, *Husserliana XIX/1* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 404.

⁹⁴³ In *Self to Self*, 82–6, David Velleman discusses some of the kinds of object-oriented emotions that are often – falsely – taken to constitute love.

⁹⁴⁴ For a helpful discussion of Husserl’s own reflections on love, cf. Ulrich Melle, “Edmund Husserl: From Reason to Love,” in *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy*, ed. John J. Drummond & Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 229–48.

⁹⁴⁵ As such, they are closely related to what Kant would speak of in terms of inclinations. In this sense, moreover, the psychological is itself a variant of the empirical, in contrast to the “metapsychical and metaphysical” nature Buber ascribes to love.

next instant.⁹⁴⁶ So, should one's love feeling dissipate, the other would cease to be the object of his love – the same instant at which the doors would be opened for all other kinds of feelings (including destructive ones) or simply plain indifference. But is that really how we experience love? Do I, to the extent that my love feeling makes way to a feeling of, say, anger, cease – if only momentarily – to love the person I would have still called 'my beloved' a second ago? And is my love for the other 'reinstated' once my anger abates? This would be a highly immature view of love – imagine the child who, angry because it does not get an ice cream, has a fit and yells at its parents "I don't love you anymore!" I think it is apparent to everyone, probably even to the child itself (if only dimly), that it does not really mean what it says. Its anger towards its parents is not really an interruption of its love – rather, it emerges within the love that is there between them and continues to be there afterwards.⁹⁴⁷ (This is not to say that it is impossible for some feelings to lead to a rupture in one's love. Yet even then, it will not be the feeling as such that is decisive but rather that of which it is the expression – say, the humiliation, the abuse, etc.)⁹⁴⁸

This points us towards the understanding of love that Buber propounds in *I and Thou*, namely as "between I and You." Understanding love as situated between I and You means understanding it in terms of something that cannot be "had" by the individuals but rather something *in* which I and You find us, something we are enveloped by, together. Just as Theunissen puts it with respect to the I-You, relations in which love manifests are not actualised by adding up two individual relata and what pertains to them, be it feelings or activities or interests; rather, the loving relation is a kind of relation that constitutes its relata⁹⁴⁹ – if the love were not in-between I and You, it would not be there at all.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁴⁶ Cf. Simone Weil: "We are attached by a cord to all the objects of attachment, and a cord can always be cut." (*An Anthology*, 292).

⁹⁴⁷ Interestingly – and worryingly – there is a tendency in neuro-scientifically oriented philosophy to fall into such immaturity by unquestioningly identifying *love* with *what can be measured in the brain when someone has 'love feelings'*. This, in turn, leads to conclusions such as that love is a "positivity resonance" that "only 'lasts as long as' the lovers "are engaged with each other" – or, to slogans, such as: "Bonds last. Love doesn't" (Barbara L. Fredrickson, *Love 2.0* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2013), 36). The quotes are taken from Camilla Kronqvist's similarly critical discussion of a neuroscientific approach to love (cf. "'Speak to us of love': Some Difficulties in the Philosophical and Scientific Study of Love," in *Moral Foundations of the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Joel Backström, Hannes Nykänen, Niklas Toivakainen, Thomas Wallgren (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 203–27, at 208–9.) In this discussion, she asks the crucial question: "What, as it were, are we entitled to say about *love* on the basis of Fredrickson's research, and not merely about the kind of reactions she calls micro-moments of positivity resonance?" (ibid., 209) (It should be added that below, I will also differentiate between lovingness here-and-now and 'substantial' love in which deep bonds prevails; however, one of the main points of this discussion will be to show that even the most fleeting manifestations of love are not to be understood in terms of mere feelings but rather *something the light of which lingers on.*)

⁹⁴⁸ Recall my discussion the relation between feeling and moral understanding in chapter 3, section 1.b. & c.

⁹⁴⁹ Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere* 271–3; *The Other* 283–5.

⁹⁵⁰ It should be noted, however, that speaking about the essentially inter-personal nature of love does not mean that it prevails only where it prevails *reciprocally*, that is, where both I relate lovingly to You and You relate

This can be further illuminated by recalling the description of the encounter I developed in the last chapter. For Buber, relation only begins with, and can only be sustained by, responsiveness to the other, that is, the other encountered as addressing one in a way that one cannot “shirk” (as Lévinas puts it).⁹⁵¹ Thus understood, the relation between I and You is always already a stepping out of oneself – *one’s self* – and towards the other, an extending of the I towards the You roused and kindled by the You’s presence alone, reflecting that the You *matters* to the I on an existentially basal level (which is to say: it can be denied, but that does not make it any less true.)⁹⁵² If the address that rouses the I were absent, there would be no response either and, thus, the relation would collapse back upon itself. Similarly in the case of love: love is there between I and You to the extent that my response is a response to the way you address me, intimately guided and directed⁹⁵³ by your presence. To the extent that I and You relate to one another from out of, or through, what we already ‘have’ qua individuals – and even if it is the most exuberant, passionate feelings – we will, accordingly, not relate to one another lovingly.

b. Affirming and Rejecting Love

Let me return once more to Buber’s reflection on love that introduces the present chapter. The quote begins with Buber claiming that when it comes to the relation between human beings, it is ‘the essential act that creates immediacy.’ First off, it should once again be stated that the

lovingly to me. In this sense, love can surely be one-sided (or somewhere in-between full-blown one-sidedness and full-blown reciprocity.) In the light of the above reflections, however, even your refusing to answer my love with yours testifies to your nonetheless being touched by it. In this sense, love will only be fully unilateral where the receiver of love is not aware of being the receiver. In the light of the last chapter’s discussion, it should moreover be noted that, just as the in-between is not a matter of reciprocity (because reciprocity is about two processes coinciding), so love is not a matter of reciprocity either. What Buber is after is not reciprocity but *togetherness in love*, that is, something which, at least in its consummate form, irreducibly involves us together. Hence, what is missing in unrequited love is not only that the other does not love me, but that the very togetherness in love – the consummation of my love, without which my love would still be lacking something – is absent. It is in this sense that love is *in-between* and not *from both sides*.

⁹⁵¹ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 245.

⁹⁵² I will expound this thought in the next section.

⁹⁵³ The vocabulary of ‘guiding and directing’ calls to mind Iris Murdoch’s already mentioned idea of *the Good* as “the magnetic centre towards which love naturally moves” (*The Sovereignty of the Good*, 100). While Murdoch’s thought shares many of the motifs with that of Buber, her understanding of love is importantly different Buber’s in that she, unlike Buber (and myself), understands the Good which guides love as something transcendent – Plato’s form of the Good – and, accordingly, the journey towards it as an infinite ascent towards perfection (ibid.). Although I will not be able to discuss in-depth the Platonic understanding of love in the present dissertation, I will offer some brief critical observations in the next chapter (section 2.b.). For a good vindication of Murdoch, seeking to show that her Platonism is less ‘otherworldly’ than may be thought, cf. David Robjant, “The Earthy Realism of Plato’s Metaphysics, or: What Shall We Do with Iris Murdoch?,” *Philosophical Investigations* 35, no. 1 (2011): 43–67.

word ‘act’ as Buber uses it, here as elsewhere, does not signify an exertion of practical reason.⁹⁵⁴ Instead, it is the deed that requires being done with our ‘whole being’ – and that, as was shown, is the same as the ‘act of will’ that is involved in meeting the You: “The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word⁹⁵⁵ to it is *a deed of my whole being*, is my *essential deed*.”⁹⁵⁶ In other words, the essential deed, or act, can only ever have the form of a response to another being that encounters me from beyond me and my worldview, a being that is in this sense ‘absolutely other’. Now, this essential deed is not an exercise of practical reason because it is non- or pre-deliberative. This comes out when Buber says that the essential deed “involves a sacrifice and a risk. The sacrifice: infinite possibility is surrendered [...] The risk: the basic word can only be spoken with one’s whole being; whoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself [...]” Practical reason, even in its ‘consummate form’ in the virtuous person in whom all non-virtuous alternatives are silenced, is distinguished by the practical agent, or subject, finding herself in a situation that presents her with different possibilities – this is the very condition for her to be able to do what is good (right or virtuous) by her own power. Yet, this rational detachment (however subtle and internalised qua second nature) is surrendered by the one who turns to the other – fully or *wholeheartedly*,⁹⁵⁷ one could say – as You.

Although he does not state this point outright, his wording makes it clear that Buber understands this “essential act which creates immediacy” – and hence, the wholehearted engagement with the other qua You – to be one and the same as love.⁹⁵⁸ This is already a contentious claim as it stands, given that it would probably appear quite counter-intuitive to say that *any* unreserved and wholehearted engagement with another is a manifestation of love. Is it not absurd to say that, say, the black man *loves* the racists because he just confronted their hatred and spite in an unreserved and wholehearted manner? This claim will probably appear even more striking if we recall that on Buber’s account, the I-It cannot be entirely severed from the I-You (for if it would, it would collapse back upon itself and into the nothingness of total

⁹⁵⁴ Buber seldom uses the term *essential act* (*Wesensakt*) and usually speaks of the less misleading *essential deed* (*Wesenstat*). That he uses the terms interchangeably becomes clear when taking into account that he introduces the discussion on the preceding page with reference to the “essential deed of art” (*ibid.*, 65).

⁹⁵⁵ That is: the basic word pair *I-You*.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 62; my emphasis.

⁹⁵⁷ As I have already used this notion (and will continue to do so), it seems called-for to clarify that when I speak of *wholeheartedness*, what I have in mind is precisely what Buber means when he speaks of the ‘act of the whole being’. The shift from ‘being’ to ‘heart’ is not supposed to change the point of the expression but rather give it a different accent, namely one that a) highlights that it is not a primarily intellectual matter (i.e. not a matter of practical reasoning) and that b) connects better to the notion of love.

⁹⁵⁸ That is: the claim that the immediacy-creating act is *not* a feeling is followed by the claim that love is *not* a feeling, leaving it to the reader to connect the (fairly obvious) dots.

indifference.)⁹⁵⁹ 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 – would cease to be.⁹⁶⁰ Yet, we *cannot but* relate to one another and the ‘act’ that establishes relation is love.⁹⁶¹ It is thus in a quite literal sense that Buber speaks of love’s *actuality*, namely as an invariable form of pre-subjective effectiveness that posits us in relation to others and thereby constitutes our most basal way of being in the world. So, love establishes and sustains the relation to the other and, as such, persists “between I and You.” It becomes apparent that Buber holds that, wherever there is a relation between I and You, love cannot be wholly absent – indeed, it even seems like he suggests that ‘in a certain sense’ love *is* I-You relationality.

This may seem absurd. What about relations of hate and spite and sadism and even of relative indifference? The first step in the direction of making room for Buber’s contentious notion of love is by calling attention to the fact that the reality of the You that approaches the I in virtue of grace – the invitation to love, as it were – can be *rejected*.⁹⁶² In this sense, there *is* unlovingness. The crucial point is, however, that it is only possible to reject what has already touched one.⁹⁶³ In other words, the refusal to respond lovingly is, as it were, always one step too late, always a defensive reaction to already having been called into love – teased out of one’s shell and into the in-between, so to speak – however faintly. This comes out in Buber’s remark that “whoever hates directly is closer to a relation than those who are without love and hate.”⁹⁶⁴ 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.)⁹⁶⁵ In a similar spirit, Simone Weil writes

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. chapter 4, section 5.

⁹⁶⁰ This is of course not to say that the material universe – the “earth”, to put it in Heidegger’s terms – would thus cease. The term ‘world’ is here intended in the sense in which McDowell (following Gadamer who, in turn, inherited it from Heidegger) uses it, that is, the conceptualised – *begriffene* – world.

⁹⁶¹ It would, however, be a misunderstanding to suppose that love only serves as a spark that ignites relation so that the relation can sustain itself if love subsequently dissipates. Buber’s understanding of relationality is that of an ‘ongoing presence’, meaning that the act that creates it, must create it at all times – in other words: relation must be sustained by love throughout. As Waldenfels puts it: “[The approaching and addressing of the You] does not come to a final rest, however, because the present in its unfathomability *is* not once and for all but constantly emerges anew” (*Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, 267; my translation & emphasis).

⁹⁶² This happens, as Buber puts it, “when a man withdraws from accepting with his essential being another person in his particularity [...] and lets the other exist only as his own experience, only as a ‘part of myself’.” If that happens, “dialogue becomes a fiction, the mysterious intercourse between two human worlds only a game, and in the rejection of the real life confronting him the essence of all reality begins to disintegrate” (*Between Man and Man*, 27–8).

⁹⁶³ That relationality means ‘touching and moving one another’ comes out particularly clearly in *I and Thou*, 67.

⁹⁶⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 68.

⁹⁶⁵ Hatred will be discussed in detail below in section 2.d.; Self-annihilation will become central in the next chapter, section 1.c.iii.

that “the only organ of contact with existence is acceptance, love.”⁹⁶⁶ This is an ingenious formulation in that it captures both aspects, the opening oneself to, and the closing oneself off from reality: on the one hand, it is possible to accept something only when it is being offered to one, in the way in which the contact with existence that is love is throughout offered to us by grace; on the other hand, however, what is offered can also be refused which, in the case at hand, means a loss of reality concomitant with a refusal to enter into love.

For the most part, Buber suggests, our lives are lived in a state in which love is not fully actual but more or less repressed, subdued by the It in its plethora of manifestations. This is why the motif of the unadulterated, wholehearted encounter of I and You ‘bursting forth’ again and again through the crust that has formed over the I, encapsulating it within its own worldview and, thus, separating it from the You, is so central in *I and Thou*. And it is also why this motif is almost always accompanied by the complementary motif, namely that of the I turning away from the lived reality of the encounter, a constant lapsing of love. The I’s withdrawal into itself and its worldview is motivated by a desire for safety, order, and predictability. It is the longing for understanding the world in a way in which one can make oneself reliably at home in it and which is not at the risk of being disrupted and shaken by the other, be it through their words or actions or through their mere presence – a distancing that minimises the uncertainty and the self-exposure of the living encounter at the cost of the love that may otherwise become actual in it. Someone who made himself at home in his worldview – “who has become reconciled to the It-world”⁹⁶⁷ – can thus be said to have adopted an unloving attitude. Reversely, the one who again and again thrusts himself into the breaches of the indeterminacy and naked exposure that comes with unreservedly answering the address of the one by whom, at each given moment, he finds himself confronted can be said to display a loving attitude.⁹⁶⁸ While an unloving

⁹⁶⁶ Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 292. This formulation also casts her claim that “[b]elief in the existence of other human beings as such is love” (ibid., 291) in a new light. While the standard (analytic-)philosophical way of reading it would be to take ‘belief’ as expressing a subjective view of what is or is not the case and, as such, something which one might also *not* have, what Weil is after is the belief in reality *as such*. But what does it mean to believe in reality as such if saying this indicates that it is possible *not* to believe in it? Just as Wittgenstein’s much referenced remark “My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul” (*Philosophical Investigations*, 178) shows that the subjectivistic language of ‘belief’ and ‘opinion’ is inapt to capture the way in which one finds oneself vis-à-vis others, so it is also inapt to capture what it means to find oneself encountering reality. In both cases, the attitude that reveals, be it the other (Wittgenstein) or reality (Weil), is shown to be the condition of the possibility even for meaningful doubt (a doubt which then becomes a doubt regarding *particular instances*, not regarding the existence of other human beings, or of reality, *as such*). In this sense, Weil’s choice of the word ‘belief’ seems to be rather synonymous with acceptance – a yes-saying to something in contact with which we stand *anyway* instead of a doubting or a no-saying that, not unlike a self-fulfilling prophecy, deludes us and, thus, makes us more and more blind to it all the while leaving us just as bound to it as before.

⁹⁶⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, 90.

⁹⁶⁸ Although I use the term ‘attitude’ differently from Buber, my and his usage can for the most part be reconciled: firstly, Buber does not speak of an *loving* or *unloving* attitude but about the *I-It* and the *I-You* attitude (*I and Thou*, 53) – yet, given that he equates the fully actual I-You relation with unreserved love (i.e. a loving

attitude is hence a matter of habit, both in that it is habit that lures one into making oneself at home in it in the first place and that which guides one's responses to others once one has adopted it,⁹⁶⁹ a loving attitude can never be a matter of habit precisely because it means entering each new encounter without holding back, putting oneself at stake in one's wholeheartedly responding to the other.⁹⁷⁰ What connects the one with a (rather) loving to the one with a (rather) unloving attitude is that both their attitudes are put to the test continuously, the loving spirit always at the risk of yielding to withdrawal into the self, the unloving spirit always carrying within it the potential for being rekindled.⁹⁷¹

This is a peculiar way of speaking about love, surely one which some would find presumptuous. I would assume that many would grant that love is something central in our lives, perhaps even exceptionally so – but the most fundamental existential phenomenon there is? And something that is present and where there is a relation? What are we to make of such grand claims? Is it perhaps merely some Jewish chutzpa showing through? In what follows, I will try to show that it is not. Yet doing so will take several steps.

c. Love and Lovingness

As mentioned, the following examination of love requires a distinction between love in the sense of *lovingness* and love in the sense of a *love relationship*.

When I speak of love in the spirit of Buber, what I am primarily after is the, as it were, quality or nature of *particular* ways of relating to or engaging with others as they play out in a

relation), reversely implying that the relation that is caught up in the I-It is unloving, it seems appropriate to speak in this way. Secondly, Buber does not explicitly speak of the I-It attitude in terms of habit – yet that he nonetheless takes them to be intrinsically connected comes out a) in that he understands the I-It in terms of an ongoing re-implementation of one's already acquired conceptual outlook, and b) in that, whenever he *does* speak about habit, it is in order to illustrate the I-It (cf. *ibid.*, 173 & 177 and esp. 111: “many a spoken You really means an It to which one merely says You from habit, thoughtlessly”). As regards the I-You (= loving) attitude, on the other hand, Buber speaks of it primarily in terms of the attitude that becomes manifest in *this very opening-up to the other* (e.g. *ibid.*, 147); this being said, however, he elsewhere suggests – especially in his discussion of what it means to be a person (*ibid.*, 111–7) – that the I-You may not merely manifests in the present moment but, in doing so, moreover come to colour an individual's overall stance: the encounter with the You “teaches you to encounter others and to stand your ground in such encounters” (*ibid.*, 84), so that one will cease to be “confined to the It-world but free to step out of it again and again into the world of relation.” (*ibid.*, 100).

⁹⁶⁹ Cf. Buber *I and Thou*, 173: “Our habits of thought make it difficult for us to see that in such cases [i.e. cases in which a being that we usually experience as an It suddenly confronts us as a You] something is awakened by our attitude and flashes toward us from that which has being. What matters in this sphere is that we should do justice with an open mind to the actuality that opens up before us.” In other words: it is precisely stepping out of one's habits of thoughts which allows one to answer to that which addresses us through grace.

⁹⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 102: “on the threshold [between the I-It and the I-You], the response, the spirit is kindled in him [i.e. the one who is freed from the fangs of the I-It] again and again.

⁹⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 89–90.

concrete situation. In this sense, it could be said that my concern lies with an *adverbial* understanding of love: what does it mean to engage with another *lovingly*⁹⁷² – and, accordingly, *unlovingly* (and all that comes in between the two poles) – in *this* particular situation, under *these* specific circumstances? Qua adverb, ‘lovingly’ – substantivised in the noun ‘lovingness’⁹⁷³ – does not designate particular actions or practices in its own right but instead thus qualifies verbs: to embrace lovingly, to listen lovingly, to question lovingly, to criticise lovingly, and so on. In this sense, lovingness is less a matter of *what* one does but of *how* one does what one does – if one does anything, that is⁹⁷⁴ – in relating to the other person. The list is, in principle, endless, although some ways of acting have unlovingness inscribed to them – one cannot abuse, betray, or humiliate lovingly. Reversely, there are other forms of engaging that have lovingness inscribed into them – feeling compassion, showing mercy, or being trusting, for instance. (If one shows mercy in an unloving way, for example, one does not show mercy; depending on the context, one simply helps or refrains from punishing or killing, or the like – i.e. one still *does* something, perhaps something very laudable, yet not in a way that expresses the kind of unmediated other-concern that goes with the unreserved responsiveness that is love in the Buberian sense.) Note, however, that, although at times connected to specific actions or practices, the ways of engaging with others that are intrinsically loving do not as such denote forms of *action*: feeling compassion is not an action at all while showing mercy,

⁹⁷² It should be added that what I am after can also be articulated with the adjective ‘(un)loving’: What does it mean to be *(un)loving* with, or towards, someone? What does it mean to relate to, or engage with, another in an *(un)loving* way? The reason why I will stick with the description ‘adverbial’ is because it brings better to light the *How?*-character of the notion of love I am concerned with: in its adverbial form, it is possible to show that love can be thought of, not as consisting of, but as being connected to all kinds of forms of interpersonal engagement, something that expresses the quality – indeed, its *moral* quality, as will be expounded in the next chapter – of a given way of engaging.

⁹⁷³ The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online lists as close synonyms of lovingness ‘kindness’, ‘care’, ‘concern’, ‘carefulness’, and ‘solicitude’ (*Merriam-Webster.com Thesaurus*, s.v. “lovingness,” accessed June 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/lovingness>). While ‘carefulness’, and ‘solicitude’ are not what I am after – although both can be connected to lovingness in the way I speak of it – the first three come fairly close to it, the risk with ‘kindness’ lying in its running the risk of suggesting that *relating lovingly* cannot mean *engaging with another in a way that is confrontational, argumentative, critical, angry, and so on*. Other online dictionaries (e.g. *The Free Dictionary (WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection*. S.v. “lovingness.” Retrieved June 18 2023 from <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/lovingness>) and *Vocabulary (Vocabulary.com Dictionary*, s.v. “lovingness,” accessed June 18, 2023, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/lovingness>)) also list ‘warmth’ – a very good synonym, I think.

⁹⁷⁴ That is to say: relating lovingly – or ‘in a loving way’ – is not restricted to the qualification of what one *does* in relation to others but also how one *is* in relation to him. So, not only is it possible to say ‘She criticised him in a loving way’ but also ‘She was angry with him in a loving way’. In other words, one can be loving while one is angry (or bored or annoyed or happy etc), suggesting that love’s ‘being’ is, as it were, on a different level than the ‘being’ of the feelings and moods that may mark one’s relation to another – which is just what I expounded above. As the formulation ‘being angry in a loving way’ is rather cumbersome, however, it seems more apt to say that ‘Her anger (towards him) appeared in the light of her love for him’. This line of thought will be further explored in the following section.

although tied to acting (i.e. acting *mercifully*⁹⁷⁵), cannot be reduced to a particular act, or *the* act, although it may show in the act.⁹⁷⁶ The lovingness resides, as it were, in the response itself, not in how exactly this response finds expression in what one does. The question that will guide the next section of this chapter is what it may mean for such a loving responsiveness to be actualised in all different kinds of relations, even in those in which it usually does not, or not fully, manifest.

In the next section of this chapter, various examples are explored, examples of interpersonal encounters and engagements with a view to the lovingness that is or is not actualised in them. Some of these examples will feature engagements of total or relative strangers or mere acquaintances, while others will play out in, and before the background of, relations in which a bond of love has already developed, enveloping those within it. The latter kinds of relations are what most discussions of love – not only but especially philosophical ones – focus on. In such relations, love is used primarily in the form of the substantive ‘love’ (“Their love has only grown over the years”) or as the verb ‘to love’ (“She loves him”).⁹⁷⁷ If, in such cases, love is used in the adverbial sense, it is before the background of something that is already there, something that has grown, developed, deepened – something with a substance (“Their love has only grown over the years. Every morning, he still lovingly prepares breakfast for her.”)

Speaking of love in the substantive sense means stepping back and looking at it from a distance, at how it has come to permeate and colour a whole relationship. As such, it means getting all three temporal dimensions into view: speaking of love in the ‘substantive’ sense, unlike in the adverbial one, means getting into perspective something that reaches back into the past of the respective relationship, colours its present, and indicates a certain direction into the future.⁹⁷⁸ This is how we usually speak of love in the familial and filial sense and also when it

⁹⁷⁵ That is to say: there can be no mere ‘feeling mercy’ – mercy means *doing something* in relation to another in a merciful way. In a nutshell, I would define it as ‘using one’s power over another *in a loving way* in situations in which it would be considered legitimate not to do so’. While the judge need not, but may, show mercy towards the offender by refraining from passing an unduly harsh sentence, the victor in battle need not, but may, show mercy by not killing the opponent. Similarly, the spiritual authority or holy person need not, but may, show mercy in the form of “a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion” (*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “mercy,” accessed June 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mercy>).

⁹⁷⁶ For a thorough phenomenological elucidation of mercy and its connection to love in the Biblical context, cf. John Cottingham, “Loving Kindness and Mercy: their Human and Cosmic Significance,” *Philosophy* 94, no. 1 (2019): 27–42.

⁹⁷⁷ As will be explored below, this is not to say that the adverbial form ‘lovingly’ has no place in such discussions

⁹⁷⁸ Christopher Cowley’s book *Moral Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 2013) bears structural similarities to this set-up: he differentiates between retrospective and prospective (moral) responsibility, yet understands the latter in such a wide way that it comprises the, as it were, immediately future (‘For what am I responsible right now?’) and the long-term future (‘For what am I responsible in the long-term?’) – a ‘move’ which, in the light of the last chapter’s discussion of the future-directedness of the I-You relation, strikes me as sensible. While

comes to romantic love relationships that have developed a certain depth. But of course, it is something different to speak of love in such a substantive sense or in the adverbial sense outlined in the last paragraph, given that, no matter how deep the loving bond between two individuals may be, they may, on a particular occasion, act very unlovingly towards one another. The reverse point, namely that of the possibility of *engaging lovingly* even with those whom one does not *love* (in the more substantial sense), is perhaps even more relevant given the tendency to conceive of ‘engaging lovingly’ as *presupposing* love to be there already between two individuals. Although it is undoubtedly true that engaging lovingly with one’s beloved will often look very different from one’s responses to strangers, mere acquaintances, and those one dislikes, this does not mean that it is impossible for a ‘loving spirit’ to manifest even in engagements with the latter.

I will now look at several different examples of engagements to explore some of the ways in which dialogical love – *lovingness*, that is – may come to be actualised. Subsequently, I will return to how lovingness and ‘substantial’ love may relate and rethink this relation in light of the insights of the proceeding reflections.

2. Love and/as the I-You Relation

The following exploration of what Buberian *lovingness here-and-now* may mean proceed by way of example – or, more precisely, by way of examples. I sketch five examples of engagements or encounters, all of them in quite different settings, and discuss each of them in respect to what it may mean for those involved to engage lovingly with one another. These five examples differ in various respects, some of the most important being a) the *personal* connection of the protagonists (i.e. closeness/distance, like/dislike, their feelings towards another), b) their *professional* relations (if there are any), c) their *shared past* (if any), d) the *power dynamics* between them (if there are any), e) the *social standing* (i.e. equality/inequality, prejudice, racism or other such –isms, etc.), f) the *one-sidedness or reciprocity* of the engagement, and g) how their engagement with one another *alters their relation to the world around them*. This being said, each example only thematises some of these aspects and in no particular order, the reason being that the aim of this section is not to lay out a ‘taxonomy of lovingness’ but rather to create a sense of its many-facedness. What I am after, in other words, is to show that answering the question whether a response is expressive of love is, although

Cowley’s discussion unsurprisingly focusses on moral responsibility, he uses the term at least partly in ways that are quite close to how I speak of love (or lovingness), especially in his discussion of the example of the Good Samaritan in chapter 7.

dependent on all kinds of situational factors, not simply an arbitrary matter. At the same time, however, I will not simply *state*, let alone *explain*, what loving responsiveness looks like – what follows is rather to be taken as an invitation that I extend to you, the reader, to follow me and to try to see for yourself whether the descriptions of (un)lovingness I offer do not capture at least an intimation of the truth of what it may mean to respond lovingly for different individuals in different kinds of situations. Apart from preparing the ground for my connection of love with morality in the next chapter, the subsequent reflections are hence written in the hope that they will eventually have helped not only me but also you in deepening or clarifying your understanding of what ‘being loving’ may mean (even if that will mean rejecting some of what I will have to say).

Example I: Loving the Beloved

After stating that the feelings that “merely accompany the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love [...] can be very different”, Buber illustrates this claim by remarking that “Jesus’ feeling for the possessed man is different from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is one.”⁹⁷⁹ In section c) below, I will discuss what it may mean to engage lovingly with ‘the possessed’ and I will do so by staying fairly closely to the Biblical original. In respect to the ‘the beloved disciple’, I will proceed differently, rather taking Buber’s remark as the starting point for my own discussions which, ultimately, retain little connection to the issue raised by Buber. What I will do, *in concreto*, is begin by reflecting on what it may mean to engage lovingly with someone whom one already loves, i.e. ‘the *beloved*’ (in this section), and then discuss what it means for one to relate lovingly to someone who is, more or less, in the position of ‘a *disciple*’ (the next section).

I will understand ‘the beloved’ as a person to whom a deep loving bond has already been formed – someone to whom one already stands in a substantive love relationship. Accordingly, ‘loving the beloved’ means ‘relating lovingly to someone whom one already loves’. More specifically, I will look at an example of a romantic love relation, thus bringing to light what it means for two lovers to engage lovingly with one another.

Take the example of two young adults sitting on a park bench, fully immersed in one another in a loving way. By this I mean no particular thing they do but rather that *all* they do – be it kissing or hugging, touching, glancing at, or speaking with, one another, or whatever else – they do *lovingly*. It is apparent that both are filled to the brink with joy and happiness simply

⁹⁷⁹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

by virtue of being in the other's presence, and for being able to dwell in it as if basking in their light. Yet, although I think it is not really an issue to speak of this 'light' in metaphorical terms (given that they do not *literally* shine rays of light onto one another and their surroundings), the last chapter's analysis⁹⁸⁰ showed that the notion of light may be of genuine help to understand what it means to engage lovingly with another. Let me thus return to the account of dialogical relationality that I propounded, so as to see whether – and if so, how – it may help us to better understand the nature of the love of the two lovers on the park bench.

Let us call our two lovers Jay and Lin.⁹⁸¹ Let us assume for the sake of simplicity that the ways in which the two relate to one another are roughly symmetrical – he responds to her as she responds to him. But then how *do* they respond to one another? Or: what does it mean to say that they relate to one another *lovingly* and not, say, merely out of mutual infatuation or obsession, or in a way that is overly misty-eyed or sentimental?

It should first be noted that the present example makes it abundantly clear that the 'ping-pong model' of responsiveness does not work – both of them are in an ongoing flow of simultaneously responding to, and addressing, the respective other. One could say that we have here an (admittedly somewhat artificial) example of consummate love – that is, of togetherness-in-love. But now let me take a look at how Lin may be understood to relate to Jay (which can be mirrored so that it applies equally to Jay). As was expounded in the last chapter, relationality begins with finding oneself addressed by the other in a way that is intrinsically bound up with one's response to this address. This, it was said, is so even where one's response is a turning-away from the address (for one can only turn away from an address that one encounters as an address.) Assuming that her response to him is indeed loving, however, this is not the case when it comes to Lin. Saying that she responds lovingly to him means that she does not turn away from, but towards, Jay. Finding herself addressed by Jay's whole being, in other words, her loving response consists in answering this address in a wholehearted way, i.e. with her whole being. In the case of Lin finding herself face-to-face with Jay, moreover, it is not merely the case that he invites her to respond lovingly – on top of that, she also finds herself addressed by him responding lovingly to her. In this sense, she responds to his loving response to her. And, because of the contemporaneity of their addressing, and responding to, one another, the same also holds for Jay – he, too, finds himself not only invited to respond lovingly to her as she responds lovingly to him.

⁹⁸⁰ I.e. section 5.

⁹⁸¹ A side remark: the main reason I tend to deploy examples of 'traditional' heterosexual love relationships is that the two 'established' pronouns, he and she, make it easier to follow who it is I am talking about whenever I do not use first names.

Furthermore, their lovingly responding to one another plays out before the background of their already existing love relationship. But in which sense does that make a difference? As already mentioned, saying that two individuals have a loving relationship – that they love one another – does not mean that they only respond lovingly to one another, far from it. Still, it seems that the love that has already come to shape a relationship between two individuals has an impact on what it means for them to respond lovingly and unlovingly to one another. That is, for two individuals who love each other (in the ‘substantive’ sense) to respond to, and engage with, one another will always be illuminated by the love that prevails in their relationship, the strength of the illumination proportional to how deep and strong their love for one another has grown.⁹⁸² This is, I think, why it is not incomprehensible to us if we hear that, say, a mother, although abhorred, is still caring for her serial killer son,⁹⁸³ or that an adult daughter may often think about her abusive father not only with resentment but also with pity.

So, even if Jay and Lin were to engage with one another in different, less loving ways, the love that has already come to permeate their relation to one another would cast its light on it. Imagine, for instance, that, on their way home, Jay thoughtlessly kicks a ball so that it flies into a window, shattering it. Imagine also that this makes Lin angry because it is the kind of thing that he is wont to do and the kind of thing she has repeatedly and emphatically told him not to do – yet in vain. Now, if it would be her anger, not her love, that would be decisive in guiding Lin’s response to Jay, then it becomes personal, that is, directed against *him*: “You are such an idiot!”, or “Why don’t you ever learn? Are you stupid?”⁹⁸⁴ If Jay would get such a reaction from, say, his bitter neighbour, he would probably not mind it all that much – of course, he might still feel ashamed or embarrassed or even offended by the neighbour’s unfriendly words; yet, given that Jay and the neighbour do not stand in a love relationship, the neighbour’s unloving response also cannot *betray* such love relationship. This is different in the case of his relation to Lin. So, if Jay would take Lin’s angry outbursts in the unloving spirit in which they were voiced – something levied against *him* rather than against *what he did* – he will feel, not embarrassed or ashamed or offended, but hurt, that is, hurt that someone whom he loves so dearly, and whom he knows loves him, would respond to him so unlovingly.⁹⁸⁵ He may of

⁹⁸² I will return to this thought in section 3 below.

⁹⁸³ Cf. Christopher Hamilton, *Living Philosophy: Reflections on Life, Meaning and Morality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 20–2.

⁹⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion of the difference between being angry *about something* and *at another (beloved) person*, cf. Camilla Kronqvist, “What We Talk About when We Talk About Love,” PhD diss. (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2008), 82–91.

⁹⁸⁵ This idea is obviously connected to the notion of trust which will be explored below in section c. For a discussion along similar lines on the connection of love, trust, and hurt, cf. Camilla Kronqvist, “The Promise That Love Will Last,” 655ff., esp. at 660.

course be very much on board with Lin's claim that his behaviour was stupid – if her response to him would have been aimed at that, he may have openly admitted to it, with no 'hard feelings' involved; yet this is not how he finds her responding to him. This is of course not to say that he would therefore think that she does not love him anymore nor that he has momentarily ceased to love her, only that a gap – a hurtful gap – has opened between her love towards him in how she responds to him there and then.⁹⁸⁶

It seems that if he were to answer her unlovingness in a loving way, then this may – although it need not – also entail anger on his part. If so, however, his would not be anger directed at, or against, *her* but rather against *her responding to his* (admittedly stupid) *behaviour in such an unloving way*. As an 'anger in a loving spirit', as it were, it would be directed towards facing her with the unlovingness of her response so as to call her back into the spirit of love that he knows (and which he knows she also knows) permeates their relationship.⁹⁸⁷ (This illuminates another difference to the encounter with the bitter neighbour: if Jay were to respond lovingly to the neighbour's unloving response, it would not be so as to recreate a loving spirit that already prevails in their relationship but rather to establish such a spirit in the first place.) Now, if he were to succeed and reach Lin with his appeal, she would feel bad and regret that her anger 'had gotten the better of her'. This may find expression in her admitting that her reaction was off and perhaps in her saying that she is sorry.⁹⁸⁸ If so, however, then this does not mean that she would therefore also have to backpedal regarding her complaint about his stupid behaviour. She may still be angry about it – yet if so, it will be in the light of her love for him. And as just stated, this may be a response that Jay may fully acknowledge as a response due to what he did.

Yet let us return to the scene as I sketched it at the beginning, namely that Lin and Jay actually do respond in an unreservedly loving way to one another, and one in which their romantic feelings for one another find expression. This means that just as Lin sees everything in the light of her love for Jay, so Jay sees everything in the light of his love for Lin. This 'everything' will, to connect back to the distinction between feelings and love, also include the feelings the two lovers have for one another. For instance, what would otherwise be plain arousal and a base sexual desire towards the respective other will, in the light of their love for

⁹⁸⁶ This also goes the other way around: because Jay trusts in their love, Lin's words, which to a by-stander could sound very harsh, need not be taken in that way by him.

⁹⁸⁷ In such a case, as Backström puts it, "you do not get angry because you did not get your way, but rather because *I* fell away from friendship in insisting on getting things my way. Your anger is then the reaction of *friendship itself* attacked and hurt, fighting back, wanting to reassert itself" (*The Fear of Openness*, 213).

⁹⁸⁸ I deliberately retained the 'may' because the speaking of words, perhaps even as some kind of speech act, is not of any special significance here. Thus understood, 'saying sorry' may also be done in a glance or a way of touching the other person (i.e. in the sense of Buber's *speaking-with*).

one another, be, as it were, transfigured.⁹⁸⁹ instead of being explicable in terms of a desire for their respective individual pleasure and for self-gratification – desires concomitant to relating to the other as the object of one’s desire – their sexual longing will, in the light of their love, become one aspect of their overarching desire simply to be *with* the other as unreservedly and intimately as possible.⁹⁹⁰

Or take another example – say their dislike of certain features of one another. Let us say that from first setting eyes on one another, Lin instantly disliked Jay’s thoughtlessness and carelessness when it came to taking care of things, while Jay never liked Lin’s obsession with planning everything in the minutest details. It can be imagined that, even though the two were attracted to one another in ways that more than ‘made up’ for these disagreeable qualities, they nonetheless became problematic now and then, even to the point of actually threatening the future of their relationship.

Now, the deepening of a relationship does not mean that those involved will therefore come to overlook, or even grow to like, what they initially disliked in one another – quite often, the opposite is the case. However, saying that a relationship *deepens* is not the same as saying that it becomes *more* loving nor that the *love* in it deepens⁹⁹¹ – it may also mean that one gets to know one another better or simply that one develops *some* kind of connection. Two persons may be shipwrecked on an uninhabited island and, due to a need for cooperation and the lack of other company, get to know one another well; their connection will probably accompany them their entire life, yet this does not mean that they will therefore have come to enter into a loving relationship. However, a relationship *can* also be deepened – or perhaps better: illuminated – by love. What does that mean? Taking the light metaphor further, I would say that it means that the love that manifests in the actual, lived engagement of those involved –

⁹⁸⁹ Despite its religious connotations, I find ‘transfiguration’, at least in some contexts, to be a good alternative to ‘transformation’ (the latter, due to its close ties to the notion of ‘form’, being problematic for describing the kind of change of attitude I am after; cf. my discussion of McDowell and Buber in the previous chapter). Furthermore, the notion has been used by other philosophers with a similar thrust. In one of the various instances that Stanley Cavell deploys it in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, for example, he uses it to describe a radically different way of conceiving, not of *feelings*, but of *Utopia*: “suppose that the world of that city [i.e. Utopia] is not a ‘something’ that is ‘outside’ [...] but is, as it says, ‘no place’, which perhaps suggests no place *else*, but this place transfigured” (20). While I cannot go into detail as to how exactly to read this passage (and the discussion of Kant in which it embedded), I think it is quite striking that what Cavell seems to be after when speaking of Utopia is close to what I am after when I, following Buber, speak of the I-You: not another “Sometime or Somewhere” (Buber, *I and Thou*, 59) but *here and now*, yet transfigured. The telling difference between Cavell and Buber, however, is that Cavell’s vision of this transfigured here and now accentuates responsiveness-*qua-life-with-language* – the city that is Utopia is for him “the city of words” (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 20) – while Buber’s vision accentuates responsiveness-*qua-love*.

⁹⁹⁰ Cf. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 68.

⁹⁹¹ For a discussion of what it means for (romantic) love to deepen, cf. Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 141–2 (as well as section 3 below.)

that is, love in the Buberian adverbial sense – sheds its light on the relationship as a whole and in such a way that it lingers on, as if absorbed by that which it illuminates.

So, if Lin's dislike for Jay's thought- and carelessness has been part of their relationship from its inception, yet if they for the most part engage very lovingly with one another, then this will also assign a different place to Jay's bad trait than it had at the beginning. Given that it will then appear in the light of her love for him, she will not anymore – as she initially may have – think of it in terms of how much it will cost her if he never looks after things or breaks them⁹⁹² but, say, also partly or even primarily in relation to what she could do in order to awaken in *him* a sense of the value of certain things, of the good sides of taking care of them, and so on. Or she may actually see something inspiring in Jay's behaviour, something that makes her aware of how much care she invests in even the most unimportant things. Then she will probably not think of it anymore in terms of *carelessness* but perhaps rather as *carefreeness*. If so, her loving responsiveness to him will show in her readiness to rethink herself, her character and behaviour, in the light of her love for him.⁹⁹³

But, of course, it need not be so rosy. After all, love's light is not a light that simply makes things appear nicer and better but a light that reveals reality – including the unpleasant, disagreeable, and painful reality, including the reality which, when disclosed to one's beloved, may lead to unwanted consequences.⁹⁹⁴ Lin's penchant for pedantic planning, for instance, may not have bothered Jay very much at the beginning – he saw it as a not-so-great character trait, true, an odd quirk, yet he did not care much about it. As his love to her developed and deepened, however, he became increasingly unsettled about it, yet not only, or even primarily, because it is unpleasant to have to plan everything but rather because, in the light of his love for her, he came to see something unhealthy – pathological, if you wish – about her behaviour and, hence, that *she* is suffering from it. He may, for instance, come to understand that it is her way of compulsively keeping control of everything. And as such, it is not only bad for her, but also bad for their love – after all, her preoccupation with organising and planning will also shine through in, and obfuscate, her loving responsiveness to Jay. So, in becoming seriously concerned with her in the light of his love for her, he may at the same time show a concern for their relationship and the love that prevails in it.⁹⁹⁵

⁹⁹² Of course, she may still think of this, too. Being concerned with money need not reflect unlovingness, at least not when it is money needed in order to look for another, or others, and one's relationship with them. It will only reflect unlovingness if the fact that it will cost her extra merely annoys her, is some sort of nuisance to her.

⁹⁹³ For an illuminating discussion of how one's love for others may transform oneself and one's sense of self, cf. Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 66–8 & 80.

⁹⁹⁴ Cf. Camilla Kronqvist, "What We Talk About when We Talk About Love," 174–5.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175–6; Kronqvist's entire discussion is helpful in respect to my present point (*ibid.* 171–6).

Lastly, it must be noted that the light of their love does not only illuminate their own reality, i.e. the reality of what they feel for, say to, and do with one another, but also that of the world around them. As in the case of feelings and speech, too, one has to be careful, however, not to confuse the disclosing power of love's light with the kind of oversaturation concomitant to romanticisation. The latter is what one usually has in mind when saying that lovers perceive the world through 'rose-tinted glasses'. Often, however, it is unclear where the illumination through love ends and the oversaturation of romanticisation begins. Is it love or the rose-tinted glasses that make lovers see what to others appear as a bleak rainy day as refreshing and exciting, inspiring a dance in the rain, or as cosy and intimate, inviting to snuggle up at home in the lover's arms? And what about the otherwise depressing slab construction settlement in which they live that suddenly appears as a nice and welcoming place, a hub of life and stories?

Let me take a closer look. Now, I do not yet see the problem with saying that, in the light of their love for one another, our two lovers see the prefab housing estate they live in as a welcoming and nice place bustling with life. But let us become more concrete and imagine what this may mean in a concrete instance. Imagine, for example, that a derelict and abject heroin addicts suddenly staggers towards them and asks for some spare change. It would seem that if they do not see his predicament as all that bad, if, in speaking about him afterwards, they are light-hearted and fairly indifferent, telling one another in a self-conciliatory manner things like "Well, he's going to get better, definitely" or "Poor fellow – but I guess we all have our problems!," then they do not see him in the light of love, for then they do not see the reality that is his misery. Rather, it seems that the way in which relate to one another somehow blinds them to, or at least obfuscates their perception of, the addict.

