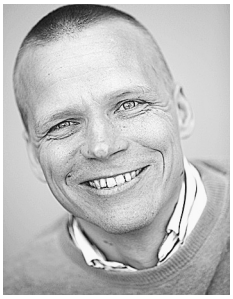
Joel Backström

The Fear of Openness

An Essay on Friendship and the Roots of Morality



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My brother Nico Backström took the photograph of the two unidentified gentlemen on the cover of this book; I want to thank him for that, among other things. Without the love and support of our parents, Carita and Lars, there would have been no book at all.

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Joel Backström
Helsinki
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– Introduction –

I have called this study *The fear of openness: An essay on friendship and the roots of morality*. This may seem strange: "fear" or "openness" are hardly the first words one would expect to find in a work of moral philosophy. Neither is "friendship", for that matter, although there are now some philosophers defending the moral and philosophical relevance of friendship. Such writers are not typically found talking about fear or openness, however, and my approach differs radically from their approaches.

– An immodest proposal –

Lawrence Blum, an influential contemporary defender of friendship, says in one of the few book-length studies in the philosophy of friendship, that his aim is to show that "sympathy, compassion, concern, and friendship", topics which he notes have not been given a significant role in English-speaking moral philosophy since the days of Hume, in fact play "a substantial role in moral life".[1] He says that his argument is guided by a widely shared sense that friendship and the "altruistic emotions" (as he calls them) are good not just in some general human sense but from a moral point of view, and also that moral philosophy has not managed to give expression to "this aspect of the ordinary moral consciousness".[2] What I want to note here is the word *aspect*. The point is that Blum does not claim that friendship and the altruistic emotions are "the most fundamental moral phenomena" or deny that it is "also morally good" to be "rational, just, principled, impartial, conscientious" – to be, in short, all those

[1] Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 1.
[2] Ibid., p. 7.

things which moral philosophers have tended to focus on.[3] He simply wants to remind us that there are *also* these *other* things, namely friendship and the altruistic emotions, which have not been discussed enough.

Blum believes, then, that friendship is a neglected but important topic in moral philosophy, that bringing in friendship will enrich ethics, and perhaps call for some revisions in the way it is done. He does not, however, believe that our view of morality and the way we do ethics could be fundamentally unsettled by a reflection on friendship. But that is precisely what I claim is the case – and this is where the fear of openness comes in.

In the pages that follow, I will try to show that what is at stake in friendship is openness, an absolutely unguarded, entirely personal communion between people in which nothing is held back – and that, morally and existentially speaking, this is also what is at stake in our relationships with each other quite generally. I say "at stake": I mean that we are constantly aware, in *some* way, of the possibility of such openness, and not just aware of it, but drawn to it in *some* way, desiring it and knowing that goodness *is* such openness. Friendship means opening oneself to this goodness, welcoming it in welcoming one's friend. In the same way, conscience – which is what gives us our "moral sense" and so lies at "the roots of morality" – calls us to welcome our neighbour openly, instead of shutting ourselves to her in fear or resentment.

We desire openness, but at the same time we fear it and feel a need to reject it. Needless to say, we often do. We reject the call of conscience, just as we refuse to be open with our friends, or to enter into friendship with others at all, fleeing from each other (and at the same time ourselves) into all kinds of attitudes and activities. The drama of our lives is played out in a constant tension between our desire for openness and our fear of it: this tension gives moral and existential questions their *urgency*. In a nutshell, that is the contention of this thesis.

This claim no doubt sounds unfamiliar, and perhaps quite perverse. Some may also suspect that the difference between me and someone like Blum is that whereas I make grand, speculative, quite unsubstantiated claims about the nature of morality, more modest and responsible philosophers like Blum limit themselves to careful analysis of particular moral phenomena, where some concrete and substantial results can actually be obtained. The contrast is false, however, for Blum makes highly contentious claims of his own about the nature

[3] Ibid., p. 8.

of morality. He denies that "morality is of a unitary nature", claiming instead that there are "irreducibly different and varied types of moral goodness", and that it is "unlikely" that all of even our "most deeply held" moral views are "entirely compatible with one another".[4] In short, and in his own words: "when I [Blum] argue for a morality of sympathy, compassion, and concern, I am seeing this as only a part of an overall 'pluralistic' view of morality".[5]

So Blum does have an "overall view" of morality, a conception of what morality *is*; it is just that he thinks morality is a collection of different and incompatible reactions, whereas thinkers such as Kant or Plato thought that underlying the obviously varied surface-phenomena there is an essential unity, an organising principle, or – to be more precise – a basic conflict or tension pervading our moral life. As I indicated, I, too, see a basic conflict pervading our life, although I disagree with both Kant and Plato about its nature.[6]

– On method: self-deception and ethics –

What takes place in the pages that follow is, in its own way, "a revaluation of all values",[7] for in the course of my investigation such central, and seemingly self-evident, moral concepts and values as respect, duty, rights, praise and blame, pride and shame, modesty, gratitude, loyalty, reciprocity, altruism and sacrifice, will appear as in various ways either corrupt or, at best, as having a place in our life only insofar as we have already fallen away from the openness of friendship. What this openness or goodness *itself* is, cannot be indicated with the means at the disposal of traditional or contemporary moral philosophy, or indeed of everyday morality, insofar as it is framed in such terms as the ones I listed for criticism just now. Nor can it be stated in terms of traditional conceptions of friendship, whether friendship is seen as a matter of sharing interests or aspirations, or of finding "another self", of the friends' fulfilling the needs or wishes of each other, or in some other way "fitting" each other.

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 9.
[6] In Kant, the conflict is not only the obvious one between selfishness and the discipline of the moral law but the seldom noted one between love and respect, which I discuss below. In Plato, the conflict is between the philosophic life, oriented towards the life of the mind, and worldly or merely sensuous life in its various forms. I discuss Plato intermittently through out the text.
[7] My supervisor Lars Hertzberg suggested to me that what I was doing might be described using this Nietzschean trope.

For my part, I will offer no definition of friendship. As I will try to make clear, I do not think it can be defined, but only indicated. I will try to do that it in various ways: I will say, for instance, that the spirit of friendship is the spirit of openness, of joy, of humility, of forgiveness, of truth, of justice; that it is a *desire* for the friend, a desire to unite with her in such a way that the distinction between *yours* and *mine* loses its meaning; that it is something pertaining to the heart or the soul, and in some contexts simply another name for conscience. When I say one of these things I have in mind all these other aspects, too. Any one of these words – *justice* or *unity*, say – might mean almost anything taken by itself; what I try to do in the pages that follow is to indicate how their meaning in the present context is shaped by their connexions with other ways of speaking within the over-all perspective I try to delineate.

I must emphasise that my purpose is not out to legislate about what kind of relationships may or may not properly be called friendship. What I want to indicate is rather the tension or the force-field in which I think the drama of our friendships, as of our life in general, is played out. The spirit of friendship is one of the forces or poles between which we move and are torn; the moral concepts I mentioned above and that I interrogate in the text are just some of the countless guises in which the force or forces driving and keeping us *away* from openness appear. In actual friendships both poles make their presence felt, and that fact as such does not make their status as friendships doubtful. Fallen creatures that we are, our friendships are not all openness, but what is really *friendly* in them is the desire for openness, even the little, that is there.

I ask the reader to bear this in mind if I say, as I may sometimes do, that "friendship *means* this", or that "a friend *is* that" (forgiving, for instance), or that such-and-such "does not belong to friendship" or that "a friend would not do it" (be unforgiving, say). I do not mean that if you do not forgive a friend his misdemeanour, you are not his friend, I only mean that whereas your forgiving him can straight away be seen as an expression of friendship, your not wanting or finding it hard to forgive him is a difficulty – a common one, obviously – you have with friendship, with being open with your friend.

The perspective which the descriptions, distinctions and elucidations in the pages that follow are meant to flesh out, may appear unfamiliar – from reading most moral philosophers one would certainly never guess it existed. But I would claim it is in fact familiar to us all: we all know it, but the extent to which we acknowledge it is another matter. In other words, I do not think of what I say about friendship as the elucidation of a *particular ideal* of friendship:

ideals belong in beauty-contests and perhaps in politics, they do not belong in philosophy, nor, for that matter, in friendship. By means of ideals – and values, principles, virtues – of various kinds we try precisely to control and limit openness, we try to tie goodness down, make it specific and thus manageable. The business of philosophy is to make sense of life as we know it, not to make proposals for how we "should" live. One could also say, with Wittgenstein, that philosophy should simply describe the phenomena of life: not judge them, or explain them, or explain them away, just describe them.[8]

Insofar as a philosophical description reveals tensions, contradictions and blind spots in the perspectives (moral or otherwise) described, it will be far from neutral, however. Peter Winch is right that while philosophy "may indeed try to remove intellectual obstacles in the way of recognizing certain possibilities ... what a man makes of the possibilities he can comprehend is a matter of what man he is", and "philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand".[9] I would add, however, that philosophising may make it clearer to someone, or make it more difficult for him to pretend that he does not know, *what* it is he attaches importance to, and that is significant in itself, it will get him moving in some way. If you show a man who had not noticed it that he is standing in an ant-heap he might want to get out of it, without your having to tell him where he *should* stand. If there are things you have not seen, or have not *wanted* to see, simply having them pointed out will in itself *change* things for you. It might liberate you or make you furious or just embarrassed, but it will make a difference. The simple description of how things are will *not* "leave everything as it is".[10]

In fact, a main contention of this study is that much of what we normally think of as morality and friendship – not excluding many of the apparently highest and profoundest conceptions of morality and friendship – are in fact defences we erect against openness; they give expression to what I claim is the real existential drama of our lives only by denying and masking it in different ways. Another central contention, connected to the previous one, is that there is no essential distinction to be made between moral and existential questions, or between such questions and personal or psychological difficulties. These

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[8] See, e.g., Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), §§ 109, 124 and 126. – The same emphasis on description can be found in the tradition(s) of phenomenology.
[9] Winch, *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 191.
[10] Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 124.

categorisations are just different names we give, both with the intent to express and to disguise, our difficulties with openness.

If this is the case, it has the general methodological consequence that philosophical inquiries into moral matters – that is: moral-psychological-existential matters – cannot be conceptual investigations in the straightforward sense which is possible and indeed indispensable in epistemology, for instance. Insofar as the epistemological questions are not themselves entangled in moral questions, the philosopher can take our ways of speaking about knowledge and the world for granted, and may try to free us from the hold of metaphysical (in the derogative sense of confused) ideas about it by reminding us of how we actually speak and think about the phenomena in question when we are *not* philosophising, thus "bring[ing] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use", as Wittgenstein said.[11] Such conceptual clarification through reminders of the use we in fact make of our concepts is not the invention of Wittgenstein; it has been part of the trade of every good philosopher since Socrates.[12]

In moral philosophy the situation is in a crucial respect different, however, and the difference may be stated by saying that here *self-deception* becomes an issue. The point is that what we say about moral matters, both in philosophising and in our everyday life, is itself part of the existential drama of our lives. In judging something to be good or bad, in claiming something to be desirable or undesirable, important or unimportant, reasonable or unreasonable, possible or impossible, worthy or worthless, responsible or irresponsible, and so on – and every morally loaded description involves tacit claims of this nature – we are speaking in our own cause, and our fear of openness may prompt us to speak falsely. For instance, we may claim that something is morally unworthy or irresponsible when what is actually at stake is that we are afraid of it, that it makes us uncomfortable. In fact, I will argue that self-deception is not just *an* issue in moral life, it is *the* central issue: moral difficulties are different from intellectual ones precisely because they are about our *not wanting to acknowledge* things about ourselves which we actually know to be true.

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[11] Ibid., § 116.

[12] I do not claim that this is *all* good philosophers have done, but I would say that if they had not done that, too, and done a lot of it, what they did would hardly qualify as philosophy at all. Socrates' critique of the natural philosophers' speculative use of the concept of "cause" in the *Phaedo* is to my mind a classic instance of returning words from their metaphysical to their every-day use (see *Phaedo*, 98b–99c, and the whole discussion of generation and destruction beginning at 96a).

This means that a philosophical investigation into moral matters should not only remind us of how we use concepts but also investigate the possible *motives* for that use; the question is not only what we in fact say but also *what it says about us that we say it*, and keep silent about other things. I think that this is what *looking* at the *use* of concepts, as Wittgenstein urges us to do, really amounts to; it involves more than just noting that words are normally put together in this or that way.[13] The point, in any case, is that a moral philosopher cannot accept the self-understandings of the various moral perspectives he investigates at face value, but must rather question them. The main problem in ethics is indeed what R. F. Holland calls "the problem of spurious semblances", arising out of our tendency to present, from self-serving motives of one kind or another, as "good" what is not really good at all; thus our life is spent worshipping moral idols in a kind of "absolutism of the Cave", as Holland calls it.[14]

The philosopher must therefore, as Nietzsche said, bring the hammer with him to his task – not a hammer to crush things with, but rather a hammer to "pose questions with", to use as a "tuning-fork" for the "sounding-out of idols", carefully tapping the idols of morality, the concepts and ideals and understandings we take for granted, to find out what kind of sound they emit when touched in the places where one is not *supposed* to touch them; in the presence of the philosopher, Nietzsche says, "precisely that which would like to stay silent *has to become audible...*".[15]

Throughout my analyses, I have tried to apply Nietzsche's advice to bring the hammer, and Nietzsche himself gets a tapping when I come to discuss his view of friendship. This means that my readings of other philosophers – Aristotle, Kant, Simone Weil and Emmanuel Levinas are those, besides Nietzsche, I treat in most detail – will be quite different from the standard ones, which like to take the texts on trust, trying to make as good a sense as possible of what they appear to want to say. Of course, I try to do that, too, but it seems to me that the real sense of these texts starts to emerge only when one contrasts what is being said in them with what they do *not* say, with the possibilities – more precisely: the possibility of friendship's openness – which they leave out. Then what is said in them starts to make good sense in a new kind of way, as

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[13] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 340.
[14] Holland, *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 129. – "The Cave" is of course an allusion to the simile in Plato's *Republic*.
[15] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 31f.

talk both deformed by what it leaves unsaid and as designed – which is not to say: consciously designed – to mask the fact that it is left unsaid.

It may seem that such exercises in unmasking are no business of philosophers, but should be left to psychologists and others who claim to uncover "hidden truths". For, as Wittgenstein says, "what is hidden ... is of no interest to us" as philosophers, since philosophy deals with the clarification of conceptual relations which "lie open to view", and so do not need to be uncovered or explained, but rather to be perspicuously laid out before us.[16] I think that such an objection would be a misunderstanding both of Wittgenstein's point and of what it means to uncover self-deception. For such uncovering is not about finding motives and agendas supposedly hidden *behind* a text – or a word, an action – but about listening for the motives which speak *in* what the text says, and which are "hidden" only in the sense of being unacknowledged.

The point is that these motives are not hidden from the readers of the text. Revealing such plain deceptions is the business of the investigative journalist rather than the philosopher, it is a matter of revealing conspiracies, bringing suppressed avowals to the knowledge of the public ("At the secret meeting, the president said he wanted to achieve X, although he claims officially to be fighting against it"). In short, it is a matter of uncovering *new facts*, whereas the philosophical question is always *what we are to make of the facts we have*, for instance how the texts we read are to be interpreted, *what we should take them to be saying*. That, in fact, is precisely Wittgenstein's point in the very remark I just quoted.[17]

What I am interested in, then, are those motives forming a philosophical text which are "hidden", from its author and possibly also from its readers, by self-deception, by an unwillingness to acknowledge what is really at stake in the text, what one is actually *doing* in the writing and reading of it. I am interested in what one wants to hide by writing and reading as one does. But this very hiding is evidenced *in* the text itself, in the lacunae and paradoxes of what it says, and in *the silence that it keeps* about certain other questions it might have raised but *avoids*. This is all there in plain view, even if it is something we do not want to see, and therefore need to be reminded of – perhaps one might even say, have our noses rubbed into.

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[16] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 126.

[17] "One might also give the name 'philosophy' to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions" (ibid.).

I should add, perhaps, that I have not engaged in these exercises of unmasking in order to prove someone wrong, but because I find that the texts I discuss speak to important questions and have important things to say. That is precisely why they must not be read as reverently and therefore one-sidedly as they tend to be read. Naturally, many of their insights remain untouched by my critique of aspects of their general perspectives, and indeed remain central for me, as will be clear from my own text.

It seems to me that *on the whole* I have managed to identify the perspective or the challenge that is *in fact* opened up for each of us in the encounter with our friends, although the details of the picture I draw may of course be wrong. Perhaps the whole picture is wrong, too, in the sense that the *emphasis* is somehow wrong. I may have fixed my eye on the right thing but still be looking at it from the wrong angle, as it were. I do not know, but I do feel that if what I say is somehow flawed the problem will not be, as many readers will no doubt think, that I have gone too far and should moderate my claims, but rather that I have not gone far enough in the direction I have found myself thinking in, that I have at some points remained captive to the standard perspectives on friendship and morality which I feel are basically flawed.

Needless to say, I am no more immune to self-deception than anybody else – my entanglements in self-deception may be different from yours, but we both have them – and what I say will show traces of those entanglements at all those points where my account is morally speaking false, where I have tried to present friendship in a way which will make its challenge more palatable to me, with my particular inclinations and fears and difficulties. But insofar as I do indeed deceive myself, I myself will of course refuse to see that I do.

I am not saying that it is impossible ever to unmask one's own self-deceptions. On the contrary, one can only do it oneself, no one else can do it for one. The dog that hid the bone *can* find it again, *if* he pleases. But if he does not, he will see to it that he is "unaware" of any hidden bones; that is the paradoxical logic of self-deception. I would say that moral philosophy is what it ought to be, that it can help us to a better understanding moral matters and moral difficulties, only when it helps us get rid of some of our self-deceptions, helps us unmask ourselves. Very often, however, moral philosophy in fact becomes an exercise in *masking* the truth about oneself.

Be that as it may, there certainly is no way to *prove* by argument that what I say about friendship and ethics is right. As I see it, arguments, conceived of as a "chain" of reasoning *binding* one to a certain conclusion, play a quite

subordinate role in philosophy. They make the sense they make only *within* particular perspectives, serving as tools for elucidation of the significance of particular details in the broader picture, and that broader picture itself cannot be arrived at, nor can it be disconfirmed, by arguments. An argument obviously cannot convince one that its own premises are correct, or that the question it purports to be an argument about is a question one *can* meaningfully argue about, and if an argument which seemed alright leads to an absurd conclusion no one will think that it must nonetheless be true because the argument led to it; rather, one will think that there must be some mistake in the argument. So much for the "power" of argument.

The problem in philosophical debates is not to prove one is right but rather to get the other to *see one's point*, to see from the point of view one inhabits, and one cannot force anyone to see as one sees – nor, for that matter, can one force oneself to see differently. One can only *invite others over*, as it were, and oneself try to remain open to their invitations. "If you say A, you *must* say B" is a very special claim, more important is the case where you say A and I say B, and then I say, "Alright, but try to think of it this way...".

– Deconstructing the social –

Given what I said about the impossibility of keeping moral, existential and psychological questions apart, it should not be surprising that this study in moral philosophy could just as well be classified as philosophical anthropology or philosophy of psychology. Some of the discussions will concern the philosophy of culture and society, and many will be relevant to discussions in theology. I also look at some philosophical issues seemingly unconnected to ethics or to friendship from the perspective friendship opens up. Thus, I outline a view of the emotions, seeing them as essentially phenomena of *friction*, as reactions registering our difficulties with openness.

In thus engaging with a variety of questions from apparently different fields of philosophy, my approach is closer in spirit both to Continental Phenomenology and to the classical tradition in philosophy – witness the impossibility of classifying a work such as Plato's *Republic* – than it is to philosophy as it is usually done in the Anglo-American world today. Some will no doubt see this wide range as a lack of focus. As a general objection this

seems to me ill-founded. In philosophy, questions become well-defined and clearly delineated only at the stage at which all the real questions have already been answered – which means, in most cases, that they have never really been asked, but have simply been answered by default, by one's unthinkingly accepting that things "must" be a certain way. A question gives food for thought only insofar as one cannot be sure one will be able to digest it.

On the level of philosophical anthropology, my project might be seen as an instance of the general and rather recent trend in philosophy and elsewhere to stress the essentially *shared* character of human life. This has needed stressing especially in contrast to the absurdities of modern, "atomistic" individualism, which, consciously or not, considers human beings as, in Hobbes' striking phrase, "but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement with each other".[18] In contrast to this, we need to stress, as I indeed do, that our identity as individuals is constituted in and through our relations to others. My discussions throughout this thesis are meant to show how this is so quite concretely and not just on some general methodological level.

Nonetheless, it would be quite mistaken to see my approach as merely an instance of a general trend to emphasise the *social* character of the human way of being. Whether we like it or not we are always, even in our solitude, related to others in one way or another, but the question is: In *what* way, in which *spirit*, do we relate to them? My perspective is different from, and even opposed to, *communitarian* theorising insofar as such theorising tends to involve not only a stress on the importance of our relations to each other but a more or less open affirmation of "the community" as such.[19] This seems to me to be a moral-ideological move in which one in effect presents human life as though it was essentially *social*, a matter of *collective* identities. This way of thinking is indeed constitutive of *society*, but it also constitutes, as I will explain, a *denial* of the very possibility of openness between individuals. Insofar as it is a desire for openness, friendship is not a manifestation of social life at all, but rather a struggle to break free from it, from the dominion of the "they", to speak with Heidegger.

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[18] Hobbes, *The Citizen*, VIII:1, in Hobbes, *Man and Citizen (De Homine* and *De Cive)* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991 [1972]), p. 205. – Hobbes of course thought that this was the point of view political philosophy ought to adopt.

[19] A good survey of the conteemporary debate about communitarianism is Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1993).

Note that distinguishing *forms* or *kinds* or *types* of community does not speak to the question I raise. The debate between liberals and communitarians concerns precisely the *kind* of social community "we" should have, or understand ourselves as in fact having; one in which the ideas of individual rights and contracts is central, or some other kind? Friendship, by contrast, takes us out of the social "we" altogether, and in so doing also frees us from questions about what "should" be the case. In the life of friends the only question is "Who am I? Who are you? Who are we to each other?"

It might seem self-evident that our relationships must always have *some* particular form. In fact, the present thesis grew out of reflections on what was originally a draft of a chapter on friendship as one form of community among others: the working title of my PhD-project at that time was *Forms of human community*. As I worked on, however, I came to see friendship as having no *form* at all. It is not a "social institution" on a par with democracy or the welfare state or various systems of kinship, for instance. It is not a historically variable "social construction". One could rather say that it *deconstructs* everything social.

This means that friendship, in the sense I speak of it, cannot be investigated historically or otherwise empirically, in any sense of those terms. Of course the various social practices, the roles and expectations and proprieties, *associated with* friendship in different times and cultures, and thus the variable *concepts* or *conceptions* of friendship, can be investigated empirically, but the possibility of openness itself cannot. It is there, in fact giving sense to our practices and conceptions of friendship – often in the capacity of being that which we try to protect ourselves from through false conceptions of "it" – but it is neither reducible to, nor in any way changed by, them. I hope that the thesis as a whole will show why this is not an unwarrantedly speculative claim.

It will no doubt be said that friendship, like love and other personal relations, belong within the private sphere, which is merely one aspect of the human world with its social and political institutions, with its practices and ways of life, and that we will never understand that world if we focus in the way I do on the exclusive relationship between two people. It might be suggested that a better starting point for philosophical reflection would be the fact Hannah Arendt designates human *plurality*, the fact that human beings exist not alone but many together. Arendt herself said, in implied criticism of the so-called philosophers of dialogue (whom I will return to below), that the

implications of the "essential plurality" of humanity are "far from explored" when an I-Thou relationship is added to the traditional understanding of human nature which deals with "man in the singular".[20]

In response to this I would say, first of all, that in attempting to relegate the *personal* question raised in friendship to the status of a merely *private* matter one misses, or purposely obscures, the challenge it brings to one's social sense of self. Secondly, I do not conceive of the openness of love and friendship as an exclusive affair; on the contrary, as I will explain, openness cannot be reserved for only some people; to be open means to see in *each* person one meets one's "Thou". Thirdly, while it is true that reflection on friendship does not as such answer philosophical questions concerning politics, work and other human endeavours, it is also true – so I claim – that if one undertakes to reflect on these endeavours without asking how they relate to the possibility of personal encounters, one will end up with false conceptions both of their basis or their limits.

In the life of friends the only question is, I said: "Who am I? Who are you? Who are we to each other?" This is also, as I will explain, the question in erotic and parental love, and it is the question put to us by conscience. A main contention of this study is that love, in the sense of a strictly personal encounter between human beings, is essentially the same everywhere. Love does not have different "forms", for love will not let itself be *formed*, conditioned, tied down, domesticated, put in the service of private or social ends. Every form one could imagine would restrict and thwart the endless desire for the other person that is love. Thus, although I speak mostly about friendship, I could just as well have spoken about love, and I will frequently do so. This is not to say that my subject is not really friendship but something else, called love. The point is rather that "friendship" and "love" are two names for the same openness, the same desire for unity and unity of desire.

This is not a dogmatic assumption I made at the outset of my investigations, but rather an insight that has grown on me in the course of them. I do not see myself as elaborating a particular "conception" or "ideal" of love among others; rather I try to indicate *love's own* perspective, the understanding of love that one will be taken to if one *opens oneself* to the desire and longing that one *actually feels* in loving others, even if this feeling is mixed up with, and

[20] Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954* (Harcourt Brace: New York, 1994), p. 445. – I wrote my MA-thesis on Arendt's philosophy. I will not discuss it here in any systematic manner, however, although I will sometimes refer to Arendt.

opposed by, a motley crew of other feelings and reactions. What one has to do is not to "commit" to "the right ideal of love" – all *ideals* of love are false – but rather to open oneself to the love that is somehow in one, instead of repressing it, diverting and perverting and limiting it in some way.

– Placing the project: some affinities and contrasts –

The argument of this thesis is essentially a constructive one, an attempt to articulate my own perspective on friendship and the moral life. However, an important aspect of doing this will be to contrast my view with others, showing the ways in which they appear problematic when seen from the perspective I propose. In this sense, the work of construction is inseparable from a work of deconstruction. What I deconstruct is not primarily other *philosophical* views, but various widely shared moral perceptions and valuations, which grow from and shape our everyday life and thought before they appear in philosophy. They do *also* appear in philosophy, however, and my deconstructive readings of philosophical texts (I do not refer to any specifically Derridean strategy by this characterisation) will focus precisely on the way they express common moral prejudices whose real meaning remains unarticulated; the unquestioned respect for respect in Kant, the self-righteous moralism of a "we" in Aristotle, and so on.

The aspects I focus on in these readings seem to me crucial for understanding the actual moral meaning of, for instance, Kant's or Aristotle's ethics, and I hope that what I say about them and other familiar philosophical views gives a clear indication of how my view stands to them, and also manages to raise unfamiliar, disquieting, questions about them. I do not, however, attempt in any systematic and detailed way to relate the perspective I propose to any particular competing view in moral philosophy. Some readers will perhaps feel that this is a weakness. Nonetheless, what I have tried to do is to make my own view intelligible, presenting it as forcefully and coherently as I can, illuminating it from many different angles without losing the focus. What I say connects in quite direct ways to central aspects of our moral life, and should not in this sense need relating to particular philosophical positions in order to be understood.

It is certainly true that the way we think and speak is formed by the traditions to which we belong, so that this thesis, for instance, would look quite different had I written it in a different intellectual environment, and in this sense a kind of historical awareness of, and reflection on, the historical-cultural background of one's thinking is quite necessary. Nonetheless, even if one can show that a particular way of speaking has certain historical roots, this still leaves unanswered the decisive question what this way of speaking actually *means*. It should also be noted, I think, that we philosophers very often dodge philosophical issues when they become existentially challenging, by turning away from a direct consideration of the significance of a troubling question or statement, turning our attention instead to how it might relate to what *others* have said, thus using historical-intellectual reflection as an escape from existential reflection. Insofar as that happens, I would say that the former kind of reflection, which in such a case amounts to a shying *away* from "the things themselves", has less right to be called *philosophical* than the latter.

Having said this, let me nonetheless offer some historical-intellectual reflections on how my thesis might be placed in the intellectual landscape. My approach to friendship and love, and to moral philosophy generally, may seem idiosyncratic, but it has strong affinities to certain central themes in Christian or Biblical thought, and also to a number of central traditions of thought in philosophy proper – and such affinities show themselves not only in the similarity of views about how particular questions are to be articulated and resolved, but also in agreement about *what* the important questions are.

As far as friendship as a specific topic in its own right goes, however, what I say is indeed close to a wholesale repudiation of traditional philosophical views. Comparatively little has been written on friendship by philosophers, although there has been a minor upswing in interest in the topic in recent years.[21] I would say that most of the little that has been written can be seen to belong to a single tradition, stretching from Plato and Aristotle, over the Stoics and Aquinas and all the way to Emerson and Nietzsche. According to this tradition friendship, when it is the way it should ideally be, is about spiritual kinship; it is grounded in the friends' being attracted to and sustained by the

[21] One can get an overview of the various approaches to friendship in contemporary philosophy and some neighbouring disciplines from perusing the three edited volumes: Neera Kapur Badhwar (ed.), *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1993), Leroy S. Rouner (ed.), *The Changing Face of Friendship* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), and Preston King & Heather Dever (eds.), *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

same good. This idea is also accepted as self-evident in most contemporary theorising about friendship, but as I explain in Chapter One, I consider it fundamentally confused, morally speaking self-deceived. This is not to say, naturally, that writers in this tradition say nothing of value about friendship. Much, I think, can be learned especially from Nietzsche, whose conception I discuss at some length.

Some philosophers have thought about friendship in ways different from, and subversive of, the tradition. Thus Simone Weil's and, surprisingly, Kant's, conceptions of friendship are interestingly different from the mainstream in that both see friendship, as I do, in terms of a fundamental *tension* – and Kant even discusses this in terms of openness. A comparison of their views with mine will, as we shall see, prove fruitful. Montaigne's famous essay on friendship should also be mentioned here.[22] The most remarkable thing about it, is the way Montaigne refuses – quite rightly, I think – to allow any divisions into the unity he takes friendship to be, and how he is not deterred by the fact that his – or rather love's – insistence on unity brings it into open conflict with most of what ordinarily passes for moral thinking. This will be the central topic of Chapter Two. Reflection on Montaigne is central in Jacques Derrida's book on friendship, which is a notable recent exception to the traditional and contemporary consensus on the character of friendship – but one I nonetheless find problematic, as I will explain.[23]

As for moral philosophy more generally, it is not as easy to survey the intellectual landscape or to place this thesis in it. Take, for instance, the

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[22] Michel de Montaigne, *On Friendship.* Translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2004).

[23] Derrida, *Politics of Friendship.* Translated by George Collins (London & New York: Verso, 1997). I will not discuss the similarly heterodox views on the question of friendship, love, community and human relations of other recent French writers, e.g. Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan and many others (Sartre will be mentioned briefly). Their views would no doubt merit discussion, but I must leave them undiscussed both because of limitations of space and, in many cases, because my knowledge of their writings is limited. The same can be said of many contemporary German writers, and of much post-Kantian German 19th-century philosophy. In general, my position is somewhat awkward, in that most of the Anglo-American philosophy I know best seems, with the exception of some Wittgensteinian moral philosophy and a few odd authors, not very relevant in regard to the questions that have come to occupy me, while I do not know as well as I would wish the work of many of the thinkers whose concerns appear to stand in a more fruitful relation to, and also tension with, my concerns. In addition to philosophers, the various traditions of thought in theology and psychoanalysis, of which I have no very systematic knowledge, obviously include much of relevance to my concerns. However, it is always the case in philosophy that much more could be said about a topic than one has in fact said, and the above remarks are not intended as an excuse for, or a defence against, anything, but rather as a straightforward explanation of why certain thinkers who might have been expected to appear in the pages that follow do not.

towering figure of Kant. While Kant's ethics is a fixed point of reference for my own discussion of the character of morality, especially in the last chapter of the thesis, my approach is very far from "Kantian" in any standard sense. It should be noted, however, that it is not at all clear what it means to "follow" or "trace" the thought of a particular thinker, which is what those avowing their allegiance to a particular tradition such as "Kantianism" claim to do.