The way in which I initially described Jay's and Lin's way of engaging with one another, namely in terms of their 'being immersed in one another', already pointed to this ambiguity between the eye-opening nature of love and the blinding nature of romanticisation and infatuation: on the one hand, 'being immersed in one another' may indeed be the way in which love comes to manifest between two who love one another dearly (and not only in the case of romantic lovers.) Imagine the moment of bliss in which a parent and her small child are concerned with nothing but the smile with which they answer to one another – or the hug of two close friends who meet each other for the first time after many years. Such moments 'claim their time' – which is to say: it is part of love for the lovers at times to be concerned only with one another. If, however, they become like 'attention magnets' to one another, directing their attention towards each other at a cost of a concern with *other* others and a concern for reality as such, then something goes awry. In the above version of the example, this lack of genuine

concern for other others took the form of a sugar-coating of the harsh reality: intoxicated by the pleasure they found being in each other's presence, Jay and Lin projected a saccharine veil over the goings-on around them, including the addict's misery.⁹⁹⁶

Understanding love's light as that which discloses reality means understanding it as that which makes those who perceive the world in it more attentive and sensitive to the world (as well as to the beings that populate it.)⁹⁹⁷ If our two lovers would hence perceive the addict in the light of their love for one another, they would be roused to the reality of his predicament and, hence, of its seriousness, an understanding reflected in pity and compassion. This is not to say that they would therefore give him money – after all, they are aware that he might very well just spend it on more heroin. If they are really touched by his dire predicament, however, it will come to colour them, however faintly. It may motivate them to donate some money to the local methadone clinic or to become active in some other way. Or it may lead to a serious, heartfelt conversation about the poor soul and others like him, as well as the overall socio-political problems that are behind such tragic fates. In any case, it will shed their rose-tinted glasses – if they wore any in the first place, that is – and open themselves to reality, including a live sense of the pain and misery in it. So, if, in the light of their love towards one another, they still see their inner-city project as a beautiful hub of life, it will have to be a more demanding and nuanced of 'beauty', one that is able to take into account the misery that also exists in it.⁹⁹⁸

Example II: Loving the 'Disciple'

Let me now turn to the 'love of the disciple'. As I said, I will not look at Buber's example – i.e. Jesus' love towards his 'beloved disciple' – but instead ask the more general question: what does it mean for an authority figure of a moral-spiritual kind to relate lovingly (or unlovingly) to someone who seeks him out? I will develop an answer to this question by turning to Raimond Gaita's discussion of what it means to respond to someone seeking moral advice from one in a way that is not morally jaded.

In 'The Personal in Ethics', Gaita writes the following:

⁹⁹⁶ Of course, being together with one's beloved in a loving spirit may also be very pleasurable. But if the pleasure comes from the satisfaction of a desire of the kind just described – i.e. of not wanting to have anything to do with what happens in the world because one has eyes only for the other – then this rather suggests that it is born out of lack and need and, hence, a self-interested desire, i.e. a (Kantian) inclination. Cf. Camilla Kronqvist, "A Passion for Life: Love and Meaning," 44–5.

⁹⁹⁷ This thought is developed in-depth by Rick Furtak, "Why Love is Edifying," 8:30–15:40.

⁹⁹⁸ Cf. Christopher Cordner, "Gaita and Plato," in *Philosophy, Ethics and a Common Humanity: Essays in Honour of Raimond Gaita*, ed. Christopher Cordner (London: Routledge, 2011), 49–67, at 56–63.

Suppose someone who is deeply bitter over some matter seeks my advice on it, and suppose, too, that although I think him to be confused I am silenced by his bitterness, because I am unable to rise to what would be required of me if I were seriously to engage with it. Under such conditions, to speak out my objections to what he is saying would be disrespectful, no matter how deeply I had thought on such matters in the past and no matter how confident I might be that my past thoughts bear relevantly on what he is saying.⁹⁹⁹

The responsiveness of Gaita's alter ego is compromised by virtue of him being "unable to rise to what would be required" of him because he is 'silenced by the advice-seeker's bitterness'. Over the course of the discussion, Gaita speaks of this inability also in terms of a "weariness of spirit"¹⁰⁰⁰ which would make any answer he would give "morally jaded."¹⁰⁰¹ If, in this predicament, he would nonetheless give advice, then this add to his already compromised responsiveness a more straightforwardly immoral dimension: if he were to speak out his objections to what the embittered advice-seeker says *despite* his spiritual weariness, then he would betray the advice-seekers trust.¹⁰⁰² After all, the latter does not come to him for impersonal information or specialised knowledge but for advice and wisdom that comes from the heart.¹⁰⁰³ What I call 'advice from the heart', Gaita describes as "'having something to say',"¹⁰⁰⁴ clarifying what he means by adding: "To have something to say is to be 'present' in what one says and to those to whom one is speaking."¹⁰⁰⁵ In the scenario at hand, such a 'being present' would mean to "be properly responsive to the depth of [the advice-seeker's] bitterness."¹⁰⁰⁶ Yet, Gaita's alter ego is aware of him not being properly responsive to his interlocutor's bitterness but morally jaded, just as he understands that part of the reason why the embittered advice-seeker seeks his moral advice precisely from *him* is because he assumes that he will not be morally jaded, that he will give an answer that is not merely judicious but also heartfelt – if he would not, then he would not seek him out.¹⁰⁰⁷ If, therefore, Gaita's alter

⁹⁹⁹ Raimond Gaita, "The Personal in Ethics," 139.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰² I will discuss the notion of trust in section 4 below.

¹⁰⁰³ It is part of Gaita's main point to show that being "scientifically jaded" (Gaita, "The Personal in Ethics," 136), in contrast to being morally jaded, "is of itself no bar to a scientist's authority to speak in his field" (ibid.)

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., 139; for a discussion of "the demand to inhabit what one says", cf. Marina Barabas, "In search of goodness," 83.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid.; I took the liberty of rephrasing Gaita's more general point: "We would not seek moral advice from someone whom we knew to be morally jaded."

ego would have nonetheless given him advice, he would have betrayed his trust – his trust that Gaita’s alter ego would ‘be present in his words’.

Gaita says that it would be disrespectful if his alter ego would betray the other’s trust. Yet while I would agree with this description, I do not think that its being disrespectful is its central flaw.¹⁰⁰⁸ If it were, then the respectful alternative would be all that it needs – but that seems hardly right. After all, he *does* respond respectfully, namely by remaining silent.¹⁰⁰⁹ Morally speaking, his honest silence is certainly better than feigning genuineness – but even so, the main issue obviously remains, namely his inability to be properly responsive to the depth of the other’s bitterness. Accordingly, rising to what was required of him in the face of the other’s embittered plea for advice would have required him to somehow be roused – a reinvigoration of his spirit in the face of the advice-seeker, or, as Buber puts it, a re-kindling of the spark that underlies and fuels his sense of responsibility for the other.¹⁰¹⁰ Only that kind of response would have done away with the problem altogether.¹⁰¹¹

As already said, such a responsiveness cannot be brought about simply by deciding to do so and implementing the decision in practice – if that were possible, one would not really be morally jaded.¹⁰¹² Yet if such a re-kindling occurs – through a meeting of “will and grace,”¹⁰¹³ as Buber says – then the overall situation becomes illuminated by the other’s presence (in this case, the one turning to Gaita’s alter ego for advice). What may this look like? The first thing to note is that even the kind of just-mentioned honest silence *may* be a manifestation of a loving

¹⁰⁰⁸ By this I mean: its central *moral* flaw. Showing this, however, would require the notion of morality that I develop in chapter 6.

¹⁰⁰⁹ This is not to say that remaining silent would, in this situation, be the *only* respectful way of responding. Another way would be to be honestly admitting the one who approaches him that he cannot advise him because he is himself weary of spirit.

¹⁰¹⁰ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 109.

¹⁰¹¹ This brings to mind some remarks by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*: “The solution to the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem” (6.521), and “[...] when no questions remain [...] just that is the answer” (6.52). In an illuminating discussion of these passages, Stanley Cavell states, in way that also sheds light on the present discussion, “[t]he more one learns, so to speak, and gets the hang of oneself, and mount’s ones problems, the less one is able to say what one has learned; not because you have forgotten what it was, but because nothing you said would seem like an answer or a solution [...] You are different, what you recognize as problems are different, your world is different” (Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, 85–6). If Gaita’s alter ego would have been able to overcome his silence by living up to the claim exerted upon him by the presence of his bitter interlocutor, he would have ‘mounted’ the moral problem, or challenge, posed to him in the situation, yet not by finding a solution to it but by *overcoming* it, by leaving it behind him. This overcoming would have implicated himself in relation to the interlocutor and, thus, would have ‘made him different’.

¹⁰¹² That is: it is intrinsic to being morally jaded to be unable to get out of one’s being morally jaded – or, differently put: it just is one’s being morally jaded that keeps one from leaving one’s predicament. What one can do by virtue of one’s practical capabilities is to either repress one’s moral jadedness and feign spiritedness or to do all kinds of other things which one may hope will somehow be conducive to overcoming one’s jadedness. Someone one who is really deeply morally jaded, however, would probably be too weary to really attempt any such things. The only way of leaving one’s jaded predicament behind is by ‘being pulled out of it’ – and that, whenever it happens, cannot be brought about by oneself but is rather something that happens to one in the present moment.

¹⁰¹³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 58.

responsiveness. If so, however, it must not be brought forth out of a sense of respect – i.e. of what one owes to the other¹⁰¹⁴ – but as the expression of a heartfelt regret of one’s failure to be properly responsive. In that case, however, one has already left behind one’s moral jadedness, if only for a moment, and has become more fully responsive.

This being said, the other’s presence may kindle one’s responsiveness in a way that ‘goes deeper’¹⁰¹⁵ with one, one that casts a new light onto the situation, not only for a fleeting moment, but in such a way as to illuminate one’s whole engagement with him. If so, the other’s address will move – or perhaps better: will heave or jerk – one out of the spiritual weariness that had enveloped one up to that point, and towards the other, into the in-between that is the lived engagement. This once again entails coming to see all else in *his* light, including the problems with which he approaches one: In being awakened to your reality and to how You address me, I will also come to relate differently to what, if anything, you tell me and ask from me. This, of course, opens up the possibility that, despite your professing your misery, your whole being tells me something else – say, that you wallow in self-pity and simply desire someone else’s validation for doing so. In that case, my response, if it is to be loving, will take this into account, say, by trying to get you out of your self-pity all the while also seeking to find out what pain or suffering lies at the roots of your behaviour.¹⁰¹⁶

If it is assumed, however, that, in facing you and hearing You put forward what lies on your heart, I get the sense that your bitterness is not feigned but genuine and that it is the

¹⁰¹⁴ If it is, then we are back at the issue I discussed in connection with Kant and McDowell, namely that the response will be morally compromised because the attention will not anymore be on the other but on some criterion of appropriateness or rightness.

¹⁰¹⁵ Discussing what it means for someone to take something morally seriously, Gaita elsewhere remarks that “Rush Rhees used the expression, though not quite in this connection, that ‘it must go deep with him’” (Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 38). Gaita deploys the expression primarily in the context of discussing what it means to deny others, or other groups, a deep sense of moral seriousness (cf. e.g. Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 58 ff.) whereas my focus is more phenomenological, i.e. on the investigation of what it means to speak of a deepened responsiveness to others. Yet my understanding and that of Gaita ultimately converge: a deepened responsiveness just *is* a responsiveness that has been roused to the moral seriousness of the situation it is responsive to. I will further develop this motif in the next chapter, especially in section 2.

¹⁰¹⁶ This may appear as if I jump to a conclusion too quickly: Why would responding lovingly to someone who wallows in self-pity entail that one seeks for some pain or suffering that supposedly lies at its roots? Why would it not be possible, say, that the other is simply an idiot? Speaking (seriously) in such a way, however, shows that one does not see the other in a loving light – for seeing the other primarily as an idiot means seeing her in the light of her bad qualities or her overall bad character. Neither bad qualities nor bad character, however, are the other’s whole being that claims me in loving response. In other words, a loving response to someone with a bad character – in this case: one that entails a validation-seeking wallowing in self-pity – means seeing her character in the light of one’s love. But once that is so, one will see her bad character as something that developed not ‘just like that’, out of some rotten essence, but due to the harm and pain inflicted on her by others (and from there, through perhaps various vicious cycles onto herself by herself, the others’ harming her gradually internalised in the form of self-harming). This being said, what is important with respect to the other’s unlovingness – be it in the form of self-pity or in some other guise – is not necessarily a historical “root” (i.e. what has happened in the past). “The root” may also refer to what the real difficulty for this person is *here and now*, and this difficulty is probably not the one he gives voice to at first and is probably not one he is fully aware of.

reflection of some moral or spiritual ‘confusion’ gnawing away at you – as it seems to be in Gaita’s example – then a loving response, whatever it may look like *in concreto*, will certainly entail that I am touched by it and, hence, take it seriously. If in my being roused to your presence, moreover, I understand what kind of advice it is that you are seeking – namely one that comes from the heart – then, as Gaita himself points out, I will not primarily feel compelled to provide you with *something*, some information or practical knowledge that I may have (although this may also factor into my response), but rather *myself*.

This means that if I do, there is always the risk that I may fail to give you advice that helps you on the practical or pragmatic level. Even the one who is genuinely invested in the predicament of another, who feels deeply about her bitterness and wants to do what he can to help him overcome it – someone, in short, whose advice is given in a loving spirit – may end up giving advice that is imprudent, be it due to a misreading of the particular situation at hand or due to a general lack of understanding regarding the human psyche or other relevant issues involved.¹⁰¹⁷ Yet, even in such a case, the one seeking advice will not have nothing – indeed, he may still have what is most valuable, namely that someone was there, listened attentively, and took his problem genuinely to heart.¹⁰¹⁸

In this sense, the lovingness of my response is intrinsic to the kind of cure that you are seeking in approaching me with your spiritual malady. When I am present to my embittered interlocutor and his pleas, then my reply is not something that I could have devised beforehand so as to simply fall back upon it when facing her. Of course, I could have thoroughly thought about the given issue beforehand (and if he asks for my advice because I am regarded as some kind of spiritual authority, then this will testify to my taking this task seriously); yet, even so, all of my prior thoughts can only form the background before which I will then find myself compelled to direct my attention to him so as to speak spontaneously and from the heart¹⁰¹⁹

¹⁰¹⁷ This lack of understanding may of course also concern the circumstances, be it in a narrower or a wider sense. I may fail to give you helping advice because I fail to understand that, say, your inability to grieve is connected to some kind of feigned optimism that you have internalised by having become socialised into the prevailing capitalist business practices. But even if I fail to understand that and my advice turns out doing more harm than good, it may still have been given in a loving spirit.

¹⁰¹⁸ I take this to be a point that Gaita neglects. Not that his account stands in conflict with it; rather that the way in which he frames the example suggests a reading on which Gaita’s alter ego’s being silenced may have to do with the fact that, faced with such intense bitterness, he *does not know* what to say. This may of course be the case, and in the case he has a role, perhaps even an official one, of some kind of spiritual teacher, it may be a problem in its own right. But it is not a moral problem; the problem becomes moral only when the other’s bitterness makes him unable to respond in an open and loving spirit.

¹⁰¹⁹ Elsewhere, Gaita gives an example of a teacher wanting to show to a “good but rather wild” (*Good and Evil*, 142) student “the dignity of the subject” (*ibid.*, 143) that he is teaching. In describing what it would mean for the teacher to ‘rise to what is required of him’ in thus turning to the student, Gaita writes: “he cannot merely tell him what his thoughts are on the subject. He does not and cannot have a clear idea of what to do. If he thought he did and acted accordingly, if he thought that in such a situation one ought to do such and such, then he would fail to do what he is now called upon to do. That is not how his past must enter what he says and does” (*ibid.*).

(which is not to say ‘thoughtlessly’ – only that the thinking has to take place *in* my responding to her, ‘subtly modulated’ towards her as I find her addressing me.)

If Gaita’s alter ego would have broken out of his spiritual weariness and responded to the advice-seeker spontaneously and from the heart, then, as in the above example of Jay and Lin, both the advice-seeker’s features (as well as that of the overall situation) and the feelings of Gaita’s alter ego would have appeared to him in the light of the spirit with which he would then have been filled. If, in that scenario, the advice-seeker were, say, slow-witted and Gaita’s alter ego would have had to repeat himself again and again, then what would have been a vivid feeling of annoyance when he was still caught up in his spiritual weariness, may now recede into the background or simply become a non-issue. Not that he would ignore the other’s slow uptake but rather that it would, in the light of his kindled concern for the other, play a different role in his response. It may, for instance, guide his attention away from *the discrepancy between the other’s speed and his preferred speed* and towards *trying to make the other understand*, perhaps using ever simpler examples – and if, after having tried everything, she would still not comprehend, then what would have otherwise erupted in anger and frustration would then be stilled by his patient acceptance¹⁰²⁰ that it may simply not work.¹⁰²¹

The last dimension I want to address is that of power. After all, it was assumed that the encounter between the one who asks for moral advice and the one who seeks to give it, is one in which the latter is regarded as some kind of moral-spiritual authority. Now, obviously, the advice-giver’s response to the advice-seeker would be compromised to the extent to which the advice-giver were to be concerned, not with the advice-seeker, but with his *own role* as a moral-spiritual authority. Such a concern could be rooted in a vain desire for him to appear smart or wise in the eyes of others (or perhaps only in those of the advice-seeker)¹⁰²² – or it could be rooted in a desire to morally position himself above the advice-seeker so as to wield influence over him. If the former concern transpires in his response, it will be in the form of boastfulness, pomposity, and the like; if the latter concern shines through, it will appear patronising and

¹⁰²⁰ For an example that illustrates the role patience may play in a loving responsiveness, cf. Christopher Cordner, ‘Unconditional Love?’, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3 (2016), 6; I will discuss the example at length in the next chapter, section 2.c.

¹⁰²¹ Again, this is only an inkling of the psychological complexities that may play out in an interpersonal engagement of this kind. If I would discern, for instance, that he is particularly self-conscious regarding his own slowness, this would obviously be reflected in a special effort on my part not to hurt him in this respect. If, on the other hand, he would poke fun at himself for her being “so dense”, then I might playfully joke about it in the conversation with her so as to break the ice. If, however, his self-deprecating sense of humour would reveal itself to be bound up with his overall bitterness – say, as a form of covert cynical self-hatred – then this would pose new challenges to me, given that, in the light of love, I see it as a terrible thing that has to be counteracted in some way. And so on.

¹⁰²²

condescending. In both cases, the advice-giver would be concerned with some selfish concern instead of, or at the cost of, the other. (In Buber's language: they would relate primarily to It, not to You.) The advice-giver would thus turn-away from his You, a move tantamount to the (vain) attempt¹⁰²³ to eschew the claim to respond in a loving spirit.

A *loving* response by someone in such a position of power, on the other hand, would, in responding to the advice-seeker, not in any way make use of her power position¹⁰²⁴; indeed, he would, as Weil puts it, seek to respond to the other "without the trace of condescension."¹⁰²⁵ That is of course not to say that his words would not nonetheless have weight and, thus, power, especially if they would at the same time appear as judicious or even wise. In that case, however, they would no longer have the kind of power that is interested in itself as power; rather, it would have the kind of weight and power intrinsic to every word in which the listener hears wisdom and heartfeltness.¹⁰²⁶ That this is so, however, also requires that the advice-seeker responds to it in a way that does not distort it – for it is obviously not in the power of even the most non-condescending advice-giver to see to it that the one who asks for advice does not elevate and idolise him or, thus, turn their relation into a hierarchical one.¹⁰²⁷ If, in giving the heartfelt advice, however, he comes to discern that this is so – that is, that the one asking him for advice treats his words as some quasi-divine commandment to be applied unquestioningly to his real life problems – then this, too, will appear in the light his love for his and, accordingly, factor into his response as yet another issue to be taken into account.¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²³ This was discussed in section 1 when illustrating Buber's understanding of love through that of Simone Weil, especially in her thought that loving means accepting reality.

¹⁰²⁴ Cf. Simone Weil, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, 293: "To assume power over others is to soil."

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, 102. It should be added that the context in which Weil uses the quoted expression is far more dramatic, namely that of love for the afflicted – a kind of situation, Weil suggests, in which love may make the difference between love and death (*ibid.*). And while this or may not be so, I think it would not do a disservice to Weil to claim, in a Weilian spirit, that *any* response from someone who is in a position of power must, if it is to be a loving one, be free from condescension – or, differently put, that any condescension that may enter the response of the one who is in power will impurify it and its love.

¹⁰²⁶ This sense of power is brought out well by Gaita in his discussion of Socrates' 'power' to move those who listened to him ("The Personal in Ethics," 141–4.)

¹⁰²⁷ For a discussion along similar lines, cf. Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 190–200, esp. at 194–5.

¹⁰²⁸ This is not to say that in order for advice of such a moral-spiritual kind to be given, authority must not be in play. In a certain sense, the advice-seeker always sees the advice-giver as some kind of authority – one asks someone for advice because one thinks that he is more likely to give good advice than other people one could have also asked. Thus understood, authority is, in the kind of situation at hand, not an issue it is possible to get away from. Moreover, the one whose advice is sought knows that it would be irresponsible to claim that it is the responsibility of the advice-seeker to determine whether the advice given is good or bad. The words of the advice-giver always have some kind of weight, which means that a loving response is here intimately connected to a sense of such responsibility.

Example III: Loving ‘the Possessed’

Let me now turn to the other manifestation of love that Buber mentions, namely Jesus’ love for the possessed.¹⁰²⁹ Although this time around, I will stick to the Biblical source material, I will not proceed exegetically but rather take the liberty to feely appropriate it to my present purposes. The Bible passage that I take Buber to refer to is Mark 5:1-20.¹⁰³⁰ It begins with Jesus getting out of a boat and being approached by a man known to be possessed. The man is described as a social outcast “dwelling among the tombs;” his possession shows in his superhuman strength (“he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him”) and his lunatic behaviour (“day and night, he was [...] crying, and cutting himself with stones”). When he sees Jesus approaching, he immediately falls on his knees before him and, with fear and devotion, asks him what he would have him do. When Jesus asks him for his name and he gives the answer “My name is Legion: for we are many,” Jesus compels the host of spirits to leave his body and haunt a herd of pigs instead.

I take it that Buber’s point in saying that “Jesus’ feeling for the possessed man is different from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is one” is that Jesus did not *like* the possessed man as he liked his disciples, that he did not find it *pleasant* – let alone that he *desired* – to be in his presence the way he found it pleasant, and desired, to have his disciples around him, that he was not as *happy* and *comfortable* and *joyous* around the possessed man than around the beloved disciple, and so on – yet that all of this is secondary when it comes to love because love, as it were, plays out on a different level than any of those feelings. These reflections make it all the more interesting that in Mark 5.1-20, no reference is made to how Jesus *feels* when he confronts the possessed man but only what he *does*. This is of course not to say that Jesus simply did not feel anything; rather, it suggests that, in facing the possessed man, his feelings were of no import. That is, by not remarking on Jesus’ feelings, the author of the text seems to suggest that they should be of no import to us, the readers, just as it seems to suggest that they were of no import to Jesus himself¹⁰³¹ – as if to call attention to the fact that, when facing the possessed man, Jesus’ attention was wholly on *him*, not on any feelings of displeasure or aversion or fear he might have detected in himself had he attended to it.

Although the Bible passage does not mention Jesus’ feelings, Buber does, and so, let us imagine what these may have looked like. First off, it should be noted that such speculation

¹⁰²⁹ I will stay with Buber’s term ‘possessed’ (which is also the established one), although the Bible version that I will make reference to describes the man as having “an unclean spirit” (Mk 5.1-20 (KJV)).

¹⁰³⁰ Cf. also Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39

¹⁰³¹ It should be noted that the Bible generally seldom makes reference to Jesus’ feelings. But the suggestion is the same: do not look so much at how he may feel but on how he engages with others!

only makes sense to the extent one is willing to humanise Jesus, i.e. to assume that he, qua son of God, was not above bodily agitations of the normal human kind. If one does, it can readily be imagined that Jesus may have been *afraid*, at least when first setting eyes on the man (i.e. before he showed his devotion). Stepping outside the boat that brought him close to the man's dwelling place, it is easy to imagine how he might have felt when seeing the superhumanly strong mad man approaching him, in tatters,¹⁰³² covered in self-inflicted scars, and perhaps crying out like a wild animal. If it is also assumed that Jesus related to him in a loving spirit, however, then he will also have seen all of this – the madness, the savageness, the self-mutilation, and so on – not only, or primarily, as a potential threat *to himself* but as horrible *for the man*.¹⁰³³ If so, he will have felt sorrow and pity seeing someone live in such a horrible and derelict state, apparently having lost all humanity. This does not mean that the sorrow and pity will therefore have superseded the fear. The adult may be very afraid to jump into the shark tank after the toddler fell in, yet not at all being concerned with her own fear because something much more important is at stake (i.e. the toddler's life); accordingly, Jesus, in meeting the man, may have had his attention directed away from his fear and towards the other's possession as the only thing that, in the given situation, was to be reckoned with.

What can be said about the fear that may have accompanied Jesus' loving attention to the possessed man can also be said about the other feelings that may have been involved: in the presence of the man, everything else, including *both* his disagreeable qualities – say, his savageness, his deranged demeanour, perhaps accompanied by a horrible stench, and so on –

¹⁰³² In Mk 5.15, it is remarked that, when others came to see the miracle Jesus had worked, “they are afraid” to see the man “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind,” suggesting that, while still possessed, he was not clothed, at least not in a normal way.

¹⁰³³ Jesus' readiness to face great danger certainly has to be understood in connection with his unwavering faith. Yet I would not go so far as to say that such a faith is a prerequisite for wholehearted lovingness. Imagine that the possessed man would have charged Jesus in a blind rage, perhaps even wielding a weapon of some sorts. It would seem to me that in such a scenario, acting on his fear and seeking some protection would not be in tension with love; indeed, his seeking protection may have just as much reflected a concern for the possessed man as a concern for his own safety – after all, he would only been able to help the man if he would not allow him to stick an axe in his head.). This being said, I think there is an important difference between two forms in which Jesus' faith manifests. The one is in relation to natural events, such as making the blind man see (Jn 9.1-13) or calming the storm (Mk 4.35-41); it seems to me to be of little avail to compare such instances of faith that works wonders to 'normal' human, i.e. sublunary faith. It is different, however, when it comes to faith in relation to the human soul and its aberrations. The case of the possessed man seems a good example, especially on a secular reading, i.e. one on which the possession is some kind of psychopathology (and assuming that this predicament is not 'hard-wired' in the man's bio-chemical make-up). In such a case I think that faith *can* make a difference, namely in that it may precisely be the unwavering openness in one's attitude towards the disturbed person that may help him to break down the barriers that hold him captive in his miserable predicament. (This will be so especially if this predicament has its roots in prior rejection and mistreatment – that is, in marked unlovingness – by others.) But of course, showing such loving faith towards someone in such a pathological state may also have the reverse effect, namely that the other feels threatened by it and by what it might do with him if he were to wholeheartedly respond to it. (Cf. Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 102: When “the 'I' is half dead, it wants to be finished off;” yet, if it is then “awakened by a touch of love, there is sharp pain which results in anger and sometimes hatred for whoever has provoked this pain.”)

and his (Jesus') own dislike, irritation, discomfort, perhaps even disgust receded into the background as they were illuminated in his (the possessed's) light. That is not to say that thereby, the disagreeable became agreeable or that the dislike turned into liking, but rather that both the disagreeable qualities and Jesus' dislike of them took on a different significance in the light of his love. The possessed man's deranged comportment, to take another example, may have still irritated Jesus; yet, while this may have compelled someone with a less loving attitude to turn away from the man in order to avoid being exposed to his possibly 'soul-corroding'¹⁰³⁴ influence, it would have just made it all the more apparent to Jesus' loving gaze how terrible it must be for the man to live in such a state. In the light of his love, therefore, Jesus saw the man's possession as something to be confronted and fought,¹⁰³⁵ even if the battle may be dangerous for himself. In this sense, responding lovingly to the one who is in acute danger may involve courage.¹⁰³⁶

This being said, there are also some features, be it in oneself or in others, that cannot be perceived in separation from the lucidity (or cloudedness) of one's responsiveness. It can be imagined, for example, that someone who would have responded less lovingly to the possessed man may have seen his prostration as abject and pathetic, as something to frown upon or to ridicule and, on the whole, as an object of disgust. If we take Jesus' response to be one of unreserved love, on the other hand, we will not imagine him taking the possessed man's reaction to his presence in such a way. Both the unloving as well as the loving person will see a man dropping to his knees – yet what the one would see as abject and pathetic¹⁰³⁷, the other would see as pitiable and heart-wrenching, what the one would see as lowly servility, the other would see as humble devotion, what the one would see as an invitation for sneering or abusing, the other just sees as a call to be risen up to, and so on.

¹⁰³⁴ Cf. Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 91.

¹⁰³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 292: "Thus the two opposites which rend human love are united: to love the beloved being just as he is, and to want to recreate him." Because Jesus' attitude towards the possessed is one of love, and because the possessed, qua possessed, is being harmed or even destroyed by his possession, Jesus is compelled to confront what thus possessed him so as to drive it out and thereby recreate him.

¹⁰³⁶ This is not to say that loves requires courage only in such extreme cases. Indeed, the opening up and exposing oneself to the other, of putting one's thoughts and feelings at the mercy of the relation to the other, as I have called it, may be said to involve courage at all times. In a diary note, Wittgenstein remarks that "For real love one needs *courage*," a remark that is discussed by Kronqvist in "A Passion for Life," 45–6.

¹⁰³⁷ This is not to say that anyone who sees some behaviour as abject or pathetic will thereby reveal herself to be unloving. I think there is room for an 'uncorrupted' way of perceiving abjectness, namely where someone feigns pitifulness, especially where that is done in a way that is overly self-demeaning. Speaking of such a behaviour as abject is thus not intended as a judgment of how the other *is* but rather a way of pointing out what he *does*, of shedding light onto his corrupted responsiveness. Speaking of abjectness in this sense is hence not (intrinsically) connected to the speaker's self-elevation; rather, it is aimed at pointing to a discrepancy that the 'abject one' himself created, namely that between himself – his 'real worth', if you wish – and the lowly image he creates of himself in front of others.

Yet, my reading of the story thus far stands in need of an important qualification. Up to this point, I have read the story in terms of Jesus' relation *to the man who is possessed*. But that is problematic because one-sided. After all, Jesus in a certain sense finds himself in the presence of two beings – the man who is being possessed and the hosts of spirits who possess him. Obviously, Jesus whole 'intervention' is to be understood as an attempt to save the man from the spirits. However, he is speaking not with the man but with the spirits. When the man – or, rather, the spirits through him – address Jesus and beseech him to leave and to not torment them, Jesus tells *them* to come out of the man and asks *them* for their name.¹⁰³⁸ It is only after being told their name that Jesus is able to use it to make them leave the man.¹⁰³⁹ Read in this way, the man's falling to his knees is not an expression of *him*, i.e. of his pained devotion, but of his inner demons who, taking hold of him, make him kneel down before Jesus because they are afraid of what he may do to them. Accordingly Jesus response will not only be one of pity for the man but also one of stern condemnation of the spirit(s).

This may seem to be a scenario that is hard to capture in terms of Buberian I-You relationality. After all, the You, as it was expounded in the last chapter, seems to be a single other, someone around whom all else 'gathers in a court', suggesting that one can only relate to one You at a time. Does Jesus thus first relate to the spirits and only then, after having banished them, to the man? Or are there somehow two I-You relations at play at once? I think both alternatives would be misleading because they would, at bottom, reduce the You to an It. If, firstly, it would be said that there are two I-You relations at play, then this would mean that You would be put next to You, thus resulting in a picture similar to that of the It-world: "every It borders on other Its."¹⁰⁴⁰ If, on the other hand, You is exclusive in the sense that one can only ever have eyes for *one* You at a time, then we would get a picture like that of Jay and Lin who lose sight of the world and all others around them because they are so 'immersed' in one another. But that would also turn You into It, namely the It that pushes away all other Its.

To illustrate what I take to be the more sensible picture, it may be helpful to somewhat alter the scenario at hand. Imagine that the man is not possessed by demons but hypnotised by someone else, and that this other person would torment the hypnotised man and make him do

¹⁰³⁸ Although here, Jesus addresses the spirits in the singular: "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit," and "What is thy name?" But I do not think that this matters.

¹⁰³⁹ That is, his first attempt (cf. previous footnote) fails; it is only after being told the name that he receive power over them. Interestingly, the spirit host also seems to know that, by having given Jesus their name, he has command over them; this is why it is *they* who ask Jesus to send them to the swine instead. (The idea that knowing someone's name gives one power of them is, of course, an old one; there is certainly superstition to this thought, yet perhaps also some truth; after all, an order may be more powerful if one is able to add the name of the ordered one to it).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 55

terrible things. If it is imagined that Jesus were to intervene in such a situation in a loving way, it would not make any sense to assume that he would have his attention only on *either* the hypnotist *or* her victim (or *first* on the one and *then* on the other). For if he would only attend to the hypnotist and not at all to her victim, then he would see nothing wrong with what she is doing – the person she is controlling would, to him, either not appear at all or as nothing more than, say, a marionette. If, on the other hand, he would attend only to the hypnotised person and not at all to the hypnotist, he would be unable to see what the real cause of his predicament would be and, thus, he would be unable to take measures against the wrongdoer. Hence, his lovingness must manifest towards the situation as such, towards both of them at the same time. This is not to say that he would thus assume some weird attitude in which two I-You relations were merged into one; instead, the modified example can help us to see more clearly what exactly it means to assume an I-You attitude.

Admittedly, Buber is at times unclear about this issue, for instance when he speaks of the I-You in terms of exclusiveness: “For those who stand in [love], men emerge from their entanglement in busy-ness [...], one after another become actual and a You for them; that is, liberated, emerging into a unique confrontation. Exclusiveness comes into being miraculously again and again. [...] Love is responsibility of an I for a You.”¹⁰⁴¹ When he speaks in such a way, however, he means to demarcate the I-You from the I-It, not the one You from all the others. That is, the “entanglement in busy-ness” means beholding the people as a great heap of Its, more or less face- and personality-less, something one relates to in the abstract, perhaps the statistical. It is in contrast to *that* mode of relating that some individuals then approach one in their uniqueness, qua You(s). But Buber does not thereby mean that they can thus approach one qua unique individuals only ever one after the other. This becomes apparent, for instance, when he states that “the sum of You and You and You [...] can never be anything else than You.”¹⁰⁴² You in the plural is still You – it is, as it were, the You of the situation. (Of course, there are limits to an individual’s ability to retain a sense of the others’ uniqueness in a given situation – but it should be apparent that it *is* possible, and not at all a problem, especially when it is not very many.) I-You relationality can thus be said to be, at bottom, a way of being in the world, including in situations that are populated by multiple individuals at once. In such situations, exclusiveness may be better understood in terms of *incomparability* and *irreplaceability*¹⁰⁴³ –

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁴² Ibid., 96.

¹⁰⁴³ A similar point is made by Gibson in respect to the love of the mother towards multiple children: “Even though a mother may have more than one child, that baby is unique for her, as she could not have given birth to any other than that specific child. Mothers may divide their time equally between their children, but love is not split and portioned out between siblings. Each child is wholly precious, for being the particular person that they

facing the imagined hypnotist and his victim, Jesus does not compare the two, neither with one another nor with anyone else (and he does not relate to them in terms of that which they share with all other, such as ‘rational humanity’ or the like); instead, he relates to both of them in their irreplaceable uniqueness as well as to their relation to one another. Following Strandberg, it can thus be said that, “love is not an ‘attitude’ which is possible to take up towards some ‘objects’ and not others; drawing a boundary for whom I will be loving towards is a threat also to those within it, and therefore unloving *tout court*.”¹⁰⁴⁴

Understood in this way, Jesus’ attempt to break the hypnotist’s spell over his victim just *is* the way in which his loving concern for the hypnotist’s victim finds expression. At the same time, however, it is *also* his expression of loving concern for the hypnotist – after all, Jesus will certainly feel sorrow and pity also for him, namely for being so wicked. Hence, his intervention, whatever form it will take, will not be aimed at doing harm to the hypnotist. With this, we can return to the original example in the Bible: it is precisely in turning to, addressing, commanding, and banishing the spirits that he expresses his loving concern for the possessed man. It may perhaps press the point a bit to say that he, at the same time, also expressed his love for the evil spirits¹⁰⁴⁵ – but it is noteworthy, I think, that Jesus did listen to them and take them up on their offer to send them to the pigs instead.

Example IV: Loving in Laying Bare One’s Heart

For the next illustration of what it may mean to respond lovingly, I want to once more return to the example expounded in chapter 3, the one revolving around the conversation between myself and my heartbroken friend. This time around, however, I want to look at what it means to say that he, my heartbroken friend, responded lovingly, or unlovingly, to me. But let me begin with a bit of a detour.

In the discussion of love that forms the backdrop to the present reflections, love is for the most part illustrated by means of examples of someone lovingly *being there for* another.¹⁰⁴⁶

are” (Catrin Gibson, “Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship,” *Sartre Studies International* 23, no. 1 (2017): 60-79, at 70.)

¹⁰⁴⁴ Hugo Strandberg, “Life and Truth: A Response to Joel Backström,” in “Post-Truth,” ed. Rupert Read & Timur Uçan, Special Issue, *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* (2019): 131–140, at 137–8.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Certainly the pigs seemed to have gotten the short end of the stick of Jesus’ love.

¹⁰⁴⁶ In addition to the example referenced in the previous footnote, other examples by Gaita, to be found in *Good and Evil*, are that of Mother Teresa (202–6) and or Primo Levi’s *Ladmaker* (xv–xxi). Further notable examples are to be found in Holland’s *Against Empiricism*, such as in his discussion of Joseph Conrad’s D’Hubert in “Good and Evil in Action” (119–25), his examples towards the beginning of “Is Goodness a Mystery?” (95–7), as well as the example of saintly love at the end of “Absolute Ethics, Mathematics and the Impossibility of Politics” (140–2). Worth mentioning, furthermore, is Marina Barabas’ “In search of goodness” (101–3; although her selection of exemplars is more varied) as well as Simone Weil’s discussion of love for the afflicted (cf. An

This tendency towards focussing on love as a being-there-for-another is of course understandable as it illustrates the other-directedness of love, i.e. that relating lovingly to another means not being caught up in one's desires, needs, or wants, but stepping beyond them in one's response to the other. Still, it would seem strange to suppose that therefore, the one who is in need of help and who, accordingly, turns to another with her problems, cannot do so in a loving way.¹⁰⁴⁷ A closer look is thus merited.

It is clear that someone who, in her pain and misery, turns to another may *love* the one to whom he turns. The child seeking consolation from its parents because it fell and has a bloody knee can, and does, surely love them. The husband who opens up to his wife about some childhood trauma may, and probably does, love her. The question is whether the very turning, and opening up, to another with what lies on one's heart may, *as such*, also be a manifestation of love. The issue is that, as was just stated, relating lovingly to another means overstepping one's desires, needs, or wants in the direction of the other and, thus, into the open, lived engagement with her – yet that the one who is weighed down by some grave matter turns to another exactly out of a need for help and consolation. Does it not follow from this that turning to someone else with some serious problem, although possible *within* a loving relation, cannot *as such* be loving? Is it perhaps, as Weil suggests, that “[I]ove on the part of someone who is unhappy is to be filled with joy by the mere knowledge that his beloved is happy without sharing in this happiness or even wishing to do so”?¹⁰⁴⁸ In other words, does ‘being unhappily loving’ mean keeping one's unhappiness to oneself and instead seeking joy in the happiness of others? And is it then perhaps the case that, while impossible to lovingly share one's unhappiness with another, one can still lovingly speak about what made one unhappy *in the aftermath*, that is, after one has come to terms with it and, thus, has become liberated again from the selfish needs that held one captive?

Anthology, esp. “Human Personality” (69–98) and “The Self” (99–104). Although approaching the topic from a different angle, Lévinas entire oeuvre can be understood as revolving around the motif of ‘being there for the other’ (although, for him, this is not to be understood in terms of love).

¹⁰⁴⁷ It may be speculated whether the preoccupation of philosophers to discuss lovingness primarily in terms of *being-there-for-the-other* (instead of a responsiveness to the other's *being-there-for-one* or simply a *being-with-the-other*) does not perhaps reflect some kind of unconscious desire to picture, and thus place, oneself in the position of power, the helper who needs nothing, fully replenished and radiating such an abundance of energy that her love towards others cannot but manifest in the form of an attending to others who, naturally, are in much worse predicaments and, accordingly, seek her out for help. A further, or an additional, factor may be that conceiving of, and approaching, love primarily in this manner is bound up with the (in my view mistaken) assumption that morality is at bottom a matter of *action*. Before this background, love then appears an emancipation, yet only as a partial one: morality is bound up with love, yet in such a way that the central question becomes what one can do, out of love, *for* others. I will leave it up to you, the reader, what to do with these thoughts.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 291.

This would seem to me to reflect a very harsh and dire outlook, suggesting that opening up to another about one's misery is to be understood only in terms of a burden to others. This *may* of course be true in particular situations – imagine, for instance, an elderly parent with a terminal illness who notices how it burdens her child that she again and again shares with him her fears of dying; if so, she may come to think along Weil's lines and accordingly come to hold back, instead seeking joy in her child's happiness. But even in such a case, it is not the opening up as such that is loveless but rather its frequency and overwhelming intensity. It may seem quite clear both to the parent as well as to the child that, *as such*, the parent's readiness to open up is just as much a reflection of her love for her child (just as, reversely, the child's readiness to listen and be there for her is a reflection of the child's love for the parent.) “[B]eing vulnerable and leaning on each other for support does not necessarily have to be perceived as a weakness in one's love, or as an impurity in one's attachments,”¹⁰⁴⁹ as Kronqvist rightly point out. Another scenario is that in which one is surrounded by strangers or mere acquaintances – the man with no family and friends, for example, may feel like he should not share his deep unhappiness with his colleagues (with whom he does not entertain particularly close relations), both because it would burden them and because he would simply deem it an inappropriate thing to do. This may certainly be true in the sense that his colleagues may in fact be relatively indifferent towards him and his life. But assume that one day he buckles and opens up to some co-workers, and further assume that they would indeed respond with relative indifference – would that show that he therefore responded unlovingly to them? I would rather say that it testifies to the unlovingness to his colleagues – while saying nothing in particular about the quality of his responsiveness. Just as the poor street urchin's stealing some food because he just has to eat reflects neither a loving nor an unloving spirit,¹⁰⁵⁰ so the man's giving in and ‘letting it all out’ simply because he could not keep it in anymore reflects neither lovingness nor unlovingness.

Now, it is possible that someone who is suffering or miserable may turn to another in an unloving way, so that the suffering and misery is connected to the unlovingness. This is the case, for instance, when someone uses someone else as an ‘emotional trashcan’, that is, as a receptacle for all of one's troubles, an occasion for venting and letting out all that lies on one's heart, without really being concerned about said, one's relation to her and, most importantly, about the other's response to what one has to say. In such cases, it does not really matter who

¹⁰⁴⁹ Camilla Kronqvist, “A Passion for Life,” 48.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Of course, this depends on how exactly one construes the example. If it is from another urchin who he knows is even more famished than he is, then the situation would be very different.

it is one instrumentalizes but only that she is suited for the job. For a pent-up teenager, it may be someone who resembles a parent, yet who, unlike the parent, does not turn away or tell her to shut up. For a frustrated and embittered man who is unconfident around other men but confident around women, all the women that put up with him may serve his purpose of venting. A very extreme case of this ‘sufferer’s lovelessness’ is presented by Simone Weil in her reflections on affliction. “[T]hose whose ‘I’ has been destroyed from outside by affliction”¹⁰⁵¹, she writes, are wont to display a “naked, vegetative egoism.”¹⁰⁵² In this state, she proceeds, “[g]ratitude (except in a base form)¹⁰⁵³ and justice are not conceivable”¹⁰⁵⁴ and survival becomes “the only attachment.”¹⁰⁵⁵ The one who has been *fully* destroyed by affliction, i.e. from the outside (her natural being) and from the inside (her soul), “either attaches himself like a dog or accepts what comes to him with a certain indifference like a cat”¹⁰⁵⁶ – a state of utter¹⁰⁵⁷ depersonalisation in which the responsiveness towards the other as a You is replaced by a (non-)responsiveness to It, namely as to an occasion to get what one desires. Images come to mind of the unfathomable affliction of the concentration camp prisoners.