Indeed, to stay with Kant, what I take to be the central insight, question and *provocation* of his ethics, namely his insistence on the mysterious, otherworldly character of moral claims as we experience them in conscience, their being somehow inescapably *given*, at the same time as they have no regard for our seemingly most "natural" inclinations, thus undermining our mundane self-conception and awakening in us a wonder at what it is to be a human being – all this I find more or less absent from the writings of most present-day Kantians. They seem to me to offer what Bernard Harrison characterises as "a demythologized, logically aseptic version" of Kantian ethics; one, that is, which simply rejects the central Kantian insight, which I accept and whose far-reaching implications I try to understand, that morality "entirely transcend[s] all considerations of common-sense mutual accomodation or rational self-interest".[24]

In this sense, I feel that what I do is more Kantian in spirit than what many avowed Kantians do. This is not to deny, however, that there are aspects of Kant's own thought which lend themselves to the kind of development that contemporary Kantianism exemplifies, and yet other aspects which are problematic in still other ways; I will touch on such aspects at various points in the text. In short, Kant is a contradictory thinker – is there a thinker who is not? – and so the question is not whether or not one follows Kant or some other great thinker, but rather which threads of their thought one picks up and follows. And again, one may pick up a thread, follow out a train of thought, in a way which shows the *difficulties* it runs into, and the questions it *avoids*, rather than the positive insights it leads to. To become aware of difficulties, of their place and character, is itself a central form of insight in philosophical and existential matters.

Anyway, what connects my approach to Kant, Kierkegaard and Simone Weil, for instance, to Socrates and Plato (but not Aristotle) among the ancients, and to such contemporary moral philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas, Gabriel

[24] Bernard Harrison, "Kant and the Sincere Fanatic", in S. C. Brown (ed.), *Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 226 f.

Marcel, and the Wittgensteinian philosophers R. F. Holland and Raimond Gaita, is the insistence that reductive accounts of good and evil – accounts in terms of biological, psychological, social or cultural needs and structures – miss the heart of the matter.[25] To my mind, the work of the thinkers I mentioned contrasts favourably, to put it mildly, with the small-mindedness and cynicism characteristic of the main-stream of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, insofar as it has adopted the so-called "scientific world-view". The very idea of a "scientific world-view" is actually a contradiction in terms, since all world-views are *anti*-scientific precisely to the extent that they are world-views, that is, expressions of a wish and commitment to admit only the reality of certain kinds of phenomena and interpretations, for instance only crudely reductive and cynical interpretations of moral and spiritual phenomena.

The prevalence of that reductive world-view has meant, however, that even philosophers critical of such reductionism often spend all their energy combating its assumptions, and at the end of the day they have hardly come anywhere in terms of moral and existential understanding. When it comes to seem like an achievement to have insisted that love is not just hormones, all the real questions about what love *is* go unasked. In general terms, in doing moral philosophy, in trying to understand what for instance love or truthfulness might mean, we should, as Marcel says, "start from the richest and fullest acceptation of the term, not from the most impoverished and debased".[26] That is: we should try to give such words as much or as strong a meaning as we possibly can, we should try to make the existentially speaking most challenging sense we can of the reality they point to, rather than refusing to admit anything above the bare minimum we need to make *any* moral sense of our life at all. The latter course makes perverse use of Occam's razor, which is supposed to cut away unnecessary assumptions about what we need to presuppose in order to make sense of phenomena, rather than cut away the phenomena themselves; it should allow us to understand more and more clearly, not make us understand less. Reductionism in ethics is a recipe for keeping ourselves in the darkness of the cave, morally speaking – and that is indeed, it seems to me, the secret purpose of the whole reductionist exercise.

To find reductionism confused does not imply naivety in regard to the extent to which our life – and our moral life with its "high" aspirations

[25] See the works of these thinkers listed in the Bibliography.
[26] Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*. Translated by Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002 [1964]), p. 89.

especially – must indeed be explained in terms of socio-psychological dynamics of various kinds, in terms of fear, will to power, and self-deception. Certainly no one can accuse Plato or Kierkegaard or Simone Weil of naivety in regard to these things. In fact it should be obvious that someone who *starts* by thinking, as the average reductionist does, that morality and life in general is "only" about this or that, will never reach a perspective from which the more subtle and devious spiritual corruptions can even be suspected.

Anti-reductionism in ethics is not, then, at odds with an emphasis on the ubiquity of self-deception and the consequent impossibility to take what we say about moral and existential matters naively in good faith – the point being that such "good faith" turns out to be in bad faith. Given this emphasis, my thesis clearly also belongs in that tradition of thought, if "tradition" is the right word, which has been designated the "hermeneutics of suspicion", Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud being perhaps its greatest exponents – although Kierkegaard should definitely also be mentioned in this connexion.[27] The hermeneutics of suspicion investigates the *repressed unconscious* of "ordinary", "decent" consciousness, delving into those hidden desires and fears and dreams and evils that shape our life most, but which we want least of all to acknowledge; a task which is, as I explained above, properly *philosophical* in nature.

In one sense there is nothing new in the hermeneutics of suspicion; the "methods" of a Marx or a Freud may be new, but essentially these thinkers are modern day heirs to the impulse of a radical critique of received opinion which exposes the "wisdom of the world" we all live by as in some deep sense "folly". That impulse animates both Biblical religion and Greek philosophy, different as they are. It is a commonplace to say that the most fundamental tension within the past, and present, of Western thought, is that between Athens and Jerusalem, between the Greek and the Judaeo-Christian or Biblical traditions. How this tension is to be characterised, what it is that creates the tension, is not so clear, however. I want to give a quick sketch of how I see the issue, because it seems to me that the appearance of strangeness or even perversity which, in the context of philosophy as it is mostly done, attaches to the perspective I try to articulate, is due to the fact that it is, as I intimated in my remarks about the gospel-teaching on love, a Biblical rather than a Greek perspective, whereas

[27] The term was coined by Paul Ricoeur in his *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), as an umbrella-term for the interpretive practices of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.

philosophers have always felt at home in, and continued, the Greek way of thinking.[28]

– The Greeks, the Bible, I and Thou –

Platonism is the most impressive expression of the Greek perspective, at the same time a "purely" typical specimen of this perspective and unlike anything else emanating from it, as great "works" of the spirit always are. Both Platonism and the Biblical tradition conceive of a "fall" which accounts for, or is a mythical way of representing, the evil in human life. Our life is in both cases assumed to be originally good in the sense that it is *meant* to be good, is opened unto a goodness, indeed to a life of divine goodness, which it nonetheless constantly falls short of. Because this "falling short" is thought of as not merely a matter of occasional aberrations, but as a systematically perverse *bent* of our life and our thinking, and especially of our conception of ourselves, the radical critique of the "wisdom" of our world has its work cut out, both because there is so much – in a sense indeed, *everything* – to be critical of, and because we do not of ourselves want to hear anything about it. Jesus and Socrates were both put to death merely for *reminding* others of something they did not want to hear.

This is not to imply that what Jesus and Socrates remind us of is the *same* thing, however. The point I want to underline now is precisely that the conceptions both of the original goodness and the fall with its attendant perversions – and so the conceptions of what it would take to become free of those perversions – are crucially different in the two traditions. Plato teaches

[28] I am well aware of the enormous simplification involved in speaking of *the* Greek and *the* Biblical or Judaeo-Christian tradition or perspective or way of thinking. A religious or intellectual tradition can appear to be one and unchanging when looked at from without, and when contrasted with other traditions, but experienced from within, its life *consists* in the debates carried on between contrasting conceptions of the meaning of its central ideas and questions, including debates about which these ideas and questions really are. In this sense, characterizing "a" tradition always involves a simplification and an interpretation, and when we are dealing with such obviously imprecise labels as "Greek" or "Christian" this fact becomes massively clear. Interpretations may nonetheless be illuminating insofar as they highlight the deepest tendencies in, the basic thrust of, different ways of thinking. – It is also true that Greek thought and the Biblical tradition have, in the history of Christian Europe, often melted into each other, but that does not prevent us from asking, on the contrary it makes it important to ask, *what* has melted into what.

that our soul knew the good ideas and the Idea of the Good, but has now forgotten this, in a forgetting which has come about because of our "fall" into *embodiment*, into corporeality.[29] The Bible teaches that our "fall" is not about ideas or forgetting nor, as we shall see, about embodiment, but rather about our *having turned away from an open, personal relationship with someone*. This someone is not just anyone, and not only or primarily a human other, of course, but God, our Creator and Father. Nonetheless, it remains true that in the Biblical tradition, evil is essentially conceived of as the *wrecking of a personal relationship*.

It is a superficial view to say that, according to the Bible, evil was caused by, or even that it came into being through, humanity's break with God. The point is rather that evil *is* this break: all the particular manifestations of evil in our lives are not merely consequences of this break, but in themselves express it and perpetuate it. Evil is at root, whatever guises it may assume, our turning away in *mistrust* from an open personal relationship with God and with each other, while goodness would consist in re-entering the openness of that relationship. If the Greek philosophers see the drama of our lives in terms of a basic conflict between the "soul", seat of the intellect, and the "body", understood as system of "natural" drives, the Bible presents the decisive conflict as that between faithful openness to God, and *egocentric*, *closed* perspectives, on the other. That conflict manifests itself in the most intellectual and abstract realms of the spirit no less than in the most "lowly" and carnal ones; just as nothing is too "high" to be incapable of expressing selfishness, nothing is too "low" to be incapable of manifesting love's openness. Thus, the Biblical notion of the "flesh" has nothing in particular to do with the *body*, but names a way of being in which the *whole person* is turned away from the love of God and neighbour.[30]

Biblically speaking, a life in truth and goodness does not, then, consist in learning to understand "our place in the cosmos"; it does not consist in anything having to do with *intellectual understanding*, as philosophers even since before Plato have always flattered themselves in thinking – this being flattering for philosophers insofar as they think of themselves, quite rightly, as those who have gone farther than anyone else in intellectual understanding. Biblically

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[29] Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, and the later part of the *Phaedrus*.

[30] This is forcefully insisted on by Martin Luther, for instance; see his "Vorrede auff die Epistel S. Paul: an die Romer", in *D. Martin Luther: Die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch 1545 aufs new zurericht*. Hrsg. von Hans Volz und Heinz Blanke (Munich: Roger & Bernhard. 1972), vol. 2, pp. 2254-2268.

speaking, goodness resides in seeing God "face to face", while evil consists in turning away from God's face, and whatever lack of understanding evil involves must be conceived of as itself an expression of, rather than the cause of, this turning away from God. The contrast of perspectives I have indicated is strikingly expressed in an old Hasidic tale, told to illustrate the difference in orientation between Ezekiel and Aristotle:

> Two people entered the palace of a king. One took a long time each room, examined the gorgeous stuffs and treasures with the eyes of an expert and could not see enough. The other walked through the halls and knew nothing but this: "This is the king's house, this is the king's robe. A few steps more and I shall behold my Lord, the King."[31]

In this thesis, I do not speak – at least not explicitly – of God, but of our relationship to the human other, but the logic of my basic claim is "Biblical" insofar as I claim that while we have turned, and are ever again turning, away from the openness of a personal relationship to our neighbour, goodness consists in returning to that openness – and also that it is *in* the struggle with openness that the question of *truth* is raised in the most radical way conceivable in our life.[32]

Even if it was always there in Biblical thought, the notion that one could and should explicitly make the question of the personal relationship of "I" and "Thou" the very starting point and axis of thinking – which, I must repeat, is altogether different from taking the *social* character of human life as one's starting point – seems not to appear anywhere in philosophy or theology until the second half of the 19th century, and it becomes established as something like a distinct tradition or orientation of thinking only in the interwar period, with the thinkers sometimes referred to, perhaps not altogether happily, as "philosophers of dialogue", the most significant among whom were perhaps Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. In France, Marcel and Levinas later added their distinctive voices to the debate. This is a tradition of thought that this thesis quite clearly belongs to.[33]

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[31] Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*. Translated by Olga Marx (New York: Shocken Books, 1991 [1947]), Book Two, p. 58.

[32] As we will see, the relationship with God cannot in fact, Biblically speaking, be understood in isolation from our relationship to our neighbours. In the Conclusion I will return to the problems that the apparent "replacing of God by the neighbour" might seem to occasion for my argument.

[33] The first philosophers to make the "I-Thou"-relationship central to their thinking appear to have been Ludwig Feuerbach (cf. his *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* [1843] in *Sämmtliche Werke. Band 2.* Hrsg von Wilhelm Bolin und Friedrich Jodl [Stuttgart 1903-1910]), and the

The point of the philosophers of dialogue – to stick with that appellation for lack of a better one – is not merely that classical philosophy has unduly disregarded the I-Thou-relationship, and that now it, too, deserves to be made the object of philosophical analysis (such an interpretation would be analogous to Blum's understanding of the relationship between friendship and standard moral philosophy which I criticised earlier). Rather, the radical claim is that the I-Thou-relationship should form the very starting point and point of reference for philosophical analysis as such, as it in fact constitutes the "point" around which our experience as a whole turns – and that acknowledging this fact will turn the self-understanding of philosophy upside down.

The complaint against traditional philosophical reflection is that it has been dominated by what might be called a monological or solipsistic paradigm, or rather delusion, of which the "atomism" of modern political philosophy would be merely one instance. The "subject matter" of philosophy has been taken to be "being" or "nature" or "the world", and man's place in it or "access" to it through language, or thought, or experience. The salient point here is not primarily that the subject imagined has always been "man" and not "woman", true and important as this is, but rather that it has been "the" subject, the solitary knower or actor or sufferer – and "mankind" or "*the* community" or, again,

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Swedish philosopher E. G. Geijer, in his *Lectures on the history of mankind* given in the year 1841–42 (cf. Geijer, *Föreläsningar öfver Menniskans Historia*. Upptecknade, redigerade och utgifna av Sigurd Ribbing [Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1856], pp. 209–220). – Buber gives a short review of the dialogue-tradition (not mentioning Geijer, however) in "Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips" in *Das dialogische Prinzip.* 9. Auflage (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002 [1986]), pp. 299–320. Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere. Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart*. Zweite, um eine Vorrede vermehrte Auflage (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), contains a good, and more systematic, discusssion of the German philosophers of dialogue, contrasting their approach with that of transcendental phenomenology. I will return to Theunissen's critique of the dialogue-tradition in the Conclusion. An over-view of the German-speaking *theologians* of dialogue, less well known to the English-speaking philosophical audience, is given in John Cullberg, *Das Du und die Wirklichkeit* (Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1933). Central among these theologians were Ferdinand Ebner and Friedrich Gogarten; theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth, and of course many others, have later picked up on the insights of the early thinkers of dialogue. – As I indicated, speaking of "dialogue" in connexion with this tradition may be misleading; for instance, Levinas, who emphasises the ethical *asymmetry* of the relationship to the other, is critical of Buber's emphasis on the symmetrical relationship (as he takes it to be) of "dialogue". – I should perhaps note explicitly that there are more or less significant differences and disagreements between my perspective and that of any of the thinkers I have mentioned. Also, I will quote passages from various thinkers with approval if these passages happen to make a particular point well, without implying in any way that I agree with the general perspective of the thinkers quoted. I do not pretend that I can somehow strengthen my position by invoking the support of others; as Socrates said, the question in philosophy is not how many support a position, but whether it is true, which is a question each person has answer for themselves.

"language" or "thought", is no less solitary a subject for being corporate and abstract. It should also be noted that the basic structure of subject-object or man-world is *not* undone merely by insisting, as more sophisticated modern philosophers since Kant and Hegel have tended to do, that the two poles of this structure always arise together; that they can neither be made sense of nor brought together if one starts by thinking them in isolation; that there is no quasi-Cartesian way from an originally isolated "subject" to an objectified "external world", but rather thought must start from our "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger), as the encompassing whole in which "subjects" *and* "objects" alike have their being.

Against even such sophisticated perspectives the philosophers of dialogue, with whom I am in agreement on this essential point, claim that the primordial relationship, the one that our experience and our thought must start from and has its being in, is not that between man and world, but (to stay with the masculine language) that between man and man, between human beings. I am not primarily an object in the world for you, nor you for me – not even the peculiar kind of object we would somehow have to conclude is *also* a subject like ourselves (which is how things are imagined in the classic, but quite confused, "problem of other minds"). Rather, our world with its objects unfolds *around us*, around "you" and "me", but we ourselves have our being in our relationship to each other, in which neither "I"' nor "you" is primary, but rather the primary fact is our very relatedness to each other. This relatedness is what I in this thesis call openness, and Buber calls the dimension of the *Zwischen*, the "Between".[34]

In terms of language, the difference of perspective the philosophers of dialogue are pointing to, could be expressed by saying that while standard philosophy has focused on the relationship between language and the world, between words and things, the philosophers of dialogue focus on the primordial fact that in what we say *about* things, we also *address someone*. What makes speech meaningful is not the mere relationship between words, or between words and objects, but the fact that someone turns to someone else desiring to tell them something. Sometimes there is indeed nothing, no "thing", that one person wants to tell the other, there is simply the turning to the other: that is the case in the *greeting*. Normally there is something someone speaks about, a theme of conversation, of course, but even in that case, I understand *what* is

[34] Cf. the texts collected in Buber's *Das dialogische Prinzip*, especially his most systematic work *Ich und Du*.

being said in the full sense only insofar as I understands why you, my interlocutor, are telling me whatever it is you are telling me. In order to understand what is *said* I must understand *your saying* of it, I must be able to relate to how you relate to me in addressing me. In short, I must feel *addressed* by your words – which means that I feel called upon to *respond* to you in some way; to answer your question or your plea for help, for instance.

The world is, to be sure, not created by our addressing each other about it; it is not that reality would somehow emanate from, or could be derived from, the I-Thou-relationship. The point is rather that the world and we ourselves have no existence *for us independently of our relationship to each other*. *Our openness to each other opens us to the world, too*, just as, conversely, when we close ourselves to each other, this will show itself in the kind of distorted sense we start to make of the world and of ourselves; in how the world becomes laden with, or is again drained of, various kinds of significance.

To make this perhaps strange and abstract-sounding claim more concrete, think of the extreme case of schizophrenics, whose terrible problems with themselves in their relationship to others are manifested in their seeing "signs" – of a conspiracy, for instance – everywhere in nature and in things. This extreme case reveals the essential point about "normal" cases, namely that insofar as we see *meaning* in our surroundings, insofar as they make sense to us, the meaning we see is not neutral – meaning never is – but is connected to, and expresses, the way we make sense of each other and ourselves. This is also true of philosophical attempts at world-interpretation or –description, so that metaphysical or ontological assertions about "being" or "reality" are not prior to, or neutral with respect to, the question of openness, which is, even when it arises in the context of a philosophical discussion, rather than in the context of a concrete encounter with one's neighbour, essentially a moral-existential question, a question of conscience. Thus, to explore the perspective opened up by the philosophers of dialogue, as I do in this thesis, is to pursue Levinas' two intriguing claims – which are in fact two sides of the same claim – that "the face of the other" is "the starting point of philosophy", and that ethics, rather than metaphysics, is "First Philosophy".[35]

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[35] Cf. Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), p. 59, and Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy" in *The Levinas Reader* (ed.) Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). –Ludwig Binswanger, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis Menschlichen Daseins.* 5. Auflage (München & Basel: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1973 [1942]), contains both one of the most systematic and rich philosophical descriptions of the I-Thou-relationship in the literauture, and a critique of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*,

I have not yet mentioned the thinker whose thought mine is closest to, and most influenced by. He is my friend and colleague at Åbo Akademi University, Hannes Nykänen. As far as the basic perspective I try to articulate goes, the things I say are no more than restatements, applications and extensions of what he said in his doctoral dissertation, which is both a strikingly original piece of philosophy, and the only substantial and detailed philosophical account of love and ethics I have come across with which I find myself in complete agreement on all essential points.[36] I will quote Nykänen quite frequently, but I will not attempt to give a summary statement of his views, on the one hand because my views are so close to his that doing so would amount merely to restating in slightly different terms what I am trying to say in my own words, while on the other hand his position is, like mine, sufficiently far from the mainstream to make it quite difficult to state briefly, and yet intelligibly, what it is. The fact is, nonetheless, that this thesis would not have been possible were it not for the perspective Nykänen has opened up for me.

– The structure of the study –

The structure of the study is, in very rough outline, as follows. In Chapter One, I try to indicate more fully what I mean by openness and by the fear and the tensions provoked in us by it. I discuss some standard views of love and friendship, which seem not properly to register friendship's character of a strictly personal encounter, and indicate possible motives for holding

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showing how the very terms in which it is set are incompatible with *love's* understaning of our being, thus undermining Heidegger's claim to have given an analysis prior to, and neutral with regard to, any particular possibilities of human existence – which is what Heidegger takes love to be; Binswanger's point, with which I agree, is precisely that love cannot be seen as merely a particular existential possibility among others. Heidegger himself thought Binswanger had misunderstood him. I will not go into the controversy further here, however. – Note that even the, as such quite "value neutral", technical-scientific investigation and manipulation of things manifests a particular orientation towards them as things to be investigated and manipulated. It can co-exist with, but has no metaphysical priority over, other ways of relating to things. Insofar as such a priority is asserted, and things are claimed to be somehow *essentially* the way science might present them, we are dealing either with arbitrary metaphysical stipulation, or else the expression of a very worrisome attitude – to express it cautiously – towards life, an attitude to be compared, for instance, with that of a businessman who instinctively sees everything in terms of the money that could be made off it.

[36] Nykänen, *The 'I,' the 'You,' and the Soul: An Ethics of Conscience* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002).

them. Friendship, I claim, is not about inclinations, or shared ideals or interests, or emotional attachment; it is simply the desire for openness. And the main point about openness is that it knows *no specifications and limitations*; it consists simply in the *wholehearted* desire to be with one's friend.

In Chapter Two, I explore the specifically moral implications of this last point. The focus is on showing how *morality*, insofar as it incorporates specifications and limitations; demands for respect, rights, reciprocity, and so on, comes into being only when openness is rejected, while conversely the openness of friendship is subversive of morality. My point is not, however, that friendship would be "beyond good and evil" in the amoral, Nietzschean sense, but that the wholehearted unity of friendship shows us a goodness completely free of evil, in contrast with which the evil, the destructiveness and pettiness, of reactions and ways of thinking which are generally taken to be essential to morality, stands revealed.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the relationship between friendship and society in general – which is, as I noted, essentially one of hostile tension – and also the way the openness or lack of it between friends is mirrored in their openness or lack of it towards others. My claim is that when friendships take on the exclusive character of "us" closing our ranks against "outsiders", this reflects a lack of openness on the inside. Openness is strictly personal, it is between "you" and "me", but *precisely for that reason* it cannot be restricted to some people and withheld from others. This insight dissolves the basis for the seemingly obvious objection to my identification of goodness with the openness of friendship, that since friendship is an *exclusive* relation between two people it is quite impossible to give an account of *moral* goodness, which is essentially defined by a requirement of impartiality, from the perspective of friendship.

Having cleared away this objection I move on, in Chapter Four, to an explicit discussion of the general character of morality, a conception of which has of course informed my discussion of the apparently more specific questions in the previous chapter. I outline the perspectives on morality and on goodness given us by *conscience*, which I take to be the name of that in us which relates us to good and evil. Conscience reveals the evil we do to be evil by reminding us of a good possibility, namely the possibility of openness, which evil is the rejection of. The existential drama discussed in Chapter One in terms not overtly moral, is thus shown explicitly to be the drama of moral life, too. I also

discuss the absurdities that result when it is denied, as mostly it is in moral philosophy, that our sense of good and evil is given in the immediate perception of conscience, and I explain my claim that moral difficulties are not, as philosophers have tended to claim, due to our lacking knowledge, but to self-deception.

The thesis concludes, in due order, with a Conclusion.[37]

[37] Let me add a brief note on the use of gendered language in this text. I have used both the neutral "one" and "they'" and the gendered "he" and "she", choosing the mode of expression which seemed most convenient in each case, without ideological bias, I hope. In the many examples I give of different ways in which friends (and other people) may relate to each other, I have generally called my protagonists either "you" and "I" or "she" and "he", simply because that is a convenient way to make it clear whether I am talking about one friend or the other. I take it for granted, as the classical writers on friendship do not, that a woman and a man can be friends (this does not have to mean that they are "just friends", as we say, for there can certainly be sexual desire between friends).

I
– Openness –

What is friendship? To begin answering that strange question, to begin to see what is being asked here, I will start in a perhaps surprising place, by reflecting on an experience we all know and which is not one of friendship at all. What I have in mind is the awkwardness one can feel when suddenly finding oneself alone with a stranger in a lift. This is a very ordinary situation, but there is something extraordinary about it, too. Something very important makes itself felt here – but what exactly?

– The tension –

There are just you and he in this small, closed space, and it makes you feel very uncomfortable. Why is that? Being alone by yourself in the lift causes you no problems, it is the closeness of the other person that causes you discomfort – just as your closeness probably makes him feel uncomfortable. But why? It is not that you fear anything in particular from him: it is quite a different experience to find yourself alone with a *threatening* stranger, with someone who seems violent or who just gives you "the creeps" in some hard-to-define but definite way, connected with your sensing that his way of relating to you is definitely not friendly. But in the ordinary case the awkwardness you feel is not about sensing any particular threat, any particular hostility. And there is not any particular thing you feel ashamed of, or guilty about, either; there is no

particular history of troubles between people of your kind and of his, say "black" and "white". All these things might be there, of course, but I am interested in the case where they are not. There are just you and he, and it makes you feel very uncomfortable. How can this be?

It is not the physical closeness as such that makes you uncomfortable, either. If more people get on the lift and it becomes positively crowded so that you have to press your body against the stranger's, you might feel not more uncomfortable, but on the contrary relieved, because what distressed you was the fact that you were alone with the stranger, that there were just you and he. That is why the awkwardness might be relieved simply by a third person entering the lift, for then there is already the beginnings of a group, of anonymity. What is distressing about the encounter with the stranger is precisely that it is not anonymous, but strictly *personal*. There really are just you and he, and so there is nothing for you to hide behind.

You might ask how it can be personal since you have never seen each other before, you are nothing to each other. But let me then ask: If the stranger really is nothing to you, how come his presence makes you feel so uncomfortable? The speck on the mirror in the lift, for instance, really is nothing to you, and that comes out precisely in the fact that you do not even notice it, or if you do, it draws no reaction from you, at least not of the strangely distressing kind the stranger awakens. Your reaction to the stranger shows that he is very far from being "nothing" to you. What needs describing is *what* he is to you, what you are to each other.

I said that the encounter with the stranger is strictly personal, but not all personal encounters are awkward, of course. What happens in the lift, what gives rise to, or rather announces itself as, your awkwardness, is that you do not *want* to get personal with the stranger. And the awkwardness comes from the fact that you know you cannot avoid getting personal: you know it has already become personal, you feel a contact with him that you would not want to have. There is a dialectic at work here whereby you are, in your awkwardness, *trying to avoid acknowledging the situation you know you are already in*. Think of how you and the stranger will try to avoid meeting each other's eyes: you will look at your feet or at the ceiling, or glance furtively at each other, and all your manoeuvres of avoiding contact only show how *in* contact, how intensely sensitive to each other, you in fact are.

In your awkwardness you will be thankful for anything you might fix your attention on; it might be just the lift making some sudden noise: you are

thankful for anything that will take the attention off *you* – off you *and* the stranger, for in your awkwardness you are conscious of yourself *and* the other *as* related to each other. One could say that your awkwardness appears as the world disappears – and by "world" I mean our everyday world of doings, comings and goings, of projects and activities of various kinds. This world suddenly disappears when the lift-doors close. Probably you and the stranger are both going somewhere, for one worldly reason or another, but the awkwardness comes from your not being related to each other through these worldly engagements: you just suddenly meet *for no good reason*. Had you encountered the same stranger for some particular reason, *in the role of* someone-or-other, a clerk serving a customer, say, there probably would have been no awkwardness, and one way of dispelling the awkwardness in the lift is to ask the stranger where he is going, that is, to focus attention away from you and him, and on the portion of the world he is involved with.

As Hannah Arendt puts it, the world is normally there between us somewhat as "a table is located between those who sit around it", but in situations like that in the lift the world seems suddenly to have "lost its power to gather ... to relate and to separate" us:

> The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two people sitting opposite each other were no longer separated [from each other] but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.[1]

The important thing to note, however, is that the awkwardness of "weirdness" of such situations is not produced by the disappearance of the world as such; rather, it is a reaction provoked in us by the presence of others (their presence to us and ours to them) which is revealed to us by the disappearance of the world. To take an analogy that is at the same time a central case of the disappearance of the "world": it is not as though the embarrassing or shocking thing about nakedness was that *clothes* "disappeared". What we react to is not the clothes that are *not* there, but the naked human being who *is* there, who now stands revealed before us, just as you and the stranger in the lift stand revealed in front of each other, even though you are not physically naked.

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[1] Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 52 f. – Arendt is talking about the conditions obtaining in an anonymous "mass society", but it seems to me that her description is valid in the context of our example, too.

This revelation, this encounter with the other, need not be experienced in awkwardness, of course. It can also happen that you and the stranger exchange a smile and a glance that is warm and open: neither of you hastily looks away, your demeanour is marked neither by awkwardness nor by any specific *attitude*; there is no defiance, no irony, no indifference, no tenseness, no detachment of any kind between you. There is just the openness of the friendly smile. Whereas in the awkward case your feeling that there is nothing between you and the stranger, nothing to hide behind, made you uncomfortable, in this case you feel no need to hide but on the contrary want to show yourself openly as yourself to the stranger, as he shows himself to you, and so the feeling that there is nothing between you is felt as a good thing, a gift – one could say a grace. It is not that in this case you feel *comfortable* with the stranger: the contrast comfortable-uncomfortable describes the difference for instance between your awkwardness with the stranger in the original example and the relief you feel when other people get on the lift, allowing you to escape into anonymity, but the case of the warm smile opens a different dimension altogether. You feel comfortable precisely when you think you have *that* dimension at a safe distance; uncomfortable when it suddenly comes close to you – and it is always another human being who brings it close by coming too close to you, for it is precisely the dimension of openness between people.

It seems to me that this is the dimension of friendship; friendship is a welcoming of that openness which is in one sense, as I indicated, always there, whether one wants it or not. However, it also seems to me that much of our philosophical and everyday thinking actually perverts friendship into a kind of defence against openness; a strategy for *comfortable* living where one is *close* to someone but remains *closed* to them. Whether one takes friendship to be, essentially, a matter of shared interests or ideals, of appreciating and enjoying each other's personalities, of sharing a history, of affection and good-will, of being on the same wave-length in some harder-to-define way, or of something else, friendship tends to be viewed as depending on the *compatibility* of the friends, on their suiting each other in some way, each giving the other what they want – and the discussion is only about *what* it is that makes friends compatible, what that "little extra something" is that drives and keeps some people together in the special way of friendship. Formally speaking, it is taken for granted that

friendship is "a relationship between a Self and Other by means of a Third that permits and enables the bond".[2]

I would rather say that friendship is a relationship between two people where nothing, no "third" of any kind, comes between us, where there are just you and I in openness, but where this openness, this nakedness is not experienced as frightening, or at least the fear it may provoke is overcome by the desire to remain in the openness, to be openly ourselves, to know and be known by the other. The "problem" in friendship is not finding that "little extra something" that endears people to each other, but finding the courage, or rather the humility *not* to draw back from others, distancing oneself from them; to let go of all those things and strategies one hides behind. Our relations and relationships, those that are less than friendships and those we call by that name, are full of a "little extra something" precisely where friendship is *not* allowed to unfold; then there is disquiet, disappointment, disillusion, discord, discontent, dismay, distaste, disdain, disgust – and both as cause and consequence of all this, distrust and dissimulation.

The prefix "dis-" indicates a negativity about all these things, but it is not a simple absence, a "nothing", but always a *negation* of something positive. These things are something we *do*, they are different modes of rejecting, distancing ourselves from each other. Friendship means *not* doing any of these things, for once holding nothing against the other: being, quite simply, unreserved. And that is, in terms of its existential significance, very far from being something merely negative; on the contrary, everything depends on it. Here one can truly say that *less is more*.

When someone *says* "I have nothing against you", however, this is normally because they in fact *do have* something against you, they find you disturbingly frank or envy you, perhaps, but do not want to admit it, at least not to you. Perhaps the other person has acted unfairly to you because he does not like you, selected someone else for the job even if you were more qualified, for instance, and when you bring it up he says, defensively, "I have nothing against you". In such a case he can typically, unless he is a really devious character, only bring himself to say that he has nothing against you; saying that he *likes* you would simply be too much of a lie.

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[2] The phrasing is Horst Hutter's, "The Virtue of Solitude and the Vicissitudes of Friendship" in P. King, & H. Dever (eds.), *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 133. – Hutter takes it as self-evident that friendship "[t]aken in its largest possible sense ... defines and describes" such a mediated relationship (ibid.).

If, on the other hand, someone really *has* nothing against you, then normally he will not say "I have nothing against you"; he will say, if he says anything at all, "I like you" or "I love you", and if it transpires that you think he has something against you, he will not, in contrast to the person who *says* "I have nothing against you", turn defensive about it, claiming aggressively or with a hurt tone of voice that it is not true; he will rather feel bewildered and sorry that you should think so, and will do what he can to make you understand how he really feels. The point here is that genuinely having nothing against others, although a formally speaking negative characterisation, actually names something positive; it means *positively wanting* to know them and be with them. There may of course be practical obstacles to actually getting to know the other – lack of time, for instance – but the *desire* will be there.

Some may feel that I am going astray in two opposite directions at once, as it were, reading too much into everyday encounters with strangers and acquaintances, and seeing too little in friendship. Surely, it might be said, we are quite often unreserved with people we do not know, and surely friendship means much more than just being unreserved? Surely we have nothing against most people we meet but relate quite neutrally to them, while our friends, on the other hand, are those we share something important with; interests, a view of life, a history, or whatever exactly it might be. Furthermore, some may suspect that the talk about "openness" and the strictly "personal" encounter is just baseless and senseless metaphysical speculation answering to nothing in real life.

There are many questions here. Let me begin with the objection that we are, contrary to what I claim, quite often unreserved with people we do not know and that we have nothing against most people we meet, but relate quite neutrally to them. The first thing to notice here is the distinction between having nothing against someone one has only casual dealings with, and having nothing against that person when one has to spend more time with her, especially when there is no anonymous "setting" to hide behind. The awkward situation in the lift is an example of how even the shortest time together with someone can bring out a tension between us that in the ordinary course of affairs, during our life in worldly settings, would not have announced itself at all.

There are degrees here, of course: the tensions may appear sooner or later. Suppose an acquaintance of yours, someone you like, steps on to the lift. You will not feel awkward at all, on the contrary, you will be happy to see him; you chat for a while in a relaxed manner, perhaps joking around a bit, and if it

turns out that you are both going in the same direction you will be happy to share the way and talk some more. You have, in that moment, nothing against each other. But now suppose it turns out that you are both on your way to the same long-distance bus that will take you to another city, and you suddenly realise that you will spend the next couple of hours in each other's company. Suddenly you might – you need not, of course, but you might – feel very differently about your acquaintance: he has turned into someone you will "have" to spend time with, someone whose company is burdensome to you, as yours probably is to him.

This does not mean that there was anything feigned about your happiness at meeting each other. You really were relaxed; in that moment, you really had nothing against each other. But the moment is past now, and the way it passed shows that your happiness rested on the tacit assumption that you would not have to put up with each other for too long; you were so relaxed in each other's company partly because you assumed it would soon be over and you would both be on your respective ways, free of each other. To take another example: think of how one can feel very friendly towards a guest who is leaving, even though (or precisely because) one thought him a bit of a bore. It is not simply that one is happy he is leaving; *that* feeling, if it is unmixed, is quite different. One is relieved that he is leaving, but at the same time one really feels friendly towards him. The point is that one dares to let one's warm feelings out only when he is no longer disturbingly close, when he is just leaving; already almost gone. And partly fuelling that small fire of friendliness there is probably also, more or less secretly, a sense of guilt and sadness because one did not like him more.

There are many reactions sharing the same general structure: feeling compassion with suffering people far away whom one would dislike if they came to live in one's neighbourhood; feeling that one loved someone only when they have left one or died and one cannot actually live out one's love for them; finding children most lovable when they are asleep, and so for once do not bother one – and so on. By contrast, friendship or love is an *infinite* affirmation of openness, a desire for the other that is not *restricted* to a certain time or place or mode; a daring to open oneself without keeping anything back, without rejecting anything in oneself or the other. It is the one exception to the relativity or conditionality or context-dependence that otherwise marks our dealings with each other, where we are happy to spend *some* time with each other, but not too long; to spend it in one way but not in another, to open up to each other to a certain degree and under certain circumstances, but not others. It is only in

friendship or love that one says, *wholeheartedly*, adding no secret riders of any kind: "I am glad that I am here with you".[3]

Someone may ask whether one ever in fact feels this way? Do *I* ever in fact feel this way? Well, I am not speaking to that question, directly. What I am claiming is simply that the spirit of friendship *is* the spirit of a wholehearted desire for openness. How much there is of that spirit in *our actual friendships* is another question, a question of fact of the peculiar kind that can only be answered *in conscience*. The immediate question in our context, however, is whether one can in principle make sense of the possibility of openness that I am pointing to. To say, in philosophy, "But such things never occur in practice", is at the same time to miss and to concede the point. It is to miss it, since the question in philosophy is not what happens but what we can make sense of happening, and it is to concede it insofar as one's response in fact reveals that one understands very well *what* the things that supposedly never occur in practice *are*. I will not say more about this now, let me just note that the curious relation between actuality and possibility in moral and existential contexts is one of the central questions of this thesis.

Note that I am not saying that we normally go around hating each other, and this hatred vanishes only in friendship or love; the point is rather that our normal state is one of *mixed* feelings; it is a state of constant *tension* between a desire for openness and a fearful rejection of that openness. However rare a wholehearted affirmation of openness may be, the openness is, in one sense, always there, making itself felt in one way or another, depending on whether, or to what extent, we are willing to open ourselves to it. The openness is not at our beck and call, it does not come into being by our decision to be open, nor does it disappear if we decide to reject it. It is there, as a reality if we dare to open ourselves to it, or, if we do not, as a constant possibility which will not leave us in peace, but which we have actively to *keep out*, as you actively have to avoid meeting the stranger's eyes in the lift. I would say, with Derrida, that "a *sort* of friendship" always exists between people, even between total strangers, even between enemies; "a friendship prior to friendships, an ineffaceable, fundamental and bottomless friendship".[4] *It* gives the light in which we understand all the different relations that people get into, and which are always

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[3] Cf. Josef Pieper, *Lieben, hoffen, glauben* (München: Kösel, 1986), p. 49 and ff.

[4] Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship", *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988), p. 636. – This essay is not to be confused with Derrida's later book of (almost) the same name, which I discuss below, and in which the thought I quote here is *not* to be found, I believe.

reactions, of one kind or another, to that primordial friendship before friendships.

It might be objected that it is meaningless metaphysical speculation to claim that openness, whatever that is, is always "there" even when we are not being open with each other, that we are "really", unconsciously, friends even in our conscious enmity. What could that mean? I do not think the claim is arbitrary, however. Consider, first, the seemingly trivial point that friendship is not a policy one decides to adopt towards someone, as one can decide to be, or try to be, nice or kind to someone, or patient or strict or correct with them. Rather, friendship is something one *feels* towards someone. Friendship is not willed, it is felt. This means, however, that when people become friends in the ordinary sense of that word, this must be described as *an opening up to each other, as a discovery and an affirmation of a relatedness one finds to be there already*. The fact that I may *deny* my feelings, but cannot simply choose not to have them, indicates that they bear witness to a reality independent of my will, to a bond between us. And as Merold Westphal says, "To love or to welcome the Other, to give oneself to the Other ... is simply to affirm this bond rather than seeking to escape or destroy it".[5]

This does not mean that friendship is something that "just happens" to one as an accident does, or that one just "drifts" into it as one can drift into – that is: *allow* oneself to drift into – bad company, for friendship only comes into being when one gives oneself to life with the other person wholeheartedly, and that implies: in full awareness. Friendship *is* that wholeheartedness.

The adoption of policies or attitudes towards others is possible only where wholeheartedness is lacking. Thus, I can try to be kind to you only where I feel irritated or put off by you in some other way: I do not feel like being kind at all, but nonetheless I feel I should try to be kind. This brings us to a second reason why it is not arbitrary to say that the openness, the primordial friendship before friendships, is always there, even between enemies. As I said I might not feel like being kind at all, but nonetheless I feel I should try to be kind; my feelings are mixed. My claim is that it is necessarily like that when we reject others: our feelings are mixed because we simply cannot wholeheartedly reject others.

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[5] Westphal, "Preface" in Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002 [1964]), p. xiii. – Westphal is characterising the conceptions of Marcel and Levinas, with which I agree on this point, although as I will explain in Chapter Two, I am very critical of the way Levinas understands this "bond". With Marcel's conception I believe I have no fundamental disagreements.

We cannot, for instance, feel simply contemptuous or irritated; in our contempt or irritation we also, at the same time, feel that our own attitude is not what it should be. This can be a conscious realisation, as in the case where I feel I should try to be kind even though, in another sense, because of my irritation, I do not at all feel like it. But it may also be that the wrongness of the attitude is not acknowledged as such, and one gives oneself over more determinedly to the irritation or contempt or whatever it is one feels, so that one claims to be quite justified in feeling as one does. Nonetheless, one's mixed feelings will come out in the *ambiguity* of the feeling itself that one has given oneself over to.

The ambiguity involved in contempt is obvious, it comes out in its very dictionary definition: "the feeling that a person or thing is beneath consideration".[6] One feels one should not give any notice to "people like that", and yet one notices them so very much that their presence in the same room may be quite unbearable. Another obvious example is envy. Envy is, as Kierkegaard quite exactly puts it, "secret admiration";

> An admirer who feels that he cannot become happy by abandoning himself to it chooses to be envious of that which he admires. So he speaks another language wherein that which he actually admires is a trifle, a rather stupid, insipid, peculiar, and exaggerated thing. Admiration is happy self-surrender; envy is unhappy self-assertion.[7]

I would claim that an analogous ambiguity, or as one might also say: an analogous self-deception, is part and parcel of all the reactions, the emotions, moods, fantasies, thoughts, and so on, which involve, in one way or another, a rejection of others. For we cannot wholeheartedly reject others; we can only embrace wholeheartedly, and therefore, insofar as we reject others, insofar as we do not open ourselves in friendship, our feelings will necessarily be mixed, we will necessarily be divided in our hearts.

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[6] This is the first part of the definition given by the *New Oxford Dictionary*, 1998 ed.
[7] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death.* Kierkegaard's Writings, XIX. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 86.

– Politeness, fellowship, cynicism –

To make the large, and perhaps counterintuitive, claim that we cannot wholeheartedly reject others somewhat less strange, one might reflect on the curious fact that it is very hard to tell someone to their face that one does not want anything to do with them. If you do not feel like talking to me, you will probably come up with some *excuse* for leaving. You say "I really have to get going now", implying that you do not *want* to leave my company, rather the circumstances are forcing you to do so. The level of hypocrisy produced in our lives by our unwillingness to admit that we actually wish to be rid of each other, if only temporarily, is quite remarkable. Think of how often it happens that two people find themselves talking to each other even if neither wants to talk to the other and this mutual lack of interest or even annoyance is quite obvious to both. Even so, they feel unable to just end the conversation; there must be some excuse to do it. This is a typical case of collective self-deception, consisting precisely in the fact that we are engaged in sustaining a deception we know no-one is deceived by. And yet it apparently manages to mask *something* from us, because why else would we keep it up?

To say that this is a convention, that we have all been taught that it is impolite to just walk away from others is true, but explains nothing. The question, obviously, is what the convention is there for: what is it one is trying to present an appearance of with all one's politeness? The answer, just as obviously, is that one wants to present oneself as *interested* in the other, as *wanting* to be together with her. On the other hand, the fact that politeness is needed at all shows that the interest, the desire to be with the other, is lacking or at least waning: if I was really interested in talking to you, my conversation would not be polite, it would be eager.

There is, of course, also the possibility that I try to suppress my own eagerness because I feel that showing it openly might in itself be impolite or inconsiderate; that you might feel it to be *intrusive* of me to assail you with my eager talk. Learning to be polite is not only about learning to dismiss others politely when one does not feel like being with them, but as much about learning to be sensitive to when others want to be left alone, and leaving them in peace if they seem to want it, thus sparing them the embarrassment of having to ask one to go or be quiet. In being polite one keeps a distance to others, one keeps one's personal self to oneself and at the same time lets others keep theirs to themselves.

Politeness is not normally a simple pretence or deception. It is not, normally, the kind of case where one says, disappointedly: "I thought he was interested, but it turns out he acts enthusiastic like that with everybody". In being polite one does hide one's true feelings and reactions, but not by deceitfully feigning others; rather, one does it by upholding a certain impersonal *measure* in one's dealings with people – and in "politeness" I include attitudes ranging from a cold correctness to a courteousness or even friendliness that includes consideration and a real interest in the other as well as a kind of frankness, but which signals, nonetheless, that one will keep one's personal self to oneself. Politeness is essentially ambiguous, because its very point is to keep the question, the always quite *personal* question, of what I think of you, in abeyance. Nonetheless, the very fact that I was polite shows that there was something – sometimes I can put my finger on what it was, other times not – that made me feel a need not to reveal myself, in my antipathy *or* my eagerness, to you.

Whereas the need for politeness shows that people are not being open with each other, but holding back, hiding themselves, friendship is a desire for openness, and one can actually say quite a lot about friendship by simply noting that friendship is *not* polite. Politeness is born of a fear, a refusal of friendship, marking, at the same time, that this refusal is not wholehearted. The point is that because and insofar as you have no friendship or love to show others, you will feel bad about this, whether you admit to it or not, and you want to show them what you *can* show them instead: politeness, consideration, kindness, respect, appreciation, and so on; all those things that are less than love and which are shown precisely in an attempt to make up for what cannot be made up for; the *lack* of love. You want to make the other, *and* yourself, feel that you accept them, that you have nothing against them, although you do not love them.

Friendship, by contrast, means not wanting to keep one's self to oneself, and not wanting the other to keep her self to herself. In describing his friendship with Etienne de la Boëtie, a friendship that has become legendary through that description, Montaigne says: "we kept nothing back for ourselves: nothing was his or mine",[8] and it seems to me that the spirit of friendship could indeed be described as a desire to abolish *yours* and *mine*. This does not primarily mean that we identify with each other's "good" or "interests", or see our "resources" as common property; insofar as we do these things it is simply an expression of

[8] Montaigne, *On Friendship.* Translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 11.

the basic fact that our hearts are set upon remaining in and entering ever more fully into the openness which is friendship itself. Openness *means*: not keeping back, not withdrawing into yourself while apprehensively peeking out at the other.

If you fear the openness of friendship, you shut yourself in with your sorrows and your inmost dreams and desires. If your friend sees this, you might try to reassure her by saying that your reticence has nothing to do with her: "Don't take this personally, it's not you, this is about my quite private difficulties". This is an unfriendly thing for you to say, and if your friend is quite satisfied with it, it shows the weakness of her friendship for you. It might be true that it is not about her in particular, that the way you feel now you would shut *anybody* out from your personal life. But she is not "anybody", she is your friend, so how could she feel reassured by your assuring her that you would act the same way with anybody? If she is reassured this shows that she is not interested in being open with you, but rather in the way you and others see *her*; your shying away from her makes her wonder whether there is something in particular about her actions or demeanour that has put you off, and she is relieved when your assurance that this is not so removes this threat to her *vanity*, in the same way as you might feel relieved when realising that the amused smile on a stranger's face has nothing to do with *you*; he was smiling at the person standing next to you.

To take a slightly different example: if your friend had some problems that you could perhaps have helped her with if she had just told you about them, you might react to the fact that she did not tell you by saying, defensively, that you would have been glad to help, but since she told you nothing there was nothing you could do. That is not a friendly reaction: if your friendship was stronger you would be sad and perhaps angry that your friend did not feel she could tell you about her problems. Whatever the reason, whether it was because she felt too embarrassed to let you know anything, or did not want to burden you with her problems, the fact is that she lacked faith in your friendship; she lacked the trust in you that would have allowed her to open her heart to you and to ask you for help. The general point is that where friendship is lacking or weak you do not, by definition, want to get personal with others, but if your friendship is strong it will make you sad to realise that they do not want to get personal with you.

I am not unaware of the fact that my talk of openness and the tense dynamics of personal encounters may not seem to have much anything to do

with most of the relationships we call friendships. Things do not feel at all so tense or dramatic as I apparently make them out to be. I agree: they mostly do not. But I do not take this to be an objection to what I have been saying. For I am not denying, but on the contrary claiming, that we mostly keep at a safe distance from others, relating to each other in a relatively impersonal way. Also, I am not claiming that doing this makes us feel uneasy or awkward; on the contrary, the distance makes us feel safe, comfortable, as the strictly personal encounter definitely does not. That is precisely why we want the distance.

In more general terms, while I do claim that where there is a lack of openness, there is by definition a reserve, a distance, a distrust, between people, I do not claim that we will generally *feel* very distrustful or distant in such situations. We may simply be conversing "the way one does", for instance, and therefore neither noting nor feeling anything in particular about the conversation. It *goes without saying* that "too personal" questions will not even be raised, or that one "cannot" just say what one thinks about the other, if it is not flattering. Most of us most of the time feel the same about these matters, and so there seems to be nothing to discuss here. That these perceived self-evidences and impossibilities nonetheless express a distrust can be seen only if one contrasts the *normal* sort of conversation with an open talk between friends, where what normally would have been "impossible" becomes possible and what was "self-evident" becomes absurd. At this point, someone might object that the point is not that there was a distrust in the normal case, but rather that there is now, between the friends, a trust, which makes it possible for them to say what could not be said before. However, there being no trust means that there *is* distrust, and this fact can be disguised, but not obliterated, by the "happy" accident that this distrust may not be teased out into the open by a closer contact between oneself and others.

I am not denying, or criticising, the fact that we often speak of friendship in a relatively superficial sense, a sense in which saying that we are friends, although it indicates a personal relation insofar as our relationship is not primarily mediated by a particular social role – it is not like saying we are colleagues, for instance – does not settle the question of how *personal* our relationship really is. In fact, one could say that speaking of friendship in this impersonal way amounts to taking "friend" as the name of a social role in its own right: being friends simply means that one associates with some frequency and fluency and with no particular practical purpose in view, that one "can" ask the other for certain favours, and so on. But all this is quite compatible with

feeling that one really does not know one's friend at all, that she is keeping her personal life to herself, as one probably does oneself, too.

Perhaps it would also be helpful to make a distinction between friendship and mere *fellowship*. I say "mere" fellowship not because fellowship would be something insignificant in itself, but because the contrast here is friendship. Instead of fellowship, I might have said comradeship or companionship; I cannot attach any very important differences in meaning to these different words, but the distinction I want to point to does not depend on what exactly we choose to call the other pole of it. The point I want to make is that while friendship is always a personal relationship between two people who are "I" and "you" to each other, fellowship is a relationship between people who feel that they are all part of something "bigger", that they make up *a* fellowship. We may say that there is friendship between two friends, or that they feel friendship for each other, but they do not make up *a* friendship.

Chesterton describes quite strikingly the "genial and not ungenerous", but yet illusory, sense one may have, when being together with many people in some undertaking – it may be a conversation round a dinner table or a military campaign – "of being at one with them all";

> You cannot [if the gathering is big enough] remember their names or count their numbers, but their very immensity seems a substitute for intimacy. That is what great men have felt at the head of great armies; and the reason why Napoleon ... would call his soldiers 'mes enfants.' He feels at that moment that they are a part of him, as if he had a million arms and legs. But it is very different if you disband your army ... if you look at ... one solitary solemn footman standing in your front hall. You never have the sense of being caught up into a rapture of unity with *him*. All your sense of social solidarity with your social inferiors has dropped from you. It is only in public that people can be so intimate as that. When you look into the eyes of the lonely footman, you see that his soul is far away.[9]

In an analogous way, two people who are part of a bigger circle of friends may suddenly find themselves alone together, and realise that they have nothing to say to each other; they feel like strangers in each other's company, even though they have known each other for a long time and felt very friendly and relaxed with each other just a minute ago, when they were part of the bigger company. That is just it: they were *part of something*, of a social event, a fellowship. But now, sitting there alone with each other, they are not part of anything, they are

[9] G. K. Chesterton, *Brave New Family* Edited by Alvaro de Silva (San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 159.

just themselves, and they would have to open up to each other, the one really addressing the other: not making *a* joke or continuing *a* debate, but asking or telling their friend something personal. I do not mean it would have to be something private, I mean that, whatever they talked about, one would address the other in a personal way, in a way signifying "*I* want to ask or tell *you* this". But they feel they have nothing to ask or tell, they feel they are strangers.

Note that whether there is friendship or fellowship is not a matter of numbers, as such. There may be twenty friends in a room, in complete openness, each addressing *each* other personally, turning straight to her – just as, on the other hand, two people is enough to make a fellowship, if they regard their relationship in that spirit, if they are not open but instead create their own little social world between them with its jargon and its characteristic gestures. Thus, the two friends who were suddenly left alone when the rest of the party left, might have chatted on just as comfortably as before, not because they had been quite open all along, but on the contrary because their attitude was just as impersonal now as before.

I am not saying that there is anything wrong with fellowship, and I am not making recommendations. It is easy to imagine the kind of disastrous bigotry that would result if someone thought that we should not, for instance, have nice, interesting, relaxed talks which do not become very personal, but should always strive to be as personal as we can. Although being closed is not something that just happens to one – rather, one *closes oneself* to others in fear or shame or some other mode of self-centredness – being open is not something one can just decide to be, and I certainly will not be giving any "advice on how to get there". What I try to do, is to describe in a general way the dynamics at work in us and between us, in which we open and close ourselves to each other. And my claim is that the spirit of friendship is the spirit of openness, while in all kinds of other spirits, among them what I called the spirit of mere fellowship, we remain at a distance from each other.

Such living at a distance from others is indeed the way we mostly relate to each other, but it does not follow that the openness of friendship is simply another possibility of relating to others alongside the various modes of distancing and closure. As I said, openness is always present as the horizon of meaning in the light of which the other possibilities are understood in their human significance, and understood to be, in the final reckoning, either of trivial or of tragic significance. For although there is no problem with having all sorts of less-than-personal relationships with others (and we all have them), if

someone has *not a single* real friend, then this is, however common it may be, humanly speaking a tragedy. Fellowship is a fine thing as such, but the fact that it is still *mere* fellowship is revealed in the loneliness of the person who, surrounded by his companions, still cannot help but cry ”My friends, there are no friends!”[10]

That cry of personal desperation does not express a metaphysical claim to the effect that “the other remains finally unknowable”. On the contrary, it is an empathic, if implicit, denial of any such claims. For if I feel that I cannot reach out to anyone, that I have no real friends and no-one really knows me, then that very fact obviously shows that I know and feel the *real possibility* of friendship: my *despair* results precisely from this possibility not being realised. Here one can see in a striking way how what life *is* is partly, and essentially, determined by what it *could* be, by what we can make sense of it being. One cannot, then, say that in ethics or in philosophy generally the question is what life could or should be like, *rather* than what it is actually like, for the actuality of life is inseparable from, although not reducible to, what its possibilities are perceived to be.

My despair shows that there is hope, but it shows it in the form of my not being able to hold on to that hope for my own part – and this disability is not just a “fact” about me: it is my *giving in* to despair, my *giving up* hope. The word despair comes from the Latin *desperare*, combining *de-* “down from” and *sperare*, “to hope”; despairing is a falling from hope. As long as one is in despair one sees the hope, *and* is continuously falling from it, letting it go. This is what despairing *means*; how consciously or unconsciously this happens is of course another matter. I despair over what life has turned out to be like for me, but my very despair results from my seeing life as it is in the light of what I hoped it would have been, and *still* hope it would be now, although I am continuously giving up that hope. What drives me to despair is precisely the fact that I cannot look at my life simply as a given, but always see it, more or less consciously, in contrast to the goodness, the openness, that is lacking in it. It is as though I saw the place I am at from somewhere else. And the cynic’s impatient, hostile or contemptuous rejection of this “idle” talk of what *might* be, reveals that even he does not really believe that life is “just” this or that; if he did, there would be nothing for him to get so *emotional* about.[11]

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[10] This cry, which can obviously carry many meanings and be uttered in very different tones of voice, is traditionally attributed to Aristotle.

[11] On the relation between the child’s hope and the grown up’s experience and disillusion, cf.

Cynicism is, I would say, an attempt to defend oneself against one's despair by trying to discredit the hope that one despairs about. One declares it illusory because one has not had the strength, the humility, to hold on to it, and one does so because one will not admit that the fault lies with *oneself*. A typical example is furnished by David Bolotin, commenting on Plato's dialogue on friendship, the *Lysis*. Bolotin explains that we should "not allow the charming illusion of friendly union to obscure the fact that each of us, alone and by himself, suffers from evils and must love what is useful"; we must get rid of "the illusion that we might become contented and forever whole by surrendering ourselves wholly to friendship".[12]

The phrase "charming illusion" gives Bolotin away. To describes friendly union thus is to brand it as something nice but silly that grown up people are too serious for; something like the belief in Santa Claus. But real union, real openness between people, is neither silly nor nice. Although it is always a *good* thing it may be a truly fearsome thing, for instance when what is revealed is that someone has been living a lie, when the closed world of the lie is broken open. And when the goodness of union does not show its fearsome side, its very goodness makes it very far removed from niceness. It may be "nice" to spend some time with an acquaintance; with a friend it is a *joy*. Friendship is, then, very far from being a "charming" thing. The fact that the cynic thus misdescribes friendship need not, however, indicate that he knows nothing about it. It may also be that he knows quite enough about it to feel a need to denigrate it. Might he not be drawn to deny the possibility of friendship by his fear of it, and resort to denigration precisely in order to *disguise* both his fear and the true nature of its object?

K. E. Løgstrup, *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse. Religionsfilosofiske betragtninger. Metafysik IV* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1978), p. 251 f.

[12] Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis, with a New Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 188. – Bolotin takes this to be the actual teaching of Socrates in the *Lysis*. As my discussion of the *Lysis* below will indicate, I think his interpretation to be wrong, although it seems true that Socrates does not believe in "surrendering ourselves wholly to friendship" in anything like the sense I would give this expression.

– *"Friends have all things in common"* –

To be friends with someone is to want to be with her in joy and sorrow, accompanying her in everything; the spirit of friendship *is* that desire for being with one's friend. This was expressed in the Greek proverb "Friends have all things in common"[13] – at least this is a possible way of understanding it. This reading would put the stress on the word 'all'; the question is what it means to share *all* things with someone – or, to speak with Montaigne, what it means to keep *nothing* back for oneself. These words ("all" and "nothing") are obviously not to be taken in a quantitative sense, whatever that would mean – being together 24 hours a day and constantly thinking aloud? What is at issue is rather the *spirit* in which friends are together: the openness, the lack of reservations, the desire.

Usually, the stress has not been on the word "all", however, but rather on the word "things". The idea has been that the love of friendship, in *contrast* to erotic, sexual love which focuses directly on the beloved, undressed – existentially, emotionally and often physically – is a "worldly" love, a "love" that is focused on the friends *sharing something*; ideals, interests and purposes. That supposed contrast was captured neatly by C. S. Lewis when he said: "Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest".[14] On this view, friendship would always, to quote Lewis again, "be *about* something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice";

> That is why those pathetic people who simply 'want friends' can never make any. The very condition of having Friends is that we should want something else besides Friends ... Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travellers.[15]

On this picture, the reason that the awkward silences that may arise between strangers do not, normally, plague the intercourse of friends, would have nothing to do with a mysterious "openness", but would rather be due to the fact that friends always *have* something between them, in the good sense of having something to talk about or to do together. But is that true? Of course, there is

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[13] See, e.g., the closing lines of Plato's *Phaedrus*, and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1159b30–35.
[14] Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1974 [1960]), p. 58.
[15] Ibid., p. 63, emphasis added.

something wrong with a friendship if the friends feel that they have nothing to say to each other, for that means that they are losing interest in each other, while friendship is all about wanting to know and be know by the other. That does not mean that friends always have a lot to talk about, however: they might or they might not, but anyway *that* is not why they do not fear silence.

If you get on a long-distance bus with a mere acquaintance you may reassure yourself with the thought that since you know he is interested in something you yourself are interested in, you will surely find enough to talk about to last the journey through. If you travel with a good friend, that will not be your thought, for then you do not fear the silence, and so feel no need to make sure that you can fill it with talk. A friend is someone you can be silent with, as well as talk. A silence between friends does not become awkward because the friends love each other and so know what they mean to each other. Therefore they have no need to try to *prove* it, to communicate a sense that they matter to or are interested in each other. If they feel like being quiet, they are, and there is no problem; it does not *reflect* in any particular way on the relationship.

To put the same point in positive terms: friends remain in touch *in* their silence, and even through the times they spend pursuing things each on their own. To have opened one's heart to someone means that she always has a place there, and although one's friend will often be in one's thoughts and one will want to be with her whenever one can, there is no need anxiously to keep her in one's thoughts or by one's side, for she is always there in one's heart. This is the true ground of the lack of *possessiveness* and *jealousy* which has always been held to characterise the love of friendship. It has been thought that this is due to friendship being a "cooler" kind of love than the "fiery" erotic or sexual love, but this view depends on distinguishing different "kinds" of love in a way I find confused, and furthermore, "coolness" in love can, as I see it, only mean that there is a measure of indifference, of listlessness in the relationship.

It is no doubt often the case *in fact* that friends can afford to be more relaxed with each other than lovers are only because their relationship remains more impersonal, existentially speaking less significant, while the fights and jealousies of lovers reveal the seriousness of their stakes in love. But on the other hand I would say that jealousy marks a *fall* from love, and this is true of sexual relationships no less than of friendships where sexuality is not involved – at least not in an obvious way, I should perhaps add, for "sexuality" seems not to have any very clear limits. If love is strong, if one has opened one's heart to

the other, one will feel no anxious need to possess her, for one feels that the only sense in which one could *lose* her is through her closing her heart to one, or one's doing the same to her, and no amount of possession or control can guard against that. In fact the desire to *possess* is the very antithesis of love, because in love one wants of all one's heart the other to be free.[16]

We need to distinguish the spirit of friendship both from the contingent circumstances that *occasion* future friends to meet and start associating in the first place – it may be sharing an interest or a daily bus-ride home from school, or exchanging a smile in a lift, or whatever – and from the *circumstances* of the friends' life together; the things they do and talk about, the places they visit and so on. While the second set of circumstances is obviously not contingent in the same sense as a chance meeting in a lift is, since the friends are presumably doing the kind of things they *like* doing together, so that their doing these things is expressive of the kind of people they are, there *is* nonetheless a sense in which even the fact that the friends do these particular things together is contingent relative to their friendship. The point is that they are not friends because they do these particular things together, but rather they do them together because they are friends. Friendship is not grounded in the friends sharing interests or aspirations, even the most important ones. Rather, friends want to do all sorts of things that happen to come up in their lives together because they are friends.