The way in which my friend responded to me on said night obviously reflected nothing even close to such affliction. Yet neither was it, so it seems to me at least, a response in which he used me as an emotional trashcan. It is true he did turn to me with what weighed down on his soul; it may even be true that the main motivation for meeting me that night was that he felt like he had to share his suffering with someone. And not only that – he may have certainly thought about calling up some other friends first; perhaps he even did and the reason why he ended up with me is because the other friends were not available. Yet that is not to say that he was just looking for someone who fitted his conception of the ‘appropriate misery receptacle’. If that were the case, then it would have been no problem if, after a while, another ‘suitable friend’ would have taken up my place, leaving me free to go home (or for a beer with another

¹⁰⁵¹ Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 99.

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵³ Weil understands “gratitude in a base form” as gratitude that goes with attachment: “gratitude must not in any degree constitute an attachment, for that is the gratitude proper to dogs.” (Weil, *An Anthology*, 295)

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 100

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Weil states that “[f]or those whose ‘I’ is dead we can do nothing, absolutely nothing” (*ibid.*, 101). However, she adds the – I think crucial – observation: “We never know, however, whether in a particular person the ‘I’ is quite dead or only inanimate” (*ibid.*). Which means: that someone seems like his I has been killed off is no reason not respond to him in a loving way anymore. And perhaps the point can be made even stronger: The one who really takes to heart this insight will not see anyone as entirely soulless, regardless of how extreme the affliction. That is, a responsiveness to the afflicted that is not merely a blind compliance with one takes to be one’s duty but wholeheartedly *loving*, so it seems, will see its addressees (the afflicted) as beings who are still, however faintly, receptive to love, as creatures in whom there is still something alive in them that can be reached and re-kindled – for if not, then what point would it have to turn to them in love?

friend.) This would just be a more nuanced version of the emotional trashcan-scenario – but it is of course absurd. So, even if beforehand, in his deliberating and deciding whom to meet, my friend compared me with some of his other friends in terms of our suitability for what he felt the urge to disclose and speak about, this radically changed when he actually found himself face to face with me, breaking the news and baring his heart.

To put it in the language of instrumental reason, even if my friend instigated to meet me that night only because he wanted to speak with me about what happened to him, the ‘end’ that he would have then set himself beforehand as it were vanished the moment he eventually addressed the issue and our conversation unfolded. Reversely, if the end that supposedly brought him to the point at which we met – say, that he wanted to speak to me because he trusted that I would stay put – would have continued to govern the way in which he engaged with me throughout the conversation, then he would have used me as an emotional trashcan, because then I would have merely functioned as an (impersonal) occasion for his realising the end he had set himself.¹⁰⁵⁸ That would have been very much unloving. But as I said, it does not capture the loving spirit in which he spoke with me.¹⁰⁵⁹ Let me thus sketch a brief phenomenological sketch of my friend’s response so as to bring out in which way it may be understood as *loving*.

As I developed it in the last chapter, the encounter with You begins with a response to the way in which I am addressed by You in the fullness of your presence – an address that only fully comes to light with the suspension of the ends that I may otherwise have set myself. This is not different in the present case: In turning to me with the intent to tell me about what had happened, the intent became suspended once my friend faced me and found himself addressed by me, for then it was this address that guided his response, not the end that he had set himself

¹⁰⁵⁸ If my friend would have engaged with me in the kind of way prescribed by Kant’s categorical imperative – i.e. “*at the same time as end and never merely as means*” (*Groundwork*, 46–7; emphasis in the original) – he would not have simply exploited me as a disposable emotional trashcan but treated me in a respectful way. Yet a *respectful* way of relating is, as hopefully transpired in my discussion in chapter 3, section 2, not the same as a *loving* way of relating. A good comparison would be the way in which he may have spoken with a therapist (who would have offered her services to him for free.) Such a conversation would have reflected respect, yet presumably not the kind of loving spirit I am after. He would have asked her politely if she could offer him professional help, she would have politely agreed, and the conversation would have proceeded in an atmosphere of reserved distance; of course, he may have still become very emotional, even to the point of breaking down, yet not in a way that would have substantially to do with him finding himself responding to just this person, there and then, and what she means to him.

¹⁰⁵⁹ It must be born in mind that when I speak of my friend’s response to me as loving, it is of course not to be understood as a judgment of some kind of matter of fact. As Kronqvist remarks, the “question about whether one’s love is pure, sincere or deep, cannot be given an ultimate answer independently of one’s own very personal understanding of what these relationships to another entail, of what one is prepared to say and accept responsibility for, both spontaneously and on closer reflection.” (“A Passion for Life,” 47). In this case, the account I give of my friend’s loving response to me is – just as the account I gave of my own loving response to him in chapter 3 – something that I, speaking personally, do take responsibility for, so as to illustrate to you, the reader, what I take it to mean for someone to relate lovingly to another in a certain kind of situation.

beforehand. The presence that he thus found himself addressed by, however, was not a presence that made any demands on him but one that appeared calm and poised.¹⁰⁶⁰ Most importantly, however, he encountered me as waiting for *him*, inviting *him*, and, as the conversation progressed, as being patient with him, giving him the time and room he needed in order to lay bare his heart. This, reversely, reflected how I found myself addressed by his presence, which, apart from the pain I saw engraved in it, carried with a sense of both urgency and seriousness that compelled me to suspend all my other concerns and let him set the tone of the conversation.¹⁰⁶¹ In this sense, unreservedly entering the dialogue with another does not mean leaving behind all the things and issues that matter to us, regardless of whether it is what fills us with joy or grief, what pains us or weighs us down, what overwhelms us or whatever else it may be. Rather, all these things may be ‘laid bare’ and ‘offered to’ the open engagement with the other, ‘put at the mercy’ of her response to it and of where the conversation may carry it.¹⁰⁶² Given that, on that night, my friend shared with me what mattered to him the most – indeed, that which was bound up so intimately with his own existence and his identity that sharing it with someone meant exposing himself and making him absolutely vulnerable – it was an immense display of trust.

In text I discussed in the previous section, Gaita remarks that “[t]rust is not surrender: to trust is both to judge something worthy of our trust and to judge ourselves to be worthily trusting.”¹⁰⁶³ I wholeheartedly agree with what comes before the colon: although making himself vulnerable to me, and to my response to his disclosure, he did not surrender himself to me in that surrender means giving the authority fully over to someone else. The one who, fatigued, barely holds on to a piece of driftwood in the ocean may surrender himself to the sailors that take hold of him and pull him on board – yet this need not mean that he trusts them.

¹⁰⁶⁰ This is another point at which it is crucial how the example is spelled out. If in meeting my gaze, he would have found him addressed by me responding to him, say, in a bored or annoyed way in such a way that reflects that I am just as distressed as he himself was, then his response to my response to him may have been quite different. In the case of boredom or annoyance, he may have been pained and irritated and, accordingly, taken me to be in a mood unsuited for him sharing his pain with me. (This is how I will develop the example in the next chapter.) If, on the other hand, he would have found reflected in my face a distress that he felt mirrored his own, then – so at least I can imagine – he may have encountered this as an invitation, not to merely for *him* to bare *his* heart to *me*, but for *us* to bare *our* hearts to *one another*. Being already attuned to the suffering he would see in my face due to that sweltering within him, I can also imagine that this would have emotionally charged the situation even further, not least because I, too, would presumably have been similarly moved by the pain I would have seen in his response.

¹⁰⁶¹ It should also be noted that, just as his way of responding to me did not remain static throughout the conversation, neither did mine to him. How we responded to one another changed depending on how we found one another addressed by the respective other – an organic flow of mutual responsiveness with what troubled him serving as a compass. Over the course of perhaps the first hour of our conversation, my response to him – i.e. to him addressing me with a sense of urgency and seriousness – gradually shifted from alarmed and overwhelmed to more sober-minded, calm and compassionate.

¹⁰⁶² Cf. chapter 4, sections 5 & 6.

¹⁰⁶³ Raimond Gaita, “The Personal in Ethics,” 137.

Reversely, my friend, while trusting me, did not surrender himself to me. If that would have been the case, he would have tried to abscond from the responsibility that he had in virtue of what just happened in his life by putting the matter entirely into my hands: “My heart has been broken, I am but a shadow of my former self – tell me, *what am I to do?!?*” (as if to say: decide for me!)

This being said, however, I have my reservations with what, in Gaita’s remark, comes after the colon. Not that I think there is no connection between trusting and judging, be it in relation to something’s being worthy of trust or one’s trusting worthily – the point is rather that, *in trusting*, I am not concerned with any such judgments, and precisely *because* I am trusting.¹⁰⁶⁴ In other words: engaging with someone in a trusting way means not judging the trustworthiness of that person because the very emergence of that question puts the trust into question.¹⁰⁶⁵ So, if the question arises whether one should trust someone or not, or whether one’s trust is merited or not, then, at least to that extent, one has already distanced oneself from the trust that one had hitherto simply ‘lived’. This is why it sounds rather farcical to say of a child who has a good relation to its parents¹⁰⁶⁶ that, in trusting them, it ‘judges them worthy of trust and itself worthily trusting;’ rather, its trust reflects the nature or quality of its relation to them.¹⁰⁶⁷ Connecting trust to judgment may to a certain extent work in the kind of example Gaita discusses, namely that between an advice-seeker and a spiritual authority, because here, the starting point is a certain distance between the two that has to be bridged. In first encountering the spiritual teacher, the one who seeks advice may still be weary and distrustful, but gradually, perhaps partly through reflection, arrive at the conclusion that he is, indeed, trustworthy and that, accordingly, he can indeed trustingly disclose his spiritual problems to him. Yet, already when looking at the kind of relation in which Jesus stood to his disciples – that is, a teacher-disciple relation that was at the same time a close and loving friendship – it would begin to sound out of place if the disciple, in making himself vulnerable before Jesus,

¹⁰⁶⁴ This view of trust is developed perspicuously in Olli Lagerspetz & Lars Hertzberg, “Trust in Wittgenstein;” in *Trust*, eds. Pekka Mäkelä & Cynthia Townley (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 31–51.

¹⁰⁶⁵ As Lagerspetz and Hertzberg (ibid., at 42) put it: “[...] [F]or A to be less trusting would simply mean that A did not trust B. But the fact is that she did. For her, there *was* no room for plausible suspicion: that is what it means to trust someone.”

¹⁰⁶⁶ I point out ‘good relation’ because it is possible to imagine cases in which a child may have to judge its parents (and perhaps itself) in respect to their trustworthiness. If so, however, then its trust to its parents has already in some way been breached, so that its judging them in respect to their trustworthiness may be its way of hoping to be able to recreate the trust that had been there once.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Cf. Lagerspetz & Hertzberg, “Trust in Wittgenstein,” 34: “[T]rust is not for the most part manifested as a particular state that occupies one’s mind. The presence of trust must rather be established by looking for an overall pattern in a person’s thinking and acting: a pattern in the weave of life, to apply what Wittgenstein said about grief.”

would be described as ‘judging Jesus to be trustworthy’ and ‘himself worthily trusting.’¹⁰⁶⁸ Saying of a relation that it is a close friendship means, it would seem to me, that any judgments regarding trustworthiness that may (but need not¹⁰⁶⁹) have stood at its inception – as guarding the gates into friendship, as it were – have already made way to a trust that is lived, or, differently put, to a relation that lived in a spirit of trust.¹⁰⁷⁰

This was the case in the relation between my friend and me – in opening up to me, my friend did not judge me trustworthy or himself worthily trusting. He simply *trusted* me, and not only ‘generally’ (i.e. in the way that his trust permeated his overall relationship to me), but also *in this particular situation*: in laying bare his heart and making himself vulnerable, and in such a way that he ‘did not even consider the possibility that he might be let down,’¹⁰⁷¹ he engaged with me in a trusting spirit. This, I would say, is the way in which his love¹⁰⁷² for me found expression in this particular situation; this is why I am compelled to describe his way of responding to me as loving.

One last point: engaging in a trusting spirit with someone who appears to be loving means to take her lovingness at face value instead of looking for cues and reasons for why what looks like lovingness may in fact not be. Or reversely: being suspicious about whether what appears to be the other’s loving response *is really* a loving response means to already having become distrustful. This, in turn, means that the one who trusts another simply sees her to *be* loving, that she sees the *lovingness* of the one she trusts. That, of course, does not mean that the one who trusts will therefore not see any unlovingness reflected in the demeanour of the one she trusts. If she does, however, then it will appear in the light of her trust. Let me illustrate this by returning to a point I made in a footnote above: if it is assumed that I would have responded to my friend’s opening-up to me in a, say, annoyed or bored way, then this *may*, but *need not*,

¹⁰⁶⁸ And not only because Jesus is the son of God. The same would hold for any other relation of that sort.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Cf. Lagerspetz & Hertzberg, “Trust in Wittgenstein,” 32: “When I trust someone,” it is mostly not “because I have, at some point in time, formed the judgment that the person in question is trustworthy.”

¹⁰⁷⁰ This is not to say that if, in a relationship of two which both consider a close friendship, one of them comes to harbour a mistrust towards the other in a particular situation, the relation will therefore simply cease to be a close friendship. Rather, it will depend on the responses of those involved whether they will still see it as a close friendship or not. If they would respond to the breach of trust in a loving spirit, then it would seem to me that they would not give up on the relation so easily and instead try to fight for it and what they take it to be, namely their close friendship. If they do, however, then this will mean that they have to restore the trust that has been violated – which, in turn, may mean that they have to begin with judging each other to be trustworthy and themselves to be trusting worthily.

¹⁰⁷¹ Cf. Lagerspetz & Hertzberg, “Trust in Wittgenstein,” 40; the passage in the original is “trust is typically characterized by the fact that we do not consider the possibility that we might be let down.”

¹⁰⁷² In a case like this, the distinction between (‘substantive’) *love* and (‘adverbial’) *lovingness* I made in section 1 becomes somewhat forced: my friend *did*, in the situation I described, respond to me in a loving spirit – yet, as a manifestation of his trust for me, this spirit coloured his overall relationship with me. It did come to the fore in an especially pronounced way in that particular night given how much was at stake for him in the given situation. But that does not mean that he did, or does, not trust me any less when less is at stake. The implication of this point is that, in a certain sense, relations of trust are always at least latently loving.

have made him trust me any less. So, even if I would have responded to him in such hurtful and unloving ways, he may have continued baring his heart to me. Of course, this *may* have reflected that he did in fact need nothing but an emotional trashcan. Another possibility, however, is that his entrusting me with what lay on his heart *despite* my annoyance or boredom showed that he trusted that I would, when push came to shove, be ‘better’ than my annoyance and boredom conveyed. In that case, his trust would have blended into *faith*, i.e. his faith in my goodness¹⁰⁷³ (and, conversely, his faith that my annoyance and boredom do not reflect the person I really was.)¹⁰⁷⁴ Such a trust/faith may, as any trust or faith, certainly be let down; however, it need not – indeed, it may even become genuinely creative: it may precisely be the other’s putting trust (or faith) in me *despite the fact that he has no good reason to do so* which may compel me to rise up to it and, thus, respond more trustworthily than I (or others) would take me to be.¹⁰⁷⁵

Example V: Loving the Hate-Filled

Over the last years, the Black¹⁰⁷⁶ US American musician Daryl Davis has become increasingly well-known as a political activist against racism.¹⁰⁷⁷ If one wishes to establish a connection between what he actually *does* and the *consequences* of what he does, however, it becomes quite hard to describe what exactly his activism consists in. What he does is the following: since the early 1990s,¹⁰⁷⁸ Davis has been meeting and talking with members of the Ku Klux Klan. The consequences of these meetings and conversations are that dozens, if not hundreds, of Ku Klux Klan members have left the organisation,¹⁰⁷⁹ even to the point at which the KKK Maryland

¹⁰⁷³ Connected to faith is also *hope*: in trusting me, or putting his faith in me, my friend can also be said to have hoped that I would take to heart what he told me (that is: despite the fact that my behaviour indicated that I would not.)

¹⁰⁷⁴ The reverse of this notion of trust is the kind of ‘trust’ that does not hang on seeing the other as loving: given the impression I got from you, I may simply *trust* that you will be a scoundrel. In such situations, trust is used in a way that is closely tied to (reasoned) expectations – and, hence, very far removed from trust in the context of faith and hope. Yet if that is how I trust you *to be*, i.e. a scoundrel, then I obviously do not trust *you*, let alone put my faith in you.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Again, cf. my discussion of Jesus’ faith in the previous section.

¹⁰⁷⁶ I use the term ‘Black’ instead of ‘African-American’ because it is Davis’ own preferred way of referring to his ethnicity. The explanation he provides for this (*Klan-Destine Relationships. A Black Man’s Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press, 1998), 310–1) is one I sympathise with.

¹⁰⁷⁷ This is reflected, for instance, in his TEDx Talk with around 12 million views on YouTube (cf. Daryl Davis, *Why I, as a black man, attend KKK rallies*, YouTube video, 18:52, posted by “TEDx Talk,” 8.12.2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORp3q1Oaezw&ab_channel=TEDxTalks) or in his appearance on the popular podcast *The Joe Rogan Experience* (Joe Rogan & Deryl Davis, #1419 – *Daryl Davis*, 2:39:39, posted by “The Joe Rogan Experience,” January 2020, <https://ogjre.com/episode/1419-daryl-davis>).

¹⁰⁷⁸ In *Klan-Destine Relationships* (29), Davis dates his first planned meeting with a Klan member to the summer of 1991.

¹⁰⁷⁹ This is what Davis himself claims (cf.: Russel Howard & Daryl Davis, *Daryl Davis on converting 200 white supremacists to leave the KKK*, YouTube video, 12:34, posted by “Russel Howard,” 3.11.2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLtp13Rw8Kc&ab_channel=RussellHoward); whether these numbers are correct can hardly be proven, yet they seem to be regarded as fairly uncontroversial. Even if they would not be

collapsed.¹⁰⁸⁰ What he does is sometimes described as ‘convincing’ the KKK members to leave the Klan¹⁰⁸¹ and while I think that this is not wrong, I do have my reservations with putting it that way. I would rather be inclined to say that while many KKK members *are convinced* after meeting Davis – that is, convinced that there is truth to what he says and, hence, convinced that there may be something wrong with the organisation they are a part of – it is not Davis himself who does the convincing¹⁰⁸², at least not if that is understood as the *Collins Dictionary* defines it, i.e. “to move by argument or evidence to belief, agreement, consent, or a course of action.”¹⁰⁸³ Now, as almost any conversation, Davis’ conversations with the KKK members certainly also entail argumentation and, hence, convincing¹⁰⁸⁴ (although it should be noted that Davis has no qualms conceding that in their conversations, it is quite often the KKK members who convince *him* to rethink *his* beliefs)¹⁰⁸⁵; yet, when it comes to the question what role he plays in their changes of heart, it seems that what is more important than arguments is *the way* in which Davis meets, and speaks with, the Klan members.

In this section, I do not want to look at Davis’ relations to KKK members in terms of what makes him so successful in bringing about changes of heart but as an example of what it means to engage lovingly with those who are filled with hatred, and not just *generally* but, more particularly, a hatred *towards oneself* and the group one is a part of. I will take as my main point of reference Davis’ book *Klan-Destine Relationships*, an autobiographical report of Davis’ experiences with the KKK and his encounters with its members. The idea is not that I want to present Davis as an exemplar of what it means to engage with hateful people in a perfectly loving way; however, I do think that at least some of the encounter with racists he describes in the book suggest themselves as starting points for reflecting about what it means to engage in a loving spirit with those who are hateful as well as how such a spirit may become corroded by the hatred it faces.

entirely accurate, however, this would not change the fact that Davis’ engagement with the Klan has had a significant impact on it.

¹⁰⁸⁰ This is another claim made by Davis (cf. Conor Friedersdorf, “The Audacity of Talking About Race With the Ku Klux Klan,” *The Atlantic*, accessed 20.6.2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/03/the-audacity-of-talking-about-race-with-the-klu-klux-klan/388733/>).

¹⁰⁸¹ Cf. e.g. Davis’ *Wikipedia* entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daryl_Davis#cite_note-audacity_2015_03_27_the_atlantic-16 (accessed 20.6.2023).

¹⁰⁸² In an interview, Davis, a Christian, puts it this way: “I never set out to convert anybody [...] some of them ending up converting themselves”, and “I go ‘round meeting them and set an example and they end up converting themselves – some of them do” (Howard & Davis, *Daryl Davis on converting 200 white supremacists*, 0:38–0:4; 1:41–1:46).

¹⁰⁸³ *Collins Dictionary*, s.v., “convince,” accessed 13.5.2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/convince>

¹⁰⁸⁴ Take any of the conversations with Klan members that Davis describes in *Klan-Destine Relationships* (e.g. 40–54, 74–85, 261–77).

¹⁰⁸⁵ E.g. *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 47–8.

Davis' first meeting with a member of the KKK is with a man of high-rank by the name of Roger Kelly. Not mentioning his skin colour so that Kelly would not cancel the meeting, Davis is mortally afraid when Kelly and his armed henchman first set eyes on him. However, Kelly, although irritated and tense, agrees to talk. As the conversation unfolds, Kelly describes himself as a segregationist, and reveals himself to be someone who passionately opposes what he calls "interracial marriage or race-mixing" and the resulting "mongrel race."¹⁰⁸⁶ He moreover thinks that homosexuals "belong under a rock"¹⁰⁸⁷ and states that he would disown his children if they would come out gay.¹⁰⁸⁸ At the end of their meeting, he wants to give Davis a T-shirt with a rifle's bull's eye centred on Martin Luther King's forehead, the caption reading "'Our dream came true!'"¹⁰⁸⁹ In spite of all of this, Davis recapitulates his thoughts after the meeting in the following way:

I went looking for a violent man who hates people for no other reason than the difference of skin color. This quest failed. Roger Kelly does not hate, nor is he a violent man. Roger Kelly is a very opinionated man. Expecting to find that Roger Kelly and I had absolutely nothing in common, we found ourselves having some of the same concerns and sharing some of the same opinions. We disagreed on many things and saw humor in others, causing us both to laugh, thus proving that a Black man and a Klansman can stand on common ground, if only momentarily.¹⁰⁹⁰

These are revealing reflections. Davis had just met with a man who, among other things many would find despicable, openly reviled ethnically mixed people as mongrels, ranted against homosexuals, and glorified the killing of a Civil Rights champion who preached love and equality – yet still he emphasises that Kelly was not a violent or hateful man. This is even more striking given that Davis says that he expected to find a hateful man when he entered the conversation, an expectation grounded in knowledge about the KKK, about its history and the heinous crimes that were committed by its members.¹⁰⁹¹ So, it seems that it was *reasonable* for Davis to expect a violent and hateful man – and not only that: the man he eventually met did

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Deryl Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 55.

¹⁰⁹¹ This knowledge is reflected in the book; however, Davis also states that he was "learning as much as [he could] about that ideology" before meeting with the KKK members, so that he "would know as much as they did, or more, about them or their organisation", so that "whether they liked [him] or not, they had to respect [him]" (Howard & Davis, *Daryl Davis on converting 200 white supremacists*, 3:58–4:16).

hold views that were rooted in a deeply hate-infused ideology. And still, Davis emphasises that Kelly was neither hateful nor violent.

Davis comes to this view over the course of the conversation as he gets to know the individual behind these views and, thus, the ways in which they, alongside others, weave into a more encompassing worldview. In this way, Davis comes to differentiate between, on the one hand, the hatred and violence that has seeped into the racist ideology that fuels Kelly's worldview as well as the horrible crimes that have been committed in its name and, on the other, the way in which Kelly appropriates them for himself. It becomes apparent to Davis that Kelly has a very clear, blueprint-like picture of what the world should look like, a picture he is quite adamant about – that is why Davis calls him “very opinionated” – and which he imposes on reality. This picture fuses the Bible with a racist ideology, resulting in a relativistic worldview on which it is God's will that every race, indeed every group with a distinct identity, stays among themselves and upholds its moral standards and values (which, in the case of the White Americans, are obviously Christian and heterosexual.)¹⁰⁹² This obviously leads to a very harsh – *loveless*, I am inclined to say – stance towards those who stand in the way of such a world, i.e. as obstacles and aberrations.¹⁰⁹³

This being said, Kelly indicates in different ways – both in *what* he says as well as in *how* he says it – that this is not rooted in a personal hatred for them. Over the course of the conversation, he makes Davis come to see that he has nothing against Blacks or ethnically mixed people *as such* (perhaps unlike homosexuals whom he thinks embody moral decay.) At the end of the conversation, for instance, when Davis asks him what he thinks about some KKK member having left the Klan, Kelly replies “that the man had joined the Klan for the wrong reason. That he had joined out of hatred,” adding that ““Anyone who hates has no business being in the Klan.””¹⁰⁹⁴ Davis adds: “In the light of history, it was a difficult premise to accept.”¹⁰⁹⁵ When Davis questions Kelly's comment, he is met with the answer “that there is good and bad in any group of people regardless of their color or beliefs” and that he was not “a hater of other races, but a lover of his own.”¹⁰⁹⁶

¹⁰⁹² Ibid., esp. 41, 43, 47–51.

¹⁰⁹³ Indeed, I think this also leads to a loveless stance towards those who are part of one's own group, because one will not be well-disposed to them simply qua particular individuals but merely in virtue of their exhibiting certain features, such as skin colour, a certain ethnic background, or the like. In other words: a stance on which one is well-disposed towards some groups and ill-disposed towards others will not reflect a loving spirit towards either – it will, as already said following Strandberg, be “unloving *tout court*.”

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibid.

Now, this could of course be a mere lip service; yet, in the light of other things Kelly says, it seems that there may be some truth to it. One of the most revealing passages of the conversation is when Davis asks Kelly about what he thinks is the problem with ethnically mixed children and Kelly answers that such children have “a lot of trouble” because “[t]he Whites are going to denounce them and the Blacks are going to denounce them.”¹⁰⁹⁷ The flaw in Kelly’s reasoning can be traced back to his worldview: he thinks in terms of ‘races’, not individuals, which, in virtue of their wish to ‘remain pure’, denounce mixed children – thus failing to recognise, or acknowledge, that it is precisely because of segregationists like himself (or racists of an even more radical kind) that children who are ethnically mixed have a hard time. Despite this blatant case of circular thinking, however, Kelly’s words at the same time indicate a however dim understanding that the problem is not the ethnically mixed children but rather those who denounce them – in fact, it reflects a concern for *them*, the mixed children, and for their suffering for being denounced by both Blacks and Whites. Although what Kelly says about ethnically mixed children – indeed about all ‘Non-Whites’ – is deeply problematic and would, when implemented in praxis, doubtlessly lead to more suffering than it would prevent, it still does not indicate that he wants *them* any harm. Or, to put it with a different, accent: while endorsing a worldview fuelled by hatred, it does not seem that he, Kelly, himself is a hate-filled man.

Thus, Davis concludes that Kelly is not violent or hateful but “very opinionated.” Now, if someone is very opinionated then, while not hateful, he is not loving either, at least to the extent that ‘loving’ is understood in terms of an unreserved readiness to put one’s thoughts and one’s heart at the mercy of the dialogue (and to the extent that ‘opinionated’ means having clear and strict views that one is unwilling to come to see in a new light.) Yet although Kelly remains adamant about his views, how he engages with Davis, at least once the initial irritation abates, is civil and polite, even at times friendly and cordial. He is willing to listen and even to acknowledge when he is wrong, just as his answers, while opinionated, are not imposing, patronising, or threatening.¹⁰⁹⁸ The very fact that he, a fervent segregationist, talks to Davis and in such an unrestrained way, testifies to the fact that he takes Davis seriously – and not as someone below himself but as an equal. So, although deeply entangled in his ‘It-world’ – one which is not positively disposed towards people like Davis – Kelly’s way of engaging with Davis conveys that he does not relate to him as merely ‘one It among others’.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid., especially from 44 ff.

Whether this is actually true is of course another question. Still, it is how it appeared to Davis and why he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that the expectations with which he entered the conversation were not met. In a sense, Davis, although not sharing Kelly's hate-infused ideology, could also be said to have been rather opinionated before having entered the conversation: 'This man, a high-ranking member of the KKK, *will* be a violent and hate-filled individual.' Yet the fact that he, in the conversation with the actual person, let himself be disabused – i.e. that he was open to the possibility that even an individual whose worldview is steeped in a hate-fuelled ideology and who is part of an organisation that has committed countless horrible, hate-filled crimes need not himself be a hateful person – shows that he was not, or at least that he did not remain, caught up in the picture with which he entered the engagement. As Buber puts it, there is no anticipation in the I's relation to You, including no anticipation of what You might be like – meeting You means being open to how You actually addresses me and to respond to it accordingly. It was the Klansman's presence, not some picture of it, to which Davis responded when engaging with him. Reading about his meetings with other KKK members, it seems to me that a similarly loving spirit shines through in them.

Davis says that Kelly held views fuelled by hatred but that he was not hateful. But what about responding lovingly to a genuinely hateful person – more precisely, to the hateful person's hateful response to oneself? An example of this kind is provided in one of the book's later chapters. Davis describes how, after a court trial, he was attacked by the sisters of one of the Klansmen who had been convicted in the trial:¹⁰⁹⁹

As I passed behind one of Pierson's sisters, she kicked me on my shin. She then attempted to kick me again, but I blocked her leg with the palm of my hand as her foot came up off the ground.

'This is not necessary,' I said, and continued walking.

She shouted, 'You're nothing but a fucking Nigger!'

Her younger sister yelled, 'He looks more like a coon or an ape to me!'

At this point my temper flared. I stared at the younger sister and said, 'And what do you look like?'¹¹⁰⁰

At this point, another KKK member intervenes, a man who feels compelled to help the white women against the Black man. Moments later, the police arrives; the women unsurprisingly

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., 284–5.

¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 285–6.

accuse Davis of having attacked them while Davis, still angry and upset, decides to press charges against them. This is how he describes the thoughts that led him to the decision:

Part of their feelings stemmed, I believe, from vindication for the stiff sentence imposed on their brother less than ten minutes prior to this incident and the rest from the fact that they could not accept a Black person being right and a White person being wrong, no matter what the circumstances. The first I could understand but the latter I could not accept.¹¹⁰¹

Let me begin with the women's attack and Davis' immediate response. Davis' defensive reaction has probably partly to do with the fact that the scene plays out in the vicinity of several other KKK members – no doubt he wants to defuse the situation instead of appearing as 'the Black man who attacked the White women'. When this attempt fails and the situation escalates further, the women hurling disgusting racist slurs at him, however, Davis becomes angry: facing up to them, he retorts that the one who called him "ape" and "coon" better take a look at herself instead. Yet even with his "temper flaring", he remains remarkably composed. He does not simply answer the women's seething spite and hatred in a like spirit. At the same time, he neither simply lets them make him their scapegoat for their frustration by (quite literally) trampling over him. He takes a stand over against the women and confronts them, yet without lowering himself to their level. With Buber, one could say that he neither lets them turn him into an It nor does he lower himself to the level of one by giving in to his anger – in standing his ground as I, he addresses them as You and, as such, he opposes how they respond to him.¹¹⁰² This being said, their spite and hatred, together with their palpable aggression, does not leave his responsiveness to them entirely unaffected. In order to better understand the relational dynamics involved here, let me once again return to Buber.

At the end of his discussion of love, Buber remarks that "[h]atred remains blind by its very nature; one can hate only part of a being."¹¹⁰³ Now, as I brought to light in the previous chapter, Buber understands the response to the You as a response to the other's *whole* being. This means that for Buber, hate, qua relation to only a *part* of the other, means relating to the other as It. Relating to the other as It, however, need not involve hate – recall that even virtuous

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid, 287; when Davis writes that „they could not accept a Black person being right and a White person being wrong” he refers to the court case in which a Black person won against Whites.

¹¹⁰² Needless to say, being an I in response to a You does not mean 'being nice' or accepting what the other does, be it to oneself or to others. As was shown in section c. above, a loving response may mean opposing the You's wickedness or evil, both for the sake of its victims as well as for its own sake. This transpires e.g. in Buber's remarks on those who stood up to the Nazi regime – and those who now find themselves called-upon to fight the dehumanisation of the human race (cf. *Pointing the Way*, 232 ff.).

¹¹⁰³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 68.

action as McDowell conceives of it would qualify as a variant of the I-It. The scope of the I-It is thus far wider than that of hatred, hatred only being one specific – and specifically destructive – form of I-It relationality. In addition, Buber connects the It with indifference and detachment rather than with hatred: “whoever hates directly is closer to a relation than those who are without love and hate.”¹¹⁰⁴ So, more needs to be said.

This is what I take to be Buber’s point: in relating to another, one may certainly dislike some, or even many, things about this other – even the whole that is the other’s character. As my above discussion of the loving response to the ‘possessed’ showed, however, this does not by itself mean that one will relate to the other in an unloving, let alone in a hateful way. After all, it is possible to perceive the other’s disagreeable qualities in the light of the love that permeates one’s relation to the other. If, however, the other’s qualities gain prominence to the point of becoming decisive in one’s relation to the other, directing one’s attention to *them* instead of appearing in *the other’s* light, one’s view of the other will be dominated by just these qualities. Take for instance the impudent child: relating to it in a loving spirit, one will see its impudence before the background of its whole being – say, that its constant vying for attention is connected to its low self-esteem and, hence, something that the child itself suffers from and which one should try to help it overcome. Once the impudence becomes dominant in one’s view of it, however – imagine the teacher whose life is made hell because of the child – one will come to disregard the whole being into which this insufferable quality is woven. The teacher thus filled with dislike for the child may label it in a way that identifies it with its impudence, say as a ‘brat’ or ‘devil’¹¹⁰⁵, and thus come to regard *it* first and foremost in terms of what she dislikes *about it* (“You can’t expect anything else from her, she is just a brat”) – at that point, the It will have taken over. Thus it is also with hatred: hatred means coming to see the other in the light of¹¹⁰⁶ what one hates about him.¹¹⁰⁷ The child who initially fears and dreads the drunken father’s violent impulsiveness may come to hate this side *about him* – and gradually,

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁵ That is not to say that using such terms is as such indicative, let alone proof of, one’s relating to the child as an It. The point is rather that if one comes to conceive of the child in terms of its bad qualities, then this may come to be reflected in certain descriptions and expressions.

¹¹⁰⁶ Given the discussion of speaking about I-You relationality in terms of light and darkness in chapter 4 (section 5), it seems that speaking about someone appearing ‘in the light of hatred’ may be somewhat misleading. I only put it in this way because ‘in the darkness of hatred’ or ‘in the shadow of hatred’ does not work.

¹¹⁰⁷ In a similar spirit, Simone Weil writes: “If I hate a man, there is not the man on one side and my hatred on the other; when he approaches me something hateful approaches me; and the perversity of his soul strikes me more immediately than the colour of his hair. If he is blond, moreover, it is a hateful blondness; if he has brown hair, it is a hateful brownness” (quoted from Peter Winch, *Simone Weil: ‘The Just Balance’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114.)

as time passes and it has to suffer again and again by his hands, transfer its hatred onto him.¹¹⁰⁸ At that point, it will have come to identify *him* with what he hates *about* him, thus turning him into the object of its hatred.¹¹⁰⁹

This situation is further complicated in the case of the two sisters who attacked Davis, however, because here we face a hatred that is not rooted in personal experience. Instead, it is a hatred that is, as it were, transferred onto the individuals – in our case: Davis – in virtue of some general attribute – in our case: his skin colour (connected to other supposed attributes, such as lower intelligence, laziness, violence, and so on).¹¹¹⁰ Indeed, Davis’ ‘slogan’, “How can you hate me if you do not even know me?”¹¹¹¹ shows that it is this abstract hatred that Davis primarily seeks to confront and expose in his interactions with the Klan members. And it seems to be this kind of hatred which Buber suggest is especially problematic when he says that “whoever hates *directly* is closer to a relation than those who are without love and hate” – the implication being that there may also be *indirect* hate which, precisely due to its impersonality, is even further removed from real relationality than the kind of hatred that grows out of a relationship with the other. The sisters neither know Davis nor do they, raised and living in a purely White social environment, have any experiences what Black people and Black culture may generally ‘be like’.¹¹¹² Thus, their hatred for him is not rooted in *his* supposed detestable qualities but in the detestable qualities that they have come to learn go hand in hand with black skin. What Davis is thus met with, and responds to, is not the depersonalisation that is part of *all* hatred – it is the more radical depersonalisation of a hatred in which he is merely an anonymous instance of what is hated, namely blackness (and what is associated with it) – and, connected to that, the prejudice that every instance of the general concept (‘blackness’) must display a certain array of detestable qualities.

¹¹⁰⁸ “Hatred [...] is not like an illness that comes up suddenly” (Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, “Phenomenological approaches to hatred. Scheler, Pfänder, and Kolnai,” in *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy 16* (London: Routledge, 2018), 158–179, at 177.)

¹¹⁰⁹ For an investigation of hatred along (at least mostly) similar lines – i.e. as a “movement of the heart,” namely one that closes off to the world and its value – cf. Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, ed. Manfred S. Frings & Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1973), 260–1.

¹¹¹⁰ Perhaps there are racists who hate people purely for their skin colour. Usually, however, this is not the case. It seems to me to be far more common for racists to associate certain skin colours or ethnical backgrounds with certain bad traits or behaviour: Thus, the White supremacist may hate Blacks but only because he thinks they are all lazy and loud, thus allowing for exceptions to the rule (“I know this guy, he’s Black but he is cool. Well-behaved, you know. Not like *them*.”) This is especially so, I think, in forms of racism that tend to veer towards the cultural because its proponents can easily ‘argue’ that certain bad traits or forms of behaviour are not a matter of biology but socialisation into a culture.

¹¹¹¹ Daryl Davis, *Klan We Talk*, YouTube video, 51:19, posted by “Google Talks,” 12.4.2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHCECtyl2A&ab_channel=TalksatGoogle

¹¹¹² This is of course not to point in the direction of some kind of race or ethnicity essentialism but rather to call attention to the difference between having a generalising view of a certain group or people that *is not grounded in any first-hand experience at all* and a generalising view of a certain group or people that *is grounded in first-hand experience*. Both of them are obviously problematic.

Now back to Davis: finding himself turned into the object of the kind of just outlined impersonal hatred, he responds, if only momentarily, with modest anger and fury. In section 2.a. above, it was already expounded that anger may be loving, namely when it is geared towards kindling the loving spirit of those towards whom it is directed. It seems to me, however, that Davis' anger is not of that kind but rather a (certainly less vile) deflection of the hatred of the two sisters back towards them. To put it in the language of relationality I developed earlier: finding him addressed by the sisters' response to him, he finds himself not only turned into an It, but into an It of the kind that they hate *in abstracto* (i.e. a black person). As such, they, enraged and resentful because what had just happened to their brother, see him as an occasion for venting their frustration and their hatred towards black people at the same time. They want to hurt him in order to feel better and so, in their spite, frustration, and ignorant hatred for 'his kind', they 'get something out of' treating him, quite literally, as a punching bag – although it must be added that, in their state of mind, a normal punching bag most likely would not do. That is, it is precisely their seeing him as a particular individual – one who wants them no harm, one who simply wants to mind his own business, one who, as the only Black person among White KKK members, is vulnerable – that 'does it' for them and for the kind of twisted gratification they seek. It is this way of responding – or from his perspective: their way of being addressed – which momentarily tempts him into at least partly betraying his overall well-meaning, perhaps even loving, stance. In this sense, it seems apt to say that the destructive blindness that marks their response to him comes to 'infect' also his response to their response to him. It is their response towards him, in other words, that tempts him into restricting his attention to just one aspect of them, to just 'a part of their being', namely their intense and even threatening hatred, thus making him neglect, if only momentarily, their 'whole being'.

However, he swiftly regains a fuller sense of their being, namely already when he, in the above quoted passage, shows understanding for at least part of what may have motivated their spiteful outburst, i.e. their "vindication for the stiff sentence imposed on their brother." He accepts that someone who just suffered a heavy blow might burst and let out her frustration on someone else. Thus, he shows an understanding for human weakness, even if he is the one who suffers from it. What he does not accept is the deeply ingrained racism he finds behind their behaviour – and that is of course no sign of unlovingness. Indeed, it may be a sign of a genuine concern *for them*, too, namely to the extent that his disavowal of their racism is not merely rooted in his desire to have a better life as a Black person in the US or even in a desire for all victims of racism to be freed from their scourge, but also in a desire for them, the two vile sisters, to be able to overcome the hatred in which they are so deeply steeped and to liberate

themselves from the ideology in which it is grounded. If that would be part of his refusal to simply accept their racism as a given, a mere obstacle to be dealt with, but to retain a sense of it as a social pathology to be addressed on the personal level, then certainly his resolution would be interlaced with sadness and pity also for them. Those who live a life of hatred also suffer from that hatred themselves – and, as Socrates puts it, ‘it is better to suffer evil than to do wrong’.¹¹¹³

3. Love In-Between & Being-in-Love

In the last section, I examined five engagements in respect to whether, and if so how, they could be described as loving. The first was an engagement of two lovers, the second between an authority of some sort and a disciple, the third between a holy person and an outcast, the fourth between two friends, and the fifth between a Black man and White supremacists. The first and the fourth are what would commonly be described as love relations, relations in which it would be nothing out of the ordinary for those involved to say to one another “I love you.” One of the aims of the last section’s discussion was to show that love can also be present in an engagement that is not a love relationship – that is, when those involved do not love one another but yet there is love *between* them, in the very engagement, manifesting in their responses to the presence of the respective other. Still, some question remains regarding the relation between such a love that is there *in-between* I and You and the love that we, qua lovers, are *in*, in which we are steeped and which envelops our relation.

Given that love in-between, or ‘adverbial’ love, manifests in the present moment whereas love in the ‘substantive’ sense refers to love that has already seeped into, and coloured, a relation, the question arises how the latter emerges. One intuition suggests that engaging lovingly with another here and now forms the starting point for any more substantive love. While I think there is truth to this idea, it stands in need of qualification.

In some cases, it seems apparent that lovingness here and now does indeed lead to love of a deeper and lasting kind. Say, for instance, someone works in an open-plan office and briefly interacts with a colleague from several desks away. Although he is quite preoccupied with his own business and hence somewhat indifferent to her, she responds to him with such kindness that he is compelled to ‘get out of his shell’ and to answer her kindness with his own. They talk for a minute and then both go back to their desks to attend their business. This may of course

¹¹¹³ Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 469c

be a one-time occurrence – they may never talk again and even if they do, the warmth that was there between them the first time may then be absent. If so, the loving spirit that was kindled on that one occasion will remain just that and not develop any further. It may, however, also be the case that they meet again and in a way that is coloured by the warmth of their first encounter. If so, it is not hard to imagine how they could get from there to having a coffee together, to spending their free time together, so as to gradually become close friends or lovers who love each other dearly.

Yet there are other instances in which it is not so straightforward. It may also be imagined that someone has a spiteful relationship with a colleague and nonetheless at some point suddenly comes to realise that he loves her (be it in a romantic way or not.) He may think ‘I hate everything about her and she about me; she is always so mean to me and I do not treat her particularly kindly either; still, I cannot deny it – I just *love* her!’¹¹¹⁴ How is that to be understood? I see two possibilities: if, firstly, his attitude towards her was hitherto actually one of spite (or something of the sort), then their relationship will, up until that point, simply *not have been* one of love. In that case, the moment of him coming to realise that he *does* love her just *is* his first encounter with her as someone he loves. In that case, what I have called (adverbial) lovingness and (substantive) love coincide – he realises that he loves her when he first responds lovingly to her.¹¹¹⁵ Alternatively, it may also be the case that, in the light of his loving response to his colleague here and now, it appears to him that what had hitherto appeared to him as a purely spiteful relation now reveals itself as having *already* been marked, or touched by love, even when they were still mean towards one another. If so, his prior understanding of his relation to his colleague will appear as having somehow been clouded, perhaps precisely by the spite that had infected their relationship, not seeing the spite for what it really was, namely a mere ‘surface phenomenon’ behind which their love for one another was already there, perhaps already deepening. From that perspective, lovingness was already woven into their

¹¹¹⁴ In order to reflect the notion of love that I am concerned with, the love that is here proclaimed must, of course, be more than a mere enchantment or desire or passion. It must entail a genuine concern for the other, i.e. a concern rooted in a responsiveness to the other that marks the other (and, hence, one’s care and concern for her) as being of a categorically greater importance than one’s (self-interested) preferences or inclinations. If the man in question claims he loves his colleague and says that this shows in him thinking about her all the time or in wanting to spend time with her every day after work, yet does not consider helping her when she has a serious problem because he wants to see his favourite band playing, then we are not talking about love in the sense I am interested in.