In many friendships this is quite obviously the case. In others a particular interest or aspiration or passion does fill a great part of the time the friends spend together. That can be an exhilarating thing indeed; the poet Randall Jarrell expressed it aptly when he said, after having once again discussed literature with a good friend; "it's always awing (for an enthusiast) to see someone more enthusiastic than yourself – like the second fattest man in the world meeting the fattest".[17] Nonetheless, we should ask what it is that makes people sharing such a passion want to say that they are *friends?* It seems obvious that however enjoyable the moments you spend together may be, if you feel that your friend is at bottom interested in your company only or primarily because you are interested in the same things that interest him – or if he feels that way about you – then you have remained strangers to each other. *Any* answer to the question *why* I spend time with you that is given in terms of some

[16] I will explore the themes of freedom and jealousy more fully in Chapter Three.
[17] Jarrell is quoted by his friend Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Harcourt Brace: New York, 1968), p. 265.

private purpose or motive, something I am looking to get from associating with you, whether it be interesting conversation or more sordid things like help in my career, shows that I am not there with you as your *friend*. To feel friendship for someone does not mean wanting to get something from her, but wanting to *give oneself* to her in opening oneself to her – and wanting her to open up, to give herself in the same way. A friend wants to know her friend as she is known by her.

Curiously, it is precisely *because* philosophers have understood that one cannot ground friendship in the friend's hope that his friend will give him what he wants to get for himself, that they have focused on shared ideals, interests and aspirations as an alternative to such mercenary attraction. As I will explain, however, the proposed alternative is really no alternative at all.

In the *Lysis*, his short dialogue on friendship, Plato notes, quite correctly, that if I am your friend only because I hope to get something out of it, then you are my "friend" in name only, and what I am *really* "a friend of" is that for the sake of which I associate with you.[18] As Plato goes on to say, this view in fact amounts to claiming that what makes us friends is only the presence of an "enemy". Whether that enemy be another human being or the ignorance we think our friend can help us get rid of, or the loneliness we hope he can help dispel, or whatever, the point is that if you take away the enemy "it seems [the friend] is no longer a friend", so that the goodness of friendship, and goodness in general, would be reduced to a shadow cast by the bad, as it were; what we call "good" would just be whatever we think helps us get rid of something that pains or bothers us, as if the good were just "a drug against the bad".[19]

Plato, of course, did not like that idea, and for good reasons, since bad or evil can only be understood as a destruction of good, not the other way around – and he therefore proposed another way of thinking about the desire of friendship. In the *Symposium*, he has Aristophanes explain *erotic* love as a searching for one's "missing half", the person who would make one's torn self whole and end the pain and suffering of separation. That is, in one sense, just a variation on the theme of "the friend as drug", but with the difference that whereas the poor man's "ills" could be "cured" by any rich man who wanted to help him, the aspiring philosopher's by any wise man who would teach him, and so on, according to Aristophanes there is for each of us only one person in

[18] Plato, *Lysis*, 220a–b. Translated by Stanley Lombardo, in Plato, *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
[19] Ibid., 220d–e.

the whole world who can cure our love-sickness, because what we are sick for *is* precisely being reunited with the particular person we were separated from.[20] According to Plato, however, the love of friendship is not to be explained in this way; he agrees that love is about some people *belonging together*, but he denies that it is *couples* who belong together. Rather, he suggests, what brings friends together is that they experience a certain, more or less spiritual, *kinship.* This is Socrates' message to young Lysis and his friend: "You, therefore, if you are friends to each other, are by nature in some way akin to each other".[21]

The point, for Plato, is that we are not friends just because we are out to get something, even something as crucial as our "missing half", from each other, but rather because both of us see the other as embodying an aspiration towards something we recognise as good, and not just as good in some vague way or in principle, but as the good that we ourselves strive for, or in the light of which we see our strivings. It is not that we want to get some good *from* each other, get something out of associating with each other; rather, what makes us friends is our sense that we are *drawn and sustained by the same good*. In the *Phaedrus*, this is expressed poetically – or religiously, if one prefers to put it that way – by saying that true lovers befriend the boys whom they feel are akin to them because they follow the same "god". Everyone, Plato says, "spends his life honoring the god in whose chorus he danced, and emulates the god in every way he can".[22] Therefore, the lovers "take their god's path and seek for their own a boy whose nature is like the god's; and when they have got him they emulate the god, convincing the boy they love and training him to follow their god's pattern and way of life, so far as is possible in each case".[23] To put it more prosaically, the point is that people who like philosophising will be drawn together by that interest; those who like singing or dancing will be drawn together by those interests, and so on.

Plato stresses that in this kind of love the lovers "show no envy, no mean-spirited lack of generosity, towards the boy, but make every possible effort to draw him into being totally like themselves and the god to whom they are devoted".[24] He is right, of course: insofar as we are both interested in

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[20] Aristophanes' speeech starts at *Symposium*, 189d; the interpretation of love as finding one's missing half is introduceed at 191d. I will return to the idea of love as finding one's missing half later in this section.
[21] *Lysis*, 221e. – The translation here is David Bolotin's in his *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*.
[22] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 252d. Translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in Plato, *Complete Works*
[23] Ibid., 253b.
[24] Ibid., 253c.

mathematics, say, this shared interest will draw us together, and envy may come in between us and drive us apart only to the extent that we also want things for ourselves that have nothing to do with mathematics as such and which we may compete for; the fame or influence over others that may come with great gifts, for example. Insofar as someone remains devoted to a pursuit of the good he pursues as *his* but not *only* his, however, Plato is right that he can "never become jealous of anything", he feels no need to keep the good as his private possession, but rather wants everyone "to become as much like himself as ... possible"; he wants to help everyone who has a natural propensity for it share in the same impersonal order of good he himself inhabits, for he thinks that "order is in every way better than disorder".[25]

This idea of a shared, non-jealous pursuit of the same good is the central idea on which Aristotle builds his conception of what he calls "perfect" friendship.[26] In the same way Aquinas, following Plato and Aristotle, distinguished the "love of friendship" from the "love of concupiscence" in order to save friendship from the suspicion – which had become pressing in a new way for Christians – that it is just a form of selfishness, in which one is out to get something one desires for oneself. While the love of concupiscence (including, centrally, erotic passion) seeks *possession*, indeed "seeks to possess the beloved perfectly, by penetrating into his heart, as it were", the love of friendship does not, Aquinas claims – and this is *not* because friends would be content to settle with less, but on the contrary because they are in one sense *already one*, for the friend "looks on his friend as identified with himself", he feels "as though he were become one with him".[27] The reason, Aquinas says, is that "the very fact that two men are alike, having, as it were, one form" – their

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[25] Plato, *Timaeus*, 29e–30a. Tanslated by Donald J. Zeyl, in Plato, *Complete Works.* – Plato actually says this of the the demiurg who fashions the cosmos in his own likeness, but the parallel with the lovers of the *Phaedrus* is evident. There are of course many conflicting interpretations of Plato's view(s) on love. It is not exactly clear what, if anything, is really said about *philia* (friendship) in the *Lysis*, and the relation of whatever is said there to what is said about *eros* in the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium* and other dialogues – and, in turn, the relation between *those* dialogues – is also debatable. So the comments I offer in the text are, quite clearly, an *interpretation*. The literature on Platonic love is huge. One might mention dozens of excellent books and articles, but I will limit myself to only three books, each quite different from the others: Thomas Gould, *Platonic Love* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), and Henry G. Wolz, *Plato and Heidegger. In Search of Selfhood* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981); the last long chapter on "A Trilogy on Love and Friendship", pp. 210–292.

[26] Cf. the discussion of Aristotle in Chapter Three.

[27] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica.* 2 vols. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Revised by Daniel J. Sullivan (London: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), I-II, Q. 28, Art. 2.

being naturally akin, as Plato would have said – means that "the affections of one tend to the other, as being one with him, and he wishes good to him as to himself".[28]

I would agree with Aquinas that *unity* belongs to friendship, both as a "state" – for the friends are in each other's heart, they feel that there *is* a bond between them – and as a *desire*, the friends' desire to be ever more united, ever more open, with each other. But I disagree with Aquinas and the whole tradition of thinking he represents, insofar as this tradition makes kinship or similarity the basis and necessary condition of the unity of friendship. I also disagree with the tradition insofar as it distinguishes erotic love and friendship as two essentially different "kinds" of love, and insofar as it takes for granted that desire for another person must be acquisitive, aiming at "possession", and so also jealous.

Nietzsche, to mention yet another of the relatively few philosophers who have had anything substantial to say about friendship, continues the same Platonic tradition and speaks like a good Thomist when he contrasts the selfish possessiveness, the "wild greed and injustice", of love between the sexes, "so glorified and deified ... in all ages", with friendship, "a kind of continuation of love in which this greedy desire of two people for each other gives way to a new desire and greed, a *shared* higher thirst for an ideal above them".[29] On this picture of friendship, the friends are like planets circling the same sun: what keeps them together is not anything between *them*, but the fact that they both gravitate towards the same good; the same interest or aspiration. Nietzsche aptly speaks of "star friendship" in this connexion; he sees our drawing near and becoming estranged from each other as something that is determined by "the law *above* us": if planets or friends seem to be following each other for a while, that is just an optical illusion; in fact they are following their respective courses, invisibly determined by the sun – or perhaps the different suns, the different aspirations – they encircle.[30]

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[28] Ibid., I-II, Q. 27, Art. 3. – Diana Fritz Cates, *Choosing to Feel. Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), is a discussion of friendship and compassion inspired by Aquinas. Servais Pinckaers OP, "Der Sinn für die Freunschaftsliebe als Urtatsache der thomistischen Ethik" in Paulus Engelhardt OP (hrsg.), *Sein und Ethos. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Ethik* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1963), argues that Aquinas' interpretation of friendship is central for his (and any proper) understanding of goodness as such.

[29] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science.* Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §14.

[30] Ibid., §279.

This being so, it should be obvious that the tradition's supposed alternative to seeing friendship as a selfish pursuit of one's own good is no real alternative at all: to say that we are friends because we are both drawn to the same good is to say that I am interested in you, my friend, only insofar as you are interested in the things that interest *me*. My good, or what I take to be my good, is still the decisive thing for me, as yours is for you. Thus Aristotle "refuses", in the words of one interpreter, "to put friendship at the centre of the best life"; that place is, for *him*, occupied by philosophy, as he believes it is occupied for everyone by something or other.[31] This means that although friendship is indeed, for Aristotle,

> essential for happiness, it is not quite the core of the happiest life. Friendship is fundamentally good because it magnifies life, expanding our concerns and intensifying our joys: Friendship makes even better "whatever it is that people love most in life" (*NE*, 1172a5-6). What matters most for happiness, then, is not the companionship that friendship brings but the pleasures and good activities that it augments.[32]

Friends come into my life only insofar as they fit into or enhance a life that remains essentially *mine*. Seeing things in this way is quite compatible with acknowledging the obvious *dynamic* aspect of friendship, the way the friends' intercourse changes them, moulds their interests, needs, tastes and aspirations. This may be what Aristotle had in mind in his cryptic remark that one comes to see oneself more clearly than one otherwise would in the "mirror" that one's friend is to one.[33] A. W. Price explains the remark in this way:

> Listening to B's counsels, [his friend A] finds that they articulate his own thoughts; observing B's actions, he finds that they realize his own preferences. Many of these thoughts and preferences ... only become apparent to A as B speaks and acts in ways that match them, so that A owes to B his awareness of the mentality to which B answers as a perfect partner. The same should be simultaneously true of B in relation to A: each reveals the mind of the other to him in a way that he could not have achieved on his own.[34]

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[31] Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 197.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, 1213a20 f.
[34] Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, p. 123 f.

Each friend, then, discovers himself through his associating with the other – Price says "through observing the other"[35] but the process evidently involves much more than that; it is a matter of being with someone, talking, playing, joking, fighting, fishing, or whatever, and through all this having one's character changed more or less unconsciously, so that the friends come to resemble each other ever more, at the same time as both, perhaps, come less and less to resemble the people they originally were. Regardless of how exactly this process of discovering oneself through the other takes place, however, the point is that the perspective remains essentially unchanged: I am interested in my friends because they answer to my interests. What has been added now is only that the friends may have been instrumental in bringing out these interests in me in the first place. That may, indeed, be one reason why I like their company; I am interested in them because they make me interested in things. But everything still revolves around my interest in "things" in the broadest sense (in activities, ideals, and so on), and people become interesting only through that.

– *Loving individuals: neither* eros *nor* agape –

If friendship really were about going after whatever interests one, whatever it is one finds one's "good" to lie in, then one would simply stop seeing one's old friends if someone more "interesting" came along – but obviously no one thinks that a relationship one can just leave like that is an example of friendship in any significant sense of that word. As far as I can see, neither Plato nor Aristotle nor others in their tradition have much anything to say about the significance of this obvious fact. Commentators often try to deal with the problem by claiming, with Aristotle, that it does not in fact arise, at least not for those Aristotle would call good people and true friends, because their aspirations, their pursuit of the good, can be counted on not to change. This does not remove the uneasiness, however, because it is caused by the feeling that an account of friendship that has nothing to tell us about how friends become attached to each other as the *particular individuals* they are is not an account of friendship or love at all. If what you "love" in a human being is something *about* her, you do not see or

[35] Ibid., p. 124.

love *her* at all.[36] That is to say: you do not *love*, although you might, for instance, appreciate the other person, admire her or find her fascinating.

Appreciation, admiration and fascination imply an explicit or tacit *comparison* between the person eliciting the response in question and others, in which she comes out favourably. I am interesting or boring, smart or stupid, fast or slow, depending on who I am compared with; my conversation which seemed flatteringly brilliant, may suddenly seem embarrassingly dull when a person of superior wit enters the conversation. One cannot compare individuals *as* individuals, a comparison is always a comparison in this or that *respect*; you and I cannot be compared just as you and me, but your hair-colour or intelligence or tenacity may be compared to mine.

In love and friendship one makes no comparisons, but goes straight for the beloved or the friend in her singularity, one "has eyes only for her". That is the essential *fidelity* of love and friendship. If you love me, it is not as though you would suddenly fall out of love with me if someone "more lovable" entered the room; insofar as something like this actually happens, it shows that what you felt was not love, but an infatuation of some kind.

If love makes no comparisons, the not too uncommon talk of people being "worthy" of love – as compared, apparently, with those who are *un*worthy of it – is nonsense from the start. One can, of course, be worthy of esteem or respect or, on the other hand, contempt, as one can be "lovable" in the sense of likeable, and when people say that someone is "worthy" of love, they actually

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[36] In "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato" in his *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), Gregory Vlastos influentially argued that both Plato and Aristotle lack a conception of love for individual human beings *as* individuals. According to Vlastos, "Plato's theory [of *eros* and *philia*] is not, and is not meant to be, about personal love for persons – i.e. about the kind of love we can have only for persons and cannot have for things or abstractions. What it is really about is love for place-holders of the predicates 'useful' and 'beautiful'" (p. 26). "What we are [according to Plato] to love in persons is the 'image' of the Idea in them. We are to love the persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful"; this is, for Vlastos, the "cardinal flaw in Plato's theory", for it means that it "does not provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities" (p. 31). Vlastos also claims that "Aristotle's conception of 'perfect *philia*' does not repudiate – does not even notice" this cardinal flaw (p. 33, footnote 100). Thus far, I think Vlastos is right. However, Vlastos himself blurs the point when he writes: "Now since all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence [...] if our love for them is to be only for their virtue and beauty, the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love" (p. 31). This implies, confusedly, that *if* we were to meet and love someone who was really a "masterwork of excellence", who was "wholly free of streaks of the ugly, the mean, the commonplace, the ridiculous" (ibid.), then Platonic-Aristotelian "love" *would* be identical with a love of the other in their individuality. In fact, however, what we would "love" even in that case would still be only the excellence of the other.

mean some such thing. But love or friendship has nothing to do with "worth" or with "valuing" the beloved. Love's desire for openness is *wholehearted* precisely insofar as it makes no judgments as to whether the other is "worthy" of one's desire: that would mean putting conditions on how much and in what way one will approach her.

As should be obvious, love's not making any such judgments or comparisons is not at all the same as the *anxious fear of* comparing the beloved with someone else, lest this comparison turn out unfavourably for her, a fear which may manifest itself for instance as a tendency to paint a rosy picture of her, or as a need to avoid getting into situations where one would have a chance to initiate a relationship with someone else. This fear reveals only that one *has* already started comparing one's beloved to others, that one is already tempted to leave her for someone else, even if for some reason or other one does not want to risk taking the full step; perhaps one thinks it one's duty to remain "loyal", or one is afraid of the changes in one's life that leaving her would bring.

To see the difference between love or friendship on the one hand, and appreciation and judgments of worthiness on the other, one may also think of the contrast between loving and the experience of feeling *flattered*. I feel flattered when others see me in a favourable light, but only insofar as I have identified with that in me which could quite naturally be called my "ego", in contrasts to my heart. I do not feel warmed in my heart by flattery, rather, it boosts my ego. Suppose someone confesses her love for me, and I feel *flattered* by this. This would show either that I am too full of myself even to understand what she is telling me – conceit is a form of stupidity and in the extreme becomes indistinguishable from imbecility – or that I do not believe that she really loves me, but finds me very *attractive* in some way. If her confession of love is really a confession of *love*, however, and I respond by saying I am very flattered, that will break her heart. The only response to another's confession of love that is not heart-rending for her is "I love you too", and nothing can compensate for its absence. If I love you but you do not love me, then knowing that you think me a wonderful person will not lessen my pain in the least. "Well, even if she does not love me, it is nice to know that she thinks so highly of me (or: that she likes me very much)", is plain nonsense.

The Greek philosophers speak frequently about love, but they seem to be quite unaware that there is any such thing as love in the sense I am pointing to. Just a few pages into his discussion of friendship, Aristotle remarks that it is

"generally accepted that not everything is loved, but only what is lovable",[37] thus reducing, *en passant*, the love of friendship to some kind of liking, esteem or admiration. This reduction reaches literally cosmic proportions in Aristotle's metaphysics, whose divinity, the "unmoved mover", moves the world by being the object on which the "love" – that is, the striving or desire in its various forms – of everything else is finally directed; everything is drawn towards it, gravitates towards it, while it remains for its own part unmoved.[38] To see the existential significance of this metaphysics, we should note the human sense of remaining *unmoved*; it means remaining cold, indifferent to others. Loving no-one but "loved" by everyone, Aristotle's god is like a film star, distant and cold, and yet with everyone's gaze fixed on him.

In the friendship of those Aristotle considers "good", the friends function in the same way as cold magnets which attract the admiration of each other. To be sure, this attraction is mutual, and if the friends are "cold" insofar as they attract each other through their "lovable" qualities, each is for his part hotly pursuing this attraction. However, what the friends are attracted to is, as we saw above, not really each other, but the shared ideal both see embodied in the other. Ultimately, it is the unmoved mover who moves them *through* their friend.

In contrast to Aristotle's unmoved mover, the Christian God does not just move creation but loves it. Unlike Aristotle's god, he is not a strange something, he is *someone*, and he is not lovable, *he is love*,[39] which is something altogether different. He is not love in the vague sense of some kind of cosmic force, but in the quite concrete sense of *someone loving someone else*, loving you and me and the man over there, all quite individually. He does not love us because he finds us "lovable" or "worthy" of love: to repeat; that would not *be* love at all. He loves us because we are here, simply because we exist. Similarly, when *Genesis* tells us that God looked at creation and saw that "it was very good",[40] this is not to be taken as a comparative judgement, as though things could have been better and might have been worse; there is nothing to *compare* creation with. Rather, what we have here is, again, an expression of God's love for the created beings in their mysterious

[37] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155b15–20. The translation is J. A. K. Thomson's in Aristotle, *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1976 [1953]).
[38] A concise account of Aristotle's cosmogony, briefly relating it to his theory of friendship, can be found in Gould, *Platonic Love*, pp. 141–163.
[39] 1 John, 4:16.
[40] Genesis, 1:31.

individuality. By contrast, it seems clear, as Suzanne Stern-Gillet notes, that Aristotle and the other Greek philosophers "did not consider personal singularity to be a fit object of wonder", and took it for granted that a love focused in such a way on the individual "cannot but fall short of the best kind of friendship".[41]

The purpose of these remarks is not primarily to make a contribution to the history of ideas, but rather to bring out what I take to be the essential difference between two contrasting conceptions of what is in both cases *called* love, with the contrast usually marked by using two Greek words for love, *eros*, which would name the pagan conception of love, and *agape*, which would name the Christian conception. In my view *agape* is misrepresented, however, when it is claimed – and such claims are very common – that what differentiates it from the egocentric *eros* is its self-denying, sacrificial, character. I agree that *eros* names an essentially self-centred, closed, attitude, while the Bible speaks of love as an openness to the other, but I would deny that this love is essentially sacrificial.[42]

To characterise my own position with regard to the *eros–agape* controversy very briefly, I would say this. The problem I see with erotic love as understood by the Greek philosophers – and this understanding of it is shared by most of their critics – is that it turns love into admiration or delight or need. Such attitudes are egocentric insofar as they let the beloved appear only against

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[41] Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 75; p. 176. – Cf. Vlastos' similar view referred to above.

[42] A standard work on eros and agape is Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), but the classic, and to my mind still the best, study of the two conceptions is Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*. Translated by Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953). Nygren's study has the merit of formulating the contrast between the motifs as he sees it very sharply (see especially pp. 200–234), and then tracing both the conflict and the interplay between the two motifs in the history of Christian teachings on love. As I see it, the main *problem* with his book is precisely his view of *agape* as a self-denying love. I will remark briefly on the confusions I see at work in that conception of love presently, and discuss the issue more thoroughly in Chapter Two. – Nygren is a Protestant theologian, as is Outka. A notable recent contribution to the debate from the Catholic side is Edvard Collins Vacek, S. J., *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994). Catholics tend to affirm that Christian love is self-sacrificial but also, at a more fundamental level, a "true" love of self. I do not think this is a satisfactory view of love, either, insofar as it still assumes that love must be discussed in terms of self-love, understood as something like a wish or aim for good for oneself, and love of the other, understood as an altruistic wish for their good, with the discussion turning around how these two things are to be combined: Should self-love be sacrificed completely for the other, as Protestants think, or do lovers perhaps identify their good with the good of the beloved in such a way that the conflict between self-love and altruism ceases? To my mind, love cannot be conceived of in terms of the concepts of self-love and altruism at all, however combined. Love is a desire for openness: openness *is* the good of love, and it cannot be conceived of as the private good of either one of the lovers (even if one adds that *both* lovers see it as their good).

the horizon of *my* predilections, *my* needs, *my* values which the other admirably instantiates, and as I explained above, the love of friendship (*philia*) which is often contrasted with *eros*, is in fact, when conceptualised in the traditional way, just as self-centred.

On the other hand, insofar as the characterisation "erotic" refers to a desire to be with the beloved, I should say that love, including the love of friendship, *is* indeed essentially erotic, although it is not always sexual. This does *not* mean, as the standard conception of erotic love has it, that one is out to get something from the beloved, but rather that a relationship in which one does not long for the other, feels no desire to be with her, simply is not love, no matter how much there may be of well-wishing, concern, benevolence and sacrifice in it. And insofar as *agape* is taken to be an essentially self-sacrificial love, a love *without* desire – which many think is what it must be if its so-called "purity" is to be preserved – it is no love at all, as far as I can see.

The problem with the Greeks is not, then, that they make desire central in love, but that they misidentify the character of that desire, failing to see that it is a desire for the beloved, a desire to move in openness with her, and not a desire to get this or that, even the most spiritual things, from associating with her. The problem with most Christian defenders of *agape*, on the other hand, is that they seem to be afraid of desire as such, insofar as it is felt by one human being for another, and especially if it finds sexual expression. It is revealing, for instance, that Anders Nygren can state, *en passant*, without explanation or qualification, that "Sensual love has no place in a discussion of love in the religious sense, whether in the context of the Eros or the Agape motif", and that he will "disregard the isolated instances in the history of the Christian idea of love when vulgar Eros has intruded".[43]

Desire seems acceptable to many Christians only if it is directed to God, rather than to other human beings, and even then it frightens the more "sober" among them. Desire belongs essentially to love, however, although it is *love's* peculiar desire, which is not to be understood as a species of the genus "desire", but is rather *sui generis*, as I will explain more fully in a moment. In sum, I would say that there seems to be no room for the desiring openness of love in either the Greek or the Christian conception as they are standardly understood. To see love as a sacrifice is no part of love, any more than are ideas about the beloved's "worthiness" of love.

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[43] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 660 and footnote 1. As an example of such "vulgar intrusion" Nygren mentions Gnosticism, which he discusses on pp. 303–310.

As I see it, there can be no question here of *choosing* the conception of love one *prefers*. The "alternatives" are either understanding what the desire for another person in her singularity means, or failing to understand. As Simone Weil said, "the criterion of good", in the full sense of that word, is that "there is not a choice to be made in its favour, it is enough not to refuse to recognise that it exists".[44] If one refuses to understand what love's desire is, the result will be something like the confused comments of Stern-Gillet, who asks, about the supposed importance of the individual in love, "Where, in any case, do we anchor the uniqueness we are alleged so to price?", and goes on to say that we hardly want to be loved for our defects or trivial peculiarities; "although they may well contribute to making us different from all others, they do not, in our own view, constitute an adequate basis for love".[45] She concludes that since we "generally want to be loved for qualities that are both commendable and central to our personality, our intuitions may not be so much at variance with Aristotle's contention that the best love is the meeting point of worth and feeling".[46]

This is obviously beside the point, because Stern-Gillet assumes the very point of contention, that love is a matter of being found lovable on account of *some* characteristic or other. She asks where we "anchor" love, what would constitute "an adequate basis for love", but the point is that anything that has a *basis*, adequate or otherwise, is not love. Where there is love, *it* is the basis for everything else, the light in which other things – the various qualities of oneself and the beloved, for instance – appear as significant in one way or another, or disappear as irrelevant. I do not love you "*because...*" but because I love you my whole life will be changed, I will feel and see and do "everything" differently.

Love's desire goes out to the other, not to anything particular about her. Love, including the love of friendship, is not, to repeat, about finding the other appealing in some way, it is not about attraction. The distinction between love and attraction is that love implies, as Karl Barth says, "a total, complete, and unconditional acceptance of the other";

> Loving one another ...does not mean saying to each other openly or secretly: I love your manner, your thoughts, your acts, your character, your outward role; it means saying to each other with unconditional honesty: I love *you*,

[44] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 107.
[45] Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, p. 176.
[46] Ibid., p. 177.

> and because of that I love all that you are and have and do, and in all this I want nothing else but to be with you. Then and not before do we *love*...[47]

It may seem surprising, but is in fact quite logical, that the *more* one focuses on the "lovable" qualities of one's friend, on praising *the way she is*, the weaker this reveals the orientation of love towards her to be. Such praise is certainly a *kind* of orientation towards her, too, but nonetheless everything starts from and returns to one's private wishes, needs, desires; in praising my beloved I am in effect explaining that I am with her because *I like* this, that and the other thing about her, because she suits my tastes. Love, however, is not about tastes, but about openness, about wanting to know and be known by the other, and wanting that wholeheartedly, that is: *not* because one expects the other to reveal herself to be a person of one kind or another, to be "lovable".

I believe that the intuition that motivates much of the resistance to accepting that love is not about finding one's beloved particularly "lovable", is the feeling that unless one is loved for one's personality, for one's particular qualities, one cannot be loved as the individual one is, but is loved somehow abstractly – which means that one is not really *loved* at all. For whatever love is, it is certainly nothing abstract; on the contrary, in comparison with love everything else seems somehow abstract, unreal. But the intuition is confused: what it really reveals is a lack of faith in love, and so a need to go for some *other* kind of affirmation. For where love or friendship is weak, the result is of course not a complete indifference to and lack of interest in others, but rather a *transformation of the kind* of interest we take in each other. If one does not believe one could be loved, one wants at least to be appreciated, approved, liked – above all, *preferred* to others; one will then feel that one's friend really cares about one only if she somehow prefers or chooses one over someone else, and so everything becomes dominated by *jealousy*, a desire to know that one is "the only one" or "the first one", or by *vanity*, a concern with one's relative position in a game of social coquetry.

We will see in Chapter Three how this lack of love in the relations between lovers and friends also implies a lack of love, a callousness in their way of relating to outsiders. Others in fact become "outsiders" only because the

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[47] Barth, *Ethics*. Edited by Dietrich Braun and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 232. – Barth speaks here of the love between man and woman, *not* about friendship, and he apparently sees an important difference between them. I cannot, however, find in his text any real explanation of what that difference would be, and it seems to me that what I have quoted is also true of friendship.

friends feel a need to prove that they are "inside", that they are the preferred ones. In Chapter Four I will describe this whole process of falling from love as the expression of our "original sin", the "fall" into the self-loathing of shame. But that is still ahead. Here, I want to point to the confusion, the tragedy, in the idea that only if one is loved for one's personality is one personally loved. The tragedy is that the comparison implied in any "love" that latches onto one's personality, one's character and manner, actually introduces an impersonal, and in this sense abstract, element into the relationship. What we get instead of love is a *private liking* for the *kind* of personality which the other happens to instantiate. It all boils down to my being the kind of person who likes your kind of person, and there is nothing *personal* in that.

At this point it will no doubt be objected by some that the beloved's so-called "qualities" – the traits of her personality and character, her idiosyncrasies and habits and appearance – are important in love in a different way than I make out, in a way which makes it impossible to oppose the qualities of a person to the person herself in the way I have misleadingly done. Thus, Irvin Singer says that when a man loves a woman, he loves many things about her, but these "attributes" of hers are "more" than just the "cause" of his love; "They are part of the woman he loves, and in loving her he is also loving *them* ... not as they might belong to someone else but as they belong to her."[48] This sounds reasonable enough. After all, people do not confront us as a bundle of disconnected qualities, but rather as whole persons; they present us with a *Gestalt*, and when we say of a friend we miss, for instance, "I miss his sense of humour" or "I miss his laughter" we are not missing *a* sense of humour or *a* laughter, but *his* sense of humour, *his* laughter. The point is that we miss *him*, but in doing so we really do miss his laughter, too.

I have not denied any of this. Love is of concrete human beings, with their particular face and voice and laughter. As I said, love is the least abstract thing there is; in a certain sense it is the only thing that has nothing abstract about it at all. The question is only which *role* one gives to the perception of the concrete "qualities" of the other in love. If one makes the appreciation of, or liking for, the other's qualities central, one has not described love, but precisely liking or appreciation – and this is so even if one understands these qualities as aspects of the whole which is the other's person, rather than as isolated and replaceable traits, and even if one as it were intensifies the appreciation until it

[48] Singer, *The Nature of Love. Volume 3* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 399.

becomes adoration and wonder, which is what happens in *romantic* conceptions of love. In the love I feel for you the essential thing is not, however, what you are *like* – wonderful, adorable – but my desire for openness, for communion with you, a desire which is, *eo ipso*, a desire for you to be open with me.

– Desire *vs.* affection, attitudes, and inclination –

In order to account for the way friends and lovers become attached to each other as the particular individuals they are – the fact Plato and Aristotle conspicuously leave unexplained – it might seem helpful to bring in the concepts of *fondness, affection* and *attachment*. These are, one might say, different names for *need individualised*. If I am thirsty I just want *a* drink, any drink will do, and if I want a particular kind of drink, say a glass of milk, any glass of milk will do. But if I am fond of someone, if I feel affection for or attached to her, it is a relation between me and that particular individual person. It is *her* I miss if I have not seen her for a long time, it is *her* I want to see, and nothing "of the same kind" can replace her, for I am not interest in "kinds" of things at all. Meeting someone who *reminds* me of the person I miss might ease the pain of separation, or again intensify it; in either case my reaction does not undermine the focus on individuality, but on the contrary emphasises it.[49]

The point is that one is, in one's particularity, attached to others, or to animals, things, places, activities, in their particularity, or to the particular world one calls one's own and that, correspondingly, gives one one's identity (I *am* "the one who lives in this place, with these people, doing these things"). The concepts of *getting used* to things, of *familiarity*, *habit, tradition* and *ritual* are obviously closely related to the concepts of fondness, affection and attachment; they mark different ways in which particular things, activities, and ways of life become ingrained in us, shaping us and our world at the same time. To my mind, the "world of attachment", as one might call it, is captured perfectly in one sentence in Virginia Woolf's description of her father Leslie Stephen: "Taking his hat and his stick, calling for his dog and his daughter, he would

[49] Cf. the useful analysis in J. L. Stocks, "Desire and Affection" in his *Morality and Purpose* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

stride off into Kensington Gardens, where he had walked as a little boy".[50] Here everything: Mr. Stephen's hat and stick, his dog and his daughter, the park where he walked as a boy, seems to have its very particular place in this very particular world that is his and *whose he is*. He has his place right here, surrounded by the "furniture" of this world, just as it has its place surrounding him.

This kind of focus on individuality, where everything has its very particular place and setting, is not the same as love's openness, however, and if one tries to base friendship on fondness or affection one lands in the same problems that beset the Aristotelian picture one wanted to supplant or supplement. It is still *my* world that is the starting-point and the end-point of everything, and my friends come in as having their place – each his very particular place – in it. This can be seen in the strange *indifference* that goes with familiarity and attachment as such, and which the phrase "taking someone for granted" quite precisely indicates. One gets used to someone who has been along for some time, one grows at the same time attached and indifferent to her in the same kind of way one grows used to things, to old furniture: if someone took it away, one's world would seem out of joint, something essential would be missing, but as long as it is there, one hardly notices it, for it has become as self-evidently transparent to one as the air one breathes.

By contrast, to relate to someone in the openness of friendship means that one does not take her for granted, but is as interested in her today as when one first met her, even though one now knows her in a way one could not even imagine then. She is *not* someone who has a particular place in one's world – someone one expects and counts on always to find in just that familiar place, doing *this*, thinking *that*, and so on – but rather someone who, no matter how unfamiliar the surroundings may be that one finds her inhabiting for the moment, will by her very presence there transform what one might otherwise have found just indifferent or repellent or frightening into terrain to be explored. This is where *she* moves now, and so one wants to move there with her.

I am not saying, of course, that friendship will automatically make me *like* whatever my friend happens to take a liking to; that would be a strange kind of magic. The point is rather that I will not dismiss it or be frightened or disgusted by it, in the way we often are when we look with an *unfriendly* eye at the things "people do", reducing others to an anonymous mass to be judged by

[50] "Leslie Stephen" in Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 70 f.

our private likes and dislikes. If one of the people doing the thing in question is my friend, I can no longer dismiss it in this way, for it is not "people", it is *my friend* doing this thing. And when the anonymous view of others goes, so too does my private "like-don't like"-attitude, for that is the arbitrary, despotic way of relating to those one does not expect to talk back at one, whereas now one is responding to one's friend, one is in conversation with him. My claim here is not that it is alright to look at others in this unfriendly light if they are not one's friends. That way of looking at others is always a corruption and a self-deception, regardless of whether one knows those concerned or they are strangers to one. The point is precisely that opening oneself in the spirit of friendship *means* that the self-deception of this perspective becomes evident to one; that one drops it, if one ever stooped to it.

The desire for openness that is the heart of friendship is not – just as little as are fondness, affection and attachment – a desire for any "kind" of thing at all, but always a desire for *one's friend*, for another individual. It does not do away with fondness, affection and attachment – it certainly does not replace them with coldness and detachment – but it transforms them.

The desire to open oneself to one's friend is an *interest in her simply as herself*. Here it may be asked, however, what would it mean to be interested in a human being "simply as herself"? Are we not always interested in this or that particular thing, even if it be something not clearly defined, as when something catches one's interest precisely because one cannot quite figure it out? Well, how is it? Is there not a way of being interested where one does not lose interest in the other when one's curiosity has been satisfied – and not because the interest is insatiable, but because one does not look for *satisfaction* at all? Is there not an interest that unlike curiosity does not turn into boredom with time, but remains always strong, so that if someone who had that kind of interest in you said "My God, how boring you have become!" it would not be an expression of her losing interest in you, but on the contrary of her interest being as strong as ever – and of her being for that very reason unwilling to accept quietly that *you* seem to have lost interest in life, and so have become such a bore. Is it not precisely from the person with such an interest that you would expect to hear such a truth about yourself? Would that person not be, in fact, your friend?

Of course, your friend will be interested in, and curious about, all sorts of particular things about you; interested in what you thought about this, why you said that, and what happened to you yesterday. The point, however, is that she is not interested in you because you can satisfy these interests of hers, but rather

she is interested in these things because she is interested in you. This is not to say that she is not *really* interested in these particular things, but only in you; the contrast does not work like that. An interest in another is not a vague, general kind of interest: that description means nothing, or at most it might refer to an interest one does not really have but for some reason feels one *ought* to have, as when one says, about something one knows one will not find the interest really to study, that it seems like a "very interesting" subject. My friendly interest in you is always a concrete interest, an interest in what you are telling me or showing me *right now*. And the more interested I am in you, the more interested I will be in the particular things you want to communicate to me: if I am not interested in the latter this betrays, whatever I may say, a lack of interest in you. This kind of interest is another name for what I have called openness; it could also be called a desire for the other as such. It does not proceed from the feeling of some lack or need in me that contact with you would make good. I am not out to get some *satisfaction*, to get approval, inspiration, reassurance, a good laugh, or whatever, but I simply want to be with you, for no particular reason.

Emmanuel Levinas is one of the few philosophers to have articulated a conception of desire for the other as such. Levinas calls this desire for the other "metaphysical Desire".[51] As he notes, we often "speak lightly of desires satisfied, or of sexual needs, or even of moral and religious needs" and take love itself to be "the satisfaction of a sublime hunger".[52] Against this he insists, I think rightly, that love's desire is "a luxury with respect to needs",[53] "an aspiration that the Desirable animates; it originates from its 'object'; it is revelation – whereas need is a void of the Soul; it proceeds from the subject".[54] Love's desire is insatiable "not because it corresponds to an infinite hunger, but because it is not an appeal for food"[55] – one might say, rather, that it "nourishes itself ... with its hunger".[56] The point is that in love one does not "anticipate" any particular fulfilment, but instead opens oneself ever more to the other's revelation; the person one desires "does not fulfil ... but deepens" one's desire, as Levinas says.[57]

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[51] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 34.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., p. 103.
[54] Ibid., p. 62.
[55] Ibid., p. 63.
[56] Ibid., p. 34.
[57] Ibid. – Having quoted Levinas at some lenght, I should note that his conception of a "metaphysical desire" is only *formally* equivalent to the desire I take to define friendship; the

The desire for the other is not a specific desire alongside others, say curiosity or sexual desire; it is rather a desire that can express itself *in* or *as* other kinds of desire, transforming them as it does so. One could say that when this desire is present the particular desires and interests cease to be particular; they are no longer experienced as focused on isolated "things", like "sex" or "gossip", but rather as aspects of one's desire to be with and know the other. Given that this desire is there, one can say with Ilham Dilman that sex (to take that example) is

> a form of affective body-language in terms of which one makes contact and communicates ... But the person who speaks it does not always say the same thing, does not always seek the same thing. In that *sex has no content of its own; it takes on the character of the contact two individuals make*, or at least long for and strive after ... it ... can bring into play almost any part of the person in his responses to the other.[58]

Note that this does not mean that sex becomes *less* sexy, which mostly seems to be what people really mean when they claim that sex becomes something "beautiful" when it happens between people who love each other – as opposed to the dirty thing it apparently is under normal circumstances. On the contrary: the desire for the other, for openness, makes sex *more* sexy, makes lust more lustful, precisely because it frees it from the isolation into which it is driven by the *fear* of openness: it is fear that makes one want to *confine* sex to certain people, places, times, positions and so on. The same thing happens with all the other "forms" of interest and desire: the fear of openness, the *lack* of desire for the other, give rise to the need for "forms", for limitations, in the first place, and we can begin to explore the real and wild possibilities of contact only when that fear loosens its grip.

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crucial difference being that for Levinas the desired "Other" is actually not another human being, but God. I will develop a critique of Levinas in later chapters. – In *On Love... Aspects of a Single Theme* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), Ortega y Gasset makes some remarks on the distinction between desire, as standardly understood, and love's desire (he speaks simply of love), which also run in the same formal direction as Levinas and mine. When we want or need something, Ortega says, the "I" remains "the centre of gravity" (p. 11), whereas in loving we "abandon the tranquility and permanence within ourselves, and virtually migrate towards the object"; to be in love is to be in "this constant state of migration" (p. 14). However, like many accounts of love, Ortega's analysis is vitiated by his apparent failure to see that the attitudes we refer to when we speak of the "love" of learning or of one's country, for example, have nothing to do with love between human beings; hence his easy way of talking about the "object" of love.

[58] Dilman, *Love and Human Separateness* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 91.

When one turns to someone in openness, in friendship, there is no *particular* expression on one's face at all, no *particular* tone in one's voice. One's face is simply open, one looks straight into the other's eyes, quite unguardedly, there is no hesitation or apprehension, no strain, in one's voice. One may be sad or glad or angry, of course – and speaking openly means that all of one's sadness or gladness or anger is in one's speech, that one does not suppress or try to hide any of it – but these feelings are as it were not allowed to *set* in a particular, fixed mould, because one is all the time open with the other, receptive to her, appealing to her for an answer. *Not* being open means precisely that one's anger, for instance, stiffens into an *attitude*, that one stops listening for the other's answer, and instead starts anticipating a particular answer from her, thus turning the dialogue into a monologue of accusation: "Don't say anything, I know what you're going to say, anyway!"

The desire for the friend cannot, then, be described as an attitude. Every attitude is a way of closing oneself to the other, of looking only for particular kinds of things in her and responses from her; if they do not fit one's expectations one will either turn away from the other, or be blind to the things one did not expect, or reinterpret them so that they are made to fit one's expectations. To take an obvious example, a person caught up in hatred cannot see anything good in the one she hates: his friendliness appears to her as flattery, his liveliness as coquetry, his real interest as malevolent snooping, and so on. For she *wants* to go on hating, and one cannot hate someone if one allows oneself to see anything good in him. One may well admit that he is talented, shrewd, charming and has other "positive" qualities, but that is different from seeing anything genuinely *good* in him.

The same reduction of the other to fit the scheme of one's own expectations is at work in positive attitudes too. Thus, if one *admires* someone, one tends to see everything she does in a favourable light, and if her behaviour forces one nonetheless to admit that she is not as admirable as one thought, one will turn away from her disillusioned. In the same way, if one is *fascinated* by someone, harbouring some more or less specific notions about the kind of fascinating person she is, and she then turns out to be in fact quite different from this, one turns away: she disappointed one's expectations. It might be objected that one *need* not turn away, just as one need not be biased in one's view of the person one admires. That is true in one sense, but I would say that insofar as one is not thus locked into a certain way of responding to the other, this means that one does not *have* an attitude towards her, or at least that the

encounter with her has freed one from the attitude one originally brought to it. Thus, if one can look quite lucidly at another person, and does not feel *betrayed* when she turns out to be less "perfect" than one imagined, I would say that one does not assume the attitude of an *admirer* in relation to her, although one may of course admire a particular thing she did, and admire her for doing it.

The point is that attitudes are *particular* ways of taking an interest in others; every attitude has *its agenda*. What fascinates one in another person is thus always something particular about her, even if that particular thing may be hard to pin-point. By contrast, simply being interested in another, being open to her in friendship or love, means (to repeat) that one does not feel a need to limit one's way of relating to her to any particular mode, one's contacts with her to any particular aspects of her. From love's perspective it is not only a problem if someone always takes the *same* attitude; the problem is rather that they always take *some* attitude; they are always in some mood or other, always playing some more or less emotional or manipulative game or other.

Attitudes come out in one's behaviour as specific *ways* of attending to the other, each attitude has its specific *physiognomy* which can be described and represented, by a painter or an actor on stage, for instance. In one's irritation one does not *simply* smile at the other, for instance, for there is a slight, irritated strain around one's mouth. Or one is eager to please, and that will show in one's being always in danger of being just a little bit *too* eager, of trying too much – and here it does not matter whether the pleasing is done in a clumsy, vulgarly obvious way, or is so perfectly discreet as to be registered only by the finest sensitivity, for what the fine sensitivity registers is still the same thing, the eagerness to please, which can also be seen in the grossest caricature.

All attitudes can be caricatured, and the caricature brings out the truth of the attitude, its salient features, in exaggerated form; it magnifies them, makes them more easily discernible – which naturally infuriates not only the upholders of pompous, heroic attitudes, but also those of discreet, tasteful attitudes, because the very point of such attitudes is to do things in such a way that it almost appears as though nothing at all was being done and things just unfolded as of themselves, whereas the caricature reveals in no uncertain light what *is* being done. There can be no caricature of love's openness, however, for love has no particular physiognomy or way of being which could be exaggerated. There are of course all kinds of very positive attitudes towards others which have their characteristic physiognomies, and may be confusedly taken for love: mere attraction, sexual or otherwise, adoration, sentimental attachment, being

charmed by someone, and so on. In truth, however, these attitudes are not love.[59]

It might be objected to my that it is a contradiction in terms to think that one could contrast something called love or openness with attitudes with their determinate shapes, unless openness itself had its determinate shape – *what* would one be contrasting with the attitudes, otherwise? That objection seems to me a sophism. Suppose you know someone who is always making jokes and being funny, and when you try to tell him something in earnest, and ask him just to be himself for once, he turns aggressive, or assumes a very *solemn* attitude. You ask him again to just listen and respond to what you want to tell him, and he retorts: "Well, *how* do you want me to act, then?" Would this not be an example of a similarly sophistic *reductio ad absurdum* of the perspective of attitudes, one in which the absence of attitudes is represented as itself an attitude among others? It is easy to imagine the question "Well, how do you want me to act, then?" uttered defensively, aggressively, indignantly, in a hurt tone of voice, or by someone who wants so desperately to please that when they are told they can stop, they merely unhappily insist that there must be something they can do to please the other. Can we, however, really imagine it uttered in genuine bewilderment, by someone who has no idea at all what it would mean to leave all attitudes aside?

The objector might insist, however, that the very fact that we can speak of an open smile or a loving look evidently means that we can recognise them *as* looks or smiles of these *kinds*, and that this proves that love's openness is not unspecifiable, does not lack physiognomy, as I claim. This objection is confused, it seems to me. I do not deny that we can recognise openness, experience love. On the contrary, love's openness is all experience, it is *the presence in love of two people to each other*, in one sense the most concrete thing imaginable, although in another sense it is quote impossible to "make concrete", since if one asks *what* a loving look or an open smile look like, what

[59] In saying that each attitude has its specific physiognomy I am not claiming, naturally, that all cases of sentimentality, for instance, look exactly the same: that is clearly not the case. I am merely saying that there are *characteristic* expressions of sentimentality and other attitudes which, among other things, make it possible to portray them on stage. In the same way, my claim about the definability of attitudes, the possibility of describing and characterising them, which I contrast with the impossibility to define love's openness, does not depend on an unduly narrow definition of "definition", according to which we have defined a word or concept if and only if we have listed the necessary and sufficient conditions for its application. On such a narrow conception of definition, sentimentality is certainly as undefinable as openness, whereas I am pointing to a contrast between undefinability of openness and the relative specificity of attitudes.

kind of smiles or looks they are, one cannot, as I have tried to show, give any answer.[60]

If this still sounds like a mystification, consider the elementary experience of looking into someone's eyes. What do we look for, what do we see, when we look into each other's eyes? In an important sense, we look for nothing at all, we see nothing at all, nothing that could be described as a "seeing this-or-that". Looking into your eyes, as opposed to looking *at* you, is literally vision without an object. It does not tell me anything in particular *about* you, about your physiognomy or the kind of person you are. When our eyes meet, I might certainly see joy or sadness in your eyes, but this does not tell me anything about *what* you are *like*, it rather tells me how things are with you right now, how you feel. As one might quite naturally put it, it shows me your soul. Or rather, in looking me in the eye, not trying to conceal how you feel, you show yourself to me, you reach out to me. When our eyes meet, we make *contact*: that is the essential point.

There is nothing abstract about this experience of meeting someone's eyes – on the contrary, nothing could be more concrete, more decisive – and yet it cannot be defined or represented. Suppose your friend is deeply troubled by something. She does not need to look you in the eye for you to know that she is troubled, and perhaps you know all about what causes the trouble, too; you have all the facts. Still, you wish with all your heart that she would not look away, shut herself in with her troubles, with her shame and misery, but would look you in the eye and let you be *with her* in her trouble. For that is the significance that meeting someone's eyes may have; it may be a kind of embrace, a being together with the other in no *particular* way, but in complete openness: giving everything, concealing nothing.[61]

If the openness of love and friendship cannot be understood as an attitude, neither can it be grounded in *inclination*. Yet the fact that love and friendship are beyond justification by appealed to "reasons", is standardly explained in terms of their being preferential attachments expressive of an essentially unaccountable personal inclination.

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[60] On the impossibility of representing love, due to love's being about openness, that is, being about "nothing in particular", cf. Hannes Nykänen, *The 'I,' the 'You' and the Soul. An Ethics of Conscience* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002), pp. 251 f., 257–274.

[61] I say "may have" rather than "has", because one may of course look for eye-contact, and meet the other's eyes in ways which are not open at all, but rather expressive of various attitudes; in seduction, for instance, or in contempt. So while it is true that insofar as we are open to each other, we will look each other in the eye, it is not necessarily true that if we look each other in the eye, we are open.

In the case of appreciation, admiration or respect, for instance, one can explain, more or less, *why* one appreciates or admires or respects someone; one can point to what she has done and how she behaves; one can make comparisons with how others behave, putting what she did in context; one can emphasise certain aspects or details, try to capture in words what is characteristic about her demeanour, and so on. In short, one can give reasons for one's judgments. One cannot in this sense give any reasons for the inclinations one has. The connexion between reasons and inclinations is rather that one's inclinations are what incline one to accept certain things *as* "reasons" in the first place. Thus, my inclination to distrust women may incline me to accept the reasons adduced by you for thinking that it is Miss Jones rather than Mr. Smith who is more to blame for the quarrel which poisons the atmosphere at work. In the same way, my inclinations may explain why I adopt a certain attitude towards someone.

However, in the case of love understood as a personal inclination, reasons and attitudes would not even come into it in this way, as it were "on the back of" the spontaneous inclination; they would not come in at all, there would just be the inclination. It would not be that my inclination to find Anne wonderful makes me see reasons for loving her rather than Joan, or makes me adopt a "loving attitude" towards her, but rather I would simply, unaccountably, be inclined towards seeing the wonder of Anne rather than that of Joan, and if someone asked me *why* I love Anne, I could only answer, with Montaigne: "Because it was her, because it was me", thus in effect rejecting the question.[62]

The Platonic Aristophanes' interpretation of love as the movement in which each one of us is "seeking the half that matches him",[63] is the most famous exposition of the inclination-view of love. As Aristophanes says, people who live all their life together in love "still cannot say what it is they want from one another"; whichever particular thing one proposes as being that which they are looking for in one another, the reason why they are together, "It's obvious that the soul of every lover longs for something else; his soul cannot say what it is, but like an oracle it has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle".[64]

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[62] Montaigne, *On Friendship*, p. 10.
[63] Plato, *Symposium*, 191d. Translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in Plato, *Complete Works*.
[64] Ibid., 192c–d.

I agree that there are no reasons for, or in, love. Reasons give the *conditions* for something, but love is an unconditional desire for the other; we love earthly beings, but "with a transcendental tie and without any earthly reason", as Chesterton puts it.[65] It seems to me, however, that in talking of love as an unaccountable inclination one tries to preserve an appearance of honouring this insight, which we know in our hearts to be true, while in fact giving it up. The essential point is not that Aristophanes speaks of love as a "riddle", but that he speaks of it as a "match". In the same way Montaigne, who indignantly rejects the suggestion that he and his friend Boëtie were bound together by what binds ordinary friends together, "some chance or some suitability, by means of which our souls support each other",[66] nonetheless also speaks of "that congruity and affinity which engender true and perfect friendship",[67] thus admitting that it *was* after all a question of "suitability" in his and Boëtie's case too, although of a rarer, deeper, more subtle kind than is usual.

From the point of view of love's wholehearted desire, this distinction between the cases in which one can adduce reasons for one's preferences and actions, and those in which one cannot, is of no consequence. For the essential point is that we are in both cases dealing with a *private preference*, a finding the other to be *exactly what one wants*, even if one cannot specify *what* it is about her that makes her such. This means that one does not want the other unconditionally; on the contrary, one has found that she fulfils all the conditions – in themselves in large part, and in their most important parts necessarily, unknown to one and impossible to formulate in words – that one spontaneously puts on what someone else should be like for one to want her. One does say: "I want you" and often also "You are the only one for me", but this just means "You are perfect for me, no one could be as perfect as you are, for me". In this sense, everything still starts from and returns to *me* with *my* inclinations. However much one speaks of oneself as being unaccountably, mysteriously, drawn to the other, the "I" still remains "the centre of gravity" (Ortega) in the inclination-view of love; the beloved becomes, as it were, my destiny – but the important thing is still that she is *my* destiny. I should say, on the contrary, that love is as far as one can get from a "destiny"; it is a complete freedom.

The view of love as an inclination manages to give a deceptive appearance of honouring another insight about love in addition to its

[65] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: John Lane, 1909), p. 120.
[66] Montaigne, *On Friendship*, p. 9.
[67] Ibid., p. 4.

unconditionality, namely its character of a *gift* or a *grace*, rather than a personal achievement. For seeing love as a personal inclination of course means seeing it as something one just happens to "have" – "happens to" not in the trivial sense that one could easily imagine not having it, not finding Anne wonderful as one does, for instance, but in the sense that it is something one simply discovers to be there in oneself. It is not an attitude one has decided to adopt, and so not something whose presence or absence one can in any way be held responsible for, or claim merit for.

I agree that love is not a personal achievement or an attitude one adopts. Seeing it as an inclination in fact reduces it to something less than the grace it is, however. In love, one does not and cannot, I would say, look on one's love as an inclination one has found to be there in one, unaccountably, and so as something that might also, just as unaccountably, one day *not* be there anymore. Viewing it in that way means looking at one's love – both the love one feels and one's beloved – from the outside, as a stranger would. From love's own perspective, the standard objection to wedding vows, that one cannot promise to go on feeling a certain way for ever, is quite senseless. For if the vows are really given *in love*, they are an expression of *wholeheartedness*, of the unconditional desire one feels for the other, and this desire by its very nature excludes any anticipations or premonitions that it will some day end. That is what wholeheartedness *means*. The very thought that the "love" one now feels may some day end *in itself* marks a fall from love, a loss of faith in love; it is precisely an admission that whatever one feels now is *not* love, but some unaccountable stirring of sentiment in one, which comes and goes as *it* pleases.

If someone says "I love you very much... but we all know love can end", she is in effect declaring that she has not and will not open herself in love to the person she claims to "love very much", but from the beginning wants to keep the option open of leaving if she starts to feel uncomfortable in some way in the relationship; she is giving herself licence to cater to her inclinations, whether deeper or more superficial ones, rather than opening herself to the other. And note that this is *just as much* the case even if she declares that she has promised herself to the other, and will never leave him no matter how her feelings might change, for at issue in the openness of love is what we feel for each other, and what we do because we feel it; not what we can force ourselves to do (stay with someone, for instance) despite what we feel (bored, for instance).

From the point of view of love, if one thinks of love as an inclination, all is lost, and then it makes no essential difference anymore whether one thinks one has a right to act on one's whims or thinks instead that one has to "assume responsibility for one's personal inclination", as Olli Lagerspetz has it.[68] Either way, one has refused love. Suppose someone about to get married says that while "we all know that, for various reasons it sometimes proves impossible to keep one's vows", and that there is no point in "forcing oneself to feel something one does not" (as indeed there is not), he nonetheless "takes the promise of love seriously", as is shown by the fact that "if it turns out to be impossible to preserve the love it will be a matter of deep concern and grief" for him – which is "a form that assuming responsibility for one's personal inclination may take".[69] What has this person said? As far as I can see, he has only said than he does not want to risk all in love, so that it is quite possible that at some point in the future he will want to leave his wife. The assurance that if he does, he will feel very bad about it – as of course he will, unless he is a very superficial person, since he is after all leaving a *marriage* – makes nothing better. This is certainly not "the language of love", but it is the way one must talk, more or less, if one sees love as an inclination.[70]

– Moving in unity –

It will probably be objected to my talk of openness, that while openness may perhaps be an important part of friendship, it is not all there is to it: what distinguishes a friendly meeting with a stranger in a lift from friendship is the fact that friends *know* each other because they share a *history* together. We may be friendly with people we do not know, but friendship is something that develops gradually and deepens with time. We do not normally speak of people as friends until they have known each other for some time, and in an obvious sense it would be absurd to say that in exchanging a warm smile with a stranger in a lift you have become *friends*; after all, you do not even know his name.

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[68] Lagerspetz, "Dorothea and Casaubon", *Philosophy* 67 (1992), p. 220.
[69] Ibid.
[70] I will return to the idea that love is an inclination which needs to be "formed" or "checked" by some more or less "moral" force at the end of this chapter.

On the other hand, that smile may have made you feel, in a sense which – although impossible to define or analyse into component parts, since it has none, is not vague but quite precise – that *you are no longer strangers to each other*. This is so because if you and the stranger exchange a smile that really is friendly – not a polite or slightly embarrassed smile, but a warm and open one – the *same* openness is already there that might then, if this friendly encounter leads to your seeing more of each other, take the form of your "becoming friends", as we say. Even at your first meeting, however, the openness was real openness, it was not there in any "undeveloped" form[71] – just as it is always there when you meet and do not turn down your eyes, or look the other way, or shut each other out in some other way.

In Chapter Three I argue that we do indeed need to distinguish a sense of the openness of friendship or love in which one may have many friends, and in which openness and love can be there for just a few moments in a lift, from the sense of love in a monogamous marriage. Nevertheless, the desire for openness is essentially the same in all cases, even when you exchange a warm smile with the stranger in the lift. Even here "yours" and "his" *are* in fact abolished: the warmth of the smile lies precisely in this, that neither of you have a private agenda. You are not smiling, for instance, because in your vanity you are trying to impress him with your charm; or because you are trying to hide your insecurity behind a "relaxed" smile; or because you want to start a conversation with him to satisfy your curiosity about something; or because you are trying to awaken his sympathy or show him that he has awakened yours; or because you want your condescending smile to let him know how you feel about people like him; or because you want to invite him to share your condescension for a third person who just got off the lift. All this and a thousand other things could have been what transpired between you, but if it was, there would have been no warmth, no openness in your smile: there would just have been your private agenda, and his, the one either matching the other or clashing with it.

That friendships really can deepen with time is due, *on the one hand*, to the fact that while friendship as such simply *is* openness, openness is not for *us*, frail creatures, sinners, that we are, something that is simply there. Rather, we live, as I have emphasised, in the constant tension of a desire for and fear of openness, and friendship comes into our relationships as a movement of *opening up*, as a searching for each other. When we say that a friendship deepens we mean that the

[71] Aristotle speaks of goodwill as an "undeveloped" form of friendship at *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167a10–15. The translation is J. A. K. Thomson's in *Ethics* (London: Penguin, 1976 [1953]).

friends open up more and more to each other, that they dare to let go of more and more of the defensive armour, the attitudes and the emotions, that we erect, more or less unconsciously against others. But this opening up does not happen with any sort of automatism: time as such does not effect it, and spending time with someone may just make one used to her, or tired of her, or simply more comfortable in her company, but that is not openness.

There is of course also another sense in which friendships deepen and change in the course of time. This change is not due to the fact that we are wary of each other's touch, and it would occur even between friends who were from the beginning always completely open. What I have in mind is the simple fact that the particular form that the friends' intercourse takes, the things they do with and say to each other, has a history in the sense that what is happening now is, in large part, a response to what has gone on before. For a friend does not, of course, forget what his friend has let him see of herself from one encounter to the next – he will not repeat a question she has just answered, for example – and their talk, although it might return to the same topics again and again, does not return to them monotonously, but always in a different way, in a way that is different from before *because* they have been here before – just as they may, on the other hand, do the *same* thing *again* because they liked it the last time.

In short, I am naturally not denying that there is such a thing as coming to know one's friend better. Nor am I claiming that this is not essential to friendship. On the contrary, the desire of friendship is precisely, as I have said, to know and be known by one's friend. I simply want to insist that what it means to *know* someone in the sense relevant to friendship must itself be understood in terms of openness. Certainly, we are not talking about the kind of knowledge ("private information") a detective might gain about someone from reading their secret diary, or practical knowledge about how to deal with and manipulate someone – humour her, upset her, and so on – for these kinds of knowledge people can have about each other without there being any friendship at all between them.

Demanding that such knowledge be *mutual* will not give us friendship, either, for it is quite possible for two enemies to know each other very well, very intimately, in these senses. Even adding that the mutuality is *willingly* entered into is not enough, for there can be all sorts of unfriendly reasons for willingly allowing another to get to know one in these senses. The fact that a relationship is "open" in the sense that both parties frankly express their

motives, and accept the other's motives, for entering into it, does not amount to friendship, either. As we will see in more detail further on, in friendship the point is not that one is "open" about one's motives for seeking the other's company, but rather that one *has* no motives (no private motives, that is, but love's desire itself may of course be said to be a motive in its own right; it is what *moves* the friends). In friendship, it is not that one is open about the game one is playing, rather, one is not playing any games at all.[72]

One can be said to know one's friend, just as one can be said to *be oneself*, in two very different senses. Being oneself in the first sense, which we might call the *descriptive* sense, is connected with one's personality: it means being a person of a certain *kind*, a person whose inclinations, character and manner can be described with the help of adjectives, anecdotes and mimicry. It means being the person one has come to think of oneself as being – and whether or not one *likes* one's person or feels trapped in it, is of secondary importance in this connexion. Being oneself in the second sense, which I would call the *existential* sense, and which I take to be the sense at stake in friendship, simply *means* being open. If someone encourages me to quit trying so much and just be myself, her sense is this latter one; she is not encouraging me to be any *kind* of person at all, she is encouraging me to open up to her and to others, to stop worrying so much about what others think of me.

I may be said to be myself, be the person who acts and thinks and feels in certain typical ways which I identify with, while yet not showing who I really

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[72] In "Trust and Antitrust" reprinted in her *Moral Prejudices. Essays on Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), Annette Baier gives an influential analysis of what she calls "morally decent trust" (see especially pp. 120–9), which reduces trust to just such a playing with open cards. As Baier sees it, "trust" is "decent" if we would go on "trusting" even if we were fully informed of the other's motives and aims in "trusting" us and wanting us to "trust" them. Thus, Baier says, "The trusted wife is sensible to try to keep [her husband's] trust, as long as she judges that the goods which would be endangered should she fail to meet his trust matter more to her than those she could best look after only by breaking or abusing his trust" (p. 122). This, quite obviously, is not an analysis of trust at all, but of the kind of calculative games that go on between people who do *not* trust each other, and therefore are always asking how far and in which respects they can "count" on the other – and the answer to that question is normally connected with how far the other "counts" on them, as when someone says "We can count on him: he has no-one else to turn to but us". That this kind of thing can be considered state of the art in philosophical discussions of trust is to my mind a typical example of the depressing state of Anglo-American moral philosophy. Olli Lagerspetz, *Trust*: *The Tacit Demand* (Dodrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), is an excellent critique of the confusions exemplified by Baier's type of analysis. Cf. also the exchange between Lagerspetz ("The Notion of Trust in Philosophical Psychology") and Baier ("Reply to Olli Lagerspetz") in L. Alanen, S. Heinämaa & T. Wallgren (eds.), *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997). – I will return to the question of trust in Chapter Two.

am in the existential sense. If I am afraid of being myself in the existential sense, but nonetheless at some point open up, let down my defences and reveal more of myself than customarily, perhaps speaking too openly, or fooling around on the dance-floor, or again (if I do not think of myself as a "serious" person) getting carried away by a serious discussion about the meaning of life, I may try to deny the significance of what I then revealed of myself by saying that "I was not myself".