¹¹¹⁵ I think that even in such a case, it would be premature to say that their relation was entirely loveless even before they realised that they loved one another. If, say, he would have slipped, fallen, and ended up with a vicious head wound, she would have probably rushed over and helped without thinking about how mean and insufferable he is. But what would such a response be other than a display of lovingness? If this sounds strange, recall the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan (which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 5.) For a discussion of these themes, cf. Joel Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 271–9.

engagements and interactions at an earlier point, perhaps from the moment they first set eyes on one another, yet in such a way that it was covered over by their meanness and, thus, came to obfuscate their understanding of the reality of their relation.¹¹¹⁶

A particularly interesting case is that of the love between mother and child. I would assume that many would be inclined to say that when a mother and child engage lovingly with one another, they do so *because* they love one another – the love they *have* is taken to be the ground for the love they *live* in relating to one another. In this sense, the substantive love is implicitly assumed to be ‘first’ – that which is always already there and is realised in concrete situations.¹¹¹⁷ Yet I find this way of putting it misleading. In order to show why, I think we should look at the starting point of their relationship. The relationship of mother and child – or at least of the mother *to* its child¹¹¹⁸ – for the most part¹¹¹⁹ neither begins with birth nor with the knowledge that she is pregnant but rather with first ‘encountering’ the child within her, that is, when she at some point finds herself addressed by the being inside of her. This being still stands in a symbiotic relationship with her but, as is heralded with this first encounter, is already another, a someone, in relation to whom she, You-saying, actualises herself as I.¹¹²⁰

Is their relation at this point already one of love? Given that the child is not yet able to answer this question, it seems that, if anyone, it is the mother who is in the position to say. I think that it is just as imaginable that a mother would say that, *yes*, in first having made contact with the child within her, she instantly had the deepest loving bond to it, as it is also imaginable that she may *not* yet be ready to speak in such a way, instead emphasising the strangeness and wondrousness of this moment. If she loves the child in her womb the moment she first feels it moving, then we are in the kind of situation outlined in the last paragraph, namely that in which the first loving response coincides with the creation of a bond of love. If, on the other hand, she does not, then her love for it will either strike her at some later time or it will gradually develop.

¹¹¹⁶ For a discussion of how a new understanding in the present can also alter one’s understanding of the past, cf. Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 28–34.

¹¹¹⁷ The common ‘story’ is that the (substantial) love, i.e. the loving bond qua deep attachment, between mother and child develops due to certain natural mechanisms, either psychological or biological (or both), and that this then forms the basis for the love that shows in their interactions with one another. For two influential such accounts, cf. Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, transl. *Helena Ragg-Kirkby* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 216 ff., and John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment*. 2nd Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 235–43. Such accounts are by no means a thing of the past. For an influential contemporary thinker whose love of parental love is strongly influenced by Freud, cf. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 45–7 & 75–78.

¹¹¹⁸ That is not to say that the unborn child does not yet relate to the mother; at some point, it certainly does. This being said, it is simply quite hard to say anything about the nature of that relationship (with the exception, perhaps, of the mother.)

¹¹¹⁹ That is: I do not want to claim that this *must* be so (although it seems to me hard to imagine how it could be otherwise.)

¹¹²⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

At some point, however, she will (most likely) find that a deep loving bond with her child has emerged. The emergence of the mother's love for her child, understood in terms of a deep bond, does not precede but either follows, or is contemporary with, the first loving encounter of her and her child.

The crux is that her love, regardless of whether it announces itself momentarily or whether it gradually emerges, will shed its light on the whole relationship with her child, present, past and future – or, more precisely, from out of the present into the remembered past and into the anticipated future.¹¹²¹ As regards the future, it has already been indicated that even when it is directed fully to the present moment, one's responsiveness to the other colours the future engagement with her – the colleague's warm and kind smile will impact how one will continue engaging with her and probably also how one will engage with her the next time one meets her. Yet, love – in the substantive sense, that is – can be said to illuminate the future in another way, namely in how it makes one think about, anticipate, and plan the future with the other. In the light of her love for her child, the mother will come to look differently at life, and in such a way that it will become more and more entwined with that of her child. She will become more concerned at the cost of others, she will make certain plans at the cost of others, some things she may have always deemed important may suddenly appear trite while others which she may have never cared about suddenly become relevant, and so on. All of these are aspects of what can be said to be her growing sense of *responsibility* for the child. The notion of responsibility in question is not that of the ability to respond to the one inquiring into one's motives – the ability to explain, and justify, what one *already did* – but rather points into the future, to the question, and challenge, what it means for one to live one's life in the light of one's love and, thus, for finding oneself compelled to reshape one's life – as well as the relationship to the beloved – accordingly.¹¹²² In the case of a small child, much reorienting will be done by the mother in response to the child; the older the child gets, however, the more will it entail a reshaping of their life together, in the light of their love for one another.¹¹²³

¹¹²¹ Here, the light metaphor I developed following Buber in his discussion of the 'space' of the You extends into the temporal.

¹¹²² This is very close to what Cowley means when he speaks of "prospective responsibility." For a good introductory discussion, cf. "Love, Choice, and Responsibility," in *New Philosophical Essays on Love and Loving*, ed. Simon Cushing (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 87–100, from 89 ff. For a more thorough investigation, cf. *Moral Responsibility*, chapters 6–8.

¹¹²³ I think there is an important dimension to responsibility that is neither about looking into the future nor about looking into the past but about answering to what is here and now. This is the notion that is closely tied to Buber's I-You – i.e. the responsibility that comes with responding to the other (cf. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 18–20) – and which in a certain sense comprises the other two dimensions. After all, it is always here and now, in responding to someone that I show that take up responsibility for what I have done just as it is in response to another here and now that I anticipate and plan our lives with the other (perhaps even a planning and anticipating that I do together with the other.) While I will unfortunately not be able to further explore the

Much more could be said about how love may come to impact how one relates to the future, yet it is the way in which it illuminates the past that is more relevant for my present purposes, namely in order to anticipate the next chapter's discussion. It was said that it may take a while for a loving bond to develop, even between a mother and her child, reflected in the mother's unreadiness to speak of her relation to the child within her as a relation of love. Not unlike in the case of the colleagues who realised that there had already been love between them, however, this may be challenged once it comes to appear in the light of love. That is, even if the mother would *at that earlier point* not have been ready to describe her relationship with her child in terms of love, this relationship may now, in the light of the love that *presently* illuminates it, retrospectively reveal itself as having been loving all along.¹¹²⁴ What she may beforehand have thought about in terms of her 'having gone easy on *herself*', for example – that is, her having avoided physical exertion during her pregnancy because it would have been straining and not good for her health – she may then, in the present light of her love for her child, come to see in hindsight as something she did, at least *also*, out of a care and concern *for the child*, albeit one that had at that point not yet been readily apparent to her. (This can be reversed: if it is imagined that the mother's heart hardens, perhaps due to a deep depression or a corrosive cynicism brought about by some horrible event, then this will also colour – or rather darken – how she views her prior relation to her child. What she may have described as expressions of her love for her child beforehand – say, her helping her child make it through school despite of its learning disabilities – she may then describe as something she did merely because she thought she *had to* or because it would be a disgrace to the family if he, the child, would turn out a failure.)

One of the upshots of the discussion in chapter 4 was that speaking about a relationship can only be done in hindsight, that is, after the moment or the period that one speaks about has already passed (and even if it in some sense still ongoing, one's speaking about it will mark one's having distanced oneself from it.) Or, in the terminology I used above: I must first speak *with* You in order to be able to turn our speaking-with (or: our relation) into an It that we can speak *about*. Yet *how* we speak about our relation – that is, whether in third- or second-personal terms or a mixture of them – depends on whether this relation appears to us in a loving light or not. Most mothers do speak about their relationships to her children in ways that indicate that

temporal ramifications of responsibility in the present work, the next chapter will shift the focus of the discussion more towards responsibility than the present one.

¹¹²⁴ On the difference between the perspective of the (engaged) 'agent' and the (distanced) 'spectator', cf. Lars Hertzberg, "On Being Neighbourly," *The Possibilities of Sense*, eds. D. Z. Phillips & John H. Whittaker (London: Palgrave, 2002), 24–38, at 31.

it is illuminated by love, even if the relationship is troubled – indeed, it may be especially in such relations that the strength of their loving bond and the light in which it illuminates their relationship comes most pronouncedly to the fore (although there are exceptions, as the case of the cynical or deeply depressed mother showed.) A mother who, in a loving spirit, speaks lucidly about her troubled relation to her child will not sugar-coat the harsh reality of their relationship – say, the ways in which they are mean, dishonest, and manipulative – yet despite this, she will see that all of this, although terrible in many ways, is not all there is to their relationship, that underneath it all, there is love between her and her child. Unless she is self-deceived, her speaking in this way will as such be an expression of her love for her child and for her relation to it. (Whether she is self-deceived or not cannot be assessed from an impersonal standpoint but only in responding to her. As such, the witness’ responsiveness – and its lovingness or unlovingness – is also implicated.)

4. Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I sought recourse to Buber in order to develop a second-personal alternative to the third-personal models of interpersonal relationality proposed by reason-centred thinkers such as Kant and McDowell. In the present chapter, I proceeded to examine what it means to understand concrete engagements and relations in such second-personal terms. In section 1, I developed Buber’s idea that the I-You relation is a relation of *love*. I began by showing that love in the relational sense is not to be understood in terms of a feeling but rather something in-between those who relate to one another lovingly (sub-section a.) before developing the idea in which sense love is ‘always already’ there between us, as something to be affirmed or rejected (sub-chapter b.); I concluded the discussion with the introduction of the distinction between love in the substantive sense, i.e. qua already formed relationship held together by a loving bond, and in the adverbial sense, i.e. qua lovingness here and now (sub-section c.). In the second section, I then illustrated, by means of various examples, the understanding of love developed *in abstracto* in the first section, seeking to convey a sense of the complex and nuanced ways in which (un)lovingness may manifest in our everyday engagements with one another. I first turned to an engaged of two young lovers, exploring what it may mean for their love for one another to cast its light on their relationship and on the world as a whole, while also considering what it may mean for unlovingness to creep in-between them (sub-section a.). Example two explored an engagement of an advice-seeker and an advice-giver, more specifically one in which the latter had been silenced by the bitterness of the former, and

what it would mean for the advice-giver to live up to the other's claim and, thus, respond to his supplicant in a loving spirit (sub-section b.). The third example revolved around the Biblical story of Jesus' encounter with the possessed man (as well as with the demons who possessed him), illustrating what it may mean to respond lovingly to a dangerous and deranged individual as well as examining what a loving response to multiple Yous may look like (sub-section c.). I then returned to chapter 3's example of the conversation of me and my heartbroken friend, this time focussing on his perspective, so as to bring to light that love can also manifest in the response of the one who bares his heart to another (sub-section d.). Finally, in example five, I looked at Daryl Davis' relation to the KKK – more precisely, at two encounters he had with KKK members – so as to bring to light what it may mean to respond lovingly to those who hate, as well as what it means to be infected by hatred (sub-section e.) In the third and final section, I then concluded the chapter with some further reflections on the relation between love and lovingness, especially on how loving engagements may develop and deepen into (substantive) love and how such a deepening is concomitant with an illumination through love's light.

Chapter VI: Love's Goodness

0. Introduction

In chapter four, I developed a second-personal alternative to the third-personal models of interpersonal relationality proposed by reason-centred thinkers such as Kant and McDowell. In the previous chapter, chapter five, I then proceeded to examine what it means to understand concrete engagements and relations in such second-personal terms. Following Buber's idea that the I-You relation is a relation of *love* – or as I spoke of it, a *loving* relation (one in which those involved engage *lovingly* with one another) – I deployed various examples to illustrate what it means to understand engagements in terms of lovingness or unlovingness, the latter marking the intrusion of some It in the response of I to You. My main aim was to show that lovingness, although in its concrete manifestations radically dependent on the situation (including the social circumstances, power & hierarchy, the individuals' feelings, the 'content' of the engagement, the shared history of those involved (if any), and so on), is something that concerns the *how*, or the spirit, of one's response to one's finding oneself addressed by the other and neither conditional upon 'anything already being there' between oneself and the other nor on one's already 'having something' or 'being in a certain way'.

As it stands, however, the account of love, or lovingness, that I gave is incomplete. This becomes readily apparent when considering why I felt compelled to go beyond the accounts offered by thinkers such as Kant and McDowell in the first place, namely because I found that they were unable to do justice to the *moral* dimension of interpersonal relationality. So, my turn to the second-personal relation, the I-You, and thus also to lovingness, was motivated by moral concerns – yet in my discussion of love in the last chapter, the moral was largely neglected.¹¹²⁵ This was deliberate, as I thought it would be too much at once both to translate Buber's thought into a 'language of lovingness'¹¹²⁶ and to bring to light the moral implications of the resulting picture. Accordingly, I will tend to the latter task in the present, final chapter of my dissertation.

¹¹²⁵ That is to say: it was neglected as a topic of discussion. I hope that in the light of my discussion in the present chapter, the moral dimension of the various examples I propounded and examined will become apparent.

¹¹²⁶ While I chose this term in imitation of what Rhees' calls the "language of love" (*Without Answers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), chapter 13) – an important motif in sections 1.a.v. and 2.b. below (though primarily in relation to Gaita's reading of it) – I do not commit myself to any similarities regarding its meaning.

This chapter has two parts. In the first part, I expound how love is ‘negatively’ connected to morality, that is, how a lack of lovingness in one’s responsiveness is connected to the experience of the moral demand of ‘being more loving’ (or ‘being less unloving’) or of ‘loving better’. The first section focusses on what has already been described in terms ‘the call of conscience’, alongside the notions of guilt, shame, and remorse, while the second section examines experiences of being engaged with unlovingly by others. Here, disappointment, betrayal, and forgiveness are important concepts. The second part then turns to examine love’s ‘positive’ connection to morality, that is, how encounters with love of an exceptional purity can reveal to us love’s goodness in a way that has a transformative impact on our moral understanding and, thus, comes to colour our own relations to others. In this discussion, the notions of witnessing, wonder, extraordinariness, saintliness, and revelation become central.

1. Love & Morality: The Negative Relation

a. Conscience

The discussion of love in the last chapter was marked by a certain one-sidedness, namely that I, while exploring what it may mean for someone to respond (un-)lovingly in a particular situation and face-to-face with a particular other (or others), did not address how this someone may experience *her own* response. Now, this point straightaway calls for an important qualification, namely that I think my way of proceeding was sound insofar as the one who responds lovingly to another *cannot* at the same time be concerned with the nature or quality of her own response. This is impossible because it would mean that someone could have his attention on the situation at hand and *at the same time* on his own reflection of the situation, on the other *and* on herself. This point was already raised in chapter 3 following Barabas’ important remark that it is of “the essence of actions which manifest goodness that it not be performed under that description, so too that which is ‘manifested’ is known, if it is known, by the recipient or the observer, rather than the self.”¹¹²⁷ Reflecting on one’s own goodness undermines that goodness because it interrupts the (loving) relation to the other in which goodness may otherwise manifest. This point was later made alongside Buber, namely that relating-to (or speaking-with) necessarily precedes reflecting-on (or speaking-about) the relation, just as, reversely, reflecting-on interrupts relating-to. The only way in which the two may be reconciled is by reflecting *together with* the other, in the form of an open dialogue – yet

¹¹²⁷ Marina Barabas, ‘In search of goodness’, 104; as already mentioned in chapter 3, Barabas speaks of goodness, not love or lovingness. I will address the distinction in section 2.a. below.

even in such cases, it is the *how* of the speaking, not the *what*, that ‘wears the pants’. (Recall the way in which my heartbroken friend opened up to me: not only did he speak *about* something, he even spoke about *himself*; yet, he spoke *with me* and in loving response *to me* instead of treating me like an ‘emotional trashcan’.)

This being said, the discussions of the examples that formed the core of the last chapter were not delimited to such wholehearted lovingness but also entailed reflections on responses of less loving kinds, responses which, when seen from the vantage point of love, appear as compromised, tainted, flawed, or straightforwardly unloving.¹¹²⁸ It was in discussing these responses that my account became one-sided – and, thus, in a certain sense superficial – because I did not address that they confront us with the experience of our not having lived up to the claims made upon us by the other’s address, that is: the claims to respond lovingly. In what follows, I thus explore this kind of experience – an experience that has already been introduced as ‘the call of conscience’ in chapter 3 – by means of two examples, namely a) in the context of a seemingly trivial interaction with a stranger and b) in the context of remorse for a wrong done. I conclude this part of the chapter with a critical discussion of Raimond Gaita’s understanding of remorse. In discussing these examples, I will at the same time try to bring to light something else, namely that the answer to the question whether (and if so, in which sense) our relations to one another are *as such* marked by love – that is, even when they do not display any lovingness, not even of a tainted kind – depends on the illuminating power of conscience.

i. Engaging with a Stranger

Imagine that you are in a rush to get a train and do not know the exact time. You neither have a watch nor a mobile phone on you. Then, you see someone else. Without any further thoughts or hesitations, you go up to her and ask what time it is. She looks at her wristwatch, tells you the time, and you hurry on.

Encounters like this are part of the fabric of everyday life and usually we live through them quite unthinkingly; if anything, they come to colour our further thinking and acting indirectly, that is, by virtue of the new possibilities which they open to us and the new paths they set us on. (Had you not asked the woman what time it is, you would not have known that you have more time than you thought you had, in which case you might have run past your

¹¹²⁸ Recall e.g. Lin’s hurtful anger towards Jay, the way in which Gaita’s alter ego was unable to rise up to his interlocutor’s bitterness, or how Davis was ‘infected’ by the hatred of the two racist women..

friend on the other side of the road who, as it happened, ended up telling you that... etc.) Often enough, however, encounters of this sort are forgotten, never to be thought about again.

It is clear that if there is no one who is in any way struck by, and stops to reflect on, an encounter such as this one, then there simply is no one to speak about it with, be it in terms of lovingness, unlovingness, its moral, immoral, or non-moral dimension, or in any other way. In such a case, the question as to whether one's way of relating to the other was in some way compromised or not will not even arise. In this sense, then, it would be misleading to generalise and say that *every* engagement or encounter is always already somehow relevant with respect to love and its requirements (which is what Buber indicates when he speaks of love as the 'metaphysical fact' that creates relationality as such.)¹¹²⁹ It obviously first requires a perspective from which the question arises – but such a perspective will always arise in relation to *particular* engagements and encounters, never to relationality *as such*. This may be from the position of a witness (i.e. the onlooker who is struck by how A responded to B), from the position of the addressee (i.e. the one who is struck by how she is addressed by A), or from the first-person position (i.e. the one who is struck by her own response to A.) It is the latter experience, that of being struck by one's own response to another, that is examined in what follows as it is only from this perspective that the call of conscience may be heard.¹¹³⁰

Thus, imagine further that, shortly after asking the stranger for the time, you sit in the train and it occurs to you that there was something off in the way in which you interacted with her. During the interaction, so it seems to you in hindsight, neither you nor she appeared to find anything problematic with how you engaged with her.¹¹³¹ But that does not change that, in

¹¹²⁹ Cf. the quote from *I and Thou* (66) I discussed in section 1 of the previous chapter. Below, however, I will point to another way in which such a generalising claim could be defended, namely *ex negativo*, i.e. that it is unintelligible to conceive of relationality in which what I call lovingness is entirely absent. Another possibility should be added, however, namely that of speaking from faith. Just as in my friend (in example 3 in the previous chapter) could be said to have faith in my taking him seriously even if nothing in my demeanour actually indicates that I do, so Buber could be said to express his faith that love persists in all encounters and engagements even if it is impossible to get all of them into view at once. While I think faith may play a role in Buber's claim, I think the negative point I will explore below is certainly also a part of it.

¹¹³⁰ It is important to keep in mind that there is a crucial difference between *hearing* the call of conscience *oneself* and what I will invite you, the reader, to undertake with me in what follows, namely *imagining* that *someone else* hears the call of conscience. The point is that to the extent that one 'merely' imagines someone's – perhaps even one's own – call of conscience, one does not really hear it, simply because hearing the call of conscience means being struck by something that, as it were, breaks into whatever it is that one thinks and imagines (cf. Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, 324–5; another account that shares this view – but importantly diverges from mine in its undialogical character – is that of Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, transl. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 244–77). This being said, all of us are familiar with conscience's call and, hence, I take it that it is not a problem for anyone to imagine what it is like for someone (or oneself) to hear it, even if, to a certain degree, the present invariably changes by being represented.

¹¹³¹ That is to say: she appeared as if she would expect nothing else and that she was used to it. This being said, the condition for a bad conscience to arise is – at least so it will appear in hindsight to the one who is struck by it – that one did perceive the other with whom one engaged as somehow 'calling for' a different kind of response.

looking back, it *does* strike you how cold and indifferent your demeanour was.¹¹³² For instance, you may now feel bad thinking about how, after she had told you the time, you immediately turned away and strode off, no ‘thank you’ or nod of appreciation or gratitude, let alone a smile. It now occurs to you that you kept eye-contact with her only as long as you expected that doing so would be conducive for obtaining the information you wanted; once you had it, you turned your eyes – along with it your attention – away from her in an almost automatic manner. Thoughts like these may be woven into a greater whole – it is, for instance, imaginable that you may also take into account that you were in a hurry, that you are generally stressed at the moment, and that you live in a country in which people are not very sociable anyway; on top of that, you may reflect on the wider socio-political ramifications that form the background to your mode of responsiveness, such as the general issue of alienation in capitalist society, and so on.¹¹³³ Still, the gnawing feeling remains that there was something lacking in *your* way of relating to the stranger, something that cannot be done away with reference to your stress or the relation-corroding effects of capitalism, namely that your concern was ‘only’ with getting *information* and not with *her*.¹¹³⁴ In the language of third-personal relationality, it could be said

This call need not be reflected in her intentional interaction with you or with the environment – yet if it does not, it will have to transpire in some other form, perhaps in some kind of sadness, spiritual deadness, or world-weariness. (That is of course not to say that how one experiences another’s call for, say, warmth and friendliness can be captured via particular features, so that learning what they look like will prevent one’s failing to live up to the other’s call in the future; rather, it is in virtue of one’s being struck by the other in a certain way – by what Buber calls her ‘whole being’ – that one may feel inclined to ‘locate’ that which one was struck by. Differently put, it is not in virtue of a certain arrangement of, say, the facial features that one will read the other’s face as calling for warmth – rather, it is in being struck by the other’s face calling for warmth that one may be inclined to point to *this* or *that* facial expression when trying to locate the ‘source’ of one’s being struck. A similar thought is developed in detail by David Cockburn in “Human Beings and Giant Squids.”)

¹¹³² Feeling bad about having engaged with, or done something to, someone else in a certain way is not as such indicative of a loving response ‘in hindsight’. As I discuss below, guilt and shame are two ways of speaking of a bad conscience that is not expressive of love.

¹¹³³ That alienation, especially of the kind that is concomitant with capitalism, may not only put obstacles in the way for people to engage lovingly with one another but that it may indeed make it *impossible* often transpires in the writings of thinkers of the Frankfurt School. It becomes particularly clear in Adorno’s “Education after Auschwitz” (in *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit. Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969*, ed. Gerd Kadelbach (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2013), eBook); e.g.: “It was one of the great impulses [...] of Christianity to quench the all-pervasive coldness. But this attempt failed; probably because it did not stir the social order which produces and reproduces the coldness. Probably this warmth among people for which everyone longs has never existed other than in short periods or in very small groups, perhaps also among some peaceful savages.” Accordingly, today’s “lack of love” is a “lack of all people” so that “the people whom one ought to love are themselves unable to love” (105–6; my translation.) More recently, Rahel Jaeggi developed a similar view, although less sharply formulated, in her book *Alienation* (transl. Frederick Neuhouser & Alan E. Smith; ed. Frederick Neuhouser (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)); e.g. cf. “social alienation” – an all-pervasive phenomenon under the conditions of late capitalism – “does not mean (as is frequently assumed) the loss of community but rather the incapacity to establish *relations* to others in one’s actions” (219); the only way of overcoming social alienation is by “appropriating and transforming” (*ibid.*, 217) our social roles which can only be done via a “real appropriation of a form of life” (*ibid.*) – which, in the end, would mean: overcoming capitalism.

¹¹³⁴ Put in other words: there may be all kinds of explanations of why you responded as you did, but that does not make the response less unloving. The most the explanations can do is to suggest what has to be dealt with in order for love to be more present than it is.

that you treated her primarily as an occasion (It) for obtaining something (It), instead of engaging with her as an actual individual (You) – an individual, that is, who you now realise you already found yourself addressed by when facing her but to whose address you were simply blind.

ii. Guilt & Shame

The question that now arises is: what is the nature of your ‘feeling bad’, of having a ‘bad conscience’, for how you responded? Let me differentiate between three ways of speaking of bad conscience only one of which captures the sense of conscience I am after. The first way of speaking of a bad conscience is in terms of feeling *guilty*. In a nutshell, the feeling of guilt can be said to be the pain feeling one has for having acted in a way in which one thinks one ought not to have done because it violated some kind of rule (principle, law),¹¹³⁵ that is, some standard the authority of which one accepts.¹¹³⁶ It is tied to the realisation of having done what one morally ought not to have done, be it in the case of a small violation of a perhaps minor moral rule (e.g. being indifferent towards strangers on the street although one thinks that one ought to be kind) or in the case of acknowledging that one has seriously and gravely wronged another (e.g. having murdered someone.)¹¹³⁷ Accordingly, the one who feels guilty is compelled to recoup in relation to the standard she takes herself to having violated, for example by accepting the punishment that comes with the transgression,¹¹³⁸ by making amends towards those she

¹¹³⁵ Cf. Gabrielle Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), 87.

¹¹³⁶ One may heed some moral precept simply in virtue of a psychological reaction to it, such as fear of punishment or admiration of those who endorse it; in that case, however, one does not really recognise the authority of the moral precept but the authority of those who reinforce it (and this only to the extent that it serves one’s self-interest.) Thus, one’s response to violating the rule will not be the feeling of guilt but the fear of punishment or shame or embarrassment for not acting in the way those one respects and fears expect it. Guilt, on the other hand, means feeling bad for having violated a rule that one recognises to be authoritative as such. Again, two forms can be differentiated, namely blind obedience to the rule – in which case the violation can be described in terms of what Bernard Williams describes as “‘irrational’ guilt” (*Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 93) – and obedience grounded in an understanding of its validity. So, while one child may feel bad for stealing because it will be punished if its parents find out about it, a second may feel guilty simply because it has done what it ought not to have done, while a third may feel guilty because she has come to recognise the moral validity – or ‘the point’ – of the precept ‘Stealing is bad’. In real life, both guilt and other ‘non-moral’ psychological reactions, such as fear and embarrassment, are obviously often interwoven with one another. (On Kant’s account, blind obedience and the recognition of the authority figures would be described as two forms of heteronomy and, thus, opposed to an autonomous recognition of validity of a moral rule or reason (cf. *Groundwork*, 58–62.))

¹¹³⁷ That is the example discussed (in various variations) by Gaita in chapter 4 of *Good and Evil* (43–63).

¹¹³⁸ Again, the authority of reason differs from any worldly authority, namely in that violating the moral law does not punish the transgressor in any other way than by exposing her before herself as having been motivated by something that is ‘below herself’, namely inclination. Precisely because it is one’s own law that one transgressed, and not any generally valid standard, guilt here blends into shame, the one before whom one is ashamed being oneself, i.e. one’s better, rational self. This is brought out perspicuously by Barabas in “Transcending the Human,” 196–200.

wronged in a way appropriate to her transgression, (or) by committing herself to heeding the rule the next time it comes to bear on the situation in which she finds herself. In feeling guilt, one thus has one's attention directed to some standard as well as to the gap between what one has done and the demand the standard formulates.¹¹³⁹ Thus understood, guilt is impersonal – one feels bad for something one has done and takes to be wrong *as such*, independently of any particular individuals that one may have wronged.¹¹⁴⁰

The second way one may speak of a bad conscience is in terms of shame. In shame, one's pained feeling for having done something one ought not to have done – or simply to be in a certain way one ought not to be¹¹⁴¹ – is not rooted in one's realisation of having violated a rule or law but rather in one's not having lived up to the – real or imagined – expectations of others.¹¹⁴² In shame, in other words, one perceives oneself through the eyes of others who judge one to having acted badly, where these others may *actually* be present or where one may simply imagine them.¹¹⁴³ This means that shame feeds on the desire to appearing good in the eyes of others to begin with – where this desire is absent, shame does not arise.¹¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, it means that in shame, one perceives oneself qua wrongdoer as standing at the centre of attention, under the judging gaze of others, exposed in one's failure. Hence, the one who feels ashamed will have her attention directed back onto *herself* – her character or personality – as the source of the failure while at the same time seeking to withdraw from the gazes she perceives or imagines to lie on her. In shame, as Westerlund puts it, “I am egocentrically concerned about my social affirmability and I am pained by the image of myself as non-affirmable.”¹¹⁴⁵ In this sense, shame does not only direct the attention of the wrongdoer away from those whom she has wronged and towards herself but, on top of that, motivates a proactive effort to turn her back to the situation – including to those she has wronged – and to turn towards herself instead.

¹¹³⁹ This thought, and its problematic implications, is well developed also in Christopher Cordner's “Remorse and Moral Identity,” in *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*, ed. Kim Atkins & Catriona Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2008), 232–51.

¹¹⁴⁰ This seems to be in stark contrast to what Gaita says about guilt in connection to the remorse someone feels for having wronged another, namely that “her guilt is necessarily personal” (*Good and Evil*, 47). Yet, Gaita's point is another, namely that a genuine sense of guilt does not merge into “a sense of common guilt, where all are guilty and so none is” (ibid.). Apart from that, Gaita is manifestly concerned not with *feeling guilty* but with *being remorseful* – and with the role played by guilt in this radically (second-)personal experience. I will problematise Gaita's conceptual interlocking of remorse to guilt in section 1.a.v. below.

¹¹⁴¹ That is, shame is not delimited to concrete actions but may also arise in relation to character traits and one's self-conception as a whole. Thus, one may be ashamed for being cold and indifferent to the stranger only this once or as an instance of one's overall coldness and indifference towards others.

¹¹⁴² Cf. Frederik Westerlund, “Shame, Love, and Morality,” 521: “shame essentially involves both worry about how others see us and self-evaluation” and 527: “in shame it is the affirmability of our self that matters to us and that we care about.”

¹¹⁴³ Ibid., 521 & 538.

¹¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 523: “If we merely experience that others see us as shameful but do not share this view of ourselves at all, this is not enough to yield shame.”

¹¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 535.

In this sense, guilt and shame can be understood as two forms in which one may feel bad for what one has done, namely either a) for one's failure to having lived up to a given *rule* (guilt) or b) for one's *own* non-affirmability before a real or imagined audience (shame). This leads to two issues with thinking of guilt and shame in terms of bad conscience. Firstly, both guilt and shame feelings are morally ambiguous. That is, whether someone feels guilty or ashamed for doing something immoral or for something moral (or for something else entirely) will depend on a) whether or not the rule for the violation of which she feels guilty is a genuinely moral rule or b) on whether the public gaze before which she shrinks is a thoroughly moral gaze. It is obviously possible for one to feel guilty or ashamed for having done something good and loving – the KKK member may feel guilty for having helped out the Black neighbour because it violates the code of his organisation¹¹⁴⁶ while the Athenian nobleman may have felt ashamed for doing a slave a favour, knowing that this is unbecoming for someone like him. Reversely, it may be precisely the KKK member's having internalised the principles of his organisation that makes him *not* feel guilty for beating up a Black man, just as the Athenian nobleman may *not* feel ashamed for, say, killing a slave because that is simply not something to feel ashamed for when one is a citizen of the polis.¹¹⁴⁷ If conscience is thus understood as the voice of morality making itself heard within oneself, then guilt and shame will not *as such* qualify as indicators of this voice; indeed, it rather seems that conscience is that which may reveal, in a pained way, that our guilt or shame was morally corrupted.

Secondly and more importantly, it means that guilt and shame depend on one's being concerned with something other than the other person and one's response to him, namely a given moral rule or one's own social affirmability. This means that the one who does not care about the rule in question, or about social affirmation, will not be susceptible to these forms of

¹¹⁴⁶ Unless, of course, one does defines guilt in terms of *moral* guilt (cf. Barabas, "Transcending the Human," 197, for such a narrow concept of guilt.) Irrespective of what 'real' ('moral') guilt may be, however, my claim is simply that guilt may *felt* also, but not only, for genuine wrongdoing. The just offered example of the KKK member's guilt, moreover, indicates that there may be something in between 'irrational' guilt based on blind obedience and 'rational' guilt based on the recognition of a real wrong being done. Indeed, it seems to me that this in-between form is perhaps the most common form of guilt there is, namely a guilt for which reasons *can* be given – perhaps even many reasons, indeed a whole worldview – yet reasons none of which are of a genuinely moral nature. Imagine for instance, how the KKK member may try to explain why he felt guilty for having helped the black man. I would assume that he would, when pressed, not simply make repeated reference to the code of his organisation but rather go on to produce more and more intricate reasons for why he thinks that doing what he did was wrong *as such* (for a white person, that is.) Yet, no matter how many of such reasons he would produce, he would not produce a single moral reason; instead, his system of beliefs would serve the function of justifying why he felt guilty for having conformed in his action to an actually moral rule, namely to 'Help those who are in need!'

¹¹⁴⁷ This example leans on Cordner's discussion of Sophocles' Ajax who, while unable to live with himself for (supposedly) having killed Odysseus and other men of higher rank, remains completely unmoved for also having slaughtered two shepherds in the process – after all, he is a hero and they were just random commoners, so why would he care about them? (Cf. Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, 20–43, at 37 ff. (& esp. at 40))

bad conscience. Yet, it is manifestly possible to have a bad conscience in cases in which neither rules nor the desire to appear good in the eyes of others play a role. This already indicates that guilt and shame are not all there is to (bad) conscience.

The notion of conscience that I suggest – of ‘conscience proper’ over against what could be called the ‘spurious conscience’ of guilt and shame – is connected to this underlying understanding-in-responsiveness that is deflected in guilt and shame. That is not to say that conscience proper is to be found only ‘underneath’ guilt and shame, far from it. There are no limits as to where conscience may make itself felt, regardless of whether guilt and shame is involved or not. This can be illustrated by returning to the above example of the bad conscience¹¹⁴⁸ it was imagined you have for your coldness and indifference towards the stranger on the street. Here, no guilt or shame needs to be involved – indeed, it would be rather strange if you would feel guilty or ashamed (or perhaps even describe yourself as having *done wrong*¹¹⁴⁹) for responding to a random stranger on the street in a cool, indifferent manner; after all, doing so is neither prohibited by some moral injunction nor shunned by a real or imagined audience of moral authorities. Yet even so, you may feel bad for how you engaged with her – that is: simply for *how you engaged with her* and not because you failed to live up to some standards or to your self-image.¹¹⁵⁰

iii. The Secondariness of Conscience

As already discussed in chapter 3, Buber writes that the call of conscience reaches one as a “second cry”, one that is “soft and secret” and says to one ““Where were you?””¹¹⁵¹ The first cry, so the implication, is the other’s address to which one was deaf when one found oneself in the other’s presence.¹¹⁵² The second cry is, as it were, the echo of the first, although now coloured by the pain that one “was not really there”¹¹⁵³ – so at least Buber seems to suggest when he says that in it, “[i]t is not my existence which calls to me, but the being which is not

¹¹⁴⁸ ‘Bad conscience’ will henceforth be used synonymously with ‘the call of conscience’ and ‘the pangs of conscience’.

¹¹⁴⁹ The case of wrongdoing is a peculiar one and I will discuss it in some more detail below in section I.a.v. Suffice it to say that I do not think that a sense of wrongdoing is bound up with moral precepts or social standards but that it, in a certain sense, arises out of the pang of conscience (cf. Hannes Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 322.)

¹¹⁵⁰ Cf. Lars Hertzberg’s discussion of what is immoral about cruelty in “Absolutely Personal,” 110.

¹¹⁵¹ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 197.

¹¹⁵² To repeat the important point already addressed in chapter 3: conscience is emphatically not a matter of the will nor is it of *phronesis*.

¹¹⁵³ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 197.

I”.¹¹⁵⁴ Thus understood, being struck by conscience’s call means coming to be awakened to something that was already there yet to which one had at the time still been deaf – the kind of responsiveness that I just said is deflected in feelings of guilt and shame. Conscience’s (always belated) cry makes one painfully aware of one’s own deafness to the other’s address.¹¹⁵⁵

As developed over the course of the last chapters, answering the other’s address with one’s whole being – *wholeheartedly* – simply is what Buber calls *love* and which I, following him, spoke of in terms of *lovingness* or of *responding lovingly*. One’s pangs of conscience, in other words, make one realise that the other had claimed one in loving response, yet that one had not lived up to that claim – had not risen to it, as I put it in the last chapter – and, instead of responding with a loving wholeheartedness, had responded less-than-fully-lovingly – *halfheartedly* – or even in a more deeply unloving way, whether by being abusive, cruel, indifferent, hateful, or in whatever other concrete manifestation an unloving attitude may show. At the same time, however, the call of conscience, understood as the voice of the ‘what is not I’ that reaches one after the encounter and makes one recognise the lack of love in one’s response, *is itself a loving response*.¹¹⁵⁶ That is, the call of conscience does not reach us simply as some information we did not have before, making us take note of the mere fact that we had been left more or less untouched by the other (or perhaps that we desired the other’s misfortune in one way or another) – if that were all there was to it, it would be possible for one to register one’s conscience, yet remain unmoved by it.¹¹⁵⁷ But the call of conscience is the call that *reaches* us and *moves* and *shakes* us.¹¹⁵⁸ In other words, conscience’s call does not merely make us aware of our own failure to respond lovingly – which, taken on its own, could lapse into yet another form of guilt feeling, i.e. one’s feeling guilty for not having lived up to what one perceives to be love’s standards¹¹⁵⁹ – but in that it awakens us to the reality of the one in relation to whom we failed

¹¹⁵⁴ Ibid; I say ‘echo’ because the echo of another’s voice is not the same as hearing her – which, so it seems to me, fits Buber’s speaking about “*the being that is not I*” and not simply *You*; cf. also Martin Buber, “Guilt and Guilt Feelings,” 201–2 & Hannes Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 324.

¹¹⁵⁵ For a similar discussion, cf. Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 31.

¹¹⁵⁶ Cf. Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 327: “Conscience offers my neighbour as someone to love;” the entire following discussion (ibid., 326–43; cf. also Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 343–53).

¹¹⁵⁷ Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 328: “Conscience does not just bring my neighbour into my consciousness, it brings my neighbour into my consciousness as someone to love.”

¹¹⁵⁸ That is, if the call of conscience does not reach one, then it will require yet another – a third, fourth, and so on – call of conscience to rouse one, and not only to one’s having remained deaf to the *first* cry but also to the *second* (third, fourth, etc.). It will eventually be in the light of the call of conscience which *does* reach and shake one that one will come to realise all the prior moments at which one had evaded one’s conscience, indeed that one’s entire attitude was one interfused with repression and evasion. So, if one always goes on to evade one’s conscience, then one will never see one’s own past in the light of what it would otherwise reveal, namely that one’s conscience had been there all along, yet that it had always been *oneself* who repressed it. Cf. Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 28.

¹¹⁵⁹ That is, of course, not to say that there exist some kind objective standards of love, some kind of commandments equally valid for all and in all relations. What I mean by standard is rather that towards which one feels claimed to raise up to in finding oneself claimed to responding lovingly to another. What may thus be

to respond lovingly. Yet that awakening to the other's reality just *is* one's – belated – loving response to her. So, even if one's conscience eventually proves too painful, thus tempting us into the spurious consolation of repression,¹¹⁶⁰ it will, at the moment when it *did* strike us and move our hearts, have been one's loving response to the other.

This means that your feeling bad for how you engaged with the stranger need not be a matter of your thinking that you did not live up to some moral standard or that your behaviour would be judged as less-than-virtuous by those you deem virtuous – it may simply be an expression of your realisation that you did not respond to her in a wholehearted way, that you did not rise up to how she, by virtue of her mere presence, claimed you to respond lovingly to her. If this is how your conscience calls you, then the pained realisation that it brings – even if the pain is just faint – will be intimately connected to how she appears to you, namely not as someone in relation to whom you *ought to* have said and done different things, but rather in the light of love which that conscience provides.¹¹⁶¹ In other words, your conscience will turn your attention not primarily to *you*, *your failure*, or to '*that in virtue of which it was a failure*,' but rather to *her*, disclosing *her reality* more fully; this disclosure of her reality will entail your implicit understanding that you had previously failed to do justice to it (that is: to *her*).¹¹⁶² Thus, you will turn *towards* her – in this case, i.e. with the other person being absent and one you will probably never meet again, this turning-towards will only be in response to the claim that reaches you in, or despite, her absence;¹¹⁶³ in the case of a person that can still be reached, it will entail your being beckoned to address her so as to (re-)create the loving spirit between you

formulated as a kind of 'meta-standard' of love finds expression in Gaita's remark that "[t]he standards intrinsic to love in all its forms are partly an expression of respect for the independent reality of the beloved" (*A Common Humanity*, 26).

¹¹⁶⁰ Cf. Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 178.

¹¹⁶¹ Hannes Nykänen, *The "I", the "You", and the soul*, 323.

¹¹⁶² Although I unfortunately cannot at present explore the deep and complex relation between love and justice, suffice it to say that I take a loving attitude to be very close, if not identical to, a just attitude (perhaps the difference is more one of where on puts the emphasis rather than on their content). I touched upon the issue in the last chapter, in my discussion of Jesus' loving response to two individuals at the same time – this, I would say, was an instance in which love and justice fully coincided. A view fairly similar to mine (although not entirely) can be found in Weil's "Human Personality" (*An Anthology*, 69–98); the following quotes hopefully convey an idea of what I have in mind: "You do not interest me.' No man can say these words to another without committing a cruelty and offending against justice" (ibid., 70); "[e]very time that there arises from the depths of a human heart the childish cry which Christ himself could not restrain, 'Why am I being hurt?', then there is certainly injustice" (ibid., 72); and "[b]ecause affliction and truth need the same kind of attention before they can be heard, the spirit of justice and the spirit of truth are one. The spirit of justice and truth is nothing else but a certain kind of attention, which is pure love" (ibid., 90).

¹¹⁶³ That remorse entails a direct, pain-filled response to the person one hurt does of course not mean that the person will actually have to stand before you. Otherwise, the murderer, in his remorse, could not be haunted by his victim. Cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 52 & 148; Cordner, "Remorse and Moral Identity," 242.

that you failed to create the first time around.¹¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the light in which you will then come to see your previous engagement with the other is not of the kind that vanishes as quickly as it may dawn – it is not a momentary inspiration, granting one a fleeting access to some kind of higher reality before abating again, leaving the one who underwent it perhaps in awe and confusion but with the same view of things as before.¹¹⁶⁵ In being roused by one’s conscience, one comes to understand, and see, things in a new way, precisely in love’s light. Someone who thus comes to first understand that his way of relating to a stranger on the street was cold and indifferent, and that it could and should have been warmer and more engaged, cannot simply ‘un-understand’ this, precisely because he will come to experience it as a disclosure of reality. It stays with her – although she may of course be tempted into evading and repressing it in all kinds of ways.¹¹⁶⁶

Does that mean that there was love in your response to the stranger *even before* you heard the call of your conscience? It depends on how one looks at it. In a certain sense, there obviously was not – you *were* indifferent and cold to her, *not* loving. On the other hand, however, your coldness and indifference is only understandable as a response towards your already having been touched by the stranger’s presence. As I put it in the last chapter, declining the invitation to responding lovingly extended to one by the other’s whole being always comes one instant too late, namely only ever as a response to *one’s already having been beckoned into love* simply by virtue of having been touched by the invitation.¹¹⁶⁷ In this sense, the call of conscience points to a response in which there had already been love but in which one, through self-interest or self-absorption,¹¹⁶⁸ rejected that love. In this sense, it seems that Buber points to something important when he insinuates that all relation is created, and sustained by, love – and, so I would add, that every less-than-loving or unloving relation is a betrayal of the loving

¹¹⁶⁴ What this will look like will depend on the nature and the gravity of what one has done to the other. In the case of one’s coldness towards the stranger, it may call for nothing more than a warm smile; in the case of serious wrongdoing, it will take on the form of remorse and the asking for forgiveness (both will be discussed below.)

¹¹⁶⁵ Cf. Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 322.

¹¹⁶⁶ Cf. Strandberg, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*, 27–8.