This will be true in the one sense, but false in another, and my friend, who witnessed my "falling out of character", may try to get me to see that my for once *not* "being myself", but coming out into the open was not something I should fear or be ashamed of, but a freedom he hopes I would dare to explore. This is the sense in which a friend can indeed, as Simone Weil writes, say to her friend "in an affectionate conversation ... without jarring upon even the tenderest nerve of their friendship": "Your person does not concern me" or "My person does not count", but *never* "You do not interest me" or "I do not count".[73] It is *because* she counts and he counts that their persons do not.

Insofar as attachment to my "person", to the one I take myself to be in the descriptive sense – liking this, disliking that, accustomed to this, afraid of that – makes it difficult for me to open myself to others in love, my person actually hinders me from being myself. If, in the face of such difficulties, I declare that *this is simply who I am*, then I am giving up and closing myself, in one and the same movement, to the other *and* to myself. Certainly, I need not close myself in desperation, as the suicide does who in his act declares that he cannot bear to go on living as the person he is; I may also close myself in self-satisfaction. For someone who loves me, who longs to live in openness with me, to see me closing myself in self-satisfaction is as painful as witnessing my despair.

Although I may *be* myself and be *known* by my friend in the existential sense, there can be no final answer to the *question* who I am in this sense, because in this context "being" does not denote a *state* of someone which could be described, and "knowing" does not denote the knowledge one could have of that state. Rather, *both* these words name the *same orientation of desire*, always the same and always new, just as the day is. Here we might recall the biblical sense of "knowing" someone: having sexual intercourse with them, getting to know them sexually. The point is that the knowledge of friendship, although normally not sexual, is not a matter of knowing things *about* the other, just as little as sexual

[73] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, Edited by George A. Panichas (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1977), p. 313.

intercourse is; it is rather about touching her, being together with her.[74] The reason why it is more than just an arbitrary play on etymology to speak of "knowledge" here, however, is that in friendship the friends are together in such a way that they *know what they are doing*. If they are open, wholeheartedly there with each other, it means that they are not deceiving themselves about what is going on between them, not repressing or pretending anything.

Since, as Levinas notes, being together with one's friend "does not fulfil ... but deepens" one's desire for her,[75] one can be said to desire and long for her as much when one is in her presence as when one is away from her. In this sense love's desire is, as Levinas says, "a way still to seek him who is nonetheless as close as he can be"; to approach the other means "still to pursue what is already present, to still seek what one has found".[76] Friendship is, no matter how much one already knows about one's friend, a *desire* to know her, to be in communion with her.

Analogously, what it means to know *oneself* in friendship cannot be understood as a matter of possessing knowledge about oneself – or indeed as a matter of any other kind of "possession" of oneself. If I have knowledge about myself there must be a part of me that knows another part, for it takes both a subject and an object to accomplish the act of knowing in the "objective" sense implied. But in friendship, knowing oneself means precisely the opposite of this splitting of oneself into knower and known: it means being at one with oneself *in* being wholeheartedly open to the other. It does not mean, to take an instance of "objective" knowledge, that one is very adept at *predicting* how one would react or what one would say in a certain situation. Rather it means that when a situation arises, one reacts or speaks out openly, wholeheartedly, without the anxiety of self-doubt, *knowing what one is doing*. One is not shocked or even surprised at what comes out of one's mouth, but that does not mean that one could have predicted it. If you ask me, "What would you say if I told you such-and-such?", and I promptly tell you, I have not predicted what I *would* say, I have *said* it, I have responded to your question.

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[74] The Swedish language, as it happens, evidences an important conceptual connection in the word *känna*: "to feel" is "att känna" and "to know someone" is "att känna någon". So, playing on the Swedish word one could say "I kärleken känner vi varandra", that is: in love we *feel-and-know* each other. – In Swedish translations of the Bible "att känna någon" has the same sexual meaning as "knowing someone" in the English, but that sense does not occur in daily speech in Swedish either.

[75] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 34.

[76] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), p. 120.

In the sense of friendship, my knowledge of you and of myself are in fact *one and the same*; they are the two sides of the same desire for and daring of openness. For if friendship is not about finding someone *just like me*, but about going out in search of *you*, that search is always at the same time a search for myself, because what I seek is *contact*, and I cannot make contact with you if I am not, at the same time, in contact with myself. Only if I speak from the heart can I speak to your heart, and when I do, I simultaneously know myself, in my speaking, *and* you in your listening, in your responding to me.

My basic claim here is that knowing the other in the sense most essential to friendship is not a knowledge made possible by openness, it is openness itself. It is the mystery of friendship and love, of the other and oneself as revealed in love, that no matter how far we go into the openness with each other, "it will never end". We will never reach the bottom, because there is no bottom. And what strikes us is not the thought that "the other remains finally unknowable", as though there was something called "knowing the other" that we wanted to do but could not. *That* thought expresses the frustration of the self-centred, fearful, possessive perspective that love frees one from. Love is, on the contrary, the joyful experience that the other is there to be known, that one wants to know and be known by her, and that she wants that, too – and that this movement will never end.

At this point I will make a few comments on Derrida's book *Politics of Friendship*, whose guiding thought appears to be that the other remains finally unknowable and unreachable. The book is one long meditation on the saying "O my friends, there is no friend"; Derrida writes of and for "the friends of solitude" who call on each other "to share what cannot be shared: solitude".[77] What these friends "desire to share" is really the feeling "that solitude is irremediable and friendship impossible"; this sharing would happen in an "extatic rejoicing but one without plentitude, a communion of infinite wrenching" (p. 54). In this friendship

> those who are separated come together without ceasing to be what they are destined to be ... dissociated ... constituted into monadic alterities ... These two are not in solidarity with one another; they are solitary, but they ally themselves in silence within the necessity of keeping silent together ... How can you be together to bear witness to secrecy, separation, singularity? You would have to testify where testimony remains impossible. (p. 54 f.)

[77] Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship.* Translated by George Collins (London & New York: Verso, 1997), p. 35. The page-references in the remaining text of this section are to this work.

What could this mean? How does Derrida arrive at such strange, paradoxical formulations? Or perhaps they are, in some sense, quite natural, given a certain way of looking at things? Derrida says that "the central question" of his book is that of "a *philia* without *oikeiótes*" (p. 154 f.) – of a friendship, that is, which is not based on the similarity or affinity of the friends, on their sharing aspirations or interests; a friendship "without a familial bond, without proximity ... without presence, therefore without resemblance, without attraction, perhaps even without significant or reasonable preference" (p. 35).

In this respect, Derrida is exploring a way of thinking about friendship that is akin to the one proposed in this thesis. Why, then, does he end up in solitude and a forced silence, whereas I claim that friendship is precisely not solitude but an openness in which we communicate freely with each other? The problem, it seems to me, is that while Derrida wants to question and subvert the "logic of the same" (p. 4) which we find in discourses on friendship from Plato on, where the friend is thought of as being in some way or other the same as me, and *therefore* a friend, the paradoxes and negativity of his articulation of the alternative conception that is supposed to emerge from this questioning show that his thinking is still caught up in that very logic. Derrida's friends are, he says, "alone because they are incomparable and without common measure, reciprocity or equality" (p. 35), but unless one accepts the "logic of the same", it does not follow from our being incomparable that we have to be *alone*. On the contrary, in the openness of friendship we are incomparably ourselves, and yet together *as* ourselves.

I am aware that Derrida would not consider it an objection to what he says that it remains caught up in the very logic he is questioning, for the defining characteristic of his way of approaching philosophical and other discourses is precisely his keen sense of the way in which opposites are always implicated in one another. And so he does not oppose two models of friendship to each other, but rather keeps the question open whether the model that might appear "other" to the traditional one perhaps only "deploys the traps that the first sets" (p. 276). Perhaps what appear to be "two different, even antagonistic or incompatible structures" in fact "imply one another – a supplementary ruse – at the very moment when they seem to exclude one another?" (p. 277)

My response here would be that Derrida's "alternative" picture really does imply the picture it is supposed to be an alternative to, and so it must necessarily be as long as one's approach is essentially *deconstructive*, for one will never be able to free oneself from a way of thinking by deconstructing it

from within. If one tries to defeat the enemy by singing his song one will only end up ... singing his song. If one wants to get out of a way of thinking one has to step out of it, to start singing one's own song. At this point Derrida would probably claim that it is *impossible* to sing a song really of one's own, or at least proceed to question and undermine any claim to the contrary. Curiously, Derrida does at one point very late in the book acknowledge that "the aporia requiring the unceasing neutralization of one predicate by another", as in "community without community" would – "perhaps" – "call for an altogether other language" (p. 298 f.). But that remains a mere gesture. Perhaps Derrida did not really *want* to step out of the way of looking at things that he questions?

In fact, it seems to me that the very character of deconstructive thinking as a constant movement of, as it were, saying something and then proceeding to unsay it, models and expresses the oscillations between approach and drawing back characteristic of a certain kind of friendship – precisely the kind that Derrida describes in his extravagant language, but whose features are quite familiar – in which the friends want to approach each other but lack the faith finally to be quite open, and so remain at a *respectful distance* from each other, "each ... in his own corner", as Derrida says (p. 55). The friends see to it that they do not come too close for comfort;

> Thus is announced the anchoritic community of those who ... can *love only at a distance, in separation* ... they love to love – in love or in friendship – providing there is this withdrawal. Those who love only in cutting ties are the uncompromising friends of solitary singularity. (p. 35)

It will no doubt be objected to my critique of Derrida that I have fatally misunderstood why he stresses that love is and should be "in separation and at a distance". What he and others who speak in this vein are pointing to, it will be said, is the very condition of any real encounter between self and other. Here is Blanchot, in a passage quoted by Derrida:

> We have to renounce knowing those to whom we are bound by something essential. ... Friendship ... implies the recognition of a common strangeness which *does not allow us to speak of our friends, but only to speak to them*, not to make them a theme of conversations ... but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even in the greatest familiarity, an infinite distance, this fundamental separation from out of which that which separates becomes relation. Here, discretion is ... the interruption of being which never authorizes me to have him at my

> disposition ... and which, far from curtailing all communication, relates us one to the other in the difference and sometimes in the silence of speech.[78]

The point would be, then, that the insistence on "distance" and "separation" is simply a way to point to something which I, too, have been at pains to stress, namely that friendship does *not* essentially consist in any particular likeness or other specifiable characteristic of the friends which could be spoken *of* (and so also appreciated, needed, and so on), but rather consists *in* the friends' very speaking *to* each other. But one's speaking to the other obviously requires that the other *be other*, be someone not "at my disposition", and it is this otherness which Derrida, Blanchot and others are trying to bring into words. Yes, no doubt this is what they are trying to do, but it seems to me that there is something very misleading in the way they choose to articulate this, in their very emphasis on otherness and separation. Friendship is unity, not separation, openness, not otherness.

Against this it might be said that regardless of how much openness there might be between us, we remain two separate persons with their separate perspectives, thought and feelings, and so the unity, the "abolition of 'yours' and 'mine'" I speak of must remain an impossibility. I do not think this is right, however.

Consider feelings, those apparently most private things. If someone tells you openly of her sorrow and you listen openly, then the listening is just as sorrowful for you as the telling is for her, as it is also just as joyful for you to hear the good news she tells you as it is for her to tell them. How do I know that

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[78] Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 294 (the quote if from Blanchot's *L'Amitie*). – In describing friendship as a "community of those without community" (p. 37), Derrida was also quoting someone, this time Bataille, and in a footnote appended to that quote, Derrida recounts his debt to the thinking of Bataille, Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy on community and friendship: the formula "X without X" will indeed, he says, "open up the sense at the heart of these thoughts" (p. 47, the text of footnote 15). I am well aware that this whole tradition – if one can call it that – of contemporary French thought about friendship and community and love would merit closer attention than I give it in this thesis. My critical remarks on Derrida are offered as a first – and tentative, even if the tone may seem definite – response to my reading of his book on friendship. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the questions I raise in the text, both with regard to Derrida's general approach to ethics and with regard to his specific views on friendship, are indeed important ones, and *if* my raising them is in fact due to a misreading, it would at least be important, I think, for those who defend Derrida's thinking at this point to make it clear wherein the misreading consists. Of course, the same proviso applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to my readings of other thinkers. – A summary of Blanchot's thought on friendship can be found in Simon Critchley, "The Other's Decision in Me (What Are the Politics of Friendship?)" in his *Ethics–Politics–Subjectivity. Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999).

it is “just as” joyful or sorrowful for you as for her? Not of course by guessing at the intensity of her feelings and yours. The point is, on the contrary, that as she speaks to you and you listen to her, you are together, you are not observing each other, perhaps wondering about what or how much the other feels. In this openness, it is not that you feel *her* joy or sorrow, so that one could then ask whether you feel it as much or in the same way as she does; rather the joy or sorrow she tells you about become *yours too*.

Perhaps this point is easier to see in the case of joy. If someone tells a group of his friends that he has just won a price, whereupon a joyous celebration involving all the friends ensues, it would obviously be absurd to wonder whether each friend feels “just as” glad, or feels “the same” joy as the next one or as the winner himself. Absurd because joy by its very nature excludes that sort of question, that kind of comparing of “mine”, “yours” and “his”. Where such comparisons enter, for instance in the form of envying the other’s good fortune, the joy is over. And is not the same true of sorrow? Is comparing any less absurd if the friends are gathered round a death-bed? Does not comparing, in this case too, signal that the sorrow has turned into something else, that the mourning for the dead friend, in which *he* was in all their thoughts, has been infected by self-pity, with its inherent tendency to contrast one’s own lot and feelings with that of others; “You have no idea what losing him meant to *me*!”

I realise that many people, philosophers and laymen alike, simply will not take in this thought, but insist that one can never really feel *exactly* what the other feels. This is partly just an intellectual muddle, but its root is, it seems to me, existential: a lack of faith in love. The openness of love or friendship *is* a *unity of feeling*, and it is only in that openness that we do actually, literally feel what the other feels, because what we feel is precisely the openness, the unity itself – which may be felt in different ”keys” as it were, in joy or in sorrow. When we fall out of this openness, into self-pity for instance, this *means* that “my” feeling is experienced as a different feeling from “yours”. When we close ourselves to each other we shut ourselves up in ourselves. The *inner life* – and with it, of course, the other side of the coin: the life that is merely “outer” – is born out of the rejection of the openness where you and I express ourselves freely and where, precisely for *that* reason, the distinction between “yours” and “mine”, “inner” and “outer” do not exist.

If it still seems that my feelings and experiences must be essentially distinct from yours, it might perhaps be helpful to think, again, of the

experience of meeting someone's eyes. When our eyes meet it is a real event, something that actually happens. But there can be no objective evidence from which it could be inferred that it took place. The event, the meeting, can *only* be experienced, and in this sense it is not objective at all. But neither is it subjective, it is not *my* experience, in the way the experience of looking *at* a person, or feeling something when thinking of him, are mine. These are my private experiences, which of course does not mean that I cannot *share* them with you by telling you about them, in words or pictures or some other medium; on the contrary, it is precisely *because* they are mine that I *can* share them, if *I* so choose. In sharing some experience with you it might transpire that we also share it in the further sense that we have in fact had the same experience, as when you say "I felt exactly the same about that lecture!"

When our eyes meet we do *not* share the same experience in *this* sense, however, for there is not our meeting as a separate "something" and then also our experiences *of* it, which happen to be the same. Rather, the meeting itself *is all experience*; it is our experience of immediate contact or unity with each other. If we are looking into each other's eyes we do not have two sets of experiences, yours and mine, shared or not, but *one* experience, *our* experience of each other. It is by definition mutual; I can look *at* you even though you do not look at me, but I cannot meet your eyes without you meeting mine. The sceptical question "But how can I really know that she experiences the same as I do?" makes no sense here, for what we experience is *the meeting*, so there can be no question of my having the experience I have, and then wondering whether you really have the same experience.

I am not denying that one may be mistaken about having met someone's eyes, of course. Just think of seeing a friend coming towards you with a warm smile on his face; you smile back, only to realise that he walks past you to embrace someone standing just behind you. Then of course he did not experience the same as you did, but neither did *you* experience what you thought you experienced, an encounter. And that is my point: *if* the experience we are talking about is there, it is *ours*, not just yours or mine. The experience of meeting someone's eyes is, simply, an experience of openness. The openness is something we feel, but it is not, to repeat the point just made in a slightly different formulation, that you and I both for our own part have "a feeling of openness", for that would merely be a case of our having the same experience, whereas we are now talking about our *experiencing each other*. We are both together in the same openness: *that* is the experience, which is by definition *ours*.

The experience of meeting someone's eyes is thus an exception to the seemingly self-evident metaphysical idea that our experiences as such are private, had by each person separately, and that they can be shared, made "inter-subjectively valid", only by being translated into the medium of a common language, in the broadest sense of that term. And since it is an exception to an idea the whole point of which is to be without exceptions, it is in fact a radical undermining of it.

It would be quite mistaken, however, to think of openness as some kind of space or atmosphere into which we step, some pink cloud that envelops us. Rather, openness exists *in* and *as* our openness towards each other, as our desire for each other. If one of us shies away from the other, the other may nonetheless remain in this desire; if she does, she will experience the other's rejection as a pain, as anguish. So one could say that the desire for openness is and remains yours and mine, it is your orientation towards me and mine towards you. *What* is desired *in* this desire is, however, the abolition of *yours* and *mine*, of every distance, every reserve between us. If we are both open, the distance is abolished, but this does not mean that we are somehow merged into one, on the contrary it means that we are ourselves, you are you and I am I, more completely than otherwise. We are wholeheartedly ourselves with each other, there is no hesitance in the touch, we look straight into each other's eyes, we do not squint.

Openness does not, then, change the fact that *you* and *I* are still there, and no matter how open we are, I will still ask you a question or tell you something, for instance, and you will answer me. Openness does not mean that we are somehow enabled to know immediately what the other thinks and feels through some kind of intuition, or a trust that would unquestioningly take it for granted that we are of one mind. Openness does not abolish the need, or the desire, for talking, for communicating in various ways. On the contrary, being open means being *all desire* to talk, to communicate, to be with the other in every possible way – but precisely because of that fact the divisive distinction between your perspective and mine is in a real sense abolished. The crucial thing is the *movement of knowing*, in which you and I *together explore who we are*. We do not insist on our own way of seeing things, on our liking for some things and our dislike of others, on the unacceptability or unthinkability of some things, or the necessity of others, thus marking the personal *limits* beyond which we – you on your side and I on mine – will not go. In short, we are not locked into, feel no distrustful need to lock ourselves into, pre-given positions.

The objector may still want to insist that no matter how open we are, there remains always the possibility that we *surprise* each other, whether this surprise comes in a shattering, shocking experience, or a joyful one, and the fact that our differences may in this way at any moment suddenly erupt into the open, means that whatever "unity" there may be between us must always be provisional, and in that sense only apparent. It may also be said that the fact that we can in the end never be certain about who the other is, that the encounter is not to be controlled, should inspire joy as much as a kind of "fear and trembling" in the face of the possible terror of what may be revealed when we open up to each other.

With this I would partly agree. As I have said, openness is not something that can be possessed, it exists only in the movement of discovery in which we "become who we are". The fact that openness is not to be possessed or *counted on* does not imply, however, that its unity is only apparent. When it is there, it is there, real, not apparent. If, while in the openness, one dwells on the possibility or the likelihood that it will end, if one thus *anticipates* its end, one has for one's own part already shut oneself out from openness. I also do not deny, but rather insist, that openness, although fundamentally a joyful thing, indeed the source of all joy, also has terrors in store for us. I think it would be misleading to say, however, that we fear openness *because* of the terrors it may reveal, for the terrors themselves are manifestations and consequences *of* our fear of openness. Openness will be terrible in proportion as one does not dare to take it on, just as it will be terrible to the open person to witness how someone else closes himself in terror. Thus, to a person ashamed of his past the revelation of that past will be terrible, and to his open friend it will be terrible to see how he locks himself in with his shame, locking her and others out from contact with him, turning away his eyes, fleeing from their presence.

As for the concern with respecting the otherness of the other which animates much of today's thinking about human affairs – might there not lurk both a fear of the other and an anxiety about oneself at the bottom of it? For we should not overlook the obvious point that my keeping a respectful distance to the other implies that she is kept at a distance from me. Respect is a very effective means of protection, a stop-sign denying access to areas one does not feel comfortable venturing into. But whatever else love may be, it is precisely a venture. Love changes us, respect allows us to stay as we are. Letting the other remain other means letting me remain the same. It means not disturbing *the other in myself*, that in me which might come to light if I dared to be open.

Analogously, when it is said that the otherness of the other consists in her forever remaining inaccessible, in the sense that I can never finally know her, this implies that no one can ever know me. This seems a despairing thought, but might it not also be the most *comforting* one imaginable?

– Are you another me? –

Let me return once more to the idea that friendship is about the sharing of ideals and aspirations. Some will no doubt feel that my critique of the tradition misses the point. It is obvious, they might say, that the mere coincidental sharing of interests or aspirations does not make us friends, at least not in any deep sense of the word. Friendship comes into play only when there is some degree of *identification* with some interest or aspiration or view of life; when, that is, we have come to think of ourselves as the ones who live for *that* or who see things like *this*. Plato's talk of friends "following the same god" was not mere poetic embellishment; what he wanted to express was, one might say, a sense of personal *destiny*, a feeling that one shares this destiny with one's friend. Friends may be very different in all sorts of respects, but the point is that they are alike in what they take to be *the core of themselves*, and this does not just mean that they are not likely to change in this respect, but first of all that they feel they would somehow *cease to be themselves* if they did change. This means, the objection would continue, that there is no room for the contrast I presume to draw between going after what interests one and loving one's friend in herself. For one's friend *is* the person who, just like oneself, more or less instinctively views life in a certain way, and identifies with that view of it.

Bertrand Russell said of his friendship with Joseph Conrad, "unlike any other that I have ever had", that the friends were "almost strangers" in the outworks of their lives; they met seldom and were in most of their opinions "by no means in agreement", but in "something very fundamental" they were "extraordinarily at one"; they "shared a certain outlook on human life and human destiny which, from the very first, made a bond of extreme strength".[79] Being "at one" in this fundamental sense does not have to preclude

[79] Russell, *Autobiography: 1872-1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 207.

disagreements, of course. Chesterton said that his best friends were all "either bottomless sceptics or quite uncontrollable believers"; they did not share any particular metaphysical view, but were at one in feeling that "metaphysics is the only thoroughly emotional thing".[80]

Meeting someone who is thus spiritually akin to one, becomes the discovery of "another myself", as Aristotle has it.[81] The experience of such a discovery is vividly depicted in C. S. Lewis' account of how he met his first real friend, the neighbour's boy Arthur, whom he had not taken much notice of until one day he discovered that they shared a passion for mythology:

> I found Arthur sitting up in bed. On the table beside him lay a copy of *Myths of the Norsemen*. 'Do *you* like that?' said I. 'Do *you* like that?' said he. Next moment the book was in our hands, our heads were bent close together, we were pointing, quoting, talking – soon almost shouting – discovering in a torrent of questions that we liked not only the same thing, but the same parts of it and in the same way: that both knew the stab of Joy and that, for both, the arrow was shot from the North. Many thousands of people have had the experience of finding the first friend, and it is none the less a wonder; as great a wonder (*pace* the novelists) as first love, or even greater. Nothing, I suspect, is more astonishing in any man's life than the discovery that there do exist people very, very like himself.[82]

I would not deny by any means that the discovery that there are people very, very like oneself in this special sense is indeed an astonishing and powerful one, and I do not doubt that many very close friends would talk in the manner of Lewis about their friendship. Nonetheless, what strikes me about the idea of the friend as "another oneself" is how absurd, how tragic and how comical at the same time, it is that friendship should be thought to consists in finding *oneself* again. I would have thought that the tragedy of having no friends is precisely that one has only oneself, that one has no-one to turn to, that the only face one may look into is one's own reflection in the mirror. But instead we are told that finding a friend is such a great thing precisely because the friend's face is like a mirror in which one sees one's own face reflected.

The perfect symbol of the topsy-turvyness of this conception of friendship is perhaps the way Plato, when reflecting on the experience of looking someone in the eye, finds the thing worth remarking on to be the curious fact that when I look into your eye, I may see a small reflection of

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[80] Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (London, 1909), p. 23 f.
[81] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a25–30.
[82] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1959), p. 106.

myself in your pupil.[83] Seeing that reflection is what drives the lovers of the *Phaedrus* mad with divine love – and it was probably there that Aristotle found the simile of the friend as a mirror in which I see myself reflected.[84] Aristotle's friends and Plato's lovers never tire of looking at each other, admiring their own reflection in the other's eyes, but apparently their eyes never meet.

Plato is not the only one who has his blind spots on this point. Despite having discussed the sense of sight profusely, treating it as a model for all perception, philosophers in general seem hardly even to have noticed that there is such an experience as meeting someone's eyes – an experience of vision, that is, which is absolutely crucial in human life and cannot be understood on the subject–object model, since there is not someone seeing *something*, but rather someone's eyes meeting someone else's.[85] To my mind, this is a striking illustration of how dominated philosophical reflection generally has been, and still is, by a solipsistic paradigm, or rather delusion, in which encounters between "I" and "you" are reduced, more or less consciously, to games the "I" plays with *its* perceptions or objects or meanings.

The fact that we make contact with each other through our eyes meeting – or through touching, speaking, and so on: in eye-contact, the essential thing is the contact, not the eyes as such – is independent of, and prior to, any *judgments* we may make about the one we make contact with. The contact is immediately

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[83] To my knowledge, Plato mentions the phenomenon of looking into someone's eyes only twice, at *Alcibiades I*, 133a and *Phaedrus*, 255d, and on both occasions he fastens on the same curious feature.

[84] Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, 1213a20 f.

[85] The phenomena of looking *at* and being looked *at* by others have been discussed by many philosophers, most notably of course by Sartre in the long analysis of "The Look" in *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966 [1956]), pp. 340–400. By contrast, I have been unable to find a single extended philosophical discussion anywhere of the phenomenon of *meeting* someone's eyes, and indeed it is hard even to find a mention of it. Sartre, for his part, denies the very possibility of it as a matter of course: for him, two people looking at each other are engaged in an impossible game in which both feel the object of the other's look, and so feel alienated from themselves, for they can neither deny that they are indeed the person the other sees, nor accept that they are merely or "really" what the other sees of them – at the same time as they turn the other into the object of their own look, while feeling, nonetheless, that they can never "capture" the other's true being in this way. To my mind, Sartre's analysis shows brilliantly that it is impossible to think of "the look" in terms of a relationship between subject and object. Since Sartre acknowledges no other possibility to think about the matter, he declares the aporia to be inherent in our very experience of each other. – Some discussions of the meeting of eyes may exist which I have overlooked, but it is clear that they are, in marked contrast to the the phenomenon itself, very rare. For a general discussion of how vision has been seen in the history of philosophy, and in contemporary thought, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

felt, it is not a conclusion or a judgment based on considering something else; whereas I may well conclude from another's behaviour that he have seen me, "...and so I concluded that our eyes had met", is plain nonsense. The contact, our openness to each other's glance and touch, is simply a fact, the primordial fact of human life which everything else rests on and expresses. Insofar as we cannot make contact with a child, we obviously cannot teach it anything else or raise it to be a member of our culture, either, and someone we can make literally *no* contact with is, literally, dead. To be alive *is* to be in contact with others; death occurs when that contact ceases (that is what dying *means*).

So the contact, the openness, is simply there. Judgments and identifications – identifying someone *as* something, or identifying with someone, feeling a *particular* kind of affinity with them – enter only in how we *react* to that primordial openness. We may try to avoid further contact altogether, turning away, closing ourselves to the other. Or we may explore the openness, keep in contact, but only to a degree and in a way that is congenial or opportune to us. This is, as we shall see, where the wish for a friend just like oneself comes in.

There is also a third possibility, namely wholehearted openness, which means exploring the openness with the other without consciously or unconsciously putting any *conditions* on the kind of response one will accept from her – for instance, only responses that are similar to one's own. One does not reject whatever the encounter may teach one, even if it does not fit one's preconceived ideas, does not cater to one's wishes and needs. This open-mindedness is not, of course, the same as the mentality "anything goes". *That* just means that nothing matters: it is indifference, not openness. Openness is not some general policy or mentality, it is about being oneself and responding fully to the other.

Precisely insofar as friends put no conditions on what they accept from each other, they can allow themselves to see each other, especially the differences between them, clearly. They can do that because they know that their desire for each other, which is another name for the openness between them, does not depend on their being alike or being *like* anything at all. That is the freedom of friendship, the freedom that only friendship or love can give: the daring humility which makes one free to show and say anything to one's friend. Hannah Arendt said, about her friendship with Karl Jaspers, that the two of them could speak to each other "without reservations", and explains: "You don't think, 'Oh, I shouldn't say that, it will hurt him. The confidence in the

friendship is so great that you know nothing can hurt".[86] To me it seems that this need not be the case: what one says or hears may hurt terribly – but one says or listens to it anyway, because one knows, knows with the certainty of the heart, that one desires only to be oneself with the other.

It seems to me that when the good of friendship is thought, and before that *felt*, to lie in finding someone who is just like oneself, this is because one fears openness, but on the other hand still in a sense wants it – and we always do want it, in one way or another. Meeting someone who is so very like oneself that one feels there is nothing he does not understand immediately is exhilarating, because the similarity means that the other will understand and *approve of* what one says and does because he feels the same way himself, and this allows for an unguardedness in relation to him that one can deceive oneself into mistaking for openness. This *confusion of openness with ease of communication, with lack of resistance*, everywhere infects our friendships as well as our thought about friendship.

Thus, most people would agree that it is a mark of friendship that friends feel they can relax and "be themselves" in each other's company: they do not feel they have to put on a front before each other, but can show themselves as they are, warts and all. Saying this need not express any desire for openness, however. Perhaps you are relaxed only because you know you need not fear any unpleasant reactions from your friend; you can afford to be "open" only because it costs you nothing, because you know you will be well received by your friend, who is like you and *therefore* likes you and likes what you say and do. What could be more alluring than an openness without risk, a frankness that is always appreciated, a truth that never hurts?

The thought may indeed be alluring, but it is confused. It is not "too good to be true", it is not true at all, and therefore not good either. It is a daydream, the fantasy of having life magically fit one's wishes, that is, of living undisturbed, without having to change, with no one challenge one's petty fears and hopes. For while finding someone who is "all one could have hoped for" may be wonderful, it does not challenge one or transform one, as loving someone does.

In opening oneself to the other in love and friendship – in talking, laughing, dancing, or being with her in other ways – one *discovers who one is.* Friendship is not about getting what one wants out of associating with one's

[86] Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt" in Melvyn A. Hill (ed.) *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 339.

friend; it is about finding the humility, the daring, to be oneself, and this means, to borrow a suggestive phrase from Gabriel Marcel, that "I must somehow make room for the other in myself".[87] As long as one remains in the closed world of one's private desires, wishes and fears, one not only closes one's friend out, *one closes oneself in*, while conversely, in stepping out of this closed world one finds not only the other but, at the same time, *oneself as another*. So if according to the classical view of friendship I am criticising, one wants to find oneself (oneself as one imagines oneself to be) in the other, I am suggesting that friendship is about opening up to the other, thereby finding the other (the unimagined other) in oneself.