¹¹⁶⁷ On this point, I am inclined to say, with Strandberg: “You do certainly not *have* to call this ‘love’ – even though one should scrutinize one’s possible aversion to using the concept – but: ‘Say what you please, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing how things are. (And when you see that, there will be some things that you won’t say)’” (ibid., 116).

¹¹⁶⁸ Both self-interest and self-absorption point to the same issue, yet with a different accent: as already discussed in chapter 1, self-interest highlights the ‘determining ground’ of an unloving relation to the world, namely what one ‘gets out of it’; self-absorption highlights how this may remove one from the other, in the sense of Buber’s ego, discussed in chapter 4.

spirit that is there at all times, however obfuscated. So at least it appears from the vantage point of love.¹¹⁶⁹

iv. Responsibility & Remorse

I imagine that some may interject that even if the above reflections hit the mark, they do not show that the claim to respond lovingly is a *moral* claim, simply because coldness and a relative disinterest towards a random stranger on the street is not as such morally problematic – it may not be a nice thing but, as I said myself, no one is really *wronged* by it. And not only that – as I put it, the stranger had no problem with me engaging with her in the way that I did. While I agree that it would be odd to say that the stranger was *wronged* in being treated in a cold and disinterested way, I nonetheless hold that the difference between a case such as this one and a case in which someone else *is* wronged is not one of kind but of degree – which reversely implies that the engagement I discussed above *is* of a moral kind, even if it does not display the kind of moral urgency and severity that becomes manifest in clear cases of wrongdoing.

Let me alter the example in order to make it clearer what I have in mind. Assume that, in asking the stranger for the time, you notice that she looks quite off. When she does not reply even after you ask her a second time, it dawns on you that her odd facial expression is most likely a sign of her having a stroke. Perplexed, you back off, turn around and walk away. While you trudge off, you may think to yourself that if you had stayed to look after her, your entire schedule would have been messed up, leading to your missing your important meeting, and that this is simply not acceptable. Apart from that, it is a busy part of town, so there will surely be someone else who will come across her and see to it that she will get help.¹¹⁷⁰ Whether or not you rationalise what you did in such or similar ways, however, does not make a difference with respect to how it may strike you when, several days later, you read in the newspaper that a lady had a stroke and died in broad daylight in exactly *that* neighbourhood and at just *that* time of day.¹¹⁷¹

¹¹⁶⁹ By this, I do not mean to speak from a standpoint of consummate love, not at all. My claim could be called moral-phenomenological, i.e. I simply aim to bring to light how one's own prior responsiveness appears to one once it appears to us in the light of conscience.

¹¹⁷⁰ Cf. the example of the car crash discussed in chapter 1, section 1.b.

¹¹⁷¹ In "Guilt and Guilt Feelings" (201), Buber briefly discusses the idea that one may not only wrong someone by, or have a bad conscience for, what one *does* do but also for what one *does not* do. (It should be further be noted that, of course, it need not take so long for one to awaken to the horribleness of what one has done. It might be just a moment later that one's conscience catches up with one. But then again, it might never catch up with one. (If so, however, this will, from love's vantage point, not appear as a plain absence of conscience but as a repressed or otherwise obfuscated conscience.))

Now, however your being struck may look like on closer examination, it will most likely involve your being confronted with your wrongdoing, perhaps in the form of “Oh God, what have I done? How could I have simply walked away?” In the previous scenario, however, no matter how badly one feels for one's relative indifference towards the stranger,, one will not think of it in such terms – that is, in terms of “Oh God, what have I done? How could I have been so indifferent towards the stranger?” – because much less was at stake in responding lovingly in that example as compared to the one with the lady having a stroke. There, ‘responding lovingly’ may have meant simply being warm and kind and perhaps grateful if the other answers your question about the time; here, however, it would mean an unreserved suspension of everything else one was in the course of doing – unless it claimed one in a similarly urgent response (in which case there would be no easy solution)¹¹⁷² – so as to be able to wholeheartedly attend to the stranger, trying to help her to the best of one’s knowledge and abilities. In the scenario we are considering now, however, the issue is not merely that you helped in a merely *half-hearted* way – no, you did not help at all but, instead, trudged off so as to stick to your schedule. What you are struck by, it seems, is *remorse*.

Let me briefly turn to the notion of responsibility in order to bridge the gap between wrongdoing and guilt, on the one hand, and remorse, on the other. On the reason-centred accounts, as was shown, responsibility is primarily a matter of answerability, that is, of being in the position of having to explain and justify one’s deeds by giving reasons.¹¹⁷³ Now, on both the Kantian and the McDowellian account, it would be hard to justify one’s walking away from the lady who is suffering a stroke;¹¹⁷⁴ in this sense, one’s inability to produce a proper reason for why one walked away will show that one is indeed guilty or that one has acted viciously (finding expression in feelings of guilt and shame.) Still, the moral problem will be that one has acted irrationally, has failed to live up to one’s responsibility as an autonomous subject or a practical agent. But there is another – call it a ‘deeper’ – way of speaking of responsibility, namely that which is bound to one’s direct responsiveness to the other.¹¹⁷⁵ It is the ability to respond, not to those who inquire into your motives to see whether they were rational, but towards the living and breathing individual before you, the one who may suffer by your hands – or by your refusal to help. This is how Buber speaks of the relation of these two variants of responsibility:

¹¹⁷² Cf. once again the example of chapter 1, section 1.b.

¹¹⁷³ Apart from the discussions in chapter 1 and 2, cf. Christopher Cowley, “Love, Choice, and Taking Responsibility,” 89.

¹¹⁷⁴ That is: at least not in the example as I sketched it. Of course, the example could be altered in such a way that you *would* be able to produce good reasons for having walked away.

¹¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ff.

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.¹¹⁷⁶

While Buber’s criticism is presumably directed at the Neo-Kantianism that was prevalent in his days and which sought to develop a system of moral duties *in abstracto*,¹¹⁷⁷ I think his central point also holds in relation to Kant himself (as well as to Kantians of a McDowellian ilk), that is, in relation to their preoccupation with reason-giving and representation. For Buber, unsurprisingly, responsibility concerns the relation, the responsiveness, of I to You – in *I and Thou*, he even goes so far as to equate responsibility and love.¹¹⁷⁸ At the same time, it is not just responsiveness – if it were, there would be no point to the distinction between the two – but, as it were, *a responsiveness that knows itself as being claimed by the other*.¹¹⁷⁹ Dialogical responsibility, it could perhaps be said, brings the ‘ought’ that swings free in the air of abstraction back to the encounter with the other.¹¹⁸⁰ Differently put, finding oneself responsible for the other means understanding that the other claims one in loving response, that a loving response is what I ‘owe’ her, yet only in virtue of how I find myself addressed by her. It is, as

¹¹⁷⁶ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 18–9. (The entire discussion (ibid. 18–20) is illuminating but would, due to its evocative, poetic language, take too much effort to analyse in detail.)

¹¹⁷⁷ Although little has been written on Buber’s relation to Neo-Kantianism, it seems at least very likely that this was the target of his critical remark, both because Neo-Kantianism was one of the major philosophical movements of the German-speaking world at the time Buber wrote the text (1931–2) and because it fits the Neo-Kantian approach to morality (cf. section 3 in, Jeremy Heis “Neo-Kantianism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/neo-kantianism/>)

¹¹⁷⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, 66: “Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou.”

¹¹⁷⁹ Cf. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 52: “Responsibility presupposes one who addresses me primarily, that is, from a realm independent of myself, and to whom I am answerable. He addresses me about something that he has entrusted to me and that I am bound to take care of loyally” (ibid., 52); and “[in] genuine responsibility, [...] the demander demands of me the entrusted good and I must open my hands or they petrify (ibid., 53). Cf. also his discussion ibid., on 109–10, already discussed in chapter 4, section 8.

¹¹⁸⁰ That is of course not to say that *the word* ‘ought’, put at the centre of so many discussions in moral philosophy, is of any substantial relevance for Buber. Perhaps it would be more to the point to speak of a sui generis experience of normativity, yet even that may be misleading unless it is clarified that the normative demand, and its moving power, are intrinsic to the relation between I and You.

it were, the second-personalised version of the Biblical command ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’¹¹⁸¹ – ‘*I shalt love You as myself*’.¹¹⁸²

Now, back to the meetings with the strangers. In the case of your cold indifference towards the ‘healthy’ stranger, you later realised that you were not properly responsive to her. However, saying that you therefore responded *irresponsibly* to her would at least put some strain on the notion of responsibility – or to put it more sensibly: your irresponsibility towards the unimpaired stranger consisted, so you later realise, simply in denying her a warm smile or some kind words. In the case of the woman you left to her fate while she had a stroke, however, your response was morally deeply irresponsible in that the claim she made on you, so you now acknowledge, was one of absolute urgency and salience. So, when your conscience eventually caught up with you, it opened your eyes and, thus brought you to the pained acknowledgment that it *was* your responsibility to help her, that you *ought to* have suspended all your other undertakings in order to tend to her.

Thus, you come to the belated recognition that you did wrong, yet not in the sense of having violated a moral principle, but in that you gravely wronged *her*, the person whose life depended on you.¹¹⁸³ Putting it this way allows a shift of focus away from the rule or principle (and the guilt that comes with its violation) and towards the relation between you and the one who suffered by your hands (or, as in the present case, by your turning away.) This, in turn, opens the possibility of speaking of guilt and wrongdoing in a second-personal way, namely as pertaining to your failure to live up to your responsibility in the face of how she claimed you in response. In forsaking the woman, you became guilty of having wronged terribly.¹¹⁸⁴ However, you will not feel guilty in the sense developed above, that is, for having violated a moral law; your acknowledgment of your guilt is tantamount to your acknowledgment that you failed to live up to your responsibility to her – a responsibility, in turn, that you had simply in virtue of

¹¹⁸¹ Mt. 22.39; it should be noted that, as the responsibility in question is not the responsibility to act rationally, there can be no rational duty for loving one’s neighbour. Kant saw this quite clearly (*Groundwork*, 24–5); however, the imperative we are dealing with here is not one of reason but of love, and its source is simply the concrete, unique other. Although Gaita also rejects the idea of there being an imperative to love one’s neighbour, he makes a good critical observation of Kant’s view of Jesus when he remarks that Kant “was wrong to think that insofar as we responded because we were moved, then to that extent we responded blindly” (*Good and Evil*, 46).

¹¹⁸² Unfortunately, I cannot at present go into the meaning and the significance of the ‘as myself’. For discussions that are very similar in spirit to mine, cf. Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 41–4 & Søren Kierkegaard, *The Works of Love*, transl. & ed. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 17–43.

¹¹⁸³ For a discussion of wronging along these lines (although with a focus on guilt, not responsibility), cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 51 ff.

¹¹⁸⁴ Gaita speaks in this respect of the “radical singularity of those who are claimed in recognition of their guilt” (*Good and Evil*, 227), meaning that those who have gravely wronged others stand alone in their guilt – for the guilty, in other words, the relation that painfully comes to the fore is that to her victim; no relation to anyone else who is guilty can take this weight off her shoulders.

her claiming you in neighbourly response. Such an acknowledgment is certainly painful, yet it is not what I spoke of in terms of ‘guilt feelings’ above. Thus, taking issue with guilt feelings is not taking issue with the emotional dimension of such acknowledging in general, on the contrary.

Moreover, the pained recognition of your having done wrong, and, hence, of your guilt is moral-phenomenologically secondary to the pained recognition of what the other has suffered by your hands (or by your omission.) In other words: in suffering a bad conscience, it is first and foremost *the other* towards whom one’s attention is shifted, not *oneself*. This, finally, brings us to your ‘bad conscience proper’, namely that of *remorse*. In an illuminating discussion, Raimond Gaita says of remorse that it is “is a recognition of the reality of another through the shock of wronging her”.¹¹⁸⁵ Speaking of the remorse a murderer may feel for having killed, Gaita remarks that it is absurd to frame it in terms of the experience of “how terrible it is to become someone who broke a certain principle or rule”¹¹⁸⁶ – at least “unless the concrete individual who was murdered assumes the kind of prominence I tried to convey by saying that a murderer is, in her remorse, haunted by her victim.”¹¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, he also points out that “remorse does not focus on what kind of person we are. Its focus is on what we have become only because we have become wrongdoers.”¹¹⁸⁸ The connection to my discussion becomes readily apparent: feeling remorse for what one has done is precisely *not* a matter of feeling guilty – where that signifies one’s having violated a rule – just as it is *not* a matter of feeling ashamed – where that signifies a concern with oneself – but indicates a concern simply *with the other*. *Oneself* becomes relevant in remorse only to the extent that it is through *one’s own* hands that the other was made to suffer and that, in this sense, one has become a wrongdoer.

But where does that leave us in relation to the above posed question regarding the relation of remorse – which I, following Backström would describe as a particularly vehement confrontation with one’s conscience¹¹⁸⁹ – and a bad conscience of a ‘lesser kind? Does not the notion of ‘wrongdoing’ erect a rigid barrier between the two kinds of cases, allocating remorse to the moral domain and lesser forms of bad conscience to the domain of normative-yet-not-moral responses? I want to approach this question in a roundabout way, namely via a discussion of Gaita’s reflections on the conditions of remorse.

¹¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 50.

¹¹⁸⁹ Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 321.

Despite the kindred spirit in which Gaita speaks of remorse, his account differs from mine in that he does not understand it as a response in which love manifests but rather as a moral response that presupposes that its object appears as lovable.¹¹⁹⁰ I want to expound what Gaita means by this both in order to expose what I take to be its shortcomings and in order to illuminate my previous example of the encounter with the stranger on the street.

Let me illustrate what Gaita's view amounts to and what I find problematic with it by turning to his discussion of slavery, more precisely of the case of a white US American slave owner raping a black slave woman.¹¹⁹¹ Gaita writes that such a slave owner would not have seen in his rape victim "an intelligible object for the kind of remorse he would feel if he felt it for raping a white woman."¹¹⁹² While this formulation suggests that the slave owner may still have felt remorse, yet of a *different kind* than he may have felt for raping a white woman, the overall discussion makes clear that Gaita thinks the slave owner would have been unable to feel *anything* that could be called genuine remorse – it was, as he puts it, "the mark of the racially based slavery of the Southern States of America [...] that whatever a slave owner did to his slaves was not within the conceptual reach of his remorse."¹¹⁹³ Or, put the other way around: "If the slave owner could be haunted by the slave girl he raped, then [...] the evil he did her would now be within the intelligible reach of his remorse."¹¹⁹⁴

Gaita's claim is one about the *concept* of remorse and how it is conditioned by other concepts. On the picture he offers, remorse is conditional upon seeing the victim of one's wrongdoing as a fellow with whom one shares a common humanity¹¹⁹⁵ and, thus, as someone whom one sees as precious.¹¹⁹⁶ The mark of having a sense of preciousness of the other is that one sees her as a unique and "not inter-substitutable"¹¹⁹⁷ individual in whom certain matters, such as suffering¹¹⁹⁸ but also spiritual concerns¹¹⁹⁹ and joy¹²⁰⁰, "go deep"¹²⁰¹ – in the case of

¹¹⁹⁰ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 157 & esp. 161–2.

¹¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 156 ff.

¹¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 156—157.

¹¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 151 & Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 259–84.

¹¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23; Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xv & 154.

¹¹⁹⁷ Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 15; quoted from Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 151.

¹¹⁹⁸ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 158.

¹¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 216–7.

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 158; Gaita introduces the term at 38 and in reference to a remark by Rush Rhees (*Without Answers*, 56.)

rape, it is the capacity for deep suffering which plays the central (but, as Gaita points out,¹²⁰² not the only) role. Seeing another as an individual with (the capacity for) depth, however, requires seeing her in the light of love – that is, not necessarily in the light of *one's own* love but in that of potential others: “We can only love those that others could love too.”¹²⁰³ What plays a central role in seeing others as lovable in such a way, Gaita holds, is that they are rendered lovable by the language of love in that “without the language of love there could not be the claims of love and there is no love without love’s claims.”¹²⁰⁴ Accordingly, the slave owner may feel remorse for raping a white woman because, given the language of love into which he was brought up and which thus came to be his own, he will see her as a possible object of love – yet he could not feel remorse for raping the black woman because his (and his peers’) language of love does not render her lovable: “The slave girl had a face, but it was not one her master could find in the poetry which informed the language of love which taught him what love was through its celebration.”¹²⁰⁵

I find Gaita’s claim regarding the language of love peculiar and problematic. As I read him, Gaita holds that there can be no love because the claims of love that condition what the appropriate objects and forms of love may be depend on there being a specific language, “historically shaped by and shaping the works of love”¹²⁰⁶ and ‘at home’ in the respective social environment. What could this mean? Could it mean that the child can only love the mother (or the mother the child) because – or to the extent that? or by the time that? – it has learned the prevalent language of love and has thereby learned to ‘read’ love’s claims?¹²⁰⁷ That would seem absurd. On a beneficial reading, I would say that what Gaita means is that it is only in virtue of the given language of love that any claims exerted on one by some other are perceived *as love’s* claims. That would mean that the claims may still be there even in the absence of the language but that it is only via the language that they appear as claims *made by love*. Thus read, Gaita

¹²⁰² Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 159–60.

¹²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 162; This claim stands in need of a qualification, one that Gaita himself provides. In the ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ to *Good and Evil*, Gaita points out that when the book was first published he failed to see that, in order for remorse to be lucid, it has to be illuminated by the light of saintly love: “[M]uch of what I say about the ‘shock’ of remorse [...] requires a conception of the victim of one’s wrongdoing that has been informed by saintly love” (xxiv–xxv) and that the “love of saints depends on, builds on and transforms that sense of individuality. It deepens the language of love, which nourishes and is nourished by our sense that human beings are irreplaceable” (xxiv). In the subsequent discussion, I will, however, not incorporate Gaita’s thoughts on the role saintly love plays for remorse, both because Gaita says quite little as to how *exactly* saintly love is supposed to transform it and because I will dedicate an entire section, section 2.b., to Gaita’s notion of saintly love. There, in another footnote, I will add some thoughts on his connection of saintly love to remorse.

¹²⁰⁶ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxiii.

¹²⁰⁷ For a discussion that shows quite clearly this would certainly be a misunderstanding, cf. Gibson, “Authentic Love and the Mother-Child Relationship,” 60–79.

could be said to hold that the slave owner is unable to see the black woman – and black people in general – as lovable because he is unable to conceptualise *any* response to a black person as a *loving* response. For him, in other words, no way of responding to a black person *counts* as a loving response. In this sense, he does not describe them as lovable, hence not as individuals in whom things may ‘go deep’, and, accordingly, not as beings whom one could wrong in such a way that it would elicit remorse.

I would tentatively agree with Gaita to the extent that I find it imaginable that no matter how horrible things the slave owner may have done to the slave woman, he may *say about it*, either to himself or to others, that it was not a big deal because such things do not ‘go deep’ in slaves, or that he may not *describe* his own response to what he did to her in terms of remorse. But Gaita’s claim is stronger, namely that the slave owner would be unable to *feel* remorse, unable to be *struck* by it. For Gaita, the slave owner could not be devastated and shocked in the aftermath of the rape, he could not be haunted by the victim of his deed, he could not be driven into despair by it. This, I think, has to do with the fact that, when Gaita talks of remorse, he implicitly puts the focus on the *what?* – “My God! *What* have I done?”¹²⁰⁸ The point is that, for the Southern slave owner, the answer to this *what?*-question will be terrible in the case of having raped a white woman – “My God! What have I done? I have raped a white woman!”¹²⁰⁹ – but not terrible in the case of a black woman – “My God! What have I done? I have raped a black woman!” The first answer will, for him, constitute a case of the gravest wrongdoing while the second answer will not – it will simply not have that kind of meaning, and the reason for that is, so Gaita’s account suggests, that black people, regarded as not lovable in a genuine, deep way, could also not be wronged in a serious way – and if they cannot, then being remorseful for raping one of them would not ‘seem right’.¹²¹⁰

Gaita holds that, “because we can only love those whom we see as intelligible objects of our love”¹²¹¹ and given that “[w]e cannot, unilaterally, make something intelligible”¹²¹², it follows that “[t]he slave girl is not an intelligible object of her master’s love”¹²¹³ and, hence, of his remorse. I think the important claim is raised in the middle sentence, that we cannot unilaterally make something intelligible and, hence, that the slave owner could not simply turn

¹²⁰⁸ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxi; my emphasis.

¹²⁰⁹ In such a case, he would probably simply think to himself “My God! What have I done? I have raped a woman!,” “I have raped her!,” or “I am a rapist!” This is a point in case for Gaita: in the case of a white woman, the skin colour is not even registered – for the slave owner, this just *is* a woman. The black woman, on the other hand, is merely a ‘woman’, namely one marked as inferior in her blackness.

¹²¹⁰ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxiii.

¹²¹¹ *Ibid*, 161.

¹²¹² *Ibid*.

¹²¹³ *Ibid*.

his rape victim into an intelligible object of remorse. I agree – he cannot bring this about by himself, in virtue of his own agency or will. But that is not to say that he could not still come to *see* her as an intelligible object of remorse or simply be *overcome* with remorse in the aftermath of what he did to her (the focus now being on the ‘to her’ instead of the ‘what’).¹²¹⁴

Now, Gaita seems to recognise this possibility at the end of the chapter when he writes that “[w]hat he [i.e. the slave owner] must learn has to do not with facts and the consistent application of principles, but with meaning – with the meaning that the lives of his slaves can have, with what they can understand, feel and do and, therefore, with what they can be.”¹²¹⁵ But if this claim is to be made consistent with what he says in the preceding discussion regarding the language of love, then this ‘coming to see a different meaning’ in the black woman’s suffering is still conditioned by the prevalent language of love. Accordingly, what is required for this meaning to change is, on Gaita’s picture, a presumably slow, society-spanning process of changing the language of love, a process in which the prevalent “topography of intelligibility”¹²¹⁶ are gradually changed so as to elicit a general understanding that suffering can ‘go deep’ also in black people. Such an understanding would be concomitant with the recognition that raping a black person is a terrible wrongdoing which, in turn, would make such cases of rape intelligible objects of remorse.

I think it is true that, as regards the ‘public understanding’, it may have been a long and arduous socio-political process that led to the general recognition and acknowledgment that it *is* possible to feel remorse for raping a black person because it *is* possible to seriously wrong a black person. However, I do not think that ‘coming to see meaning where hitherto one had not seen it’ depends on such change in the social, public conceptions – and, accordingly, in the prevalent language of love – at least not where the meaning of moral responses such as remorse is concerned. This point may become clearer by recalling my discussion of *meaning* in chapter 2: assume that the slave owner is indeed unable to see that the *meaning* of what he did when he raped the black woman is what it would be if he had raped a white woman, where *meaning* refers to the way in which he would describe it given the language available to him – to how *it*

¹²¹⁴ There is one point in his discussion at which Gaita comes very close to making this point himself, namely when he states that “[i]f the slave owner could be haunted by the slave girl he raped, then her days as a slave would be numbered” (ibid., 156–7). This formulation suggests, not that it is *impossible* for the slave owner to feel remorse after having raped her, but rather that if he *does* feel remorse, he would simply not relate to her as to a slave anymore. Now, although I think more would be said about this (which, unfortunately, I cannot do at present), I actually think that this is a very fruitful thought. Unfortunately Gaita takes it into (what seems to me to be) the wrong direction.

¹²¹⁵ Ibid., 163.

¹²¹⁶ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 187.

makes sense to him (or how *he makes sense of it*).¹²¹⁷ Thus understood, the meaning of his deed would, at least to himself and his peers, not reflect that he found it grave or terrible to commit it. Indeed, he may even be unable to describe the meaning of what he did and in that sense, his deed may be quite meaningless to him. But even in that case, it may be intensely *meaningful* to him in another sense of the word, namely as something that haunts him and drives him to despair. Gaita says that this is not possible for he cannot see moral importance in her *face*¹²¹⁸ – a term he uses, it seems, in deliberate reference to Lévinas; if so, however, then he either uses it in a strikingly un-Lévinasian way or he misses Lévinas’ central point, namely that, just as in the case of Buber’s *You*,¹²¹⁹ encountering the face of the other *cannot be conditional upon anything* because it, the encounter with the face, is what conditions all conceptions, certainly those pertaining to the ethical and moral dimensions of our shared lives¹²²⁰ – and not only that, it is also that which may *shatter* all such conceptions, break into them as their Other.¹²²¹

If that is what happens to the slave owning rapist, then his being struck by his victim’s face, haunted by it in the aftermath to what he did to her, *will not* make sense to him, nor will he be able to make sense of it, because it is precisely a kind of encounter with (moral) reality that shatters the structures of intelligibility¹²²² (at least where these structures have detached those who dwell and ‘make sense’ within them from the ethical reality of the face.) In that case, his suffering may not be alleviated but, on the contrary, further aggravated by the fact that she is, generally speaking, not an intelligible object of remorse. That is, he may be fully convinced that he just cannot – should not, must not! – feel remorse for having forced himself onto a ‘lousy’ slave girl, that this is ‘just impossible’; after all, nothing can ‘go deep’ in them, nothing in their face reflects that they love, or can be loved, with any depth, and so on.¹²²³ At this point, shame may also come to play a role in his response, that is, shame for having a bad conscience for a deed for which one, so he may think, *cannot* have a bad conscience. Yet at this point, he is already the living proof that at least *someone can* and so, under the pressure of his desire for social affirmation, the *cannot* may turn into a *should not* and, thus, into an awareness of his

¹²¹⁷ For a lucid criticism of the idea that what does or does not make sense is in some way circumscribed by an established language is to be found in Lars Hertzberg, “The Sense Is Where You Find It:”

¹²¹⁸ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 162.

¹²¹⁹ I am not claiming that Buber’s *You* and Lévinas’ *face* are identical. Although they have much in common, they are also different in certain central respects. Yet, they *are* identical in the respect I am presently discussing.

¹²²⁰ Cf. Lévinas, “The Trace of the Other,” 351.

¹²²¹ *Ibid.* & Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 36–40.

¹²²² A very similar point is made, and in an illuminating way, by Nykänen, *The ‘I’, the ‘You’ and the Soul*, 168 (footnote 76).

¹²²³ In Buber’s language: he would desperately cling to his orientation and safety providing It-world in order not to be exposed to the ego and worldview threatening presence of the You. The sense of overwhelmingness and the inarticulability that may be part of facing up to the other’s presence is well described by Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 19–20

failure. If he is in fact frowned upon or ridiculed by his peers for responding in what for them may¹²²⁴ be an absurdity, he may even accept their descriptions of his response, namely as stupid, effete, or sentimental. Such cases of struggle resulting from the coming-apart of the prevalent *mores*, perhaps deeply internalised by everyone around, and the individual who has undergone some kind of exceptional experience, are common themes of literature and cinema. As such, we are all quite familiar with them, at least in its artistic representations.¹²²⁵ Yet Gaita, strangely, seems to find no place for them on the view he propounds.¹²²⁶

It seems to me that what is at stake, then, is that although the slave owner and rapist may not have understood his response to what he did in terms of remorse, we may very well imagine his response to be of a kind that *we* would describe as remorse – quite independently of what he would or would not say. From our vantage point, his desperation, his being haunted, his despair, perhaps his suicide, *just means* that he feels remorse – and, accordingly, it would seem clear to us that he simply failed to properly make sense of his predicament.¹²²⁷ I think Gaita has a point when he says that this rapist would not have *merely* been self-deceived,¹²²⁸ yet I would then, unlike Gaita, develop this point by saying that he *was* deceived, yet not merely qua self but as part of a social wider collective deception in which he partook simply as a member of the society of which he was a part, something into which he had become initiated from infancy onwards, a worldview which, in a sense, ‘held him captive.’¹²²⁹ It was, one could say, a case of ‘self-and-social-deception’.¹²³⁰ Still, the fact that he *could* be overcome with remorse shows that he was not fully caught up in his worldview and that real responsiveness to another,

¹²²⁴ I put it so carefully because I think that, just as the slave owner may come to feel remorse although it is ‘unconceivable’, so those to whom he tells about his experience may also come to moved, may even come to understand, even though what he reports is, in a certain sense, ‘unconceivable’.

¹²²⁵ Perhaps the most well-known example, and probably the most-discussed by philosophers is the way in which Antigone’s love and grief for her dead brother alienates her from the *mores* of her society.

¹²²⁶ It is not clear to me whether this significantly changes once, in his later writings and in the second edition of *Good and Evil*, he brings saintly love into play. Before the background of a culture shaped by saintly love, it would seem that feeling remorse for raping a slave would be within the Christian slave owner’s horizon of intelligibility; on the other hand, Gaita’s own example from the time he spent working at a mental ward suggests otherwise. (I will return to this point in section 2 below.)

¹²²⁷ A similar view is developed by Lagerspetz & Hertzberg in relation to trust in “Wittgenstein on Trust,” 33–4.

¹²²⁸ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 160.

¹²²⁹ This is not to absolve the slave owner from responsibility but it is to convey a sense of the profound complexity of the psychological mechanisms at work. I would assume that, for example, the small children of the slave owners were still much more open to, and moved by, the reality of the blacks around them than the adults – but that their parents would have driven such ‘nonsense’ out of them, be it through reprimands, castigation, by providing them with ‘reasons’ for why ‘they’ are inferior, or by otherwise instilling in them an us-vs.-them attitude.

¹²³⁰ This idea is developed by Joel Backström in “Pre-Truth Life in Post-Truth Times,” *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* (Special Issue 2019: *Post-Truth*), 97–130, and with special emphasis in Hugo Strandberg’s reply ‘Life and Truth: A Response to Joel Backström’ (*Nordic Wittgenstein Review* (Special Issue 2019: *Post-Truth*), 131–140) where Strandberg examines in which sense “ways of living can be self-deceptive” and how “self-deception [can] unfold on this non-individual level, specifically on the political one” (131).

unmediated by the prevalent conceptual outlook, was still possible for him.¹²³¹ In being struck by remorse, he found himself brought back into the presence of the You he had so terribly mistreated, a presence which now came to bear on him and claimed him in loving response.

Against the philosophical mainstream in response to which he wrote, Gaita seeks to show that “[o]ur understanding of remorse is not conceptually recessive in relation to an independently intelligible conception of moral wrongdoing”.¹²³² I think that is an important step in the right direction. Yet what he ends up with is still unsatisfactory, namely a picture on which “remorse and our sense of wrongdoing” are “conceptually interdependent”¹²³³ – or, as he elsewhere puts it, that they are “at least, equal partners”¹²³⁴. The problem with this is that it suggests that not only the scope of what may count as possible moral wrongdoing is delimited by what one may feel remorseful for, but also, reversely, that what one may feel remorseful for is delimited by the scope of what is intelligible as moral wrongdoing. That, it seems, is why Gaita holds that the slave owner cannot feel remorse for raping the black woman: doing so was, at the time and place, not intelligible as a serious moral wrongdoing (for the whites, that is.) But as I have tried to show, this does not make it impossible for the slave owner to be struck by remorse (although it may mean that he will not *conceive of* what he is struck by in terms of remorse.)

Let me tie this back to the question with which I ended the last section. I think that at least part of the reason why it is possible for there to develop a general understanding, shared by most people in a given social environment, of the grave moral wrongness of a deed such as raping black women is precisely that it is possible for there to be remorse *already beforehand*, that is, when the deed in question is not yet generally considered a serious moral wrong. Thus understood, remorse – and more generally: the call of conscience – may be a *catalyst* of what is generally conceivable as wrongdoing. Now, this is not to say that I envisage a society in which ‘being cold and indifferent to a stranger on the street’ counts as a moral wrongdoing, at least not where saying that is supposed to compare it to something as terrible as rape. However, speaking of something as ‘wrong’ need not have this connotation of terribleness yet still be meant in a moral sense. In the social environment in which I live, for instance, being cold and indifferent to people on the street is very normal and I think most people see no issue with it. However, there are some – myself included – who, at least in some cases, do regard it as a moral issue. If I, thus, find myself having been as cold and indifferent to some random stranger as I

¹²³¹ Cf. Lévinas, “The Trace of the Other,” 351.

¹²³² Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 60.

¹²³³ *Ibid*, 55.

¹²³⁴ *Ibid*, 60.

above described ‘you’ to be, then I may later think about it along the lines of “How I engaged with her... I don’t know, that was just *wrong*.” Even if very few people around me would share this sense of wrongness with me, that is not to say that they *could* not. If they would, then this may betoken a more general change in the broader social understanding of what may count as ‘wrong behaviour towards strangers on the street’. If so, this changed social understanding would, if it would proliferate enough, constitute the background before which other moral responses would play out and by which it may, in turn, be changed.¹²³⁵

b. Suffering Unlovingness

I will now discuss another way in which the notion of love that I developed in chapter 4 may reveal itself to be morally charged, this time in the form of the experiences of *someone else* relating to one in a more or less markedly unloving way. This may be in the form of one’s being abused, humiliated, patronised, objectified, let down, betrayed, and many others. I want to take a look at two examples in order to expatiate how this may be understood *in concreto*.

i. Disappointment

Let me begin by once more returning to my friend’s opening up to me with his heartbreak. In the discussion of the example in the last chapter (section 2.d.), the way in which he opened up to me was described as his response to how he found me responding to him, namely patiently and inviting.¹²³⁶ As I also briefly noted, he would have presumably responded to me in a different way had he found me responding to him differently, say, with boredom or annoyance. If my boredom or annoyance would have been too striking or off-putting, he may have changed his mind or simply responded differently to me. But regardless of how exactly he would have responded, he would have presumably been pained and disappointed by my response to him. This is not to say that this disappointment must have been rooted in an expectation, such as “I am sure that he will take a serious interest in what happened to me,” which was then let down when he found himself faced with my annoyed boredom. Even without such an expectation, my response would presumably have hurt him, and simply for what it expressed: boredom or annoyance in response to his baring his heart to me.

¹²³⁵ The picture of social change of developed in this paragraph exhibits some notable similarities to a particular (left-)Hegelian strand of critical theory, wedded to social philosophy, with its perhaps most well-known example in Rahel Jaeggi’s *Critique of Forms of Life*. One of the most obvious differences between Jaeggi’s project and the line of thought I just developed is that Jaeggi does not grant moral categories a special place in her thought (far from it, in fact) and she does not address second-personal relationality at all.

¹²³⁶ For a similar point, cf. Kronqvist, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” 207.

It is of course true that if my friend would have told the story of his break-up, not to me but, say, to someone he barely knew and into whom he ran by chance on the street, and if *this* person would have responded in a bored or annoyed way, then he would, while perhaps still irritated or displeased by her response, not be hurt and disappointed as he would have been towards me. This is so because his relation to the other person would not be of the kind of loving trust that permeates our relationship. Even in the absence of this loving trust, he may certainly still have given the other person an account of the same events that he gave to me, including all kinds of details regarding his heartbreak – yet, then he would not have given it in the same trusting way. (Unless, of course, they would have had an exceptional connection in which they would have immediately come to trust one another – in which case they would not have *been* strangers anymore, at least not in the relevant sense.¹²³⁷) In other words, he may have told the other person *about* his pain and suffering, yet presumably not in such a way that he trustingly laid bare his pain and suffering *in* his very speaking. So, while revealing to the acquaintance what happened to him, he would still not have made himself vulnerable in his words in the way he did when speaking about it with me.¹²³⁸ Unlike in his (imagined) response to the acquaintance, his response to me exposed him before me as brittle and vulnerable, thus beseeching me to respond to it with a tenderness and gentleness that befits it. If one thus wants to speak of his ‘expectation’ at all, then it would be an expectation that was intrinsic to the vulnerability with which he addressed me.¹²³⁹ This, I think, is why he would not have been as hurt and disappointed by the acquaintance as he would have been by me.

In my friend’s encountering me and me responding to him in such an unloving way, something of moral importance is disclosed. I think my response to my friend – and his response to my response – can be connected to the moral in a way that mirrors the above discussion of guilt and shame. One way for my friend – or for anyone else, for that matter – to respond to my hurtful boredom and annoyance would be to thematise it in terms of *wrongness*, that is, by pointing out that I respond to him in a way in which one ought not to respond to another. If my friend would do that, he would refer to a gap between how I *do* respond to him and how, in a

¹²³⁷ Cf. Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 167 ff.

¹²³⁸ But then again, he would, in revealing what lies on his heart to me, probably not feel vulnerable precisely because he trusts me (cf. Kronqvist, “The Promise That Love Will Last,” 660); on the other hand, he may feel vulnerable to even mention the issue when speaking with the acquaintance, namely because (or if) their relation is not as trusting.

¹²³⁹ In the spirit of Simone Weil and her remark that the outcry “Why am I being hurt?” (*An Anthology*, 72) is an expression of the “secret heart” of the one who is hurt, one could say that the plea “Please be gentle to me!” is an expression of the one who is vulnerable and exposed; both of these, in turn, are connected to her view that the human being never ceases to expect goodness: “At the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him” (*ibid.*, 71).

situation of this kind, I (as an instance of the *one*) *ought to* respond to a friend – a gap that thus indicates that my response falls short of a moral standard. Such an appeal to a moral standard will be successful if I acknowledge its authority and its applicability to how I behaved. If so, I will take myself to be guilty for having failed to live up to the moral standard in question. The other way for my friend to respond to my hurtful response to him, and in such a way that it connects to morality as it is commonly understood, would be for him to point to me and to locate the problem in *me*, in my character or personality. Such a ‘move’ is of course most common when someone reflects the same kind of unlovingness in response repeatedly. However, it need not be – even if it is the first time that I respond to my friend’s vulnerability in such a callous way, my friend may locate the root of the issue in me (such as in “I always took you for someone who was sensitive and caring but it seems that I was wrong.”) This will bear fruit if what he sees lacking in me – namely sensitivity and care – I take to be of importance for my self-image, either because I take myself to be sensitive and caring and do not want him (or any others) to get any other impression of me or because I am insecure in this respect precisely because others have already pointed out that I lack in sensitivity and care. In this case, I will feel ashamed.

Both of these forms of moral reproach, the one that points towards guilt and the one that points towards shame, may perhaps have the intended result, namely that I will subsequently shed my bored and annoyed comportment and make me more seriously attentive to him, my friend; if so, however, this will be the case only indirectly – after all, both reproaches direct my attention away from him and towards either the abstract moral precept or my self-image. Hence, I will, in living up to what he demands from me – namely to turn more fully towards him – in a certain sense go counter to where he directs my attention, namely away from the rule or my self-image. Needless to say, his ‘strategy’ is likely to fail – not in pointing out *what the problem is* but rather in putting the problem at the focus of attention, at the cost of one’s attention for one another. The question thus arises what it would mean for my friend to respond to my callousness towards him in a way that is not deflective but a direct answer to it, an answer, that is, that gives expression to his sense of what pains him in how I responded to him without, however, ‘making it all about’ the pain.

I think there is no *one* form which such a direct response may take; still, I can imagine several. One possibility would be that he, faced with my annoyed boredom, would interrupt whatever he was about to say so as to look into my eyes in such a way that gives unfettered expression to his sense of irritation and perplexity. Sometimes, meeting the irritated and perplexed look of another may rouse one quite forcefully to the other’s presence while at the

same time making one aware that one is behaving like a fool towards her. Another way for my friend to respond in a non-deflective way to my callousness and insensitivity would be for him give voice to how the way in which I respond to him hurts and disappoints him. He may, for one, simply say just that: “You know, it’s quite hurtful that you seem to be more interested in your phone than in what I have to tell you.” But, of course, he may also express it in all other kinds of ways, such as, for instance: “Hey, what’s going on?” or “I am telling you something really important here, you know...” – or, when it is particularly hurtful, along the lines of “What the hell, man, what is this?! Do you want to look on your stupid phone or listen to me?” or “I cannot believe it. I am baring my heart to you and this is how you react? Jesus Christ...”¹²⁴⁰ None of these expressions of hurt, disappointment, and anger resort to normative language, none of them seek recourse to moral rules, and none of them shift the focus of attention to the character of the one who is being reproached.¹²⁴¹ Yet another form in which it may find expression is simply by ceasing to hold back the tears he may have felt welling up inside him.¹²⁴² (If this may sound unproportional, keep in mind that my friend was already under great emotional pressure and strain due to his break-up.)

All of these responses seek to call the other back into the present engagement, to rouse him to the seriousness of the situation; in this sense, they are what I have called expressions of love (or lovingness.) It may thus be said that lovingly responding to unlovingness means seeking to (re-)create a loving spirit in the other; in doing so, the other’s unlovingness may be addressed but only as part of the attempt to redirect the other’s attention back into the ‘in-between’. Another way of putting this is that a response to a moral blemish – be it of the other’s response, action, or character trait – manifests a moral spirit if it does not seek to shift the focus of attention to the moral blemish but towards the relation.¹²⁴³

¹²⁴⁰ Another example, provided by Gaita (though in the context of discussing serious wrongdoing and remorse), “My God! Don’t you realise what you did?” (*Good and Evil*, 40)

¹²⁴¹ The idea that morality is not primarily of a certain vocabulary, and that often when our engagements and conversations are morally charged, no ‘specific’ moral vocabulary is resorted to, is brought out nicely by Lars Hertzberg in “Absolutely Personal,” 106 ff.

¹²⁴² Of course, beginning to cry is not as such an attempt to bring the other back into the loving spirit of the relation. It may simply be a sign that the pain was too great. One may even ‘force the issue’ and cry in the attempt to manipulate the other, say, by eliciting pity. However, it may also be a plain expression of how saddened and hurt one is that one’s good and dear friend is so callous towards one, and this expression may be addressed precisely at the friend, one’s answer to his callousness.

¹²⁴³ To rephrase a formulation by Strandberg: My friend’s love for me would show in his trying to open my eyes to what I have done and to the possibility of togetherness in love (*Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 9).

ii. Betrayal & Forgiveness

Let me exacerbate the scenario by bringing its moral dimension to the fore even more clearly. After all, it may be imagined – just as in the previous section – that someone may counter that being bored and annoyed when a friend discloses something of great significance may surely be of personal or even of existential importance but, given that no one was straightforwardly wronged, it is of no genuinely *moral* importance. Imagine, therefore, that the situation plays out differently: say, I do show great interest to what my friend has to tell me, that I seem very invested and pained by what happened to him, that I am patient and kind in the face of his suffering – but that I, after hours of conversation, reveal that I was the one who had an affair with his partner. This drastic betrayal of his trust in me – of the trust that was there between us – will not be *wrong* in that what I did made me *culpable*¹²⁴⁴ (unless we imagine that the scenario is set in a society in which cheating is unlawful) but it should be clear that it what I did was manifestly *immoral*.

It is hard to predict how the victim – not only of being cheated on but, on top of that, of being betrayed by a close friend – may respond to a situation as terrible as this. One imaginable kind of response would be for my friend to simply ‘lose it’, be it in the form of collapsing, having a nervous breakdown, attacking me, or who knows what else. Such reactions are surely not *loving* but neither would it be fitting to describe them as *unloving*; in relation to them, questions of love simply do not arise anymore because both lovingness and unlovingness involve the I’s relation to a You – which is precisely what is abrogated when someone ‘loses it’.¹²⁴⁵ Another imaginable response would be that of my friend’s being so shocked and devastated that he would end our friendship, there and then and for good (although he might say that it was me who ended our friendship when I had an affair with his partner.) Perhaps he would explode and hurl all his hurt, frustration, incredulity, and disillusionment at me, perhaps he would just get up and leave never to speak with me again. In the light of the terribleness of what I did, this would of course be a very understandable response.¹²⁴⁶ He might blame me for

¹²⁴⁴ Cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 44: “To hold someone responsible [...] means that the moral significance of what they did must not be evaded, neither by them nor by us, but it does not, thereby, mean that we find fault with them, that we can accuse them, or that we find them culpable.”

¹²⁴⁵ For Buber on such a loss, yet in the context of erotic and mystic ecstasy, cf. *I and Thou*, 135.

¹²⁴⁶ While I think that sympathy and understanding for such responses is important, I also think that leaving it at that keeps one from developing a deeper understanding of the moral dimension of what is at stake, at least where ‘moral’ is taken to be connected to love in such a way that goodness is understood in terms of loving togetherness (as I will develop in more detail in section 2.b. below). The problem with leaving it at sympathy and understanding with the one who, with good reason, ends the relationship, is that one thus also adopts the view that the termination of the relationship is (morally) *good* (or at least ‘good enough’.) Psychologically speaking, it may of course be the best thing to do, even in a sense necessary, in order to avoid further pain or

the betrayal for the rest of his life or think of me as a horrible person, yet I would never know; if I would feel guilty or ashamed for what I did, it would thus not be due to what he told me face-to-face – unless it was part of the barrage of insults he hurled at me before he left – but as a result of my own thoughts, perhaps including what I think he *would* tell me I if he were to speak to me.

It could also be imagined, however, that he would somehow still try to hold on to me and to our relation despite the devastatingly horrible thing I did.¹²⁴⁷ Perhaps this would not show immediately due to the overwhelmingness of the shock, the depth of his disappointment, and his overall lack of comprehension of how I, someone whom he always considered such a good friend, could have done something like this, both to him and his relationship with his (ex-)partner. At a later point in time, after the dust had settled, it may begin to show, however. It would probably be a longer process that may develop in all kinds of ways – yet the general direction, it seems, would be towards forgiveness.¹²⁴⁸

This being said, forgiveness cannot be willed; no one can simply decide to forgive and then implement that decision in one's engagement with another. It requires a change of heart – or, with Buber: a shift of attitude – and that, in turn, requires coming to see, and relate to, the one who has wronged one in a new light.¹²⁴⁹ But that does not mean that one may just as well stop concerning oneself with the issue in question – in this case: being terribly betrayed by a friend – and tell oneself that whether one will or will not forgive is in any case beyond one.¹²⁵⁰ As every genuinely second-personal relation, forgiveness is neither simply active nor is it simply passive.¹²⁵¹ It is a response to the other, to the one who has gravely hurt¹²⁵² one; indeed, it is a response that is lucid about the terribleness of what the other has done and fully acknowledges it. Forgiveness does not seek to evade, forget, or embellish.¹²⁵³ At the same time, however, it is a response that nonetheless goes beyond seeing the other solely in terms of the

even worse – but that is not to say that turning-away from one another is a *good thing*. On the need for forgiveness of the one who has been wronged, cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Works of Love*, 336.

¹²⁴⁷ This is not to say that he would require certain reasons, let alone new information, in order to be able to undergo this first change of heart (cf. Christopher Cowley, “Why Genuine Forgiveness must be Elective and Unconditional,” *Ethical Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2010): 556–79, at 574–5.)

¹²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; cf. Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 93–4 & 169.

¹²⁴⁹ Cf. Robert C. Roberts. “Forgivingness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995): 289–306, at 295.

¹²⁵⁰ Cf. Buber, *I and Thou*, 108–9.

¹²⁵¹ Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 94.

¹²⁵² Why I prefer to speak of ‘hurt’ instead of ‘wronged’ has hopefully become clear in my discussion of the relation between remorse and wrongdoing in the previous section.

¹²⁵³ Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 33; Cowley, “Why Genuine Forgiveness must be Elective and Unconditional,” 576–7.

past, of the terrible thing he did, and comes to see him in the light of the possibility of a (renewal of a) loving togetherness in the future.¹²⁵⁴

Yet, a readiness to forgive on the side of the one who has been hurt is, while crucial, not enough for forgiveness to reach consummation because that requires a similar spirit – namely a loving one – in both, the one who is to forgive and the one who is to be forgiven.¹²⁵⁵ It is commonly held that, on the side of the wrongdoer, this spirit takes on the form of remorse. So, even though my friend may still be caught up in his wrath and resentment towards me, it may be my asking him for forgiveness that brings about a change of heart in my friend – given that he receives my plea as having been made in a loving spirit, that is.¹²⁵⁶ Now, there is of course no guarantee that forgiveness will follow remorse, even if the remorseful plea is received as having been made in a loving spirit, just as it would be a case of blunt moralism to make the general claim that any genuine remorse *should* be answered with forgiveness; matters are not so easy and a soul that has been deeply wounded by another may take very long to heal – or never get there – even if the only proper cure is provided. This being said, receiving my appeal as having been made in a loving spirit will already by itself show that my friend responds lovingly to this appeal – for if he would not, then he would not perceive its loving spirit.¹²⁵⁷ Of course, this is not all there is to it – a lot more than this may be needed in order for my friend to forgive me with his whole heart. Still, it may be a first step, or at least a pointer in the direction of forgiveness, for he will have been able to once again relate to me as a You, at the very least in responding to my remorseful plea.¹²⁵⁸ And as was said above: the light of a loving response, even if it flickers only briefly, lingers on.

It should be added, however, that the relation between forgiveness and remorse is not so straightforward. Imagine that my friend and I break off our contact after the betrayal and that he gradually opens his heart to the idea of a possibility of reconciliation. He slowly comes to acknowledge to himself that, despite the terrible thing I did to him, he has not yet given up on me and our relation, that there is still some hope in him. He need not romanticise or be

¹²⁵⁴ Ibid.: “Despite the expression ‘forgive and forget’, true forgiveness does not forget – although it does not dwell on it either”; cf, also Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 30: “By being forgiven, that which I am on account of my past – say, a thief, a bully or a coward – is no longer what I am. Forgiveness means that there is no ending: what has happened is not the last word, a future different from the past, a real future, is possible. Forgiveness is thus not directed to the past – embitterment is – but to the present and the future;” the entire chapter (23–46) offers a lucid exploration of this theme.

¹²⁵⁵ Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 34.

¹²⁵⁶ That is, it is certainly not necessary that someone will, or ought to, show forgiveness if the other shows remorse (or fulfils certain other conditions); for a development of this thought, cf. Christopher Cowley, “Why Genuine Forgiveness must be Elective and Unconditional,” 559–64.

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sentimental – he may be quite lucid about the gravity of what I did just as he need not fool himself into thinking that there could be a simple way of recreating the friendship, let alone its exact prior state.¹²⁵⁹ Most importantly, he may be clear about the fact that there cannot be reconciliation if there is a spirit of forgiveness on his side only, that is, no spirit of remorse on mine.¹²⁶⁰ In other words, he comes to relate to me, albeit in my absence, in a forgiving spirit.¹²⁶¹ When eventually meeting me, this lucidity may show in his not giving in to his desire for things to be as nice and happy between us as they were before but, instead, of being acutely responsive to the spirit in which I engage with him.¹²⁶² This means that his readiness to forgive may, especially if my heart is still hardened and I am unrepentant, not manifest in a harmonious manner but involve confrontation, that is, an outspoken and perhaps hurtful addressing of what I did to him and our relationship. This said, it may be precisely his spirit of forgiveness – a spirit that had already emerged beforehand¹²⁶³ – that allows me, in meeting him, to open my heart to him and show the remorse that I had hitherto prevented from arising.¹²⁶⁴

Let me take a step back and recapitulate: in cases of suffering a moral wrong of the kind of gravity just sketched, it is common for the victim to end the relation with the wrongdoer. However, it is usually only the *direct* relation with the other that can thus be abrogated¹²⁶⁵ – the *imagined* relation to him usually haunts the victim all the more vehemently and indeed often deepens over time, albeit in an increasingly pathological way.¹²⁶⁶ Turning one’s back to the

¹²⁵⁹ Cf. Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 7: “even if forgiveness points us towards what we once had, it still points in a spirit of love that would transform our relationship if we held on to it.”

¹²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 33 & 35.

¹²⁶¹ In a *certain* sense, this shows that he already has forgiven me – he does not see me, and what I did to him and our relationship, exclusively in terms of the past anymore. (This is close to what Cowley, following Calhoun, discusses in terms of “aspirational forgiveness” (cf. Christopher Cowley, “Forgiving the Unrepentant,” *Etica E Politica* 2, no. 1 (2000).) On the other hand, this would make his forgiveness a matter that only concerns him; I am secondary at best. That is, if that is all there is to his forgiveness, then he may, after having forgiven me, simply turn away and never think about me again. And if he would decide to meet with me again, then he would present me with his forgiveness as a *fait accompli*, as something already settled and done with – “I have forgiven you. I would be happy if you would also show remorse; then we could renew our relationship. But if you do not, then that is up to you.” This seems odd, to say the least. Hence, more seems to be needed for consummate forgiveness – or, differently put: a forgiving spirit will, where possible, extent itself to the other so as try to move him in such a way that, through his remorse, consummate forgiveness becomes possible.

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¹²⁶³ Cf. Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 132.

¹²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 212.

¹²⁶⁵ cf. Backström, *The Fear of Openness*, 221–2.

¹²⁶⁶ By ‘imagined’, I mean the way in which the victim conjures up the wrongdoer in her thoughts in the light of what he has done for her, i.e. as an *It*. (This is very close to the account I gave of what it means for someone to come to hate someone else; chapter 5, section 2.e.) But that does not mean that the thus ‘imagined’ person may not also be present, only that, if she is present, she will not be encountered in her full, living presence but in the way one has imaginatively appropriated her in the light of what she has done to one. Reversely, it is possible to have a ‘direct’ relation to the wrongdoer even if she is absent; if that were not so, there could be no way to relate in a loving spirit to the dead or those who cannot be reached. This of course poses the challenge of how it is possible to relate to another imaginatively, yet in a way in which one is still touched by her presence.

Unfortunately, I cannot at present explore this very interesting – and, I think, very important issue; suffice it to say that, phenomenologically, we (at least most of us) know the difference – imagine the difference between,

wrongdoer will leave one with one's pain, disappointment, and an ever deepening resentment for what he has done, often leading to an outright obsession with him, thus solidifying the sway he holds over one.¹²⁶⁷ In such obsessive imagined relations, blame towards the imagined other for the terrible wrong she has done and (/or) derision and spite towards him on account of the terrible person he is will likely play a central role. Both are of course very understandable, yet they are, again, deflections, allowing one to evade the direct response to what the other has done. (The difference between a case of being seriously wronged and the comparably slight disappointment discussed above is that in the former, one's sense of the utter incomprehensibility of what the other has done makes it all the harder not to resort to deflections of such a kind.)¹²⁶⁸ This direct response may be unbearably painful and it may not lead to anything; still, it is the only way in which the recreation of the relationship's loving spirit is possible.¹²⁶⁹ In this sense, it is crucially different from ascriptions of guilt and blame – while they persist in the mode of relating to the other exclusively in terms of his moral badness or even evil, forgiveness points towards the recreation of love and, thus, to something which, if not distorted by sentimentality or other forms of deception but lucid, is manifestly *good*.¹²⁷⁰

iii. A Life of Lovelessness?

Before turning to the notions of *goodness* and *the good*, let me examine from one further angle what it may mean to suffer from a lack of love, this time with the focus on how unlovingness may come to infect and corrode a whole relationship, indeed the entire lives of those in the relationship. It is a case in which the lack of love cannot anymore be located clearly on one side, in one of the two individuals, but one in which the relational dynamics *as such* have become deeply unloving – deeply pathological, to put it in a psychological diction – so deeply, indeed, that it may appear that love has either been entirely quenched or that it has become so twisted that only destructiveness and nothing of the just discussed togetherness-creating spirit has remained. To do this, I shall now turn my attention to Franz Kafka's short story *The Judgment*.¹²⁷¹

say, you *thinking about your deceased grandmother* and suddenly *finding yourself addressed, 'in thought,' by your deceased grandmother*.

¹²⁶⁷ This can be regarded as the complement to Gaita's remark that the wrongdoer may be haunted by the victim. But of course, the moral implications of being haunted by the victim of what one has done and by the one whose victim one was are very different.

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¹²⁶⁹ Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 27.

¹²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 34. This thought will become prominent in section 2.c. below.

¹²⁷¹ The edition of the text I will be working with my own translation of: Franz Kafka, "Das Urteil," in *Arkadia: ein Jahr für die Dichtkunst*, edited by Max Brod (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1913), 53–65.

At the heart of Kafka's *The Judgment* lies the relationship – and especially a single, dramatic encounter – of Georg, a young man and successful business owner, and his elderly father of whom Georg takes care and who lives in the same house. The encounter plays out when Georg visits his father's room to tell him about a letter he wants to send to a friend in St. Petersburg; despite his frail appearance, the father responds in an increasingly hostile way, hurling more and more hurtful and humiliating accusations towards the son, partly in relation to the friend in Russia, partly in relation to other issues. The story climaxes with the father exclaiming "I sentence you to death by drowning!"¹²⁷² upon which Georg, who had gradually turned from confident to stunned and stammering over the course of the father's slowly erupting tirade, feels himself "urged from the room"¹²⁷³ and rushing to the river where he climbs over the railings, says with a low voice "Dear parents, I have loved you, all the same,"¹²⁷⁴ and lets himself drop to his death.

The story does not shed much light on the nature of the relationship between Georg and his father prior to the meeting depicted in the story. We are not told how it could have come this far, that is, to the point at which the father could demand something so dreadful of his son and at which the son unhesitatingly complies with it. We are told that Georg has gradually come to take over the lead in the family business but that his father is still helping out;¹²⁷⁵ we are told that the mother has died two years ago¹²⁷⁶ and that this was a heavy blow to the father (and, as he claims, a heavier blow for him than for Georg);¹²⁷⁷ and we are told that Georg looks after his father whose age has made him dependent on the help of others.¹²⁷⁸ Despite this sparseness of detail, a closer look reveals a fuller picture of the psychological dynamics between Georg and his father.

Three notions that are central for characterising Georg's relation to his father are *power*, *authority*, and *business*, all three of which are closely interconnected. First of all, the relation between Georg and his father has developed, and plays out, before the background of the family business – a business which until recently had been led by the father and in which Georg had become all the more involved as he grew up. Accordingly, the father had always been simultaneously paternal authority and business authority to Georg – and in such a way that it is not clear where the one ends and the other begins. So, when it is remarked that the "father's

¹²⁷² Ibid., 65.

¹²⁷³ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁵ Ibid., 54–5.

¹²⁷⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁷⁸ Ibid., 60.

insistence on having everything his own way in the business”¹²⁷⁹ may have hindered Georg “from developing any real activity of his own,”¹²⁸⁰ then this is not restricted to Georg’s passivity in the family business but – so the story makes abundantly clear – something that characterises his overall relation to the father. That is, even after the son has taken over the business and the father is old and dependent, it is the father who wears the pants and Georg who kowtows. This is conveyed already at the beginning of the story when Georg informs his father about sending the letter.¹²⁸¹ No reason is stated for why Georg does this; it seems like second nature to him. This creates the impression that it is a given for Georg that, although he is a grown man and business manager, even something as personal as sending a letter to a friend first requires the father’s blessing. This impression is further solidified in what comes first to Georg’s mind when he finds himself facing his frail, old father: “My father is still a giant of a man.”¹²⁸² And of course, the entire following dialogue between the two illustrates the way in which, despite the recent reversal of power on the surface – Georg taking over the business with the father merely helping out – the father completely dominates Georg.

Things stand not very differently when it comes to the question what role love plays – and does not play – in the relationship of Georg and his father. Although seldom directly addressed, much can be read in-between the lines, especially in the descriptions of how Georg engages with the father. Over the course of the story, it becomes clear that the father is of the greatest importance to Georg, for better or for worse. When he helps his father up and sees his dirty underwear, for instance, Georg “reproach[es] himself for having been neglectful,”¹²⁸³ telling himself that it “should certainly have been his duty to see that his father had clean changes of underwear,”¹²⁸⁴ and deciding that he will take his father in with himself and his wife-to-be so that he would be able to better care for him. What his father means to Georg is articulated in a language of duty, that is, of what he owes his father as a son, of what it means for him, qua son, to act responsibly towards his father. It is not mentioned whether Georg is actually pained to see *his father* in such a rather pitiful state, just that he is pained for *not having lived up to his filial duty*. The story indicates that he feels guilty for having failed to meet standards he takes to be authoritative; it does not reveal whether this guilt is accompanied by a sense of remorse for having failed to properly be there for his father.¹²⁸⁵

¹²⁷⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹²⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

¹²⁸² Ibid., 58.

¹²⁸³ Ibid., 61.

¹²⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁸⁵ Again, cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 46–8.

Neither is it clear whether he only thinks that he *ought to* care for his father or whether he actually *desires* caring for him – that is, it is not stated whether he merely feels obligated to care for him or whether this *caring-for* is rooted in his *caring-about* his father. It is true, here and there flashes of what might be Georg’s more genuine concern for his father, for instance when he tells him: “I can’t do without you in the business, you know that very well, but if the business is going to undermine your health, I’m ready to close it down tomorrow forever.”¹²⁸⁶ Yet, even this seemingly honest confession of how much his father means to Georg is not to be read in separation from the occasion at which it is brought forth, namely as part of Georg’s attempt to soothe the father’s growing hostility towards him: when the father, being told by Georg about his plan to send the letter, questions whether Georg really has this friend in St. Petersburg, Georg rises in embarrassment (–not in incredulity or indignation¹²⁸⁷ –) and proceeds to effusively ascertain his father about how much he matters to him.¹²⁸⁸ So, even if honest, Georg again confesses his love for the father in the context of the guilt he harbours for not meeting his expectations.

As was shown, however, duty and guilt (feelings) are not expressions of love. Rather, they are forms of shifting one’s attention away from the other who claims one in loving response and towards the impersonal, i.e. the rules that are authoritative for one.¹²⁸⁹ This is of course not to relativize the above made claim that Georg has a strong attachment to his father – had he not, then what he takes to be his filial duties towards him would not be of such importance to him. And not only that: as comes out in his effusive and guilt-ridden assertion of love for his father, the reason Georg ascribes such great importance to his supposed filial duties is his desire to please his father – or, differently put, the injunctions that govern much of Georg’s relation to his father are authoritative because they appear to him in the light of the absolute authority that is his father. This father, however, shows Georg no inkling of recognition, let alone affirmation, regardless of how desperately he tries to show him that he is worthy of his love.¹²⁹⁰ It thus

¹²⁸⁶ Kafka, “Das Urteil,” 59.

¹²⁸⁷ The fact that he feels embarrassed – and not incredulous or indignant – about his father’s seemingly out of place question may indicate two things: firstly, it may be taken to indicate that there is actually something to the father’s suspicion (and that Georg is indeed somehow deluded regarding this apparent friend), or – which would be closer to the reading I am now suggesting – the very fact of Georg’s father putting this question to him, even if unfounded, conveys to Georg that his father does not believe him – something which, due to Georg’s powerful desire to please his father at all times, embarrasses him.

¹²⁸⁸ Kafka, “Das Urteil,” 59–60.

¹²⁸⁹ Cf. the discussion in section 1.a.ii. above.

¹²⁹⁰ For a good discussion of the connection of guilt and authority in the short story, cf. J. P. Stern, “Franz Kafka’s ‘Das Urteil’: An Interpretation,” *The German Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1972): 114–129, at 119. A further point: What adds to Georg’s tragic existence (and death) is that it seems that there is simply nothing he could *possibly* do to receive his father’s affirmation because the father, caught up in his own fears of being dethroned by his son, has already forsaken him. Or, differently put, no matter what Georg would do and no matter how flawlessly he would live up to his father’s demands, it would not ameliorate his father’s attitude towards him (–

seems that in Georg's case, guilt and shame interlock: he feels guilty for failing to do what he thinks he ought to do and he is ashamed because his father makes it clear that his attempts of fulfilling his expectations count for nothing given how "devilish"¹²⁹¹ he is.¹²⁹²

So, Georg desires nothing more than to please his father and he seeks to do so by fulfilling his expectations and by living up to his filial duties. As Judith Butler rightly notes, moreover, Georg's final words – "Dear parents, I have loved you, all the same" – can be read as the tragic culmination of this desire: "The reflexive action of 'letting himself drop [*liess sich hinabfallen*]' is nothing more than a deadly way of consecrating his attachment to his parents. His death becomes a gift of love."¹²⁹³ But what is the notion of love that Butler ascribes to Georg? It seems that it is precisely the filial correspondence to what Erich Fromm calls "fatherly love."¹²⁹⁴ This is how Fromm introduces the term:

Fatherly love is conditional love. Its principle is 'I love you because you fill my expectations, because you do your duty, because you are like me'. [...] In the nature of fatherly love lies the fact that obedience becomes the main virtue, that disobedience is the main vice – and its punishment the withdrawal of fatherly love.

Fatherly love is a 'love' with which the child is rewarded if it lives up to the parent's expectations. The child in whose life fatherly love dominates thus learns that love is *just that*, i.e. what it receives if it does what the parent demands of it – and what is withdrawn from it if it does not. This is the sense in which it is conditional. Moreover, the child will thus also come to learn that it, i.e. the child itself, shows its *own* love to the parent by doing what he demands. It is thus not merely a *conditional* but, more specifically, a *transactional* understanding of love which the child thus develops: "If you give me your love (which you prove by living up to my expectations), I will give you my love (i.e. my recognition and affection.) If you do not, I will not." It is important to add that the kind of transaction in question is obviously not 'among

if anything, it would aggravate it –) because the problem lies not in the imperfection of his deeds or of his character but in what he symbolises to his father, namely an existential threat to his power, the slow but inexorable approach of death, and so on.

¹²⁹¹ Kafka, "Das Urteil," 65.

¹²⁹² It must be noted that shame is not mentioned in the story, neither in relation to Georg nor in any other respect. Still, it does not seem a far-fetched interpretation, given, firstly, how large the father looms and how small and insecure Georg appears in his presence and, secondly, how scathing and crushing the father's tirade is – a tirade that is, after all, directed at Georg and his worthlessness. Thus interpreted, Georg's suicide is indeed his final desperate attempt of showing his worth to his parents, which would suggest that it was at least partly motivated by the crushing shame he felt when having to endure his father's words.

¹²⁹³ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 48

¹²⁹⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (London: Unwin Books 1962), 33–6; it should be noted that Fromm does not use these terms in a specifically gendered way. That is: a mother may show fatherly love and a father motherly love.

equals' but rather like that of the salesman who sells the drugs to which customer is addicted: the father – i.e. the one who sells the drug, namely recognition and affection – has almost unlimited power over the child – i.e. the customer who craves nothing more than the recognition and affection the father has 'on offer'.¹²⁹⁵

That this is the understanding of love that prevails in Georg's relation to his father is indicated in an especially forceful way in the story's last lines. Right before Georg lets himself drop to his death, the narrator dryly remarks that in his youth, he, Georg, was a "distinguished gymnast [...] to his parents' pride."¹²⁹⁶ Now, this can of course be read as a mere comment on the skill with which Georg swings himself over the railings – yet it seems to force another point, namely that the theme of Georg's making his parents proud is important for understanding the motivation behind his suicide. Following Butler and Fromm, it can now be said that the 'gift of love' that Georg gives to his parents – and especially to his father – in the form of his suicide, is his final, desperate attempt to make them as proud of him as they once were. If he would succeed, he would of course not be able to receive their 'love' – that is, their fatherly love – because he would be dead; yet, it seems that the mere idea of making them (or his father) proud suffices for Georg to do as he is commanded to.

In the light of the discussions of this and the previous chapter, it will not come as a surprise that I am not satisfied with simply leaving it as that. My critical intuition can be further developed by once again turning to Fromm and to look at what he presents as the complement to fatherly love, namely motherly love.¹²⁹⁷ In contrast to the experience of fatherly love – 'I am loved because I live up to my parent's expectations' – the experience of motherly love is simply "*I am loved because I am.*"¹²⁹⁸ To this, Fromm adds that "mother's love is unconditional,"¹²⁹⁹ that is, that "it need not be acquired, it need not be deserved,"¹³⁰⁰ "if it is there, it is like a blessing"¹³⁰¹ but if it is not, then "there is nothing I can do to create it."¹³⁰² This notion of love,

¹²⁹⁵ In an earlier footnote I already made I point that I take to be of relevance also at this point, namely that the child who experiences 'genuine', i.e. 'motherly' love (to which I will come in a moment) from its parents will not as strong of a craving for the kind of recognition of affection that is presently discussed. In other words, the child who finds itself really loved does not *need* the kind of recognition and affection thus 'on offer' by fatherly love because it knows that it is loved *anyway* (although it will presumably still find it nice to get 'extra recognition and affection' from the parents if it does well.) Fromm, who stressed the complementariness of fatherly and motherly love (ibid.), apparently did not see this point.

¹²⁹⁶ Kafka, "Das Urteil," 65.

¹²⁹⁷ As I said above, I do not think that what Fromm calls motherly and fatherly love are complementary; while I cannot explain in detail why, I hope it will transpire over the course of the following discussion.

¹²⁹⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 31; emphasis in the original.

¹²⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹³⁰¹ Ibid.

¹³⁰² Ibid. I am not so sure if I would agree with this point. I would agree if the 'can' is understood in terms of 'what I am able to bring about in virtue of my practical powers.' But, as was shown (especially in chapters 2 and 3), there is a way of speaking about 'can' that is not to be understood in such terms but rather in terms of an

although not identical to the notion of love I have been developing, is still obviously much closer to it than fatherly love and it seems to be what is lacking in Georg's life. As Corder rightly points out, moreover, fatherly love ceases to look like a genuine form of love at all once it is seen in the light of motherly love and instead begins to look "like a form of esteem."¹³⁰³ (The attentive reader will recall that it is this love-qua-esteem that underlies McDowell's Aristotelian conception of ethical upbringing – a conception that, at the same time, leaves no room for what Fromm calls mother's love.)¹³⁰⁴

But what if Georg's tragedy is precisely that he does not know, or has long since lost sight of, any motherly love in his life, so that fatherly love is all he knows? In a certain sense, such a reading would suggest itself, not least because it helps to explain Georg's obsessive-submissive behaviour. But if that is so – that is, if it is possible for there to be a life in which the kind of love that I am presently concerned with has no room and if, accordingly, love is understood exclusively in the conditional-transactional terms sketched above – then does this not manifestly show that there may be relationships that lie entirely beyond the scope of the account of relationality that I am presently developing? Perhaps this question cannot be answered, nor do I seek to answer it. My present concern lies not with such general claims but with the example at hand, namely the relationship of Georg and his father, and it is in respect to this relationship that I seek to show that what may appear as a total absence of (motherly) love from afar will reveal a more nuanced picture on a closer look.¹³⁰⁵ To bring this to light, however, more needs to be said.

I want to call attention to two issues in relation to the question whether Georg's life is indeed devoid of (motherly) love. I want to begin by returning once more to Georg's final words and exploit an ambiguity that Butler overlooks in her reading. First off, I agree with Butler insofar that the meaning of Georg's final words is not properly captured in the English translation, especially due to the elusiveness of the little word 'doch' in the German original –

'appeal to the other in the hope of making her see something in a new light'. In the light of my reflections in chapters 4 and 5, moreover, it may be doubted whether a parent may indeed not love her child *at all*.

¹³⁰³ Christopher Corder, "Two Conceptions of Love in Philosophical Thought," 321: fatherly love is "a form of 'esteem'—since it involves an 'estimation' of this or that as its warranting or justifying ground, along with the recognition that such esteem rightly varies with the strength of the grounds for it."

¹³⁰⁴ The claim that there is no room for genuinely unconditional love in Aristotle's ethics is also made by Corder in "Gaita and Plato," 53; I will discuss the passage in section 2.b. below.

¹³⁰⁵ Which also means that I do not presume to be able to show that it is impossible for the critic to produce an example of a relationship that is totally devoid of love – all I can do is invite the critical reader to come up with such examples so that I and she will may discuss them case by case and with the kind of attention to detail that I hope to display in my present reading of Kafka.

“Liebe Eltern, ich habe euch *doch* immer geliebt”¹³⁰⁶ – and its misleading English translation ‘all the same’. Butler writes:

The translation of *doch* as ‘all the same’ is perhaps stronger than it need be. There is in the *doch* a certain protest and rebuttal, an ‘even though’ or, better, a ‘still.’ Some difficulty is obliquely referenced by this single word, but it hardly rises to the level of a counter-accusation.¹³⁰⁷

Butler is right in pointing out that the ‘doch’ indicates a certain protest, and the alternative expressions she offers point to a better reading as that intimated by the phrase ‘all the same.’ While the ‘all the same’ suggests that Georg’s love for his parents is entirely unfazed by their refusal to affirm him, Butler’s speaking of the ‘doch’ as adumbrating a more tentative ‘protest and rebuttal’, perhaps better translated with ‘even though’ or ‘still,’ brings to the fore that Georg is *not* unfazed, that he *is* hurt, by just this refusal – while at the same time *still* being determined to prove to them – or to his father¹³⁰⁸ – that he is worthy of their love. Simply put, their denial of him, although shaking him, is precisely what provokes him to take his own life in order to give them a final and irrefutable proof of his love and, thus, of his worthiness: “*Even though* you treat me so mercilessly, I will prove to you that I love you;” “You treat me so harshly; yet, *still*, I will prove that I love you by taking my own life.” So, Butler’s problem with the translation is that it indicates a sense of indifference where there is none – Georg’s confession of love is not unaffected by how his parents treat him; instead, it is to be understood as his passionate, although not quite accusatory, rebuttal of how they treat him, his way of expressing his pained sense of “You just wait and see! I’ll show you!”

The other way of reading the ‘doch’ is also as a sign of tentative protest, yet one that expresses incomprehension, indeed incredulity.¹³⁰⁹ Read in this way, it indicates that, although he complies with the father’s sentence without resistance, Georg is not in full accord with what he is made to do, indeed that he does not understand it. The thrust of his last words are on such a reading better conveyed in the form of a question along the lines of “Dear parents, *but have I not always loved you?*,” pointing towards the follow up question “So why do you make me do this?” Taken in this way, Georg’s last words tentatively convey that he fails to comprehend

¹³⁰⁶ Kafka, “Das Urteil,” 65.

¹³⁰⁷ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 48.

¹³⁰⁸ Given that the last words are addressed at Georg’s parents, I will, following Butler, also keep referring to them, the parents, although many of the points made primarily refer to his father.

¹³⁰⁹ For some interesting remarks on the incomprehensibility of terrible or even evil deeds, cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 232–3.

how his love – or what he takes to be his love – for his parents can be answered with his father’s command to take his own life.

This leaves us with an interesting juxtaposition of two notions of love. On Butler’s reading, Georg’s final utterance shows that he is still caught up, perhaps even more doggedly so, in the same understanding of love he already had, namely as a ‘living-up-to-expectations,’ as him doing his part in the ‘trade deal of love’ between himself and his father. On the other possible reading to which I just pointed, the utterance indicates that, in his last moments, Georg distances himself from such a logic. That is to say, he does not distance himself from it *in actu* – after all, he *does* execute his father’s judgment by taking his own life. Yet, he does not straightforwardly see it as his way of showing his love to his parents anymore.

Indeed, there seem to be various possible layers of incomprehension at stake, leading from the kind of understanding of love that Butler works with to the one I want to get at. The questioning undertone of Georg’s last words firstly indicates a thought along the lines of: “Have I, Georg, not acted in a way which, according to the implicit deal between me and you, my father, counted as loving? And do I thus not deserve your love?” These questions still seem to be general reservations with the ‘trade deal’ between Georg and his father and, as such, they fail to capture the supposed incredulity in which he finds himself after his father’s outrageous demand. In the context of this demand, however, his words may be taken to adumbrate another issue: doing what his father demands is how Georg can expect to get rewarded with love – yet, the father’s final ruling makes it impossible for Georg to receive any reward (qua love) for it; indeed, it makes it impossible for him to be loved by his father ever again, just as he will be unable to further prove his love to his father by doing what he is told. The father’s death sentence irreparably breaks their love deal – and so, Georg’s final quiet exclamation may be read as expressing his incomprehension: “Why, given that I have always been a son who proved his love by doing what you, father, wanted me to do and who could thus expect to be rewarded with your love, am I now commanded to do something that breaks our deal so irrevocably?” When the flawless compliance is not rewarded in the appropriate manner, the deal is exposed as a scam. In this way, yet another insight might be taken to dawn on Georg: “Could it perhaps be that my always living up to your expectations, father, and that your rewarding me for doing so, might not really be what our love for one another consists in? Do we interact in ways that stand in a conflict with the love that we have for one another? Or at least with the love I have for you?” If something along such lines is what dawns on Georg in his final moments, then his exclamation-qua-question – ‘But I have always loved you, have I not?’ – may just as well express his sense of incomprehension about how *he himself* is able to do the thing he is about

to do given that he has always loved his father. His final words can be taken to indicate that he has an inkling of understanding that his impending suicide is *not* an expression of his love for his father but that it is indeed incongruous with this love – a love for his father qua individual, not as the source of extraneous demands.

On the alternative understanding of love which I have been developing, relating to another lovingly does not set itself as its end the elicitation of the other's recognition or affirmation, so that the frustration of this end either leads to a frustration of one's love or to some form of obsession (as in the case of Georg.) Rather, it entails *inviting* the other to answer in a similarly loving spirit, without the hoped-for result serving as the invitation's end.¹³¹⁰ In the case of Georg, responding to his father lovingly would, accordingly, firstly mean to wrest himself free from the shackles of his, the father's,¹³¹¹ desires and commands; secondly, it means coming to see these desires and commands as what they are, namely as deeply unloving. The father's overall mode of responsiveness towards his son is, as already stated, permeated by a desire to excoriate and debase, presumably in order to sustain his own position of power and authority – and in his final judgment, this attitude culminates in the (successful) attempt to annihilate the son once and for all.¹³¹²

If Georg were imagined to respond lovingly towards his father's deeply corrupted stance towards him, it would thus involve a resistance towards his father's attempts of using and abusing him. Such a resistance would interrupt the matter-of-courseness with which his father debases him (thus stalling the toxic, self-perpetuating dynamic that is sustained between them throughout their meeting and presumably throughout their entire relationship); yet, even more importantly, it would also entail an expression of his love for his father. In order to reflect not only a concern *for himself* and the freedom he may hope for in trying to break the father's sway over him, but also a loving concern *for his father*, Georg's resistance would have to turn, not away from, but towards his father. Put differently, Georg's response to his father would reflect the kind of love I am after if it would not merely be marked by a desire for *himself* to be free from his toxic dependency on *his father* but also by the desire that *his father* be free from his toxic dependency on *him, Georg*.¹³¹³ Given the deeply pathological state of their relationship,

¹³¹⁰ That would turn love into a matter of instrumental rationality and, thus, of self-interested inclination.

¹³¹¹ That is to say, not only the father's but also his own, to the extent they have become second nature to him.

¹³¹² The story seems to suggest that the father, in passing Georg's death sentence, may at the same time have also brought about his own end. Thus, it is said in the story that, when Georg feels rushed from the room, "the crash with which his father collapsed on the bed behind him was still in his ears."

¹³¹³ This point is made by Strandberg with a stress on forgiveness: "Forgiveness thus liberates not only the perpetrator, the one being forgiven, but just as well the victim, the one doing the forgiving, for by forgiving you stop yourself from becoming caught up in such an endless chain of revenge" (*Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 51). This, in turn, sheds light on what was said in the previous footnote: the father's breakdown immediately after passing the judgment is presumably not merely due to his exhaustion but rather to his being

it is certainly hard to even imagine a scenario in which Georg might succeed. The question of what might be done in order to succeed, however, is a different one from that of what it would mean for Georg to respond lovingly to his father. Of course, it would be intrinsic to Georg's reaching out to his father that he would hope to somehow touch him and bring about at least an inkling of a change of heart.¹³¹⁴ Yet even if he would fail entirely and even make things worse – whatever that might mean given the disastrous state of their relationship – his response might nonetheless reflect a lovingness that is absent in his complicit, subservient demeanour as the story portrays it.¹³¹⁵

This may invite the reservation, perhaps from someone like Butler, that all this sounds well and good but that it is simply not how human psychology works. The nature of the love that we, each of us, have for those who have shaped us from early on is not so rosy. As a kind of attachment that marks the very onset of our development into self-referential beings, it is not chosen, just as it is not possible to reach the kind of self-sufficiency that I imagine when I talk about what a loving responsiveness might look like.¹³¹⁶ We become selves by being thrown into the midst of people and we attach ourselves to those who happen to first look after us, including the intricate ways in which they may fail to properly do so. This is what we first learn love to be and it is an understanding that we can never fully overcome.¹³¹⁷

To this I would reply, firstly, that, apart from the fact that I think she misleadingly portrays infants as 'miniature adults,'¹³¹⁸ Butler does not consider love of the 'motherly kind.'

now bereft of that on which he, or at least his identity, depended, namely his superiority and power over the son. I would even flirt with reading Georg's desire to annihilate his son as a desire to simultaneously annihilate himself – or, rather, to annihilate precisely the terrible person he has become. But I want to leave these speculations as an invitation for further reflection.

¹³¹⁴ As Backström says (in a quite different discussion but still to my present point): "the father's sin is his whole person. *But he is not his person.* As long as he goes on [...] being the way he is, he himself reduces himself to his sinful person, but he is not doomed to do it, there is the possibility that he changes, that he gives up that 'persona,' and is thus *freed to be himself* in the true, existential sense" (*The Fear of Openness*, 221; emphasis in the original).

¹³¹⁵ Cf. my discussion of the imprudent advice-giver in chapter 5, section 2.b.

¹³¹⁶ Cf. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 74: "attachment is already overdetermined from the start, since the other besieges and engulfs the infant, and the emergence from this primary impingement is a struggle that can have only limited success".

¹³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77: "the infant will be disposed to love any and every thing which emerges as an 'object' (rather than not love at all, fail to attach, and jeopardize its survival). This is a scandal, of course, since it shows us that love, from the outset, is without judgment, and that, to a certain extent, it remains without judgment or, at least, without good judgment for the rest of its career."

¹³¹⁸ Following Laplanche, she speaks of the infant, among other things, as "overwhelmed," (*ibid.* 71) "besieged," or "engulfed" (*ibid.*, 77) by those around it. But it would seem to me that such talk posits the infant rather as a someone, a person with an already developed sense of self that is somehow jeopardised by those around it. After all, overwhelming, besieging, and engulfing presupposes there to be someone who is overwhelmed, besieged, and engulfed. I think that Butler is right that the infant is totally vulnerable and exposed and, thus, at the mercy of how those around it relate to it; the problem in her wording is that the infant thus invariably becomes some kind of battle ground of greater, indeed political, powers (*ibid.*, 67–82). (The accusation of treating children like 'miniature adults' is taken from Cavell (cf. *The Claim of Reason*, 171).)

That is, she is right in holding that infants are at the mercy of how those around them – those who are there for, and care for, them – respond to them and that they will form attachments to them even if they are as vicious as Georg’s father. Yet she does not seem to conceive of the possibility that there is a kind of parental love that does not capitalise on this vulnerability – and, more importantly, she does not consider that it makes a substantial difference *from the child’s perspective* whether it forms its bonds to someone who responds to it with love ‘simply because it is,’ or whether the adults’ affection and recognition is dependent on the child being and behaving in this or that way.¹³¹⁹ Of course, both will be attachments and, so, the child will be ‘bound’ to both, the one who gave it motherly love and the one who gave it fatherly love,¹³²⁰ however, only the latter will be experienced as someone to whom it is attached in a way that makes her dependent and unfree, someone from which it is compelled to liberate itself. The person in relation to whom genuine love has flourished, on the other hand, will be experienced as the one in relation to whom it can be free, it can really be itself, without judgment yet still with love.

But this, of course, still leaves the possibility that a child, perhaps like Georg, is never shown such unconditional love – or at the very least that any contact with it has been overpowered and quenched by the conditional esteem that is fatherly love. Again, I do not know if such parent-child relations exist; yet, my claim was merely that Georg’s relation to his father can be read in such a way that he, Georg, shows that he does have a sense that there may be another kind of love – or, rather, that love may be something else than what he lived in his relationship to his father. Apart from that, the present text has not tried to show that it is possible to entirely transcend any of the deep infantile attachments which Butler claims lie at the roots of our self-development; rather, it sought to point to *the possibility of a process of liberation* from what we take to be pathological in them, even if this process may never – and presumably will never – come to an end.¹³²¹ The very realisation that those who are closest to us may neglect, mistreat, and abuse us in all kinds of ways – and that we may manifest the same failings in our relating to them – by itself already indicates that we are not fully caught up anymore in the destructive dynamics that drive these relationships. Georg lacks such a realisation and, hence, he remains caught up. Only right before he lets himself drop to his death do his words

¹³¹⁹ Cordner, “Two Conceptions of Love,” 321–2 & 325–7.

¹³²⁰ The way in which the child’s attachment to the one who relates to it with motherly love may show in its joy when she is around, its sadness when she not, and its grief when she has fallen seriously ill or has died. In such moments, the strength of the bond may flare up and show the child – show us – how much we are connected to them. What makes itself heard in such moments, however, is the love that is there between the child and the parent, not simply some psychological mechanism (cf. my discussion in chapter 5, section 1.a.; cf. also Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 51).

¹³²¹ Hugo Strandberg, *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*, 132–3.

suggest that he has a certain kind of faint understanding that there is something off with said dynamics and that there might be another way for a son and a father to relate to one another. If this suspicion would have gotten the better of him and he would have climbed down the railings and started to critically reflect on the relation with his father, this might have marked the onset of an alteration in the dynamics of the relation with his father. Yet, his father proved all too powerful and so, the “low voice”¹³²² with which Georg mutters his final tentative protest remains powerless in the face of the booming voice with which his father passes the judgment.

2. Love’s Goodness

I will now undertake a change of perspective: up to this point, this chapter discussed examples of what it is like first-hand to experience love as being morally charged, primarily through negative examples, that is, of engagements in which either oneself responded unlovingly towards the other or the other to oneself. In this section, I will take a step back and consider what it may be like to have the moral dimension of love disclosed to one from the vantage point of the witness, that is, not as an I directly engaging with a You, but as someone who witnesses two others engaging with one another in loving (or less-than-loving) ways. I put the ‘less-than-loving’ into parentheses because, unlike in the discussion up to this point, the focus will lie not on the ‘negative’, i.e. on engagements in which the lack of love directs one’s attention to love’s moral charge, but rather on the ‘positive’, that is, on one’s being struck by the goodness of love as it appears to one in the engagements of others. In a nutshell, it can be said that the subject of the present section will be an examination of what it means to be responsive to someone else’s loving responsiveness to a third – and, more specifically, what it means to respond lovingly (or unlovingly) to such a loving responsiveness.

a. Witnessing & Responding to Love

i. The Witnessing Levite

I want to begin with a rather free re-imagination of the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan.¹³²³ Imagine that a Levite travels by foot from Jerusalem to Jericho. Not far in front of him walks a priest and not far behind him follows someone else, a Samaritan by the looks of

¹³²² Kafka, “Das Urteil,” 65.

¹³²³ *The World English Bible* (<https://ebible.org/web/LUK10.htm>; accessed 2.6.2023) will provide the basis for the following discussion. The parable of the Good Samaritan can be found at Lk. 4.25-29.

it, along with some animal, perhaps a donkey or an ox.¹³²⁴ At some point, the Levite sees the priest giving a wide berth to something lying on the side of the road. When he approaches, he sees that it is a man with serious injuries; given that he has nothing on him, not even clothes, it seems that he must have been robbed. The Levite takes a deep breath and does as the priest before him did; after all, he has important business to attend in Jericho and he does not want to end up robbed and left to die as the poor wretch lying there. Soon after he has passed the man, he hears that there is some commotion behind him. As he turns around, he sees that the Samaritan, having dismounted his animal, hurries towards the man lying in the dust. As he is not far from the Samaritan, the Levite sees that he radiates a sense of urgency and that he appears to be moved with compassion.¹³²⁵ When he reaches him, he immediately sets about dressing his wounds and to pour oil and wine on them.¹³²⁶

Here we have an example of someone witnessing someone else responding lovingly to someone else. How may the Levite be imagined to respond to what he thus witnesses? One possibility is that he may simply turn around again and continue walking. Yet, even if so, his response will be different from the Levite as he is depicted in the parable, because – so at least it is suggested¹³²⁷ – the Levite at no point turns around. So, while the Levite in the parable responds *to the wounded man*, namely in a very unloving (‘un-neighbourly’) way – that is, by giving him a wide berth and continuing to walk – he does not respond *to the Samaritan*. This is different in the case of the now imagined Levite who does turn around, sees the Samaritan’s response to the wounded man, yet turns away again and continues his journey, for his turning around and continuing his journey will precisely *be* his response to the Samaritan and his

¹³²⁴ In the Biblical original, the animal is not specified; given that the Samaritan puts the wounded man on it to bring him to the nearest inn, however, it can be assumed that it was an animal of this kind.

¹³²⁵ The original Greek text uses the word *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splagchnízomai*) which literally means as much as “to be *moved as* to one’s bowels [or generally one’s ‘inner parts’], hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)” (Blue Letter Bible, “*splagchnízomai*,” accessed 23.6.2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4697/kjv/tr/0-1/>).