In less paradoxical terms, the point is that I can know myself in truth only insofar as I reveal myself truthfully in my life with others. It is not the case, as we often imagine, that we know ourselves well enough, and the question of openness, insofar as there is such a question at all, would then be only how much of ourselves we want or dare to show to others. In some cases we can certainly describe the difficulty we have with openness as a matter of daring to reveal to others something we already know about ourselves; say when we have done something terrible and try to find the courage and humility to confess it to someone, to ask them to forgive us.

Even in such cases, however, it is not a matter of just letting the other know something about oneself that was already the case and remains the case even after one let the other know it; rather, confessing to the other *changes* one, and the difficulty one had to overcome in bringing oneself to confess is the index of the change wrought by confessing. In the case of people who walk around "confessing" all sorts of things to strangers at a bar without a blink of an eye, the concept of confession has a very attenuated sense, one both ironical and tragic. Difficulties by themselves do not prove that there is any real change, of course: we often wallow in our difficulties without ever coming, or even wanting to come out of them. However, a confession which is really an opening up to another – which *means* that in making it one asks the other's forgiveness – changes one by definition. In it, one is freed from the feelings of guilt and shame that one was oppressed by – which does *not* mean that anything is forgotten or excused – and so one comes out of the confession as another person than the one who went in.[88]

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[87] Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, p. 88.

[88] These short remarks on confession and forgiveness may seem incomprehensible; I will elaborate on them in Chapter Two, pp. xx below.

So openness, even in the sense of revealing something one had anxiously kept hidden, changes one in delivering one from the anxiety. Furthermore, daring to be open may of course mean daring to *do* something with another, rather than confess something to her; to dance, or sing, or try something one has never done or not done since one was a child, for instance. Here opening up to others means opening up to oneself and to the possibilities of life to which one had closed oneself in one's pride, or shame, or seriousness, or depression, or whatever it was. In opening up one "becomes who one is", to use a Nietzschean formula.[89] That is, one becomes the human being one had anxiously kept oneself from becoming.

– *The lure of culture and solitude* –

If one fears the challenge opening oneself to others brings – and who does not? – one might find solace in the contemplation of nature or of art, or in any other mode of immersing oneself in one's inner *or* outer world; in the world of one's thoughts, feelings and fantasies, or in the world of things.

In a short-story by Solveig von Schoultz there is a very precise description of how the world of small, ordinary, things may function as a safe-haven from the all too menacing presence of others. Maggi, an old woman, goes into the kitchen to fetch a glass of water for her husband Erland, and she is calmed by the presence of the old kettle and all those other dear old things which had become more than just things, a part of her very being, so that "it was impossible to say who was owner and who was owned"; she had "confided in them" often, and knew "she could count on their reticence", knowing that they "never asked anything of her, but simply received what poured out of her".[90] Her relation to her husband is in one sense as familiar and close, as *old*, as her relation to these things, but the silence between *them* is not comfortable

[89] The subtitle of Nietzsche's self-assessment *Ecce Homo* is "How one becomes who one is".
[90] The story is called "Genomskinlig morgon" ("See-through morning") and the passage reads, in the Swedish original: "De hade många gånger anförtrott sig till varandra, tingen härinne och hon, vem som var den ägande kunde ingen avgöra, de visste att hon inte kunde skilja sig från dem ens då de var utnötta [...] Hon kunde lita på deras tystlåtenhet och de frågade henne inget, tog bara mot vad som flöt ur henne" (von Schoultz, *Närmare någon. Noveller* [Helsingfors: Holger Schildts förlag, 1951], p. 130).

and comforting at all; in fact, it speaks of a painful distrust and lack of openness between them, for Maggi has never been able to bring herself to tell Erland about an episode of infidelity, many years ago now. His presence is oppressive to her because she cares for him but does not dare to be open with him. When we escape from others, it always has this ambiguous character; it is never a matter of not caring at all about others – then there would obviously be nothing to escape from – but always of not daring to face openly those one cares about.

Just as Maggi goes out into the kitchen to temporarily escape from Erland's presence, others may escape into thinking, into creative work or a religious life or into making the world a better place: what one escapes *into* differs, but one always escapes *from* the same thing: from others, from the pain of not daring to be oneself with them. We very often use culture in the broadest sense of that term, also including all that is highest and finest in culture, as this kind of escape from the menacing presence of others.

I am not suggesting that cultural activity is *always* an escape. That idea has of course been put forward too, especially by psycho-analysts who have tended to believe, in the words of Rollo May, "that human beings produce art, science, and other aspects of culture to compensate for their own inadequacies", as the oyster produces the pearl "to cover up the grain of sand intruding into its shell".[91] May relates how he and a group of artists were once invited to the home of Alfred Adler, a prominent proponent of such a compensatory theory, who at one point in the talks, "having entirely forgotten he was addressing a group of artists, looked around the room and remarked, 'Since I see that very few of you are wearing glasses, I assume that you are not interested in art.'"[92] As May says, this makes a nice allegory for the oversimplification involved in compensatory theories; although compensatory needs may indeed "influence the particular bent or direction" that a person's or a culture's creating will take, they do not, May points out, "explain [...] creativity itself", and we should refuse the idea "that talent is a disease and creativity a neurosis" – an idea implying, of course, that healthy people would create nothing at all.[93]

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[91] May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 37.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., p. 38 f. – Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), is a classic treatment of the relationship of culture, repression and sublimation in the light of psychoanalytic insights. And Freud's own discussion in *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Hogarth Press, 1949) is of course full of insights and thought-provoking hypotheses, even if one does not agree with his premises or conclusions.

My claim is not, then, that all cultural activity is an escape or defence or compensation. The point is, rather, that what we do and say and attend to can *either* be used as a way of escaping from what one experiences as the threat of the openness of personal encounters, *or* on the contrary be way of seeking contact with others and exploring openness (it may also, perhaps, be merely an innocent pastime, but I leave that existentially and philosophically uninteresting possibility aside).

Think again of the awkward situation in the lift, and the noise the lift makes, which may deliver you from the pain of a personal encounter by giving you and the stranger something to focus your attention on, to gather round and perhaps talk about. *If* that is a *relief* for you, it is because you can hide yourself behind this subject; or more precisely, because it gives you the opportunity to express yourself *in the kind of way you feel comfortable with*, that is, without getting personal. But not every conversation is a way of hiding oneself, and I am not saying, absurdly, that only encounters in silence are somehow "real". The point is simply that if your encounter with the stranger was an open one, the noise of the lift might still give rise to a conversation, but then you would not feel *relieved* that something to talk about appeared; you would simply start talking: it would be, as it were, a natural continuation of your silence, not an anxious breaking of it.

The point is that everything we do in terms of culture, interests and activities, will be coloured, will have its significance changed, by how it stands to our relationship with others, by whether or to what extent, in what way, it is, or is not, an escape from openness with them. Where openness prevails, one is not afraid of others and is not trying to prove anything to them, and so one is liberated for cultural activity that is *not* undertaken in order to hide oneself from others, or to defend oneself from them, or to try to impress them in some way; to the extent that one is free of anxiety in relation to others, one's "works", whether it be the writing of a thesis or the telling of a joke, will not be marked by any such intentions, conscious or unconscious.

Here someone might ask: Even if someone is "open", what guarantees are there that the work she does, if any, will be any good? Well, there are no *guarantees*. But if one thinks that nothing much would change simply through people daring to be more open with each other, one underestimates remarkably the degree to which we are generally kept back, in *everything* we do, by shame, distrust, a need to prove things – that is, by our fear of openness. Just think, for example, how little use most of us, even those who "can" sing, make of the

actual resources that are there in our *voice*, waiting to be discovered, and how many people feel that they "cannot" sing at all, even though singing is a very natural thing to do, and everyone sings sometimes (perhaps only in secret). I am not saying that if people only dared to be open everyone would be a great singer. The point is simply that insofar as people are open, everybody who cares to sing is free to sing as well as they can, because they are not afraid to express themselves. Furthermore, the question of whether someone is a "great" singer or not will not then have the same kind of seemingly crucial importance that it has where one tries to hide one's fear of the personal encounter behind ceaseless activity, and to compensate for one's loneliness by achievement.

Being with others, living with them, loving them, is very often a very difficult and unpleasant thing, others being the way they are and, *nota bene*, oneself being the way one is. It seems to me that it is simply bad faith to claim, as most of our cultural, artistic and spiritual tradition has claimed or implied, that the *real* existential difficulties and questions make themselves felt only, or primarily, or most acutely, in the "higher" cultural, artistic and spiritual endeavours, rather than in our everyday difficulties in living with each other. Chesterton is quite right to say that no one should "flatter" himself that he leaves his family or his beloved or his friends "in search of art, or knowledge; he leaves [them] because he is fleeing from the baffling knowledge of humanity and from the impossible art of life".[94]

This is not to say, however, that I speak for a romanticism of "the ordinary" or "the little people", which flatters itself that "real" life is not to be found in the world of books but rather in the kitchen or the work-shop. Such romanticism can be found both among intellectuals and among the "ordinary" people idealised by these intellectuals, and in both cases the attitude seems to me to be essentially one of hostility to thinking and creativity as such. Nietzsche is right to denounce that sort of romanticism no less than the romanticism of the "great man" as an expression of bad faith.[95] Although I disagree with the starting point of Nietzsche's discussion of friendship, which is, as we saw, the classical idea that friendship is not about the "desire of two people for each

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[94] Quoted in Chesterton, *Brave New Family*, p. 224. In this particular context, Chesterton is speaking specifically of family life, but the point is general, of course. For a good and, as always, funny, discussion of similar points, see Chesterton's "On Certain Modern Writers and the Institution of the Family" in his *Heretics* (London: John Lane, 1905). The piece is also reprinted in *Brave New Family*.

[95] Those who think that Nietzsche was an adherent of the romantic cult of the "genius" and the "great man" should compare those passages which may give that impressions with, for instance, *Beyond Good and Evil.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), § 269.

other" but rather about "a *shared* higher thirst for an ideal above them",[96] what he says about friendship is quite to the point, insofar as he is denouncing the romanticism of "the ordinary".

The friend, on Nietzsche's conception, is the very opposite of the "last man" depicted in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; that epitome of smugness who says that he has "discovered happiness", who wants to have his "little pleasure for the day and little pleasure for the night", but cleverly sees to it that life does not become uncomfortable or threatening, that he does not get "indigestion".[97] We are all of us "last men", insofar as we think we have *discovered* happiness; insofar, that is, as we have resigned to the thought that our life as it now is, is what life has to offer us or we it; its end-form, its last word, as it were.

Nietzsche's, or Zarathustra's, *Übermensch* or "Overman", is essentially the name of a *perspective*, of a *hope* and a movement of self-overcoming, which is the opposite of this listless arrogance; it is the hope that life may and will become something altogether different.[98] The "negative" side of the movement of self-overcoming is the experience of "the great contempt" when "even your happiness grows loathsome to you, and your reason and your virtue also"; when you realise that all these things are "poverty and dirt and miserable ease", when you have to say: "What good is my justice? I do not see that I am fire and hot coals. But the just man is fire and hot coals!", when you are forced to admit the pettiness of everything you do, to admit that it is "not your sin, but your moderation [*Genügsamkeit*] that cries to heaven" (p. 42 f.). Zarathustra asks:

> Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the madness, with which you should be cleansed?
> Behold, I teach you the Overman: he is this lightning, he is this madness! (p. 43)

The friend is not the Overman, for the Overman exists only as the hope one is moved by and moving towards, but your friend should give you "a foretaste of the Overman" (p. 87), just as you should be to him "an arrow and a longing for the Overman" (p. 83). In his face you see "your own face, in a rough and imperfect mirror" – the imperfection being due not to his being worse or not quite like you, but to the fact that your own face, your ownmost possibility, does not exist as a

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[96] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §14, quoted above.
[97] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969 [1961]), p. 46f. Page-references given in the text of this section are to this work. Hollingdale translates "der letzte Mensch" with "the Ultimate Man"; I prefer "the last man", and have changed the quotes accordingly.
[98] I prefer "Overman" to Hollingdale's "Superman".

reality yet; on the contrary, your human-all-too-human reality is "something that must be overcome" (p. 83). The "love of the most distant" (*Fernsten-liebe*) that Zarathustra proposes in place of the "love of neighbour" (*Nächstenliebe*) is essentially just another name for this movement of self-overcoming, a movement he finds lacking in the relationships that ordinarily pass for friendship (p. 87). "When there are five of you together, a sixth always has to die", he says – that "sixth one" is the Overman, it is what the five of us would have it in us to become, if only we were not so listless (ibid.).

Friendship conceived in Zarathustra's way, as a shared striving for self-overcoming, cannot be a state of peace and comfort, it is a state of tension and strife. "If you want a friend, you must be willing to wage war for him", Zarathustra says (p. 82). But this war "for" the friend is first of all a war *against all that in him – and* in you – which stands in the way of self-overcoming, and loving your friend means fighting those forces mercilessly. It is in this sense that Zarathustra can say: "In your friend you should possess your best enemy. Your heart should feel closest to him when you oppose him" (p. 83). Indeed he exclaims: "Let us also be enemies, my friends! Let us divinely strive against one another!" (p. 125)

With all of this I would in one sense agree; but I would place it in a different context, and I would insist that this "striving against one another" is reduced to a conveniently bloodless abstraction, to shadow-boxing, if one tries to make it impersonal, to turn it into some kind of war of *ideas*. It seems to me that Nietzsche is often tempted to do just that – for instance when, apparently after quarrelling with people near to him, he tells himself it is no use: "Let's rather make sure our own influence on *all that is to come* balances and outweighs his influence! Let's not struggle in a direct fight /.../ Let's sooner step aside! Let us look away!"[99] That is not fighting, it is fleeing battle, and perhaps the rather pompous rhetoric of war and battle in the passages on friendship I quoted earlier reflects Nietzsche's awareness that he himself is often in fact fleeing rather than fighting.

Struggles do indeed belong in friendship, but they are precisely our struggles with daring to be ourselves with each other. That is: they are struggles with openness or, as one can also put it, with truth. Nietzsche is quite right to say that truth is a difficult thing not primarily because we finite beings lack intelligence, but because we *fear* the truth: "Even the bravest of us rarely has the

[99] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §321.

courage for what he really knows".[100] It takes courage to acknowledge a truth exactly to the extent that doing so jeopardises one's relationship to others, and so one's view of who oneself is. It takes no courage to acknowledge a purely theoretical or factual truth, say the truth that the sun has spots or the fact that one has no money in one's pocket. More exactly, there is nothing to *acknowledge* here, there is simply something to note or to understand. One may of course fail to note or understand such a truth, but it will not be because one lacks courage or because one refuses to acknowledge it, but because one overlooked or forgot something or simply could not follow the argument, or some such thing.

Truths like the ones I mentioned may certainly in particular situations be transformed into truths demanding acknowledgment, but that will be so precisely to the extent that they, because of the character of the human situation in which they are set, challenge people's sense of who they are. Thus, it took some courage for Galileo to claim that the sun, that heavenly body assumed by everyone to be perfect, actually had spots, because it threatened the authority not just of individual experts, but of whole institutions, and so by implication of a whole "world-order" ordering the relations of people to each other. Galileo's claim awakened a sense that if we accept *this*, then anything goes*, and who will we then be?* In the same way, and just as dramatically for the individual if not for the culture as a whole, the fact that a man has no money may put his whole view of himself in question: he has perhaps always been the one who supported his family and friends; people depend on him and he depends on himself being the one they depend on, and now he has no money, so what is he to do, *who is he to be now?* Insofar as the questions of philosophy demand courage, and not just cleverness of one sort or another, it is because they, too, are existential questions, questions questioning who we are.

Whether one happens to be sitting alone in a room thinking or not, one's thinking demands courage only to the extent that thought is not a *solitary* business at all, but in thinking one is in constant communication with others, potentially if not actually. One's thoughts can frighten one precisely insofar as they *threaten one with loneliness*, with isolation from others, because they raise the unsettling question "How can I think this, when everyone I know thinks the opposite?" Frightened by that question, one may shy away from even thinking a thought long before it ever becomes an issue whether one should communicate it to anyone else.

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[100] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 33.

Solitude is a very ambivalent thing. In one sense it is something frightening, and our fear of it keeps us from thinking thoughts we feel others will not understand. At the same time, there is a great temptation in solitude, in the thought of being alone with one's thoughts and dreams, precisely to the extent that this gives us peace from the challenging presence of our neighbour. This is not to deny that one may also, as Nietzsche said, escape one's solitude into company, but what one escapes into in such cases is not openness – it is impossible to *escape* into openness – but a togetherness that fills one's private needs, in this case the need not to have to be by oneself.

From the perspective of openness even *contemplation*, which has always in our tradition – certainly the philosophical and aesthetic, but to a large extent also the religious tradition – been praised as the way to the highest truth, may come to appear as a form of self-centredness and escape. It is true that in contemplation one lets go of certain *kinds* of self-centredness – those that mark, say, the attitudes of mere curiosity or a focus on the usable or advantageous – and in some sense lets the reality one is contemplating speak to one on its own terms. Letting the pine-tree be what it is, contemplating its beauty or mystery, is certainly very different from cutting it down for timber, but it is nonetheless the case that a pine-tree can never challenge you like another human being can, just as (correlatively) the fact that you *contemplate* another human being shows that you are not, for the moment, challenged by her.[101]

The comfortable absence of challenge in solitary contemplation is nicely revealed, I think, in Zarathustra's dithyramb to solitude, where he explains how, when alone, he can "speak to all things straight and true", can "utter everything and pour out every reason", because "nothing is here ashamed of hidden, hardened feelings" (p. 202). He goes on:

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[101] Martin Buber speaks of "encountering" a tree in a sense that is meant to be, if not the same, at least analogous to, the sense in which he speaks of encountering another human being as one's "Thou" (*Das dialogische Prinzip*. 9. Auflage [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002 (1986)], p. 10 ff.). I cannot, for my part, make any real sense of this suggestion, but insofar as there is sense in it, this implies that one's approach to the tree is *not* contemplative. – Josef Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture.* Translated by Alexander Dru (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), is a useful discussion of contemplation, albeit one that does not question it in the way I have done, but rather speaks for it as a human possibility, against the forgetfulness and denigration of it which has undeniably been characteristic of much modern thought. Pieper's study stays within the classical (essentially Platonic) tradition of Western philosophy. A more subversive questioning of that tradition, although not (at least as far as I see) of contemplation as such can be found in many texts of Heidegger, e.g. in *Was Heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1971). The views taken of contemplation in the various traditions of religious thinking, Eastern and Western, is of course a subject onto itself. The easily available works of J. Krishnamurti are full of evocations, descriptions and discussions of what a contemplative attitude to life might involve.

> O Solitude! Solitude, my home! How blissfully and tenderly does your voice speak to me! We do not question one another, we do not complain to one another, we go openly together through open doors.
> For with you all is open and clear ... all existence here wants to become words, all becoming here wants to learn speech from me. (p. 203)

"We do not question one another", Zarathustra says. That is exactly the problem: in one's solitude there is no one there to challenge one. Zarathustra may question everything but no one questions *him*, he has the first and the last word: "All existence here wants to learn speech from *me*". Zarathustra boasts of being "hard" with himself (p. 204), but in solitary contemplation – in thought, insofar as one manages to keep one's concrete relation to others, where all is *not* "open and clear", in abeyance – one's will and imagination encounter no resistance at all. Under such circumstances, I do not see how one is to mark a difference between truth and falsity, between contemplation of reality and mere daydreaming.

It seems to me that Simone Weil concedes the point I have been making, at the same time as she confuses it, when she writes:

> Solitude. Where does its value lie? For in it we are in the presence of mere matter (even the sky, the stars, the moon, trees in blossom), things of less value (perhaps) than a human spirit. Its value lies in the greater possibility of attention. If we could be attentive to the same degree in the presence of a human being...[102]

Why can we not? Because human beings challenge us the way mere matter does not. Weil, however, confuses the point she just conceded by presenting it as though we had to do with *one* "capacity", if that is the right word, called "attention", which we could then direct to different kinds of "object", and where one kind of object, trees in blossom as opposed to human beings, would be a more promising choice for spiritual education – at least to start with, for us who are spiritually as wretched as we are – because the "possibilities" are "greater" there. The whole point, however, is that when you meet someone's eyes, you are not looking at an "object", you are not looking *at* anything at all – you *encounter someone*, and that encounters puts you on the line in a wholly different way than anything you merely "attend" to.[103]

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[102] Weil, *Gravity and Grace.* Translated by Emma Craufurd (London & New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1987 [1952]), p. 110.
[103] D. H. Lawrence's short prose-piece "Insouciance" is a very striking description of the power of one human being to challenge and unsettle another, to wrest him out of his contemplative

In more concrete terms, the kind of thing Weil has in mind is, I suppose, something like the following example from Iris Murdoch (whose central ideas are taken from Weil, and from Plato read through Weil):

> I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious to my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important. And of course this is something we may also do deliberately...[104]

This example comes in a discussion of "the powerful energy system of the self-defensive psyche", a discussion guided by the question "How can we make ourselves better?"[105] Murdoch says she does not give the example because she thinks that the "self-forgetful pleasure" we may take in contemplating nature would be the "most important place of moral change, but because [...] it is the most accessible one".[106] Note, however, that in order for such experiences as the one Murdoch recounts to have anything to do with moral change, they must actually *change* one's way of relating to the matter one was initially taken up with, rather than just take one's mind off it; they must act as a catalyst freeing one from the anxiety or resentment, not just make one temporarily forget it. If *that* was all they did, they would be just diversions, and instead of the kestrel, it might have been an unexpected compliment someone paid me, or the whisky I poured myself, which suddenly made my hurt vanity "seem less important".

The change in one's way of relating to the initial moral problem needs to be described, and it obviously cannot be described by just focusing on the encounter with the kestrel; instead what must be indicated is how one now encounters the people one initially resented and was anxious of. That is where the problem lay, and still lies, and that is the "place" where it has to be resolved. Whatever truths contemplation, or philosophy, or art may reveal to us, will not in themselves make our life with each other any more truthful, and it is precisely in this life that our real struggles with truth are fought out.[107]

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mood. It is reprinted in *Phoenix II. Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence*. Collected and Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Warren Roberts & Harry T. Moore (London, Heinemann, 1968), pp. 532–4.

[104] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 84.

[105] Ibid., p. 83.

[106] Ibid., p. 85.

[107] This should be kept in mind when assessing claims – made more frequently in recent years, in no small part thanks to the influence of Murdoch – about the alleged importance of imaginative

– *"A spirit of truth in love"* –

We all of us, at least sometimes, wish, and indeed feel a desperate need, to lie and be lied to, if only in the form of flattery or self-indulgent sympathies. To lie is to refuse to be open. In the openness of friendship and love we will not, however, get away with anything, not even the "whitest" lie. To love someone means, one could say, *forgiving her everything while not letting her get away with anything*. Truthfulness is not something that should or could in some "moral" sense be demanded from friends – who would have authority to demand it? The point is rather that, in a sense which I will try to explain, feeling friendship *means* desiring the truth. It is not by linguistic chance that we speak of a real friend as a *true* friend.

Such a friendly desire for truth was manifested, I believe, in Wittgenstein's way of relating to his friend Norman Malcolm when a conflict broke out between them – at least that is one way to "read the story". The year

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literature and art in general in moral "education" and "growth". Murdoch herself claims that art is "not a diversion or side-issue, it is the most educational of all human activities and is a place in which the nature of morality can be *seen*" (*The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 87 f.). Now the obvious problem with "Visit a museum!" or "Read novels!" as an advice for moral growth is, as Murdoch notes, not only – although this should certainly not be forgotten – that much art is bad, and shows us only "the recognizable and familiar rat-runs of selfish day-dream" (p. 86), but more importantly that "even great art cannot guarantee the quality of its consumer's consciousness" (p. 85). As Lichtenberg remarks somewhere, a book, even the greatest book, is like a mirror, and if a monkey looks into it, a monkey will look out. Art is not a privileged road to moral understanding because there *are* no such privileged roads: nothing, no activity or experience or encounter, can guarantee that I come out of it any less of a monkey than I went in, for I may always refuse to see what is there to be seen in them. The basic point to be clear about here, however, is the one I mentioned already, that whatever existential help one may get from reding a novel or seeing a kestrel, the help is help in coming to relate differently to others and oneself in one's life with them, and how one sees, in moral terms, the importance of art and contemplation comes out in what one says about *that* difference. – As for Murdoch, a particular attitude to life and to others is clearly implied when she says that art, at its best, offers us "the austere consolation of a beauty which teaches that nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous", which teaches, that is, that "All is vanity" and that "the only thing which is of real importance is the ability to see it all clearly and to respond to it justly" (ibid., p. 87). This is resignation of a very familiar kind, at the same time hign-flown and listless. Most importantly it seems to me, despite, or rather *in*, its claim to have "transcend[ed] selfish and obsessive limitations of personality" and gained an "objective", "truthful" and "realistic" vision of "the human condition" containing "both pity and justice" (p. 86f.),to be completely self-absorbed. For "nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous" *means*, properly spelled out, "nothing in life is of any value except that *I* be virtuous".

was 1939, and Malcolm commented on the German accusation that the British were plotting the assassination of Hitler, saying that he could not believe it was true, because "the British were too civilized and decent to attempt anything so underhand"; such an act was "incompatible with the British 'national character'".[108] This, Malcolm tells us, made Wittgenstein "extremely angry"; "He considered it to be a great stupidity and also an indication that I was not learning anything from the philosophical training that he was trying to give me".[109] After the incident Wittgenstein stopped visiting Malcolm, and then the war separated the friends for a long time. Five years later, in 1944, Wittgenstein answered a letter from Malcolm, writing:

> My dear Malcolm, Thanks for your letter, dated Nov. 12th, which arrived this morning. I was glad to get it. I thought you had almost forgotten me, or perhaps wished to forget me. I had a particular reason for thinking this. Whenever I thought of you I couldn't help thinking of a particular incident which seemed to me very important. You & I were walking along the river towards the railway bridge & we had a heated discussion in which you made a remark about 'national character' that shocked me by it's primitiveness. I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any … journalist in the use of the DANGEROUS phrases such people use for their own ends. You see, I know that it's difficult to think *well* about "certainty", "probability", "perception", etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think, or *try* to think, really honestly about your life & other people's lives. And the trouble is that thinking about these things is *not thrilling*, but often downright nasty. And when it's nasty then it's *most* important.—Let me stop preaching. What I wanted to say was this: I'd *very* much like to see you again; but if we meet it would be wrong to avoid talking about serious non-philosophical things. Being timid I don't like clashes, & particularly not with people I like. But I'd rather have a clash than mere superficial talk.—Well, I thought that when you gradually ceased writing to me it was because you felt that if we were to dig down deep enough we wouldn't be able to see eye to eye in very serious matters. *Perhaps I was quite wrong*. But anyway, if we live to see each other again let's not shirk digging. You can't think decently if you don't want to hurt yourself. I know all about it because I am a shirker.
> [---] —Read this letter in good spirit! *Good luck!*
> Affectionately
> Ludwig Wittgenstein[110]

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[108] Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 30.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, p. 93 f. On the view that (good) philosophy does not primarily raise merely theoretical questions, but very personal ones, cf. Wittgenstein's remark that "Working in philosophy – like

It would not be surprising if the first thought evoked by reading this letter was what a truth-loving person Wittgenstein seems to have been; that it shows what a good friend he was to Malcolm perhaps does not strike one. But that is, I think, what is at stake here. Wittgenstein did not want truth "for its own sake", he wanted truth for the sake of his friendship with Malcolm. Or rather: the truth he wanted for its own sake was truth *in* their relationship, their being truthful with each other. I say this because a *longing for Malcolm* is so pronounced in Wittgenstein's letter – "What I wanted to say was this: I'd *very* much like to see you again – a longing which, precisely *because* it is a longing for Malcolm *is* a longing for truth, for openness between them ("But I'd rather have a clash than mere superficial talk").

There is in fact no such thing as wanting the truth *simply* "for its own sake", although we sometimes speak as though such a thing existed. We only want to know the truth about things that are *important* to us, connected with our interests and desires in one way or another.[111] Thus, if I find someone counting the words of a newspaper article very carefully and ask her what she is doing, I will not accept the answer that she simply wants to know how many words there are, because she is "interested in the truth for its own sake". That makes no sense, whereas I could understand it very well if she just wanted something to do to kill time, for instance. The question is *what* the connection between our desire to know and the other things we desire is in different cases, or, as one may also put it, *what* it is we actually desire in desiring the truth. However, this is not to say that truth always has only an *instrumental* value to us. Wittgenstein did not, on my reading, have any ulterior motives for desiring a truthful relationship with Malcolm.

Love and truth go together, but they go together only *in love*. What I mean is that the *sense* of "truth" relevant in love or friendship is not given form somewhere else, but is revealed only in love itself. Simone Weil captures the connections here very well when she writes:

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work in architecture in many respects – is really more a working on oneself. ... On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them)" (*Culture and Value.* Translated by Peter Winch [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], p. 16). Wittgenstein also wrote, in a manuscript: "Ich möchte sagen: jedes philosophische Problem, entspringt eigentlich aus einem Charakterfehler" (MS 158, p 6r. 24 Feb 1938). I thank Aleksander Motturi for the latter reference.

[111] Cf. Lars Hertzberg's critique of Apel and Habermas in "Is Religion a Product of Wishful Thinking?", in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), *Can Religion be Explained Away?* (Houndmills & London: Macmillan, 1997).

> Love of truth is not a correct form of expression. Truth is not an object of love. It is not an object at all. What one loves is something which exists, which one thinks on, and which may hence be an occasion for truth or error. A truth is always the truth with reference to something. Truth is the radiant manifestation of reality. Truth is not the object of love but reality. To desire truth is to desire contact with a piece of reality. To desire contact with a piece of reality is to love. We desire truth only in order to love in truth. We desire to know the truth about what we love. Instead of talking about love of truth, it would be better to talk about a spirit of truth in love. [...] Pure and genuine love is in itself spirit of truth. [...] What we translate by "spirit of truth" signifies the energy of truth, truth as an active force. Pure love is this active force, the love which will not at any price, under any condition, have anything to do with either falsehood or error.[112]

If I love you, what I want is to be with *you*, that is: with you as you truly are, not with some semblance or imaginary representation of you that you want to hide yourself behind, or that *I* want to make you out to be, because it meets my needs or fulfils my expectations. From the perspective of love or friendship, then, the desire for openness which is their essence simply is a desire for truth; openness *is* truthfulness or fullness of truth, in the humanly and existentially speaking most pregnant sense of that word; "love", "friendship", "desire for the other", "openness" and "truth" are different names for the same thing, and the sense of any one of them must be understood in the light of this identity.

Truth and truthfulness can of course also be thought of as something separate from love and openness, but this results in a more or less impoverished and thin concept of truth, which is what we in fact often make do with in our dealings with each other – and it should be evident that the concept of truth that fits relationships which are reduced to "dealings", will indeed be a very thin one. At the furthest remove from the perspective of love, truth and falsity are reduced to a matter of the correspondence or lack of it between a statement and the reality it is supposed to be about, while truthfulness is reduced to avoiding statements which are literally false in this thin sense.

It should hardly need saying that as long as we operate with this concept of truthfulness we get no hold of the question of truth in friendship, for it is, as R. L. Stevenson says, evident that "a man who never told a formal falsehood in his life may yet be *himself* one lie – heart and face, from top to bottom"[113];

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[112] Weil, *The Need for Roots.* Translated by A.F. Wills (London: Routledge, 1978 [1952]), p. 242.
[113] Stevenson, "Truth of Intercourse" in his *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p. 93.