¹³²⁶ The reason for this re-imagining is that it accommodates the notion of the *witness* in a more straightforward, and hence easier to examine, way than the Biblical original. In the Bible, no witness is mentioned; the one who comes closest to being a witness is the ‘lawyer’ to whom Jesus tells the story. Yet he is not a witness in the strict sense but someone who listens and imagines. That makes an important difference because he will, while still able to single out the neighbour among the three who came across the wounded man, not be struck by the neighbour in his manifest *otherness* but as a creation of his *own* imagination (an imagination which is, in turn, based on the story Jesus tells). On a meta-level, it is of course also us, the readers, who are, like the lawyer, ‘quasi-witnesses’ of the Samaritan and, thus, addressees of the lesson that Jesus seeks to teach by telling the story, namely that we all always already know what it means to be a neighbour (and, by extension, that it is *good* to be a neighbour.) This last point does not change in respect to my re-imagining. For a good discussion of the moral-philosophical relevance of the parable of the Good Samaritan, cf. Peter Winch’s influential paper “Who is my Neighbour?” (*Trying to Make Sense* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 154–66) as well as the debate that followed in its wake. Some noteworthy contributions of this debate will be mentioned in what follows.

¹³²⁷ All that the Biblical parable mentions in this respect is that “a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side”.

response to the wounded man.¹³²⁸ Thus, it seems to be what I, following Buber and Weil, have called a refusal or a rejection, namely of the claim to respond lovingly and, instead, to turn away.¹³²⁹

At the other end of the spectrum¹³³⁰ of possible responses stands the Levite's being deeply moved by the neighbourly love he sees displayed in the Samaritan's compassion for the wounded man. Whereas before, he was adamant about not letting the wounded man's presence interrupt his journey to Jericho, both because of his business there and because of the risk involved in stopping, he now sees that despite all this, he just has to help – indeed, he may not think about his plans and worries anymore at all because his attention is so fully on the scene that plays out before him, claiming him in wholehearted response.¹³³¹ Such a response may be called a change of heart – from callous and indifferent (cold- or hard-hearted) to compassionate and involved (warm- or open-hearted).¹³³² In that case, however, the Levite would not simply remain a witness in the sense of a detached spectator; in the light of the Samaritan's love for the wounded man, he, too, would come to see that it is of paramount importance that the wounded man be helped – and that, as he has the power to help,¹³³³ he, too, must help.

Of course, there lies a world of nuances and shades between cold-heartedly turning away and opening his heart in the way just sketched. In discussing the parable, Gustafsson thinks about what may have gone through the Samaritan's mind when facing the wounded man; however, the thoughts he ascribes to him may be used just as well, or perhaps even to a better

¹³²⁸ The implications of thought will be discussed in more detail below.

¹³²⁹ Cf. my discussion in chapter 5, section 1.b.

¹³³⁰ The two poles of the spectrum are, respectively, the unreservedly loving and the quasi-indifferent ('quasi' because, as was just remarked, even the most cold-hearted response would still be a response and, hence, not entirely indifferent).

¹³³¹ I develop this thought at length in "Goodness beyond Moral Necessity" (forthcoming), although in relation to the Samaritan in the Biblical original. The claim of the paper is, in a nutshell, that saying that the Samaritan's responds in a neighbourly way – i.e. that he is "moved with compassion" and nothing else – suggests that he does not 'act on reason', be it in the sense of explicit deliberation-cum-decision or in the sense of perceived practical-moral necessities (as Winch holds; cf. "Who is my Neighbour?," esp. 157–9.) The alternative notions that are central for characterising the Samaritan's response are *wholeheartedness* and *single-mindedness*. For a similar perspective, cf. Søren Kierkegaard, "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing," in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 24–154; for a critique of practical necessity, cf. *ibid.* 118–21.

¹³³² For a thorough discussion of the notion of *change of heart*, cf. Kamila Pacovská, "Remorse and Self-love: Kostelnička's Change of Heart," *The Journal of Ethics* 25 (2021): 467–86.

¹³³³ That is not to say that the Levite thus 'inspired' – and neither the Samaritan for that matter – are neighbourly or loving *because* they help. This is so, firstly, because they might help yet in an unloving spirit; secondly, a scenario can be easily imagined in which they would be practically decapacitated – for instance that they are severely maimed – yet nonetheless just as loving, namely simply in virtue of their being touched by the wounded man's fate, their feeling compassion and pity, and so on. Being a neighbour or being loving does not *as such* mean doing certain things or acting – it means doing them if they are demanded by love (which they will not be if they lie beyond one's power).

effect,¹³³⁴ to illustrate what may have gone through the mind of the re-imagined Levite who finds himself torn between continuing his journey and assisting the Samaritan:

[...] *I need to get home, Sarah and the children will be so worried and upset if I'm late this night as well ... and this is a really dangerous place ... I don't need to help him ... "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" ... but this cannot be my responsibility ... I'm no doctor ... maybe I'll do more damage than good ... and he seems like a really unpleasant guy ...but isn't he my neighbor? OK, OK, OK! I'll do it, I'll do it! Damn it, it's my bad luck, it's always my bad luck, I really hate this ...*¹³³⁵

Here, we have a Levite who still has a strong urge to leave the wounded man to his fate – or, rather, to the Samaritan's hands – so as to continue his journey, and for various reasons some of which are better (e.g. him being worried that he might do more harm than good) and some of which are worse (e.g. finding the man unpleasant.) Having his eyes opened to the urgency of the situation in the light of the Samaritan's love for the wounded man, however, he also has the sense that he *must* help. And of course, this is but one of countless scenarios in which his being torn may find expression. He may, for instance, also decide to continue walking, yet later be haunted by crippling remorse for not having helped. Or he may help but only in a rather half-hearted manner – for instance, he may be imagined to help partly due to his being roused by the Samaritan's loving responsiveness, yet partly also because he does not want to appear like a coward in the Samaritan's eyes. And so on.

ii. Goodness, Wonder, Extraordinariness

What would it mean to say that the Levite saw the Samaritan's neighbourly response to the wounded man as *good*? That is, what does it mean to say that he saw *goodness* manifested in it? To answer this question, let me first take a step back and reflect on the notion of goodness. Marina Barabas states that "it is a fact generally unnoted that goodness is of little concern to ethics"¹³³⁶ and that, while, in ethics, "we find 'good' as end or purpose, we seldom find goodness; while we find rational, moral or virtuous agent or person, we seldom find a good man or woman."¹³³⁷ As Barabas puts it, goodness is not the same as rationality, morality, or

¹³³⁴ That is, I think there are some problems in some of the thoughts Gustafsson ascribes to the Samaritan, such as that he may have been tempted not to help the wounded man because "he seems like a really unpleasant guy." If the Samaritan would have been thus tempted, he would not really be "the Good Samaritan."

¹³³⁵ Martin Gustafsson, "Perception, Perspectives and Moral Necessity Wittgenstein, Winch and the Good Samaritan," *Wittgenstein's Moral Thought*, ed. Reshef Agam-Segal & Edmund Dain (New York: Routledge, 2017), 201–21, at 206.

¹³³⁶ Marina Barabas, "In search of goodness," 82.

¹³³⁷ *Ibid.*

virtuousness in that the good person – that is, the person in whose deeds and responses goodness manifests – is not concerned with either principles, consistency, virtue, or nobility. The good person, rather, is concerned simply with *others*, and in such a way I have been referring to in the last chapters as *wholehearted*. Thus understood, the *good* person is simply the *loving* person,¹³³⁸ her lovingness marking her ‘whole being,’ the overall spirit with which she lives her life in relation to others. In this sense, the good person can be regarded as the ideal of what Buber simply calls ‘person,’¹³³⁹ that is, the individual who stands fully in the basic word of the I-You, unreservedly dwelling in the in-between. Accordingly, goodness – in the sense of the German *Güte* or the French *bonté*¹³⁴⁰ – can be taken to signify the loving spirit in which someone responds; by extension, it can be used as an attribute for the person in whom such a loving spirit appears to ‘go deep’.

This being said, the goodness that manifests in a particular response does not depend on its being rooted in, and emanating from, a good person; rather, it is in virtue of the goodness that manifests in someone’s responses – especially if it displays a certain constancy over time and in different relations – that we say of this someone that she is a good person.¹³⁴¹ This seems to be a characterisation that neatly fits to the Samaritan and his response to the wounded man – we do not know what kind of person he is ‘overall’, yet the goodness manifesting in how he tends to the wounded man indicates that he is a good person.¹³⁴²

¹³³⁸ This point is omitted in Barabas’ otherwise illuminating discussion of goodness in “In search of goodness.” On her account, love is listed as one of the responses to goodness (the others being wonder, awe, and gladness (ibid., 103). It is striking in that the list she gives of literary examples of ‘good persons’ – Alyosha Karamazov, Caleb Garth, Mishkin, Daniel Deronda, and Billy Budd (ibid., 102) – all seem to me to be ‘good in their lovingness’. I think the reason why Barabas refrains from speaking of goodness in terms of love, or lovingness, is that she has a wider notion of love than I do, one that comprises what I have spoken of in terms of ‘substantive love’ in the previous chapter as well as all kinds of relations in which it may appear that love is less-than-good, perhaps even destructive (as, for instance, Othello’s love for Desdemona (cf. Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 27)). This comes out clearly in her discussion of the difference between *philia* and *eros* as well as that between ‘love that seeks to possess’ and ‘love that respects proper limits’ in “Transcending the Human,” 214–7. This discussion is illuminated by the one she provides in her “Critical Notice on Nussbaum’s *The Fragility of Goodness*,” *Philosophical Investigations* 12, no. 1 (1989): 63–9, esp. at 68–9.

¹³³⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 114–5.

¹³⁴⁰ I mention this because it seems to me that the German and the French words have still retained more of their original moral weight than has the English goodness which, I presume, many would simply understand as the nominalisation of the adjective ‘good’. Gaita seeks to bring this moral weight to the fore by speaking of goodness “that invites a capital G” (*Good and Evil*, xiv).

¹³⁴¹ This differentiation between the goodness that manifests in particular responses and that which manifests in a person in a deeper, more encompassing way is also not mentioned by Barabas.

¹³⁴² It should be noted that what strikes one as a manifestation of goodness in a certain response or a sequence of actions – such as the Samaritan’s – may later come to appear as less-than-good or even straightforwardly bad or evil when seen in the wider context of the person in question. If, say, we would follow the Samaritan home and thus find out that he is a violent husband and father as well as a corrupt businessman, then his response to the wounded man would appear quite differently from how it appeared without any such context. Part of the point of the parable, on the other hand, is to show that one does not need to know a person’s life and personality in order to see him responding to others in a neighbourly way. Indeed, I would even go so far as to say that knowing about a person’s life and her personality may impede a fully open responsiveness to the other’s response here

Now, unlike in the case of the moral or the virtuous person, it makes little sense to ask *in virtue of what* the good person is good – or, differently put, what the good person’s goodness *consists in*. I just described it in terms of love or lovingness, and I think that this is the best way of putting it, yet doing so does not *explain* the goodness;¹³⁴³ rather, that putting it like this is meaningful depends on our simply agreeing that love simply *is* good¹³⁴⁴ (a point to which I will return below). When it comes to moral principles, it is their necessity and undeniability that in a certain sense explains their rightness; when it comes to virtue, the fact that one sees it as noble testifies to one’s finding it worthy of praise – yet when it comes to goodness, there is nothing beyond it, or apart from it, that one can point to in order to illuminate what it consists in. Goodness is what it is simply in virtue of striking one in the way it does.¹³⁴⁵ But how *does* it strike one? As Barabas puts it, goodness inspires wonder, awe, gladness, or joy¹³⁴⁶ and in ways that, as Gaita says, compels one “to affirm its rightness.”¹³⁴⁷ Furthermore, the deed or response in which goodness manifests, and/or the good person whose deed or response it is, stands out from its environment: “however interwoven with the ordinary, absolute value is extraordinary,”¹³⁴⁸ and in such a way that “the ‘extraordinary’ is not just the (statistically) exceptional, but is experienced as the ‘extraordinary’; more worryingly, it may run counter to the ‘ordinary’ moral beliefs and responses.”¹³⁴⁹ That something strikes one as a manifestation of goodness at all, in other words, already implicates the awareness of a chasm between it and what surrounds it.

iii. Being Blind to Goodness?

Let me apply these two points to the case of our Levite. Regarding the first – that being struck by goodness finds expression in wonder, awe, and being compelled to affirm its rightness –

and now, precisely because one may be tempted to see him in the light of his life instead of letting the present speak for itself.

¹³⁴³ Another way of bringing this out is that, in a moral context, it is usually the terms ‘good’ and ‘goodness’ that are used in order to explain, or shed further light on, other phenomena or concepts. For instance, it makes sense to answer the question “Why be virtuous?” with “Because being virtuous means being good” or “Because a virtuous person is a good person” but it makes little sense to answer the question “Why be good?” with “Because being good means being virtuous” or “Because a good person is a virtuous person.”

¹³⁴⁴ This brings to mind Wittgenstein’s well-known remark that “[i]t is not only agreement in definitions but also (odd as it may sound) in judgments that is required” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 242); I read R. F. Holland’s ‘Is Goodness a Mystery’, especially its discussion of Wittgensteinian judgments of absolute value (94–7; discussed already in chaptre 3, section 1.c.ii.) as an excellent exercise in transposing this remark into the moral domain.

¹³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 96–7.

¹³⁴⁶ Barabas, “In search of goodness,” 103.

¹³⁴⁷ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xiii.

¹³⁴⁸ Barabas, “In search of goodness,” 84.

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

seems to be on point with respect to the Levite of whom it was said that witnessing the Samaritan made him undergo a change of heart. But what about the Levite who responds by turning away? Now, if ‘being struck’ is simply defined in terms of wonder, awe, and affirmation, then obviously this Levite, as I have described him, will not be struck because none of these three apply to him. Certainly, too, he will not judge what he beholds as good, as a manifestation of goodness.¹³⁵⁰ In the light of my discussion of what it means to reject the invitation to respond lovingly, however, it seems that even the Levite who would, as it were, harden his heart, turn away, and indulge in thinking derisively of such do-gooders as the Samaritan, would still be touched by what he perceives, namely the Samaritan’s love – indeed, his hardening his heart would, as pointed out above, precisely *be* his response to this love. But it seems to me that in the case of such a striking manifestation of love, such a however faint inkling of ‘already-being-touched’ that resides even in the most spiteful or destructive response to it is *at the same time* a however faint affirmation of its goodness. That is to say: of course, the Levite who is filled with spite when seeing the Samaritan tend to the wounded man will not say (either to himself or to others) that he sees goodness in what he is witnessing – if he would, then his response would not be one of spite; this being said, the reason that he responds with spite is that there is a however obfuscated or repressed part in him who *does* affirm what he witnesses – and that, accordingly, his spite is the way in which, in this concrete scenario, his response to this foregoing response (his ‘disaffirmation of his affirmation’, as it were) finds expression.¹³⁵¹

But what, then, of yet another version of the Levite, one who, in seeing the Samaritan rushing to the wounded man, is simply ‘left cold’. Remaining entirely unfazed by, and indifferent to, what he sees, he turns away again as if what he just saw was nothing but, say, a stone toppling down a slope or dead tree branch falling to the earth. Does he, or does he not, in doing so respond to the Samaritan? Let me approach this question via a brief detour. In “The Iliad or the Poem of Force,” Simone Weil famously states that “[a]nybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power that belongs to him alone,

¹³⁵⁰ That goodness involves judgment is claimed by Nykänen (*The ‘I’, the ‘You’, and the soul*, 320); he does not make it clear what exactly he means by that but if it entails ‘perceiving and affirming *as* good(ness)’, then the thoughts I will now proceed to develop will go against what Nykänen says.

¹³⁵¹ Compare this to the following scenario: the Levite, turning around, sees the Samaritan rushing over to the wounded man in order to see whether he can steal any gold teeth from him. If the Levite would, say, find this funny, that will manifestly reveal that he is twisted and has a twisted sense of humour. But what would be twisted about him and his humour? It seems to me that, in order to be able to find the scene as it plays out before him funny, he would have to quite literally twist it, namely from how it actually touches or moves him – namely as something terrible, despicable, even *evil* – into something that he can find pleasure in. Again, it would be the response to his own response – the denial, rejection, or repression of his sense of the terribleness and evil – which would merit speaking of his finding it funny as *unloving*.

that is, the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out.”¹³⁵² However, she says this directly after describing how Achilles “with a single movement of his hand”¹³⁵³ pushes the old King of Troy, Priam, away „as if, clasping his knees, there were not a suppliant but an inert object.”¹³⁵⁴ In discussing this passage by Weil (alongside Wolgast’s criticism of it), Hertzberg observes that “‘*ignoring others without a qualm*’ or ‘*acting as if others were not present*’ are also descriptions of ways of relating to others, ways of relating whose peculiar character is dependent on the alternative ways of acting that we expect in the situation.”¹³⁵⁵ The crucial observation follows several lines further down:

Who will be deemed to be affected by someone’s acting or failing to act depends on how the situation is viewed. On this score, the perspective of the agent may differ from that of the spectator (or that of someone putatively affected by the action), and they would accordingly describe the action in different terms. A spectator might think the agent is neglecting certain demands that she herself does not acknowledge or of which she is not aware.¹³⁵⁶

Applying this to Weil’s rendering of Achilles treatment of Priam: the answer to the question whether or not Achilles is in fact wholly unfazed by, and completely indifferent to, Priam will depend on the perspective of the one who is speaking about it. So even if some, including perhaps Achilles himself, may say that Achilles indeed registers no difference between Priam as he clutches his leg and some lifeless object, others may say that there *is* a difference, a difference which, as Hertzberg further notes, Weil indeed invites us to see when she writes that Achilles pushes Priam away ‘*as if he were a lifeless object*’¹³⁵⁷ – if Achilles would have indeed responded to Priam *in exactly the same way* in which he may have responded to a lifeless object, he would not have responded to him *as if he were a lifeless object*.

Applying the idea to our example of the ‘indifferent Levite’ will involve one further reflective step in that we are now not anymore looking at the response of the ‘agent’ – which in this case would be the Samaritan (and which, in Weil’s text, was Achilles’) – but at that of the spectator, or witness, of the agent. Still, the basic point is the same: whether or not the Levite will be seen as absolutely indifferent will depend on the perspective of the witness – that is, of the witness’ witness (the Levite being the witness who is being witnessed.) The thrust of the

¹³⁵² Simone Weil, *An Anthology*, 187.

¹³⁵³ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁵ Lars Hertzberg, “On Being Neighbourly,” 30; emphasis in the original.

¹³⁵⁶ Ibid., 31

¹³⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

thought becomes clear: no matter whose response stands at issue, describing whether it does or does not reflect absolute indifference or not cannot be stated from some kind of detached viewpoint but only from yet another witness perspective, just as engaged. But that eventually directs the pointer back at *me* and *you*, that is: to those who witness – or in our case (as that of the lawyer to whom Jesus tells the parable) *imagine* – the entire scenario, comprising all imagined spectators and witnesses, unfold. This, it seems to me, is ‘where the spade eventually turns back.’¹³⁵⁸ So, we – I and you – have to ask ourselves: can *we* truthfully imagine that the Levite who sees the Samaritan responding with wholehearted compassion to the wounded man can be left absolutely cold by what he thus witnesses?¹³⁵⁹

Before answering this question, I think that another important observation by Strandberg should be borne in mind. Strandberg’s observation is made in relation to absolute evil yet I think it holds just as well in respect to absolute indifference (– indeed, it seems to me that radical indifference would be, if not *the*, then at least *a* form of absolute evil):

Saying that someone is absolutely evil is to say that remorse is not within the horizon of her possibilities, and the problem with saying this is not only that it is far from clear how one can claim to know that this is so, but first and foremost that saying this is to give up hope about her: she will never come to even an inkling of moral understanding of what she has done. And this not only concerns my relation to her; speculating about such a possibility risks making one’s own conscience turbid.¹³⁶⁰

Adjusting this remark to the case of the Levite’s indifference to the scene he witnesses, one could say that assuming the possibility of his indifference being absolute means assuming that it is possible that being roused, or having his eyes opened, to the moral significance of the situation would be beyond the ‘horizon of his possibilities’. The two interconnected problems with this are, firstly, that this effectively means excluding the Levite from the sphere of morality altogether and, secondly, that doing so seems to be morally problematic in its own right. Thus, it can be said with Nykänen that “the question as to what it is to be ‘actually’ without conscience is a moral question.”¹³⁶¹

¹³⁵⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217. (My present point is a rather free appropriation of that made by Wittgenstein.)

¹³⁵⁹ This is not supposed to be a rhetoric question. At the same time, however, it is also an expression of my hope (as well as my trust and faith) that you, in fact, cannot imagine it.

¹³⁶⁰ Hugo Strandberg, “Is Pure Evil Possible?,” in *The Problem of Evil: New Philosophical Directions*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw & Robert Arp (Lanham, ML: Lexington Books, 2016), 23–34, at 32.

¹³⁶¹ Hannes Nykänen, *The “I”, the “You”, and the soul*, 321.

iv. Goodness as Extraordinary

Barabas holds that wonder, awe, joy, and love are responses to goodness; above, I sought to show that an absence of such responses does not mean that goodness is not encountered, precisely because ‘not seeing goodness’ means ‘turning away from goodness’ – that is, rejecting or repressing it (and, thus, rejecting and repressing the responses it would otherwise give rise to.) Let me now turn to the second claim Barabas about what it means to witness goodness, namely that it is encountered as *extraordinary*. Again, my aim will be, not to reject, but rather to complicate Barabas’ account. The aim of doing so is – apart from getting a clearer view of the nuances of what is at stake – to pave the way for the discussion in the next section and for the understanding of goodness that I will expound in it.

Now, in which sense does it make sense to speak of goodness as extraordinary? In the case of our reimagined parable of the Good Samaritan, it is easy to imagine that the Levite sees the Samaritan’s response to the wounded man as extraordinary – in the qualitative sense of ‘better than the ordinary’ rather than the quantitative ‘less frequent’ – and in various respects. Let me point to some of what may strike the Levite as extraordinary in the Samaritan: The Samaritan helps the man 1) despite the fact that he is a stranger to whom the Samaritan has no familial or filial ties, 2) although the wounded man – who is also described as “half dead” – seems to be unconscious and does not plead or appeal to the Samaritan, let alone make any demands upon him (meaning that the Samaritan’s response is thus not an answer to anything the half dead man ‘does’)¹³⁶², 3) despite the fact that helping the man means interrupting his own endeavour, namely travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, an interruption, moreover, which 4) due to the man’s predicament, is not just a simple and quick matter but will presumably take a lot of time and energy, and which thus 5) involves a real risk that the Samaritan may suffer the same fate as the man (after all, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was known to attract highwaymen of just the kind that robbed the man) – meaning that 6) the Samaritan would not have undertaken the journey unless he had important business to attend in Jericho; to this, it must be added that 7) the Samaritan is part of an ethnoreligious group that is at enmity with the Jews and that 8) the Samaritan is neither a priest nor a Levite and, hence, he would be expected to be uneducated in the divine laws that lay out how one ought to behave towards others. To sum up: the Samaritan responds lovingly a) despite the fact that he has no personal attachment or attraction to the wounded man, b) despite the fact that it is at odds with his own undertakings,

¹³⁶² Recall that the address that is made with what Buber calls the ‘whole being’ is not dependent on the You having one’s attention on, or intentionally to, the I.

c) in spite of various socio-political reasons counting against it, and d) despite the fact that he is unlearned as regards the *mores*.

Given the urgency of the situation, it may, of course, be very well the case that the Levite, in beholding the Samaritan, may not be aware of all these factors. Yet, I think he will have a quite immediate grasp of, and be struck by, at least some of them. (I would imagine that he would be taken aback especially by the fact that the one who helps the wounded man in such a compassionate way is, of all people, a *Samaritan*.) However, being struck by the Samaritan's *extraordinariness in tending to the wounded man all these various odds notwithstanding*, is not the same as being struck by the *extraordinariness of his goodness*. This becomes clear when one imagines that the Levite, for whatever reason, knows that the Samaritan only helps the man because, say, he is paid for it. In that case, helping the man in the face of all the various obstacles and challenges will not appear as a display of extraordinary goodness anymore but, if anything, of an extraordinary commitment to getting rewarded for it. But that is not so – the Samaritan helps because he is “moved with compassion.” And so, it would seem that his helping the man in the face of all of the various obstacles and challenges is a display of extraordinary goodness because they all serve to bring out more prominently, to accentuate, the purity of his neighbourliness. He is so strongly moved by compassion when he sees the wounded man, in other words, that all the various factors that may otherwise count as reasons for continuing the journey count for nothing.

This connects to a related point: I think most of us would regard at least *some* of the factors I just listed as reasons for at least *considering* not to help the wounded man. Some may care less or none about some and more about others, but it is hard to imagine that someone might remain unfazed by all of them. But that seems to be the case when it comes to the Samaritan as I described him: not only does he interrupt his journey although various factors would count against doing so – he does not even seem to consider any of these factors *as* factors for continuing on any longer. He sees the wounded man and simply rushes over to him as if it were a given, a matter of course (which, maybe for him, it is.)¹³⁶³ So, the Samaritan is extraordinary – ‘extraordinary in his goodness’ – in two respects: he is extraordinary in that he, moved by compassion, helps the wounded man *at all* despite the fact that there are various factors in play which, from an ‘ordinary perspective’, appear as incentives not to do so – yet

¹³⁶³ This is, in a nutshell, the point I raised in a footnote at the beginning of the present discussion, namely that in the case of the Samaritan, the response (compassion) seems to translate directly into a deed (helping) without practical reason coming in as a mediating instance. Even describing the Samaritan as being morally necessitated to help the wounded man then appears misleading because it suggests not only a sense of obligation but also entails that he perceived other practical alternatives as morally impossible.

his response becomes even more extraordinary if it is assumed that, due to the “purity of his compassion,”¹³⁶⁴ he does not at all care about, perhaps not even consider, any of these incentives any longer.¹³⁶⁵

There are two sides to how the kind of goodness in question may stand out as extraordinary from its context, namely in relation to *the individual witnessing it* and in relation to the respective *social standards*. Barabas does not differentiate between the two yet I think they are important. (Indeed, it seems to me that in what Barabas says about the ordinary, she appears to gravitate to conceiving of it in terms of the latter, or even to integrate the former into the latter.) Let me explain what I mean. One way of speaking about someone’s goodness appearing extraordinary is that it may simply stand out from how *people* would *generally* tend to act, or respond. But that leaves open in what relation the witness stands to what is ordinary, to the behaviour that people generally tend to display. Of course, the Levite *may* be part of ‘the people’. If the people around the Levite, including the Levite himself, would have generally not responded in such a neighbourly way in which he now witnesses the Samaritan to respond, then he may find the Samaritan’s neighbourliness extraordinary. It may perhaps even be imagined that, as far as the Levite can see, *no one* (including himself) would have *ever* even conceived of responding in a way in which he just witnesses the Samaritan to respond. In this case, the Samaritan’s response would have exploded what the Levite took to be the horizon of moral-practical possibilities,¹³⁶⁶ thus striking him in an even more forceful way.¹³⁶⁷

It is also possible, however, that the witness may, at least in respect to the situation at hand, not be part of the ordinary. One way in which the witness may diverge from the ordinary is in his ‘undercutting’ it. That is, it can be imagined that it would be quite normal for the people

¹³⁶⁴ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 20.

¹³⁶⁵ To put it in Kierkegaard’s terms: he is not *double-* but *single-minded* (cf. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 24–30.) For a helpful discussion of the kind of attitude that Kierkegaard is after and that I ascribe to the Samaritan, cf. Jeremy D. B. Walker, *To Will One Thing: Reflections on Kierkegaard’s Purity of Heart* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972), 128–44.

¹³⁶⁶ I think that it is quite imaginable for someone to think along such lines. The problem with such a thought, however, is that there is not way for him – or anyone else – to ever check up on whether it is actually true, i.e. whether in fact no one (in his social environment) would ever conceive of responding in such a way. In other words, what may appear from one’s own standpoint as a certain, socially shared horizon of practical-moral possibilities might, on closer look, reveal itself to be much less homogenous (and, thus, not as a genuine horizon at all.)

¹³⁶⁷ It may be worth noting that in such a case, the Levite’s witnessing the Samaritan would have altered his entire conception of what counts as ordinary and extraordinary responses to a situation such as the one the Samaritan found himself in. For instance, it could be imagined that, before having witnessed the Samaritan, the Levite would have found it ‘ordinary’ for people to simply walk past someone lying half dead in the ditch and ‘extraordinary’ if someone would have stopped briefly, splashed some water on the wounded man’s face so as to wake him up again, and leave some oil and wine next to him so that the man could have tried to look after himself. Before this background, the Samaritan’s response would have been more extraordinary than other extraordinary responses, thus making what had previously been an extraordinary response into one that is less extraordinary.

that populate the Levite's social environment to show the kind of dedicated neighbourliness to others with which the Samaritan attends the wounded man – and that the Levite would, as it were, be the black sheep that stands out in his selfish callousness.¹³⁶⁸ Now, if this version of the Levite were to see the Samaritan tending to the wounded man, he would most likely not acknowledge, but rather reject and repress, being touched by what he sees. After all, he had been surrounded by this kind of behaviour his entire life and still remained unloving – perhaps his cold-heartedness was even the result of a certain kind of twisted response precisely to the neighbourliness that was all around him. Accordingly, it would be quite striking – quite extraordinary, in fact – if he would suddenly be able to open up to the scene he witnesses. That it would not be *impossible*, however, is something I hopefully managed to show over the course of this chapter. So, imagine that he would indeed suddenly find himself moved by the Samaritan's response to the man. In that case, he would not see the Samaritan's response as extraordinary in relation to *what people generally do*; after all, it would be normal for people to show this kind of neighbourliness. Yet still, it may strike him as wondrous and stand out to him as manifestly *good*. Perhaps it would be somewhat misleading to say in such a case that the Levite would see the Samaritan's response as *extraordinary* given the notion's social connotation. But even so, the Samaritan would *stand out* for him – yet only in relation to *him*, to *his* character and to what appears to *him* as normal ways of responding to a situation such as the one at hand.¹³⁶⁹ In this sense, it seems that the comparison with what people would generally do, how they would generally respond in a situation like this one, is not intrinsic to someone's being struck by another's goodness.¹³⁷⁰

It is also possible, however, that the witness may diverge from the ordinary in the opposite way, namely by being 'better' than the bulk of people. Imagine, for instance, that the Levite, in seeing the wounded man, is moved with wholehearted compassion to help him – and that, when he approaches him, he suddenly sees the Samaritan kneeling next to him, also filled with compassion and a desire to do whatever he can to save the man. In such a situation, it would seem that either the Levite will not take a marked interest in the Samaritan at all – after all, it is of paramount importance to save the half-dead man – or, if he *would* take note of him, he would simply be filled with gladness, gratitude, and a sense of relief that there is someone else who is so passionate about helping the wounded man. Internal to this response would be his understanding that it cannot simply be expected that others would respond in such a helpful

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way and that, in this sense, the Samaritan's response *is* extraordinary. In other words, the Levite would *not* be struck by the Samaritan's *goodness* – after all, there is no marked difference between how he, the Levite, and the Samaritan respond to the wounded man; hence, seeing the Samaritan respond to the wounded man would *not* make him aware of his own relative shortcomings. Instead, the Levite would see as manifestly *good* that the Samaritan takes the situation so seriously and shows such unwavering commitment to saving the man's life. This latter notion of goodness – the goodness of neighbourliness *as such*, apart from any comparison, one could say – seems to differ from the one Barabas has in mind.¹³⁷¹ (In order for goodness in Barabas' sense of *Güte* and *bonté* to become an issue in the present scenario, it would thus require the perspective of someone else, a witness of the kind described in the previous paragraph.)

I think that these reflections on what it means for goodness to be extraordinary are important, both because they call attention to issues that Barabas (and Gaita) do not address (or perhaps fail to see) and because I think they point towards another – and in my view: better or 'fuller' – understanding of the relation between love, goodness, and morality. To this effect, I now turn away from the discussion of my re-imagined parable of the Good Samaritan and towards the thinkers in whose thought I see the tension at work.

b. Saintly Love

I think the issues I just called attention to become clearly apparent in Raimond Gaita's autobiographical example of a transformative encounter with an extraordinarily good and loving person. In the 1960s, when he was seventeen years old, Gaita worked as an assistant in a mental ward in Australia.¹³⁷² As Gaita describes it, the relation between much of the staff and the patients – people whom he describes as “having irretrievably lost everything that gives meaning to our lives”¹³⁷³ – was more like that between zoo-keepers and animals than that between human beings. When the patients soiled themselves, for instance, the nurses mopped them down from the distance “as zoo keepers wash down elephants.”¹³⁷⁴ All in all, the patients were for the most part “treated brutishly,”¹³⁷⁵ the exception being “a small number of psychiatrists”¹³⁷⁶ who spoke of “the inalienable *dignity* of even those patients”¹³⁷⁷ and who

¹³⁷¹ I will discuss this alternative understanding of goodness below in 2.c.iii.

¹³⁷² Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 17.

¹³⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

worked “devotedly to improve their conditions.”¹³⁷⁸ Against this background, Gaita describes his first meeting with said good person as follows:

One day a nun came to the ward. In her middle years, only her vivacity made an impression on me until she talked to the patients. Then everything in her demeanour towards them – the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body – contrasted with and showed up the behaviour of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this.¹³⁷⁹

As Gaita describes it, “the purity of the love”¹³⁸⁰ with which the nun engaged with the patients revealed his own and the psychiatrists’ ways of relating to them as condescending. Yet this was but one side of the coin of what was revealed by the nun’s love, the other side being its power to reveal the reality of the patients. This is how Gaita puts it:

I felt irresistibly that her behaviour was directly shaped by the reality which it revealed [...] [H]er behaviour was striking not for the virtues it expressed, or even the good it achieved, but for its power to reveal the full humanity of those whose affliction had made their humanity invisible. Love is the name we give such behaviour. [...] For me, the purity of the love proved the reality of what it revealed.¹³⁸¹

To put it somewhat schematically, Gaita’s encounter with the nun and her love – the wonder and awe it inspired in him – directed his attention in two directions at the same time, namely in the direction of the patients, i.e. to their “reality” (a reality which, as Gaita describes it, is bound up with a sense of their “full humanity” and, thus, their equality)¹³⁸², and in the direction of himself and the psychiatrists, i.e. to what had then been revealed as their condescension towards the patients. However, these two revelations – or perhaps rather: these two sides of Gaita’s (single) revelation – were not on a par; rather, the former was logically prior to the latter: it was in the light of the nun’s love opening his eyes to the patients’ reality that his own (and the psychiatrists’) condescension was revealed.

¹³⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁷⁹ Ibid., 18–9.

¹³⁸⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁸¹ Ibid., 20–1.

¹³⁸² I will later cast a critical light on Gaita’s interlocking of the notions of ‘reality’ and ‘common humanity’.

There are some significant parallels and differences between Gaita's anecdote of his witnessing the nun's love for her patients and my re-imagined story of the Levite – at least the version in which he undergoes a change of heart witnessing the Samaritan's love for the wounded man. In both examples, those who witness the love are struck by it with wonder and awe and moved by it, just as the love they witness makes both come to see the situation in a new light. Moreover, both Gaita and the Levite come to recognise and acknowledge the goodness manifesting in the love they witness. However, there is one respect in which the two examples diverge and regarding which Gaita's account, so I hope to show, is caught up in some confusions – namely the sense in which the nun's love struck Gaita as *extraordinary*.

Witnessing the nun's love and the goodness manifesting in it was undoubtedly an extraordinary experience for Gaita. In the light of my above discussion of the different 'constellations' of the ordinary and the extraordinary, moreover, it can be said that the young Gaita was 'part of the ordinary,' that is, that he thought and spoke of moral matters more or less in the ways in which those around him *ordinarily* thought and spoke of moral matters. True, this 'ordinary' was itself in a certain sense quite extraordinary; after all, the group of psychiatrists whose conception of morality he had come to adopt were quite extraordinary – quite modern, morally progressive,¹³⁸³ and very much the exception – and not only within the precincts of the mental ward but presumably also beyond them. Still, they were part of the ordinary insofar as they, just as all others, did not relate lovingly to the patients – indeed, insofar as they did not, as Gaita puts it, see the patients as the possible objects of *anyone's* love.¹³⁸⁴ This comes out, for example, when Gaita, approvingly citing Rush Rhees' remark that individuality "means little more than 'something that can be loved,'" ¹³⁸⁵ adds that: "'something that *can* be loved' (my emphasis). Not anything can be."¹³⁸⁶ As Gaita presents it, the 1960s Australia was a time and place in which it was simply out of the question for people to respond lovingly to individuals like the patients – in which no one saw them as lovable and, hence, in which no one *could* love to them. Gaita thus seems to undercut, or fails to see, that his own account conflates two ways in which the nun struck him: on the one hand, he was struck by the

¹³⁸³ Cf. Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 19.

¹³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 & Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 146; I think, however, that in these two passages, Gaita reveals a marked shortcoming of the picture he offers. In *A Common Humanity*, 26, he writes "We would not even find it intelligible, I think, that we have obligations to those whom we do not love unless we saw them as being the intelligible beneficiaries of someone's love." Just a few pages earlier, however, Gaita describes himself and the psychiatrists in a way that suggests that they felt very much obligated towards the patients *already before seeing them in the light of the nun's love*. I hope to shed light on this apparent incongruity on the following pages.

¹³⁸⁵ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxiii.

¹³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

purity of her love for the patients while, on the other, he was struck simply by the fact that she *did* – that she *could* – respond lovingly to them at all.¹³⁸⁷

Right before the just quoted passage from *Good and Evil*, Gaita states that “the language of love, historically shaped by and shaping the work of love, yields to us a sense of love’s object that makes the love *seem right*.”¹³⁸⁸ The implication is that if someone in Gaita’s social environment in the 1960s would have tried to describe her own or someone else’s response to people like the patients in the mental ward as *loving*, or would have tried to describe the patients with the kind of language normally used to describe those we *love*, then this would simply not have ‘seemed right’ – perhaps it would have appeared like a joke or a case of sentimentality or a metaphorical use of such language but not as something that could be meant in a serious and lucid way.¹³⁸⁹

Together with the reflections of the previous paragraph, this points to a notion of ‘the ordinary’ that is both very wide and very ‘sturdy’, perhaps one could even say *grammatical*, namely one revolving around what, at a given point in time in a given socio-cultural formation, is *intelligible* as a certain kind of response – such as a loving one. Simply put, it was within the limits of the ordinary (in this wide sense) that parents and children may love one another, that two friends may love one another, that a man may love a woman and vice versa – perhaps even that there may be something like homosexual love (but this would have probably already strained the limits of intelligibility for at least some) – and even that there could be the kind of neighbourly love towards total strangers, even towards enemies, as it is described in the New Testament. However, it was not within the bounds of the (ordinarily) conceivable that people as broken and afflicted as the patients in the ward could be loved. Yet if such a love is not *conceivable* then there *is* no such love – for nothing that is done or said will count as an instance of such love.¹³⁹⁰

Thus understood, the nun’s love was not only neighbourly but more than that. That is, while the example of the Samaritan’s love – at least when read from a modern day vantage point – serves as a *reminder* of something we all at some basic level know and see, namely that everyone is a neighbour and ought to be treated like one, the nun’s love – at least for Gaita at the time he witnessed it – revealed something radically new, something hitherto unforeseen, namely that even those patients were ‘the intelligible object of someone’s love’ and, thus, that

¹³⁸⁷ As will become clearer below, these are, for Gaita, two sides of the same coin: precisely because the patients are unlovable, loving them requires a love that is pure, i.e. a love that is not conditional upon anything *about* them but only on *them* qua individuals.

¹³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

¹³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, xxiii—xxv & Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 26.

¹³⁹⁰ This is a continuation of the thought that I began to develop in section 1.a.v.

they *were* neighbours just like anyone else. This is, I take it, why Gaita describes her, and her love, as *saintly*:¹³⁹¹ like a quasi-divine intervention, her love, as it were, changed the rules of the game – changed what love could mean and, thus, changed the language of love.¹³⁹² Again, the contrast that Gaita invokes is important, for talking about *saintly* love only makes sense where there is also the *non-saintly* love – and when Gaita goes on to talk about absolute goodness of the kind reflected in the nun’s love in terms such as “otherworldly,”¹³⁹³ “absurd,”¹³⁹⁴ “wondrous,”¹³⁹⁵ a “miracle”¹³⁹⁶, or, following Holland, “mysterious,”¹³⁹⁷ then this, in turn, implies the assumption that there also is the worldly, mundane, and intelligible love that does not manifest (absolute) goodness.¹³⁹⁸

In order to get a better sense of the nuances – and tensions – of Gaita’s account, it is instructive to look at how he speaks of “parents who love a child who has become a vicious and vile adult.”¹³⁹⁹ Shortly after recounting his encounter with the nun, he writes: “Were it not for the love saints have shown for the most terrible criminals, were it not for the generalising authority of such love which we take to apply to all human beings, the love of mothers to their criminal children would appear to be merely the understandable but limited love of mothers.”¹⁴⁰⁰ In Gaita’s description, two things come together, namely, on the one hand, what I just called the ‘worldly’ or ‘mundane’ – and what I termed ‘ordinary’ before – in the form of “the understandable but limited love of mothers” and, on the other, the otherworldly, miraculous – ‘extraordinary’ – “love saints have shown for the most terrible criminals.” The resulting picture is one in which motherly love may, on certain exceptional occasions, have a similar revelatory power as saintly love because – yet only to the extent that – it has been illuminated by saintly love ‘proper.’ The contrast that Gaita points to is that in being confronted with saintly love ‘proper,’ we first realise that there exists a kind of love that is dependent neither on any

¹³⁹¹ Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 24–26 & esp. in the ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ of *Good and Evil*.

¹³⁹² *Ibid.*, xxiii.

¹³⁹³ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 50; although he does not use the term “supernatural”, he quotes Weil approvingly when she speaks about “the supernatural virtue of justice” (Simone Weil, ‘Forms of the Implicit Love of God’, in *Waiting on God* (Glasgow: Collins Fountain Books, 1977), 100; quoted from Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 193), justice for her being closely connected to love.

¹³⁹⁴ Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxviii.

¹³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, e.g. xvii.

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxi; again, he uses the term in connection with Weil, yet again in a seemingly approving manner.

¹³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 210

¹³⁹⁸ It must be added that in the ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, Gaita states that he regrets speaking about the kind of absolute goodness he is after in terms of other-worldliness and mystery; the reason why he regrets it, however, is that they come with a theoretical baggage he would rather not carry (*ibid.*, xxx–xxxii). Thus, he does not seem to question his distinction between two radically different kinds of love, the one manifesting absolute goodness of the kind which is, in a certain sense, incomprehensible and the other being comprehensible yet without manifesting goodness of that kind.

¹³⁹⁹ Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 24.

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

inclinations or the like (such as in romantic or erotic love) nor on any emotional attachments (such as in familial love) but which is a love for nothing but the other qua “unique and irreplaceable”¹⁴⁰¹ individual. The reverse implication is that in a world untouched by “the works of saintly love,”¹⁴⁰² human love would – *could* – only ever be of a worldly kind, that is, conditional upon precisely the just mentioned inclinations, personal attachments, or the like. (In other words: love would be a matter of longing for the object of one’s love due to what one lacks without it.)¹⁴⁰³ It is in the light of saintly love, then, as it has come to shape our culture over centuries that even such cases of a mother’s love for an “evil” child – as such intelligible as an ordinary, worldly attachment, although of an exceptional kind – may appear as more than worldly but instead as reflecting the ‘radical unconditionality’¹⁴⁰⁴ of saintly love. One could thus say that, historically speaking, we are part of a culture in which, as regards love, the ‘ordinary’ has become deeply interfused with the ‘extraordinary’ – or, to put it in a more down to earth language: unconditional love, in all of its absurd otherworldliness is, for us, in a certain sense a ‘normal’ thing.

The thoughts propounded in this previous paragraph, however, stand in a marked tension with what came before. While before it sounded as if Gaita holds the view that the 1960s Australia was a place in which love for people like the patients was literally unthinkable, it was now stated that he thinks that the works of saintly love have been shaping the (Western) world and its conception of love for centuries. Now, in a plain, factual sense, it is obviously the latter that is true. But what, then, of the former? As Gaita does not address this issue, it is up to me to try to fill the gap. I think the best sense can be made of Gaita’s picture if we differentiate

¹⁴⁰¹ Ibid., xxii.

¹⁴⁰² Ibid., xxiv.

¹⁴⁰³ This calls for a qualification: Given the central role of Plato’s notion of *the Good* in Gaita’s understanding of love, this must not be conceived of in plainly naturalistic terms. After all, it is in the last instance the Form of the Good that illuminates and inspires all of our sublunary longings as well as our longing for the Good itself. Of course, man’s striving towards the Good is not a matter of inclination or personal attachment. On the Platonic picture, however, even this striving only makes sense against the background that man is *lacking* with respect to it – in this regard, the worldly, finite *does* play a central role even in our love for the Good. The difference between the love for *the Good* and the love for that which we see *as good* in its light – including the mother’s love for her child, it would seem – is that the latter will appear to us as more or less lovable in relation to that in us which we lack. In this sense, it seems apt to say that our loves – always seeking to overcome our various lacks and shortcomings that we, qua finite beings, display – incline us towards, and lead to personal attachments to, some rather than other ‘objects’. For an analysis of the role this Platonic-Socratic (i.e. *erotic*) understanding of love plays in Gaita’s thought, as well as of the tensions between it and the Christian themes in Gaita’s writings, cf. Cordner, “Gaita and Plato,” esp. at 52–4 & 63–5.

¹⁴⁰⁴ I speak of ‘radical unconditionality’ because Gaita’s discussion suggests a distinction between two ‘kinds’ of unconditionality, namely unconditional love that is partial (e.g. unconditional love of parents towards their children; *A Common Humanity*, 22) and unconditional love that is impartial (as the nun’s love towards the patients; *ibid.*, 24). I speak of the latter in terms of ‘radical’ unconditionality because it seems to me that ‘partial unconditionality’ is not *really* unconditional – after all, it is conditional upon a specific, exceptional bond or attachment to a particular individual.

between the language of love as it was available to Gaita at the time before he met the nun – which, as a child of his times, will have presumably been the language of love that was prevalent in his social environment – and the language of love which was available *as such*, as it were – that is, *historically* available, sedimented in our culture for centuries and still accessible to those who venture out to seek it.¹⁴⁰⁵ In this sense, I would read Gaita with Cordner and say that in his thought he is “undertaking conceptual and ethical recuperation”¹⁴⁰⁶ in order to reconnect us with a much richer language of love that has shaped our culture – which was, in turn, shaped by saintly love – and of which in today’s social and philosophical environment merely bloodless and inert shadows remain. One of these shadows is to be found precisely the secularisation of the concept of saintly love in the kind of Kantian talk of dignity and respect of which the psychiatrists were so fond and by which the young Gaita was so impressed.¹⁴⁰⁷

I think there would be much to discuss regarding the picture Gaita offers us and which I regret I cannot presently explore in more detail. However, I do want to expound one major reservation that I have with it, one that aims at the foundations of the picture that I have just outlined. At a later point in *A Common Humanity*, Gaita writes:

The responses that form and are formed by our sense of belonging to a common kind cannot be elicited by beings that do not look and behave like us. This is [...] because those responses are built into the concepts with which we identify what could be appropriate objects for our responses. This is a circle – a non-vicious circle – from which we cannot escape without losing the relevant concepts [...] For the same reason

¹⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Gaita, *Good and Evil*, xxiv: “Estrangement from the language of love – perhaps because we are suspicious of it, believing that it should be replaced by a rationally more attractive and tractable language of metaphysics – will prevent us from seeing clearly, perhaps from seeing at all, the distinctive kind of preciousness that human beings can have.”

¹⁴⁰⁶ Cordner, “Gaita and Plato,” 50.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Let me at this point hearken back to the above discussion of remorse and especially to what I said there regarding Gaita’s belated insight that remorse – at least when it is “sober and lucid” (*Good and Evil*, 9) – is supposedly bound up with saintly love. It would seem to me that, just as the white slave owners, the staff of the ward in which Gaita worked (including Gaita himself), were, on Gaita’s own account, not really capable of seeing the patients as individuals who could be seriously morally wronged and, accordingly, as individuals who could be treated in ways that could intelligibly elicit remorse. In the light of what Gaita adds to this view in the ‘Second Preface to Good and Evil,’ however, namely that “much of what I say about the ‘shock’ of remorse [...] requires a conception of the victim of one’s wrongdoing that has been informed by saintly love”, it seems that, after having witnessed the nun and her love, the ward staff – or at least those of them who were, like Gaita, touched by it – came to see that the patients could be wronged and that, accordingly, they were intelligible objects of remorse. What I said in the above discussion of Gaita’s view on remorse can thus be amended by adding that, on Gaita’s later view, even the slave owners were at least implicitly familiar with saintly love by virtue of their Christian heritage; just as in the case of the ward staff, however, this by itself would probably not have sufficed for them to open their eyes to the reality of their Black slaves, which means that they, too, stood in need of a saint-like person who, in showing pure love and compassion towards the slaves, could have opened their hearts (although even then, they may still not have recognised its authority.) While all this adds further nuance to Gaita’s picture, I think my basic point of criticism, developed above in section 1.a.v. holds.

we cannot [...] tell in advance all that we will count as looking and behaving like us. We have to see how we respond. And reflect on our responses of course.¹⁴⁰⁸

While I wholeheartedly agree with the two last sentences, what Gaita says before indicates that he takes them to mean something very different than I do – and something with which I do not agree. The main problem I have with this passage is that Gaita seems to suggest that there exists a rather clearly circumscribed “sense of belonging to a common kind” that forms our responses.¹⁴⁰⁹ As Hertzberg puts it, for Gaita, “thoughts about *who I am and what I share* with the other are assumed to have a role in the way I respond to him [i.e. the other].”¹⁴¹⁰ Yet, Hertzberg also crucially observes “that the notion of sharing something with the other plays a merely accidental part for my moral responsiveness”¹⁴¹¹ and that “[w]here the compassion is pure, on the other hand, no thoughts about myself enter in, nor are these thoughts required in order to justify my compassion. Obviously, the compassionate nun in Gaita’s example was someone who did not have to remind herself that the mental patients were human beings like her.”¹⁴¹² The point echoes those I have made in part one of this chapter and in a different form in the chapter before: there is no way of telling how someone – anyone, including oneself – may respond, that is, in relation to whom and in which way one may find oneself claimed in loving response. A certain cultural climate with a certain prevalent language of love may make it impossible for one to have words ready that are appropriate for describing such responses,¹⁴¹³ just as it may come with certain socio-normative pressures that stand in the way of acknowledging that what one experienced *was* a, say, compassionate response. But that does not mean that such extraordinary responses are not possible or that it requires some kind of divine intervention to make them possible – unless, of course, it is assumed that the divine is always already present, latently or in an actualised form, in our life shared with others.¹⁴¹⁴ In the language of Buber: the It-world, and the scope of possible I-It relations it may constitute

¹⁴⁰⁸ Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 269.

¹⁴⁰⁹ I had my attention called to this problem by an unpublished text by Christopher Cordner.

¹⁴¹⁰ Lars Hertzberg, ‘Gaita on Recognizing the Human’, in *Philosophy, Ethics and a Common Humanity: Essays in Honour of Raimond Gaita*, ed. Christopher Cordner (London: Routledge, 2011), 7–21, at 16.

¹⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹² *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹³ For a discussion of this motif with a focus on the specific temptations that may come with the pressure to ‘articulating one’s experiences in a clear language’, cf. Hugo Strandberg, “On the Difficulty of Speaking,” in *Ethical Inquiries after Wittgenstein*, ed. Salla Aldrin Salskov, Ondřej Beran, and Nora Hämäläinen (Cham: Springer, 2022), 77–90, esp. at 84 ff.

¹⁴¹⁴ This is what Buber would say, indeed what he, although with a different wording, does say; cf. e.g. *I and Thou*, 130: “That there are world, man, the human person, you and I, has divine meaning.”

(perhaps even in a flexible and organic way), can never define how an I-You encounter may look like or the meaning it may have.¹⁴¹⁵

This casts a new light both on my preceding discussion of the reimagined Samaritan and that of Gaita and his encounter with the nun. I want to be brief regarding the Samaritan and rather address an issue in relation to it that may have arisen in my subsequent discussion of Gaita. The point is that, on Gaita's picture, there are two ways of understanding the Levite's response to the Samaritan's response to the wounded man (and for that matter also that of the lawyer to whom Jesus tells the story in the Biblical original.) The first is that the Levite/lawyer already *did* see the wounded man as a neighbour but merely needed to be reminded, or roused, to that fact by the example of the Samaritan. In that case, they already had a conception of love that allowed for the possibility for someone to respond lovingly to another despite the fact that there were no worldly attachments in play and despite the fact that there would have been many 'worldly' incentives against doing so. The second option is that they had not at all conceived of the possibility that someone lying there half dead in the dust may be the 'proper object' of a loving response and that, accordingly, the encounter with the Samaritan transformed their conception of what is, in a situation like this, meaningfully possible. I think it is clear that the message of the Biblical parable is the first: we all see one another – 'always already' if you wish – as neighbours, and that the problem is merely that life has countless ways of tempting us into overlooking, repressing, or becoming neglectful of it.¹⁴¹⁶ In other words, nothing is presupposed – no saintly love – for us to see one another as neighbours; all that love of an especially illuminating nature can do is to awaken us to this loving responsiveness that is always already there within – or *between* – us.¹⁴¹⁷

¹⁴¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 271.

¹⁴¹⁶ This is the guiding idea of Hannes Nykänen's *The 'I', the 'You', and the 'Soul'* and generally the main theme of most of his and Joel Backström's writings. (It is especially prominent in "Unbearable Certainties".)

¹⁴¹⁷ It can be imagined that someone may hold against this that it was part of the miracle that was Jesus that he did in fact introduce a radically new and different understanding of love – that before Jesus spread his message, people were indeed entirely unfamiliar with the idea of divine neighbourliness as he preached it. I think this objection conflates two issues. On the one hand, I concede – although I think it is hard to imagine and not at all verifiable – that it may have been the case that the people in ancient Israel (as perhaps anywhere else) did not think about love in the way that Jesus did and familiarised them with. In this sense, they may indeed have been unacquainted with neighbourly love. But that does not mean that they did not, at least at times – and in this sense, like us today – respond to, and interact with one another in neighbourly ways, and even towards strangers and enemies. If that would not have been the case otherwise the parable of the Good Samaritan would hardly make any sense (after all, it would be absurd to suppose that the lawyer, in order to know who was neighbour to the wounded man, had to imagine that the Samaritan was taught by Jesus.) The perhaps deeper problem that I see with the objection, however, is that it would go counter to the very spirit of Jesus' teaching. For if the people at the time were indeed absolutely unacquainted with unconditional neighbourly love, then they would have had to accept Jesus' teachings without understanding them, that is, simply in virtue of his divine authority. As Winch and Hertzberg point out, however, it would "radically thwart one of Jesus' apparent intentions" (Winch, "Who is my Neighbour?," 161) to assume that "the only authority for doing one thing rather than the other would be whatever Christ had commanded" (Hertzberg, "On Being Neighbourly," 35) because on someone like that "the

But what, then, of cases such as that of the patients that Gaita witnessed being lovingly tended to by the nun? It would seem to me that this does not fundamentally change the picture but, rather, that it adds a further layer of complexity. That is, I do think that Gaita's example is in an important respect different from the Biblical parable in that I think that it could well have been the case that, before having met the nun, Gaita and those around him indeed never saw the patients as inviting a neighbourly response – something which is hardly imaginable in the case of the Levite or the priest in the parable or the lawyer listening to it. The point which Gaita undercuts, however, is that once one *does* come to see those hitherto seemingly unlovable beings suddenly claiming one in loving response – and this may not happen before one comes to see them in the light of someone else's love¹⁴¹⁸ – then this will also entail a changed perception of the past, that is, a changed perception of how one had *already* seen, and related to, them beforehand. In other words, coming to realise that people such as those afflicted patients claim one in loving response means that one will thereby come to realise *that there was not 'nothing'* – no responsiveness whatsoever – on one's part but, instead, that *one had not seen them* properly, that one had not been open – sensitised, roused – to their reality, a reality bound up with the claim to respond lovingly to it.¹⁴¹⁹

c. Comparing Oneself with the Good Person

In Gaita's discussion, it transpires that, in seeing the nun's love for the patients, he did not come to love the patients *himself* but rather that he came to see them as the possible addressees of *someone else's* love, and in such a way that deepened his moral understanding.¹⁴²⁰ That it deepened his moral understanding comes out in what he says about what it meant for him to suddenly be faced with the patients' reality, namely that it at the same time revealed their full humanity and showed that they were fully our equals; indeed, it was in witnessing the nun that Gaita came to deepen his overall understanding of what it means to speak of a common humanity, of equality, and unconditional worth. It also transpires in his coming to understand

spirit of the command had been lost" (ibid.). In other words: if those who first listened to Jesus' teachings about love, or witnessed his love, would have accepted it as authoritative simply because it came from Christ, then their acceptance would have been blind and, thus, lacked precisely the loving, neighbourly spirit to which he sought to rouse them. This, I think, also has substantial consequences for Gaita's account: the first historical encounters (if ever there were such a thing) with a love of the kind of purity that became manifest in Jesus – and which Gaita calls saintly love – already presupposes that those witness it are open to being touched by it and, as it were, seeing and understanding its 'point'. This, in turn, means that it must be possible for us to be familiar with such love even in the absence of a historically developed language of love.

¹⁴¹⁸ This is not to say that it *requires* the love of someone else; recall my discussion in section 2.a.v. above.

¹⁴¹⁹ For the way in which love may retroactively alter our understanding of the past, cf. my discussion in section 3 in the last chapter as well as this chapter's discussion of conscience.

¹⁴²⁰ For Gaita's discussion of moral understanding, cf. *Good and Evil*, 264–82.

that “we should do all in our power”¹⁴²¹ not to treat condescendingly people such as the patients. But is it imaginable that Gaita’s moral understanding deepened when he came to see the patients in the light of the nun’s love without this love also colouring off on him in one way or another?

I think there are several points at issue. For one, I agree that seeing the patients in the light of the nun’s love did not simply *make* Gaita’s loving. Yet, it did alter the way he perceived them – that is his own point: the nun’s love disclosed to him their reality, a reality which, as Gaita and I agree, is bound up with recognising a certain claim it makes on one – which, of course, entails the possibility that one may fail or succeed to live up to that claim.

The difference between Gaita and I is that I say of this claim that it is the claim to respond *lovingly* while Gaita does not. On my picture, then, coming to see the patients in the light of the nun’s love did not make Gaita *loving* but it roused him to their presence in such a way that he then *felt claimed to respond lovingly* to them. I think bringing in love already at the level of the claim helps to make sense of why Gaita felt ‘shown up’ by the nun’s love – in revealing the patients reality to him, the light of her love at the same time made him aware of how unlovingly he responded to them, namely with condescension. So, while the nun’s love made him see that he should respond differently to the patients than he did, it at the same time made him aware that he failed to do so, that he found himself, as it were, caught up in his condescending attitude towards them, thus leaving him with the moral task of trying to do all in his power to overcome his condescension.¹⁴²² But as I see it, overcoming his condescension would simply mean being less unloving towards the patients – and, accordingly, more loving.

But if that is so, why does Gaita not speak about it in such, or similar, terms? 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), I do think there is something problematic about his marked avoidance of describing his own relation to the patients in such a way that love plays any role in it whatsoever. The problem is, I think, that what motivates his rejection of such language is that *he implicitly compares himself with the nun*. That is, I think the reason he avoids using the term ‘love’ with respect to his relation to the patients is, at least partly, because he thinks that he could never

¹⁴²¹ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, 21.

¹⁴²² Gaita makes a similar point in his discussion of Mother Teresa in *Good and Evil*, 203: “Some people love better than others, and in relation to the requirement to love better than we do, there is much that may properly be described as the development of certain powers and capacities. A certain dimension of the requirement to love better is analogous to the requirement to be more courageous.” This, for Gaita, is the only kind of ‘imperative to neighbourliness’ that there is and it is this imperative the force of which he felt in the light of what the nun’s love revealed to him.

display the kind of attitude towards them as the nun did, that her love, in her purity and saintliness, is radically beyond whatever he could even hope to aspire to.

Let me explain why I think that is so. In his discussion of goodness in *Good and Evil*, he states that “in the face of an instance of a pure love, no one *conjectures* whether it is possible for him [i.e. to be equally purely loving]”¹⁴²³ because “[o]ur conjectures about what we may be capable of are based upon an assessment of what is within our power to achieve”¹⁴²⁴ and because “with certain kinds of love we are judged under a conception of perfection, and we call that perfection purity.”¹⁴²⁵ In other words: we do not compare ourselves with what strikes us as perfect – in this case: as perfectly pure – because perfection lies beyond the reach of what is humanly possible to achieve by the exertion of one’s powers.¹⁴²⁶ This means that, in a certain sense, Gaita does *not* compare himself with the nun, namely in the sense that he would see her as embodying a merely ‘better’ version of the virtue displayed by himself or other people, and that there would thus lie a bridgeable gap between him and her. In another sense, however, he thereby does compare himself with her, namely precisely by describing her as *perfect* (or *pure*) and himself, in comparison, as *imperfect* (or *impure*).¹⁴²⁷

To this, I have two comments: firstly, I think that, apart from the fact that I do not know how it could ever be verified that Gaita could never become as ‘pure’ as the nun, at least part of what may stand in the way of someone’s becoming more loving is precisely the forming of such comparative judgments, that is, judgments that erect a barrier between oneself and the seemingly perfectly pure other, elevating her onto a pedestal of supernatural saintliness while placing himself on the level of the merely human. I do see that there is a point in doing so; after all, measuring oneself against such saintly individuals may be very daunting and ultimately lead one to despair of one’s own relative blemishes. On the other hand, however, such a hierarchisation may – as it very often does – lead to a problematic resignation, even to a justification of one’s own lack of love. “After all, we are all merely human. So, who am I to expect perfection of me?” Of course, there is truth to such an exclamation. Yet, it seems mistaken to believe that we have to think that, in the face of a love of the kind of purity displayed by the nun, we are caught up between having to choose between either merciless self-condemnation for our flaws and the kind of apologetic attitude I see adumbrated in Gaita’s writings.

¹⁴²³ Ibid.

¹⁴²⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴²⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴²⁶ Ibid, 203–4.

¹⁴²⁷ Cf. the passage some footnotes earlier: “Some people love better than others.”

This leads me to the second, more important, point, namely that it is possible to be inspired by love of a striking purity in a way that does not entail a comparison with the one in whose responses it manifests. The point is, again, that the nun's love allowed Gaita to see the reality of the patients in a new light – that is to say: to *really* see their reality for the first time. But that means that the light of the nun's love will have come to bear on Gaita irrespectively of any such comparison between himself and her. Whether or not Gaita thus goes on to respond in more of a loving spirit to the patients or whether he will fail to do so is thus nothing in relation to which the nun's love has to be consulted as some kind of ideal yardstick. It will, at bottom, be a matter of how *he* will find himself claimed in response and how he will live up, or fail to live up, to that claim.

A good illustration of the former – that is, of what it means to open oneself to the light of the love of another – is provided by Christopher Cordner in yet another autobiographical account of an encounter with 'pure' love:

I coached my son's community football team when he was 10. My assistant coach, Dennis, had a boy in the team. He also had a younger son, Toby, with pronounced physical and intellectual disabilities, who used to come to the football games with Dennis. I had seen only a little of Dennis with his sons away from the football field; I was vaguely aware that Toby needed quite a bit of his time. One day, at a big moment in an important match for the team, with Dennis and I both fully focused on the play, Toby came up to ask his father for something. The loving and wholly attentive patience with which Dennis turned and immediately responded to Toby has always remained with me, as a kind of beacon for my sense of my love for my own children. But as such it has been primarily a reminder not of the need for 'more of the same,' but of what real attentiveness, real loving presence to one's child here and now, is.¹⁴²⁸

When Cordner speaks of "more of the same" he addresses the distinction that he had been discussing in the preceding pages between a 'quantitative' understanding of unconditional love, i.e. where unconditional means merely "more of the same" love,¹⁴²⁹ and a 'qualitative' understanding. This qualitative understanding, Cordner suggests, is something that one first and foremost witnesses – perhaps merely for a fleeting moment – in how someone engages with another, and in such a way that it shows with an undeniable authority what it means to love purely. Here, the context of the example plays a role: as in the parable of the Good Samaritan,

¹⁴²⁸ Christopher Cordner, 'Unconditional Love?', *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3 (2016): 6.

¹⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4–6.

Dennis' loving attention for Toby comes to the fore all the more pronouncedly because it manifests just when the football game is particularly captivating and exciting and because it does not seem to be dampened in any way by Toby's marked disabilities.¹⁴³⁰ So, in a way, Cordner's description of the situation exhibits marked similarities to Gaita's encounter with the nun in that both are struck by the purity of the love they witness, a purity that at the same time creates the awareness of a contrast between it and how people normally express their love for one another (the difference of course being that in the case of Gaita's nun, it was, as I pointed out, not only the *purity* but also the mere *fact* of her love that struck Gaita.) However, Cordner does not resort to talk of saintliness, neither as something that manifested in Dennis's response to Toby nor as a historical-cultural condition for this response to display the purity it did display.¹⁴³¹ Instead, he stays, as it were, on the phenomenological level, thus avoiding the complications that I showed arose on Gaita's account. The love he witnessed simply *did* strike him in its purity and, in doing so, came to bear on his own life and his relationships with his own children.

Now, the crucial point is how he describes that it came to bear on his own life, namely as something that 'has always remained with him,' 'as a kind of beacon for his sense of love for his own children,' and as a "reminder" of "what real attentiveness, real loving presence to one's child here and now, is." I think this is a beautiful illustration of the idea of how love's light, when it is especially bright – a brightness certainly bound up with its purity – may, when one opens oneself to it, illuminate one's own way of relating to others and the world, and not merely for a fleeting moment or as some kind of epiphany but as something that lingers on. In witnessing Dennis's loving response to Toby, Cordner's understanding of what it may mean to love, to relate lovingly to another, deepened in such a way that it carried over to his relationships to his own children (and probably not only to them) and came to colour them. Again, this is not to say that witnessing Dennis simply *made* Cordner more loving; yet, it did deepen the way in which he found himself claimed in loving response to his children – that, at least, is what I take him to point to when he says that Dennis' love served for him as a 'beacon for his sense of love for his own children.' Where before, for example, he may not have seen any issue with dismissing his children if they came to him with some minor problem while he was watching a

¹⁴³⁰ That is not to say that it is surprising, let alone striking, that a parent would love a seriously disabled child, far from it. What I mean is rather that the strain, the demandingness, and perhaps the frustration that may come with caring for a seriously disabled child – depending of the specific nature of the disability, of course – may also make it particularly challenging for parents to display in their engagements with their children the kind of genuine and pure attentiveness and patience that Cordner saw reflected in Dennis' way of responding to Toby.

¹⁴³¹ Recall: Gaita suggests that the love of parents for their children can reflect the kind of purity that reveals the reality of its addressees (i.e. the children) more fully because, and to the extent that, it appears in the light of saintly love and the impact it had on our culture.

football game, he may then, after having witnessed Dennis' patient attention for Toby, find himself claimed to shift his attention away from the game in order to be able to fully tend to them – and if he does not live up to this claim, he would feel bad for it.

There is, then, an important difference between how Cordner describes the way in which the light of Dennis' love came to bear on his relation to his own children and how Gaita describes how the light of the nun's love came to bear on his relation to the patients: while in Gaita's description, the focus is on what love's light showed him what he was *unable to do*, namely to respond without condescension to the patients. In the light of the nun's love, he feels compelled to work on himself so as to become less condescending; yet, still, the nun appears before him as utterly removed and unapproachable in her perfection. In Cordner's example, on the other hand, the focus is on the way in which love's light coloured off on him, not in the sense of a practical challenge or task, something to work on (although this may have also been a part of it), but first and foremost on his responsiveness towards his children.

Of course, the difference between Gaita's relation to the patients and Cordner's relationship with his own children must be borne in mind: Cordner, presumably already stood in a loving, affectionate relation to his children while Gaita's related to the patients with condescending respect. So, if Cordner would have had a very cold and distanced relationship with his own children, then Dennis' love for Toby, if he would have still let it touch and move him, would have perhaps shown him up in the way the nun's love for the patients showed up Gaita in his condescension.) But what I am after is something else, namely that, in coming to see someone in the light of the exceptionally pure love of another, one's attention need not be directed back onto one's own relative unlovingness or to the task of 'doing all in one's power' to overcome the shortcomings of one's responsiveness that have now become apparent. It is also possible that one just goes along with, or opens oneself to, where love's light directs one's attention, namely towards the other, the one who is illuminated by its light. This, I think, is what it means to have the sense of what Gaita calls the 'inestimable preciousness' disclosed, or further illuminated, in the light of the love that one has witnessed to come to bear on one's own life in relation to others.¹⁴³²

¹⁴³² Indeed, I think that a shift of attention towards oneself can be in 'a loving spirit' only qua response to the realisation that one is somehow caught up in one's unlovingness; in that case, trying to overcome one's unlovingness will take on the form of a practical challenge. That may have been the case for Gaita as he came to see his own relation to the patients in the light of the nun's love. Yet, a shift of attention towards oneself – to what one ought to do – can also be a deflection from what is really at stake, namely to open oneself to the claim to respond lovingly to *the other*, and instead to become preoccupied with *oneself* and one's shortcomings.

d. The Goodness of the One who Loves and the Goodness of Loving Togetherness

Despite his repeated emphasis of the importance of what the nun's love revealed to him, Gaita's account nonetheless displays a certain preoccupation with the nun, with her saintliness and goodness. That is not to cast doubt on whether this is how Gaita really experienced this encounter, however, or to make a normative claim along the lines of 'he should have been less focussed on the nun.' I rather think that Gaita's example does not show all that there would be to show regarding the illuminating power of love, that it does not give us the full picture. That has of course to do with the fact that Gaita speaks autobiographically, that he imbues the example with the force it has. Yet 'speaking personally'¹⁴³³ about such experiences also involves the risk, at least when honest and truthful (which I do not doubt Gaita is), that one's account will not only depict what one has learned from the experience in question but also what one may have remained unclear about.

I think Gaita's account of the encounter with the nun is of great benefit to the phenomenology of love and goodness in that it brings to light in a poignant way what it means to be struck by someone's goodness, a goodness that 'consists' precisely in nothing but that individual's loving responsiveness. His description wonderfully captures the sense of awe and wonder, also highlighted by Barabas, by which one may be overcome when finding oneself in the presence of such an individual. Still, I have the sense that Gaita says quite little about the patients after their reality has been revealed to him in the light of the nun's love – other than that he came to see them as "infinitely precious," that is. That is of course not a minor thing. Still, the way in which he presents this revelation-of-preciousness is more or less like a function of the nun's loving goodness. It is as if he wondered at the nun for what she revealed to him without, however, really being all that attentive to what – or who – she actually revealed.¹⁴³⁴ This is not to pass judgment; the point, it seems to me, is rather that a disclosure of the reality of the other qua unique and irreplaceable individual claiming one in response goes hand in hand

¹⁴³³ Gaita emphasises that when it comes to encounters with the kind of pure love that he is 'speaking personally' (cf. e.g. *Good and Evil*, 205), indeed that "one must speak personally" (*A Common Humanity*, 22).

¹⁴³⁴ This is not to say that Gaita witnessing the nun did not make Gaita more attentive to the patients; if it did, then my criticism is directed only to the somewhat one-sided account he gives, i.e. an account on which the patients play no role other than being revealed as precious. Some of Gaita's own remarks suggest that he understands that a turning-towards the patients is what a genuine disclosure of their reality would entail – for instance when he states (although in discussing Mother Teresa) that "[t]he wonder which is in response to her is not a wonder at her, but a wonder *that human life could be as her love revealed it to be* [...] There is a sense in which *she* disappeared from consideration" (*Good and Evil*, 205; emphasis in the original). Yet, I think that 'making the saint disappear' is at the end of the day is just as problematic as 'not making the afflicted appear', as it suggests that the saintly person is only relevant to the extent that she is the source of light revealing the afflicted. However, I think that really coming to see the situation in the light of love means coming to relate in loving responsiveness to both the nun and to the patients as well as to their relation.

with a shift of attention also to this newly disclosed reality – or perhaps better: with a widening of one’s attention (and, hence, of one’s responsiveness) in such a way that it comprises both the one who revealed the others’ reality (the nun) and those whose reality was thus revealed (the patients). Moreover, the attention to those whose reality has been revealed will not appear to one merely as loci of preciousness to marvel at; instead, one will now encounter them as individuals with whom one can stand in genuine, meaningful relations – indeed, as individuals who, in virtue of their presence, *invite* one to enter into relations with them, and in a loving spirit. In the case of the ineradicably afflicted patients, any such relation will of course be very different than the relation one has to other people – presumably, it will be much less ‘nice’, it will not offer the kind of joint activities that relations with others do. But that is not to say that no real relation is possible (for if it were, then talk of reality and preciousness would be empty.)¹⁴³⁵

What I am after is this: if the light of the nun’s love would have come to deeply permeate Gaita’s responsiveness to the patients – which, I think, may have taken time (time he may not have had given the little he spent at the ward) – his attention would have come to be less on the nun and more on what her love revealed (or, as I put it above, fully on both at the same time.) This means that he would have gradually ceased to wonder at the nun’s love for the patients, yet not because what was initially striking became a matter of mere routine and habit, but because he would have seen it as less and less wondrous and absurd that the patients could be responded to in a loving way – for after all, he, too, would have then found himself claimed in an ever-deepening loving response by them. He may have of course still marvelled at the naturalness with which her love for them found expression, an ease that conveyed that she did not encounter any claim at all¹⁴³⁶ (– and perhaps she did not, in the same way a parent or lover may also often not encounter *a claim* to respond lovingly; in the absence of any challenges and temptations, the love simply flows naturally.) But this ease would by have become secondary to what, by then, would have become the most important thing for him, namely *to tend to the patients – together with the nun*. If so, he would not have been struck by her goodness anymore, that is, by the goodness of her love, because being thus struck means that one is still concerned with the gap between oneself and the other; once what has thus been revealed becomes part of one’s own way of seeing and understanding, however, one will not perceive this gap anymore

¹⁴³⁵ These thoughts also cast a critical light on how Gaita first describes the patients, saying that “they appeared to have irretrievably lost everything which gives meaning to our lives” (ibid., 17). Firstly, who is in the position to say what really gives meaning to whose live? And secondly and more importantly: if a meaningful relations to those patients is supposed to be possible, then is it possible to really see their lives really as entirely devoid of meaning?

¹⁴³⁶ Cf. Hertzberg, “Recognizing the Human,” 9.

– one will then not anymore perceive the other as *over against* oneself, implicitly comparing her (and her goodness) to oneself (and one’s lack of it), but rather as someone *together with whom* one can tend to what is revealed in the light of one’s shared love.

Yet even if, at that point, Gaita would not have marvelled at *the nun’s* goodness anymore – that is, at the kind of extraordinary goodness (qua Güte or bonté) that marks the awareness of a gap between it and oneself – he may still have been moved by the goodness displayed in the *loving togetherness* of the nun and her patients. In that case, the notion of goodness does not refer to particular responses, an overall stance, or even a whole person but rather to a way of being – a way of being together, that is. So, while beforehand, goodness was located in the individual or her responses, the focus now shifts to the relation as such. This shift allows a new perspective of what it may mean to speak of love’s goodness.

It seems to me that love of the kind as it is displayed in the nun, in Dennis’ loving attention to Toby, as well as in the Good Samaritan – that is love which stands out in its striking purity – makes it in a sense indubitable that it is indeed love and not merely, or even partly, one of its many counterfeits (such as inclination, infatuation, obsession, glorification, and so on.) This is so because in all these cases, the love manifests in a situation in which nothing else comes into question, in which there is, as it were, ‘no grip’ for inclination etc. to play a role – there is nothing lovable ‘about’ the patients *and yet* the nun loves them, Dennis is focussed of the game and *still* he fully attends to Toby, all kinds of things count against the Samaritan helping the wounded man but *despite all this*, he helps. In responding lovingly where no inclinations ‘support’ it, indeed where there may be many incentives against doing so, people like the nun, Dennis, or the Good Samaritan certainly strike many of those who witness them in their goodness. What such manifestations of love thereby show in a striking and impressive way, however, is what it *may mean* respond lovingly, what love *can be* – or, in a sense, what it *really is*. This is not to say that any love that strikes on in its purity will always, as it were, just regurgitate the same insight, namely that love is not merely a response to something one likes or desires *about* the individual but a response towards the individual *as such*; rather, they will, as especially the cases of Gaita’s nun and Cordner’s Dennis illustrate, deepen the ways in which we, qua witnesses, find ourselves claimed in response to the reality they reveal. As such, they bring to light where unlovingness still resides, where there is still room for one’s love to improve, and so on. It was, after all, only in the light of the nun’s love that Gaita realised that he was in fact condescending towards the patients, just as it was only in witnessing Dennis that Cordner realised what real attentiveness and patience to one’s children mean.

Yet, in revealing this – that is, in revealing what it really means to love the other simply qua unique and irreplaceable other – such extraordinary manifestations of love at the same time reveal that *it is not because of such extraordinariness that love is good*. That is, although it is their extraordinary purity which reveals love’s goodness – that is, its *absolute* or *moral* goodness – it is not their *extraordinariness* in virtue of which love is good but simply in virtue of its being *love*. The young Gaita encountered goodness not only in the person who *could* love the patients, not even in the *purity* of her love, but also in what this pure love invited him to see, namely its addressees illuminated by its light and, thus, that *love is good*. Love is good not in virtue of anything else but simply in virtue of being what it is, namely love. In this sense, I agree with (a slightly altered version of) Gaita’s remark that ‘the purity of love proves the reality of what it reveals’ – only that now this revealed reality is the *goodness of loving togetherness* as such.

3. Conclusion

In this final chapter of the dissertation, I tied the notion of loving responsiveness, or lovingness, that I developed in the previous chapter back to the domain of morality. I did so in two ways, namely ‘negative’ (in section 1) and ‘positive’ (in section 2). Experiencing the connection between love and morality negatively means to experience in one’s own – or someone else’s – responsiveness a lack of love, a lack the experience of which carries its own *sui generis* normative force, namely that it *ought not* to be there, that there should be a loving responsiveness where there is (or was) not. However, this ought is not a ‘free floating ought,’ one that directs one’s attention to a sphere of rationality and its impersonal demands; rather, it directs one towards the other, either to live up to love’s claims where one had hitherto failed to do so, or to try to bring the other person (back) into a loving togetherness.

In section 1, sub-section a., I began with an analysis of the notion of conscience by illustrating that its call may reach us even in relation to those whom we do not know and in situations in which no serious wrong is done; I then turned to guilt and shame feelings, showed that they direct one’s attention away from the person to whom one has responded unlovingly and towards either oneself (shame) or some rules or principles (guilt), and, thus, exposed them as spurious forms of conscience. Reflecting on Buber’s understanding of conscience as an echo of the other’s address, rousing one to one’s own numbness while at the same time transcending that numbness in a (belated) loving response to the other, I then showed, via the notion of responsibility(-as-tied-to-responsiveness), that in cases of serious wrongdoing, genuine

conscience takes on the form of remorse. This eventually lead me to a critical discussion of Raimond Gaita's idea of the 'boundedness' of remorse, bringing to light that a cultural and social environment as well as prevalent 'language of love' cannot put limits to the situations and relations in which one may be struck by remorse.

In sub-section b., I then explored what it means to encounter unlovingness in the responses of others; I first discussed disappointment, seeking to show that a loving response to another's unlovingness does not seek to direct the attention either towards a rule that has been violated or towards the flawed character of the other. This scenario was then morally exacerbated by replacing disappointment with betrayal, leading to a discussion of the nature of forgiveness, including its relation to remorse. Coming to relate to the other in a spirit of forgiveness, so my main point, means ceasing to see him exclusively in the light of the terrible thing he has done and in the light of the possibility of the (re-)creation of a loving togetherness.

In section 2, sub-section a., I then turned to what it means to encounter love of such a striking purity that one is moved by its goodness. I began my reflections with a reimagined account of the parable of the Good Samaritan revolving around the Levite who witnesses the Samaritan's neighbourly response to the wounded man (sub-section i.). This raised the question of what exactly it means for someone to witness goodness; turning to Barabas' analysis, it was stated that the response to goodness entails wonder and a sense of extraordinariness (sub-section ii.). Bringing further nuance to the picture offered by Barabas, it was then shown that, while wonder is the response to goodness of the one who is open to it, even the one who shows apparent indifference, callousness, or spite responds *to goodness*, yet in the form of denial or rejection (sub-section iii.). Likewise, it was expatiated that the relation between goodness, the ordinary, and the extraordinary is more complex than transpired in Barabas' account, suggesting that there is a way of encountering love's goodness as extraordinary without, however, tying it back to extraordinary goodness of the one who loves (sub-section iv.).

These reflection then provided the background for my discussion of Raimond Gaita's understanding of saintly love in sub-section b., revolving around his autobiographical story about his encounter with a loving nun. Fathoming the depths of his understanding, it was shown that he offers a rich picture, yet one that is not without flaws. My criticism focussed primarily on Gaita's understanding of the 'language of love,' namely as "historically shaped by and shaping the works of [saintly] love," thus circumscribing the sphere within which love is intelligible. In sub-section c., I then turned my attention to another problem I see adumbrated in Gaita's focus on saintly love, namely that of putting the saint on a pedestal in such a way that she becomes a quasi-otherworldly 'lightbulb of love' that does not invite, or beckon, one to

respond in loving response, but rather keeps one focussed on one's own shortcomings as well as on the practical effort to lessen them. Seeking recourse to Cordner's example of how a father's purely loving attentiveness and patience came to serve "as a beacon" in his own life, I sought to show that there is another in which love of a strikingly pure kind may come to bear on one's own responsiveness to others. Finally, in sub-section c., I concluded the discussion with further reflections on what it means for a love of such a revelatory power to thoroughly permeate the responsiveness of the one who witnesses it, claiming that while such a process means that the witness will gradually cease to be struck by the goodness of other, it allows her to see more clearly that there is another, deeper way of understanding love's goodness – namely simply as the goodness of loving togetherness.

Conclusion

I do not want to say much more at this point; I hope that the chapters speak for themselves and that both the introduction as well as the conclusions of the respective chapters have already given a clear overview of the contents of the present work. Hence, I will keep it short:

The present dissertation a) has shown up the limitations of two seminal reason-centred accounts of moral relationality, namely those of Immanuel Kant and John McDowell, and b) has developed a more promising second-personal approach revolving around the notion of love.

The philosophical upshot of my critical discussions of Kant and McDowell (chapters 1 to 3) is multi-faceted. Firstly, showing up the flaws and limitations of any theoretical account is certainly a philosophical end in itself. Moreover, much of the criticism I provided, although delimited to the thought of two thinkers, also holds, in one way or another, for many, if not most, other philosophical accounts of moral relationality, at least those who also take reason as their central concept and understand morality primarily in terms of rational action. Lastly, the present work has offered a valuable contribution to moral philosophy in showing that, even in a particularly subtle contemporary vestment (i.e. in the thought of John McDowell), a conceptualistic outlook makes it impossible to conceive of a relation to the unique, yet morally salient other – that is, to You.

The second part, from chapters 4 to 6, yielded further results. For one, it contributed to the re-actualisation of the thought of Martin Buber as a serious and profound philosopher and not merely as the 'the forerunner of Lévinas' or as the preacher of authenticity who, as

Adorno derisively put it, plays “the Wurlitzer organ of the spirit.”¹⁴³⁷ Secondly, it helped to connect the thought of Buber – and continental philosophy of the phenomenological/dialogical/existential kind, more generally – to contemporary post-Wittgensteinian moral philosophy, especially to a presently emerging, yet still somewhat minor current in moral philosophy that takes as its central notions love, conscience, and goodness and, thus, presents a very potent (and urgently needed) alternative to the moral philosophical mainstream. Its most valuable contribution, however, lies in its going beyond Buber by bringing to light the moral dimension of his thought, thus offering a new and radical understanding of moral relationality which subserves not only to criticise established, reason-centred moral philosophy but, as was shown in the final chapter, also the far more nuanced thought of thinkers such as Raimond Gaita.

Let me end on a personal note. The present work is intricately interwoven with my personal life and thought, and what ended up becoming its central themes and motifs had already occupied my mind before I began my doctoral studies. This means that addressing these entanglements runs the risk of becoming verbose and cumbersome – yet it is also why I think that saying nothing about them would mean leaving something important unsaid.

I will resist the temptation to start off by saying “It all began way back when...” and instead point out that the structure of this work mirrors in a remarkable way the trajectory of my philosophical development over the, say, last seven years. Back in my undergraduate days, I was in a certain sense spellbound by the philosophy of Kant – and it is a discussion of his thought with which I begin the present dissertation. Later, towards the end of my studies, and while I was developing a dissertation topic, I grew more and more uneasy with the abstractness and unworldliness of Kant’s thought, and thought I saw the ‘solution’ in the thought of those, like John McDowell, who sought to ‘hegelianise’ Kant. The discussion of McDowell’s thought follows in chapter two of this dissertation. In the second year of my time as a PhD student, I then came into contact with the thought of Martin Buber and it left a deep impression on me, opening up an entirely new philosophical perspective in the light of which both Kant and McDowell then came to appear as, in a certain sense, wrong-headed. This shift of perspective away from Kant and McDowell and towards Buber is reflected in chapters three and four. And lastly, it was via my colleagues, both in Pardubice and in Åbo, that I became acquainted with, and came to see depth in, post-Wittgensteinian moral philosophy, especially as it was done in, around, and in the wake of the Swansea School, and in particular by those of its proponents

¹⁴³⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, transl. Knut Tarnowski & Frederic Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 17.

who emphasise notions such as love, goodness, and conscience. Their influence on me becomes apparent most clearly in chapters five and six.

In order for the significance of this brief sketch to become apparent, however, it has to be understood in the light of me finding my own philosophical language. No doubt I ended up studying philosophy because I have always had a penchant for it, especially for ethical matters. Yet, when I came to study it, it led to a peculiar – but I think by no means uncommon – rupture between my own ‘private’ thoughts and my ‘professional,’ philosophical thoughts. That is not to say that I ceased to reflect on philosophical matters in private, be it alone or with my (non-philosopher) friends. Rather, it means that there developed a strange chasm between how I thought and reflected philosophically *in private* over against how I thought and reflected *in the seminar room* – and that, in a certain sense, the seminar room thoughts and reflections ‘came to wear the pants’ and relegated my personal thoughts to the status of ‘*merely* personal thoughts.’ This, unsurprisingly, left me in an unhappy predicament. Yet, I think it did not come about by mere chance but had much to do with *how* I engaged with philosophy as well as with the thinkers I read – that is, thinkers such as Kant. Although profound, Kant’s thought is highly impersonal (– a point which holds true for very many philosophers). I think it is this impersonality that came to colour off on me, not in such a way as to supersede my personal thoughts but to leave me in the painful state of disunion I just sketched.

Fortunately, I did not simply accept this predicament as a given, as the philosopher’s fate, so to speak. Surely, philosophising means meddling in the abstract but does it therefore have to mean tearing oneself asunder in the process? It was this taking issue with the partial depersonalisation of my own thought that spurred me to seek for a more personal way of thinking, one that took into account that it was *me* who does the thinking as well as *the others*, those with whom I think, reflect, and discuss. An important role in my growing resistance to philosophical depersonalisation, moreover, was played by scattered, yet profoundly striking encounters that I had over the years. I never quite managed to put into words what it was that struck me in these encounters – they always played out very differently and occurred in all kinds of situation and with all kinds of persons. Still, I came to think about them as ‘*That’s what it’s all about!*’–encounters. In hindsight, I would say what became manifest in those moments was an unreserved opening up to the other, a falling away of all barriers, which, so I felt, was of the greatest moral significance – yet a significance that was not at all addressed by the moral philosophers that I read and admired.

In Martin Buber, I eventually found a thinker who offered (much of) what I had been searching for. Through his thought, I came to understand that what lay at the roots of my partial

depersonalisation – and which, I think, at the same time constitutes the central flaw of thinkers such as Kant and McDowell (as well as of many other philosophers) – is the belief that the individual's relation to the world is always already conceptually pre-mediated and that, accordingly, wherever individuals relate to one another, reason, impersonal and abstract, is interposed between them. Coming to see this as a flaw this did not turn me into an, as Kant would put it, 'misologist;' rather, it made apparent to me that what lies at the heart of morality is that we care about, and matter to, one another as the 'unique and irreplaceable individuals' we encounter one another – and that this is not a matter of reason but, if anything, of love. This understanding enabled me to bridge the gap between my own, personal language and the one I had acquired in the seminar rooms, and is the reason why the dissertation has the form it has.

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