> The cruellest lies are often told in silence. A man may have sat in a room for hours and not opened his teeth, and yet come out of that room a disloyal friend or a vile calumniator ... And again, a lie may be told by a truth ... and part of the truth, as often happens in answer to a question, may be the foulest calumny. A fact may be an exception; but the feeling is the law, and it is that which you must neither garble or belie. The whole tenor of a conversation is a part of the meaning of each separate statement; the beginning and the end define and travesty the intermediate conversation.[114]

The point is that whether you are speaking truthfully or not cannot be decided by any criteria, because here your "feeling is the law" – what you in fact feel, not what you *tell* yourself you feel, which may obviously be a lie just as much as what you tell someone else. Whether you keep to the truth or not is something you can *only* know, and something you *do* in fact know, *in conscience*. This last statement would be obvious nonsense if the truth in question were truth in the sense of correspondence with empirical reality, because one cannot know in conscience whether what one claims to be the case is actually the case; one can only know *that* by checking the facts. The question of truth in friendship is, however, whether one is *oneself* true. When we speak of a true friend we patently do not mean someone whose statements are always true; we mean someone who plays no games but is openly himself with us.

To be openly oneself with someone does not mean that one blurts out everything that goes through one's mind; that would be a strange parody of openness. In some situations, one's openness may of course express itself in telling someone what one just happened to think of. This is so when *not* uttering the spontaneous thought would be an evasion, a hiding oneself from the other, as when one starts to say something, but then holds back, saying it was "nothing", precisely because one realises that it was *something*, something one did not dare to utter. But being open is always more than merely reporting what comes into one's head: it is a matter of how one relates to the person one is speaking to, and it shows both in how one *reacts to* what comes into one's head and, more importantly, in *what* comes into one's head in the first place.

Openness is, then, much more than *frankness*, or sincerity or honesty; those concepts are all too thin to capture the *complete lack of falsity* at stake in friendship. Frankness, to take that concept first, is a *particular attitude* that one adopts, more or less consciously, on a particular occasion with regard to some particular question or subject-matter. This means, on the one hand, that frankness in regard to one thing does not imply it in regard to another, and, on

[114] Ibid., p. 97 f.

the other, that one can in principle always ask *why*, for what reason or from what motive someone was frank. Thus I may be very frank about economic or sexual matters, say, but quite reticent about other things, or I can decide to confront someone frankly on a certain question because it is important for me to know her stand on that particular question, while I might not care at all about what she thinks or feels about other things. I do not care who she is, I just care about this question. The motives for my frankness may be very particular or more general, having to do with my character or the mood I am in, as when in my pride I consider it beneath my dignity to stoop to petty lies, or in my dejection I simply lack the energy to keep up appearances.

However that may be, there *are* by definition motives for frankness, whereas there are no motives for openness.[115] To put the same point about the lack of motives in openness another way: if you speak openly with me your words are not intended to produce an *effect* on me, even a good one like cheering me up, but are spoken simply out of a desire to open your heart to me; a desire which is at the same time the desire that I do the same. This does not mean, of course, that you confess something to me in the hope of getting a similar confession out of me; the point is simply that you are really speaking *to me*, and so wish that I will really *listen to you*, and not just sit there as someone to talk *to*. And really listening *is* an opening of one's heart just as much as speaking truly is. Talk about "really" listening may easily lead our thoughts in the wrong direction, however. One imagines a kind of straining and stretching of one's attention to the utmost – something like standing on tip-toe, trying to reach a book on a shelf that is perhaps just out of reach – whereas listening is in fact the very opposite of this kind of tense straining. It is an opening up of one's being to the other *and* to one's own responses to her; these are actually two names of the same thing.

In an open talk between two people there are not two parallel processes going on inside two heads, and then a third process, the physical transmitting of sounds between them, but *one* talk in which two people share. It all happens out in the open, which does not mean "outside" the people talking, for they themselves are *in* the talk, *with* each other. What I want to underline, and what distinguishes what I am saying from the kind of general point against

[115] There are no motives, at least not in the surface-psychological sense, for sincerity or honesty either, or for frankness insofar as it names not an attitude one may adopt in a particular situation, but rather something like a character-trait. The problem with all these concepts lies on another level, as we shall see. – Lars Hertzberg pointed out to me the need to treat sincerity and honesty separately from "momentary" frankness, when I sloppily wanted to run them together.

psychologism so ably made by Wittgenstein and Heidegger, among others, is that the picture of different things going on inside the two talkers is quite correct for all those talks where we are not being open with each other – and that is a *lot* of talk. Then everything is *not* out in the open, but much is anxiously kept hidden, left unspoken. Language does not "work" in *one* way, and there cannot be an *autonomous* philosophy of language in the sense of an investigation into "the workings of language" that would be independent of a moral-existential perspective on how relations between people can be open or closed, can manifest a truthful desire, or on the contrary be marred by distrust and ambiguity in one form or another.

When we are *not* open with each other *how* we express ourselves becomes a source of constant problems: the problems present themselves as questions about what one is to say and how one is to act so as to achieve some effect or other. One starts *choosing* one's words, but not in the sense that one tries to find the words that will express what one wants to say exactly, without falsifying anything; rather, one tries to find words that will be taken by one's audience – and here the word "audience" is precisely the right one – in the way one would wish them to be taken. Sometimes one is out to deceive people in the basic sense of that word, trying to get them to believe what is not the case – and one's motives for such deception may be quite respectable; perhaps one does not want to hurt the other by letting her know how one really feels about something. At other times one is not trying to get others to believe anything in particular, but rather trying, by being ironic or vague or refusing to be serious, for instance, to avoid committing oneself to anything definite; one is trying to escape responsibility, one does not want to have to answer for anything. Or perhaps one wants to avoid certain particular implications. "I did not say *that*, I only said...", one insists, precisely because "that" *is* what one *wanted* to say, just as one will say "I never promised you anything" precisely when one has led someone to believe the very thing that one never explicitly promised her.

What should be noted is that the less there is openness, the more *form* is stressed, and the more this happens, the *more ambiguous* speech actually becomes.[116] This apparent paradox results from the fact that we stress form precisely because our words are spoken out of a need to show others something other than our uncensored thoughts and feelings and intentions. Our words do not say just what they say, as they do when we speak openly with one another, but are used as *instruments* to achieve some purpose or other, and they always raise the question of what that purpose is, *what the words are really there for*. "It sounds as though he wanted to say this, but maybe he is just trying to lead me to believe that ..., or maybe he just wants to avoid the impression that ..". and so on, without end.

Note that I am making a point about what it *means* to speak where openness is lacking; I do not claim that we necessarily or normally use words as means to our ends *consciously*, nor that we always in fact *raise* questions about the purpose of words where we *might* do so. It is an essential part of being polite or courteous or respectful that one does *not* raise questions about the hidden motives of others – or one's own. However, one's refraining from raising questions makes sense only on the assumption that there are certain motives which might, even if they should not, be exposed. *Normalcy*, the everydayness of everyday-speech, is not characterised by a genuine transparency, an absence of double-play and double-binds, but rather by our tacit agreement not to press questions about them, to be unsuspecting. We stay on the surface, leaving the dark depths undisturbed, whereas in the openness of wholeheartedness, the depths themselves are flooded with light.

I am not saying that there is always a double-play going on in everyday communication. To take a simple example, I may perfectly well ask you for the time simply because I need to know, and you may tell me simply because I asked, with no strings attached on either side. But take another example, one which is just as everyday, but not so simple: the standard exchange of greetings "How are you?" – "I'm fine, how are you?" Immediately, all sorts of questions about what really takes place in this communication might arise. For instance, the person asked how they are might respond by asking "Do you really want to know?" That would make no sense if someone asks for the time, but here it

[116] This kind of stress on form, on the correctness of particular expressions, is institutionalised in jurisprudence and diplomacy, institutions built precisely for managing distrust, but its origin is in our quite everyday attempts to evade responsibility, or at least see to it that we are held responsible only to the degree that suits us.

does make sense precisely as *a questioning of the ambiguous sense of normality*, a question put to the interlocutor whether he is willing to step out of the anonymity which is another side of the ambiguity in which the question how one really means things is left in abeyance.

Normally, the ambiguities of communication are left standing, while in openness one speaks wholeheartedly, and so unambiguously. A third possibility, one not demarcated in any clear-cut way from the "normal" case, is that the ambiguity, or rather the discrepancy between the apparent and the real meaning of an utterance or expression, comes to the fore explicitly. This is what happens when *suspicion* flares up in a relationship, for instance in the mode of bitterness. In a badly embittered marriage, for example, it is, as Hannes Nykänen notes, almost impossible for the spouses "to understand an utterance, a glance or a gesture, without attaching an accusation, self-pity, hostility, irony or some other purposiveness to it"; "straightening out the newspaper is expressing offence and the doors just never seem to close without either slamming or closing 'unnaturally' softly (signalling: 'I am not the one who is slamming doors in this house...,' 'I'll creep away and leave you in peace' etc.)".[117]

A witness to the spouses' communication might at first be at a loss to understand the reactions provoked in one spouse by the other's actions, but the spouses are certainly not unaware that what is going on between them is an exchange of bitter accusations. On the contrary, the problem is precisely how extremely aware they are of it, how sensitive and attentive to the significance of everything they do, and one thing this example brings out is how thoughtless it would be to make subtlety and sensitivity to contexts and to significance *as such* the mark of the understanding that belongs to love and friendship.

The dead-lock of the embittered marriage would obviously not be unlocked by the spouses just expressing their bitter feelings "openly", in the sense of saying out loud what they think, since *that* is quite clear to them already. The problem is not that they do not express their bitterness, but keep their feelings to themselves; in fact they do nothing *but* express it. The problem is that bitterness is in itself a way of keeping oneself to oneself, closing oneself to the other.

There is certainly no need to doubt that the bitterness of the spouses is *sincerely* felt, and they might decide to be *honest* about it with each other and with others, refusing to pretend that they do not feel the way they do. That does

[117] Nykänen, *The 'I,' the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 267.

not bring them any closer to being open or truthful with each other or with themselves in the sense relevant to friendship, however. One could put the point by saying that bitterness *cannot* be *openly* expressed, however frankly one lets the other know how bitter one is, for bitterness *itself* is *a refusal to be open* with the other: it is what disappointment turns into at the precise point when one gives up the desiring hope that the relationship between oneself and the person who disappointed one could ever be mended in forgiveness and reconciliation. Then all that remains is the hopeless pain of disappointment, and so one tries, hopelessly, to ease one's pain by hurting the other. The "communication" of bitterness only serves to manifest one's refusal to enter into genuine communication with the other. One thinks one knows the tragic truth already: that the other does not love one. What help could "openly" telling that "truth" be? Openness, without the scare quotes, is simply another name for the wholehearted desire to be oneself with the other, and it implies a faith in the other's love and in one's own, be it in the form of a hope against all odds that the distrust, the distance, the enmity that now prevails will be overcome.

To say, as therapists and others are wont to, that honesty and openness is a necessary condition for a good and lasting relationship, that nothing built on lies will last, while if the problems in the relationship are frankly confronted and discussed, there is a better chance that they can be dealt with, may be an excellent piece of advice on how best to deal with many problems, but as I have tried to indicate, what I mean by openness is something different. Openness is not a policy or a way of dealing with anything at all. It is not that we have "the relationship" with its problems on one hand, and then, on the other hand, "openness" as one possible option for relating to the relationship or tackling its problems. Just as the lack of openness between the spouses in our example lies, as I said, *in* their bitterness as such, not in any lack of frankness in its expression, so the openness that may be there between friends is not a different thing from their relationship, *it is the relationship itself*, the way the friends are in relation to each other, their "mode" of encountering each other. The openness *is* their wholeheartedness.

When we are not wholehearted, our thoughts, feelings, words and actions will fall apart as we will be torn apart by conflicting emotions and ambiguous thoughts; we will say one thing but mean, and therefore do, another; we will claim we believe things we are not really convinced by, have feelings we think we should not have, do things that make us feel bad, and so on. Wholeheartedness is the only thing that makes things truly simple, or simply

true, and as long as we lack it nothing we do or feel or think will be simply what it is: if things appear straightforward the impression will soon disappear as circumstances change and affection turns into anger, trust into jealousy, avowal is followed by denial, "Certainly...!" by "Or maybe not..".

Perhaps some readers feel that I am being a bit melodramatic about this business with "wholeheartedness" and "truth". How important is truth, after all, and what is it, anyway? Is it so bad if everything between us is not all that "true"? Can there not be affection and all sorts of good things regardless of that? Certainly, but their "goodness" will be marked by the lack of truth, that is, by the presence of falsity between us. And the difference between opening oneself to the spirit of truth in love, and not doing it, is not like the difference between having a room with or without a view, it is like the difference between really going on a trip and just fantasising about going. The question is whether our life together is a dream or a reality. Weil writes, *exclaims*, really:

> Love needs reality. What is more terrible than the discovery that through a bodily appearance we have been loving an imaginary being? It is much more terrible than death, for death does not prevent the beloved from having lived. That is the punishment for having fed love on imagination.[118]

Weil says somewhere that a real hell is to be preferred to an imaginary paradise, which is not to say, of course, that a lover desires hell, but that she desires to know the other, and if that means hell, so be it. Openness itself cannot be "hell"; what can happen is that the other refuses the lover's invitation to openness. Such refusal is the only "hell" love knows. Weil writes:

> day-dreaming ...in all its forms – those that seem most inoffensive by their childishness, those that seem most respectable by their seriousness and their connexion with art or love or friendship – in all its forms without exception ... is falsehood. It excludes love. Love is real.[119]

If one does not feel the truth of these words, it is more than a matter of differing preferences: it means that one does not dare to seek love or friendship – I mean the real thing, not all the semblances one may call by those names. On the other hand, if someone thinks that truthfulness in anything like the sense we have discussed here is not a *problem*, that it could ever be *a matter of course* in human relations, then he is himself *not being truthful*, he is refusing to admit

[118] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 57.
[119] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, p. 90.

what he in fact knows about himself and his friends. He might consider Nietzsche's observation that

> close human relationships almost always rest on the fact that a certain few things are never said, indeed that they are never even touched upon; if once these pebbles are set rolling, the friendship follows after, and falls apart. Are there people who would not be mortally wounded if they discovered what their dearest friends actually know about them?[120]

We constantly, routinely deceive ourselves and conceal things from each other. We do it in the name of consideration and avoiding "unnecessary" complications, and it is often true that if we had not concealed the thing from others, they would indeed have thought us inconsiderate, and nothing but misunderstandings and bitter feelings would have resulted. That only goes to show how difficult truth, that is, openness, is for us.

– Love, psychology and the emotions –

Because I have spoken about "wholeheartedness" and about what people may *feel* in various situations, readers accustomed to a rationalistic way of thinking will no doubt feel that what I say, although perhaps not uninteresting, is "mere psychology". Such a reaction completely misunderstands what I try to say, however. It is absolutely crucial for the perspective I try to articulate that love's desire for openness is seen to be categorically different from all the reactions, emotions, thoughts, fantasies and so on, that make up what we usually think of as our psychological life. According to the seemingly more natural view, the one accepted by rationalists and irrationalists alike, the status of love is in principle no different from that of envy or any other psychological reaction. The basic idea of my whole project is, however, precisely to think love wholly differently. I would agree that love cannot be seen as something *separate* from human psychology, but this is not because love would be part of psychology.

[120] Nietzche, *Human, All too Human*, vol. I, §376. The translation I give is a combination of parts from the translations of both Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and Faber and Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1994), collated with the German original (*Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* [München/Berlin: DTV/de Gruyter, 1988 (1967-77)], Band 2).

Rather, the point is that love gives us the light in which we see our psychology in the first place. Instead of reducing love to psychology, I *try to see psychology in the light of love*.

According to the seemingly more natural way of thinking, love is an inclination which, in contrast to envy, for instance, mostly tends to good rather than bad, but always has a potential for turning destructive in various ways, and so has to be checked by ethical considerations. To my way of thinking, such an idea makes no sense: love cannot be measured and does not need to be checked by anything, because it is itself the "measure of all things", it is what goodness *is*, and it is only because we are not good, because we are weak in love, that we feel, as we indeed do all the time, a need to *check* love.

I do not agree that "love is flawed because we are flawed".[121] There is certainly no doubt that we *are* flawed, but the question is what our flaw(s) consist in, and as far as I can see, *we are flawed precisely to the extent that we are lacking in love, fearful of openness*. I would indeed say that "love is perfect", but that is not to deny the obvious fact that there are all kinds of self-seeking and power-games going on in our actual love-relationships all the time. The point is rather that I see this as being a manifestation of our lack of love. It is not love that is the problem when someone is jealous, for instance, it is *jealousy*, which is, I would claim, a symptom that the desire for freedom for oneself *and* the other that is another name for love itself, is lacking. Jealousy is certainly not mere indifference; it is a form of "caring" about one's relationship to someone, a form of the other's "meaning very much" to one. But it is not *love*.[122]

All this is not to say that I think of love or friendship or openness, in Platonic or Kantian fashion, as some disembodied principle of perfect goodness. Love's openness exists only as one individual turning quite concretely to another, looking her in the eye, speaking to her, touching her. When I say, as I sometimes do, that "love" *is* or *does* this or that, I do not mean to discuss love quite separately from the individuals experiencing it; what I try to do is rather to ask myself, to imagine, what it would be like if two individuals experience love as fully as it can be experienced, that is, if they love wholeheartedly.

Someone may react to this by saying: "Well, of course you can just decide to adopt a way of speaking which makes 'love' or 'openness' perfectly good by

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[121] This way of putting it comes from Marguerite La Caze (personal communication). The discussion about love and psychology in this section was prompted by her perceptive criticisms of my position.

[122] I will return to jealousy in Chapter Three.

definition, but then what's the interest in that?" As a first response to that, I would point out that philosophy – insofar as it is an inquiry into the essence or logic or grammar or intrinsic character of phenomena, experiences, or concepts – *is* precisely the attempt to see what is "true by definition" of them, to become clear about what they *are*, what it *means* to call a phenomenon or experience "love", for instance. It is true that what we actually say about love is very variable and even contradictory, but the philosophical task is precisely to make clear what the *differences* between these various modes of speaking are. Are we perhaps dealing with different perspectives on, or conceptions of, love? If that turns out to be the case, the appearance that love (apparently this *one* thing) might "behave" now in one way, now in another – that love somehow seems "absolute", but may also seem to be just a more or less ephemeral inclination, for instance – is replaced by the realisation that we have deceived ourselves, by using the *word* "love" in both cases, into overlooking that we were in fact talking about two qualitatively different experiences or modes of relating to others – for *each* of which we can now see that different things are "true by definition". In other cases, we may find it to be "true by definition" of love, in the very same conception of it, that love may be *both* this *and* that, both glad and sad, for instance. But then *that* is itself "true by definition" of love, thus conceived.[123]

Insofar as a philosopher, whether he is speaking about love or something else, can be *validly* criticised for "making things true by definition", it must mean that he fails actually to *show the sense* of what he *claims* to be saying. If I have at some point stooped to merely claiming things, I have failed in my aim, which is to show, through descriptions and discussions of various kinds, what I *mean* by saying, for instance, that love's openness *is* goodness, or that even the things which are patently *not* good in our lives are, in various ways, to be seen as reactions *to* love.

It is precisely in terms of such reactions that I view our emotional life. It would not be surprising if some readers were under the impression that I am speaking for a very "emotional" and perhaps sentimental view of friendship and love, in which "what we feel for each other" is or should always be the issue of our thought and our talk. That is not my intention at all, however.

I *would* certainly reject C. S. Lewis' claim that friendship is "an affair of disentangled, or stripped, minds" which "ignores ... our physical bodies", is

[123] In the Platonic dialogues the nature of philosophical claims about what things are, is discussed time and again, often in very illuminating ways. See, e.g., *Phedrus*, 264e–266c, where love is the "concept" discussed, and all of the *Sophist*.

untenable.[124] That idea is confused, although Lewis is no doubt right that it was an important part of the *ideological* attraction of friendship to more "ascetic and world-renouncing" ages, when "nature and emotion and the body were feared as dangers to our souls";

> Affection and Eros were too obviously connected with our nerves, too obviously shared with the brutes. You could feel these tugging at your guts and fluttering in your diaphragm. But in Friendship – in that luminous, tranquil, rational world of relationships freely chosen – you got away from all that. This alone, of all the loves, seemed to raise you to the level of gods or angels.[125]

This idea is confused, because we *cannot* get away from "all that", from our embodied feelings for each other; we cannot form any conception of what it would mean even to *try*, for we remain always living, *incarnate* beings. When I long for my friend I long for *her*, not for her "intellect", in my thoughts I see her face before me, hear her laughter, perhaps feel her smell; all that *is* her, and it is her I long for. What we *can* try to do, is keep each other at a distance by adopting a "cool", impersonal attitude, and a friendship may of course thrive precisely because both parties want to maintain that detachment, "that luminous, tranquil, rational world of relationships freely chosen" – of relationships, that is, which are not allowed to get too personal. Such a distance needs to be actively *kept*, however, it demands that we *repress* or try to *deaden* our feelings, and even when we do so "successfully", we do *not* succeed in turning ourselves into disembodied intellects, but only maim our embodied souls.

Friendship is indeed all about feeling. It is quite obviously not *a* feeling, however. It does not feel in any particular way to be a friend; rather, one's friendship will express itself in all sorts of feelings, depending on how things are with one's friend and what happens between her and oneself. Friendship or love – and I will stay with the word *love* for a while now – cannot be reduced to what *I* do or feel towards you, or you towards me; it is rather the openness itself in which we both have our being, insofar as we love. It is no coincidence that while we say that people *are* proud, or envious, or happy, or that they *have* a certain feeling, we say that they are *in* love. As Buber says, while feelings and emotions live in us, we live in our love.[126]

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[124] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 66 f.
[125] Ibid., p. 56.
[126] Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip*, p. 18: "Gefühle wohnen im Menschen, aber der Mensch

Love is not about being emotional. On the contrary, emotional is how you get when out of fear you do not want to open up to the other and yourself in love. Emotions in all their variety are, more or less directly or indirectly, the reactions in us provoked by the conflict or friction we experience in the face of openness; they appear when, instead of being openly who we are, speaking, moving and touching freely, we hold back and draw away from each other. Emotions are *what it feels like to shut oneself out from love,* and *the mother of all emotions is the fear of love*. In a sense, then, the classical philosophers were right to say that emotions are a sickness of the soul, although their reason for saying it – that emotions impair the work of *reason* in us – was all wrong.

Let me try to make this no doubt outrageous suggestion more concrete. Suppose you are talking in a friendly way with someone; you are not being emotional nor, of course, cool and detached; *that* would not be friendly at all. Your talk could become emotional: that happens if it turns to something one of you does not want to talk about because it is, as we aptly say, a touchy subject. Subjects are obviously not touchy as such, there are only subjects that *someone* is touchy about, which means that if you introduce the subject it will touch them, but in a way in which, they *do not want* to be touched. Again, it is not the subject as such that touches them, it is you; *you* have touched them, and their reaction will be directed at you, not "at the subject", whatever that would mean. Subjects are touchy because *we* are touchy, shy of each other's touch. Our touchiness is our unwillingness to feel another's touch, to feel ourselves touched by others, whether they touch us by their words, or with their hands, or by looking at us.

If you are touchy, you shy away from contact with the other, and your shying away manifests itself in the emotions and feelings – ranging from just a vague unease or irritation to anger, resentment, indignation, revulsion or sheer panic – that surge up in you when you are touched. It is not that because you feel these things you *decide* to shy away from the other's touch; rather, these feelings are *the form that your shying away takes*. These emotions are what it feels like when you withdraw from love's openness.

But suppose the other's touch was not loving at all, but sleazy or prying or intrusive in some other way? *Of course* one will shy away from that, but it will not be a case of "withdrawing from love" or from "openness"! Well, maybe it will be, and maybe not. Certainly, someone may approach you not seeking

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wohnt in seiner Liebe".

any openness at all, but some private sensation or satisfaction, and he may do it in a sleazy way That does not determine your response to him, however, and in the way you respond you show whether *you* are open to him or not. Do you feel sad because he is so servile or so arrogant, for instance, or do you perhaps find him *disgusting*? If the latter, you are as far from being open to him as he is from being open to you. You are both out to get a particular *kind* of response from others, leaving your respective touchy spots untouched, and your preferences just do not happen to match. If you were open, on the other hand, you would not be touchy at all, precisely because the *only* thing you wanted, and wanted unrestrictedly, was to touch and be touched.

Note that I am *not* saying, appearances perhaps to the contrary, that if you are open, you will "accept anything from anybody". If you are open, you do not want just anything from the other, you *desire openness*, which obviously includes desiring that the other be open, too. There will be no openness between you and her if *she* does not want it, but only wants someone to take out her frustrations on, or someone to complain to, or someone who will flatter her, or someone she can look up to, or whatever. Assuming that you desire openness, her refusal to be open – which does not exclude an intense desire on her part to be *near* you, to seek the *particular* kind of contact with you that she wants – will be saddening and perhaps maddening for you.

There can be no a priori answer to the question what you will *do* in such a situation; and note that the general description of the situation as "a refusal to be open" covers cases as diverse as a self-absorbed bore wasting everybody's time at a meeting with irrelevant questions, a friend wallowing in self-pity and refusing to come out of it, or a husband battering his wife. Perhaps you become angry with the person who closes herself, or perhaps you will simply have to sit the whole thing out, or leave. Whatever the case, the point is that being open does not mean – how could it? – happily accepting the other's refusal of openness. But it does mean that one will not react to that refusal in one of the countless ways which *themselves* mark a shutting of oneself to the other; insofar as one desires openness one will not, for instance, react to flattery by being *either* disgusted *or* flattered.

It seems to me that we need to distinguish at least three senses in which we may speak of "feeling". *First*, there is the wholeheartedness of love or friendship itself, an openness which is not a neutral emptiness, but a desiring receptivity, a going-towards and welcoming of the other. Wholeheartedness is all about feeling, and yet it seems to me that only two of the many words for

feelings in our vocabulary, *joy* and *sadness*, can *unequivocally* be said to belong in a description of love: love is joyous when it is welcomed by the other; it is sad when it is rejected or when evils afflict the other. In the next chapter, I will suggest that *anger*, too, can be a "mode" of love, although often it is not. Needless to say, one can also speak of joy or sadness in situations quite devoid of love; I am not marking words here, but trying to characterise a particular perspective. Love in the sense I intend is not something one "has" or feels for some people and not others, rather, it is a constant possibility of openness that we often fearfully turn down but sometimes, and more with some people than with others, dare to explore.

When we do not dare to be open we cannot just leave love aside, however, we must *reject* the other's touch, and this will leave its mark. The other two senses of "feeling" I want to distinguish are, as it were, the primary and secondary effects or expressions of this rejection. *Secondly* there are, then, the primary feelings and emotions felt *in* rejecting the other's touch and *thirdly*, the feelings and emotions belonging to what I would call *the social game of attitudes*. This game comes into being when the various ways in which we draw back from love's openness settle into more or less permanent patterns.[127]

To see the difference between the second and third class of feelings, consider the difference between envying and resenting a rival who gets something you wanted, say the last word in a discussion, and the very different feelings aroused in you if you realise that *she* does not see you as a *rival* at all. Unlike you, she did not want to have the last word, she quite simply had something to say, and so she does not, for instance, follow that unanswerable last word with the triumphant smile you expected, signalling that she knows exactly how frustrated you feel. Such a smile might have made you furious, but it would not have challenged your egocentric attitude of rivalry in any way, since it would itself be an expression of the same attitude, a move in the same game of rivalry. Envy and triumph exemplify the class of reactions belonging to the social game of attitudes. By contrast, the presence of someone who does not care about rivalry at all, may challenge your very existence; it will do so

[127] I have not distinguished feelings and emotions; I would insist that friendship is neither *an* emotion nor *a* feeling, and when it comes to characterizing what we feel in turning away from the openness of friendship, the standard distinction between "feelings" and "emotions" made in terms of the latter's intentionality or "aboutness" seems to me quite irrelevant. The same goes for the purely formal distinction between "positive" and "negative" feelings and emotions, for the same attitude will give rise to one or the other depending on the circumstances; if getting something makes me happy, losing it makes me sad, and so on.

precisely insofar as what the other person suddenly faces you with is the alarming possibility of openness. The emotional turmoil this provokes in you is the measure of your lack of humility to take on this challenge.

Insofar as in rivalry each person is determined to get what *they* want, rivalry obviously implies a rejection of openness, regardless of how "openly", in the sense of unabashedly, the rivalry is played out. However, as I noted above, any *attitude* implies such a rejection. Attitudes, I would say, consist in the more or less spontaneous and idiosyncratic patterns of feeling, of attraction and aversion, which *trace the history of one's avoidance of love*. They are *social* in the sense that they are all about setting oneself and people like oneself – that is, people one likes, those one feels comfortable with – apart from others. This does not mean that like is always attracted to like; it may also happen that our differences bring us together, perhaps because we like the friction this brings, or because we complement each other. Thus, your shyness may allow me to be the centre of attention, which again allows you to remain in your shyness: *I* don't mind! But however these dynamics may go, the point is that we are both allowed to remain undisturbed; the touchy spots are left untouched, and ensuring *that* is precisely what attitudes are there for; they are, as it were, the pre-emptive strategies of touchiness – which is not to say that they are consciously adopted, of course.

Obviously some attitudes are, on the face of it, more detached, others more emotional – but essentially they are all *both* detached *and* emotional. The detachment that is normally taken to be the alternative to being emotional is actually a secondary reaction: a way of trying to deal with the emotions provoked by the touch of others. The more "cool" and detached an attitude is, the more it reveals its emotional charge, for to be detached you clearly need to have something to detach yourself from, just as you can remain cool only in the face of something intense and burning; if you are just talking in a friendly way with someone you can not even *try* to be cool, for there is nothing to be cool *about*. Here, someone might object that there are two ways of being detached, one in which one tries, as I say, to hide one's passion behind a cool appearance, and another in which one is *simply* cold or indifferent. As an observation of surface-psychology, the objection is certainly to the point. Might we not, however, see the person who appears to be "simply" cold or indifferent as someone who has simply pushed the feelings he tries to distance himself from further down into the unconscious? I will return to the question why I want to see the situation in this way, rather than the other, at the end of this section.

If detachment presupposes an emotional response, on the other hand even the most intensely emotional attitude is about detachment, about keeping others at a distance. The difference is that in this case one deals with the emotions provoked by the threat of touch not by suppressing them but by playing on them, acting them out. Thus, if I feel threatened when you remind me of something I do not want to be reminded of, I may defend myself either by "playing it cool", or by becoming very angry with you, making it impossible to go further into the touchy subject. Becoming angry is, of course, a rather childish reaction; a more adult version of the same game can be played with resentment and moral indignation, with the "Who are you to tell me...?" Another strategy is to be *hurt*, playing on the pity and guilt-feelings this arouses.

I am not saying we are normally dealing with *conscious* strategies or *pretence* here; one can sometimes pretend to be hurt or angry only because often one really *is* hurt and angry. There is a strategy, a purposiveness, at play here, but it lays *in* the emotions themselves. In my anger, I do indeed try to get you to leave me in peace, but I do so by giving myself over to the anger I really feel. The crucial point is that, whether I let my emotions out or try to control them, my emotions in themselves express my spontaneous need to try to escape from, contain or control the uncontrollable openness which the other's touch reminded me of.

One possibility of escape, which helps to account for a large and important class of *positive* emotional reactions which I seem no doubt to have left out of the picture altogether, is *sentimentality*. In sentimentality, one apparently affirms quite unrestrictedly emotional reactions which seem to bring one in loving contact with other people; one affirms one's warm and compassionate feelings for others, opening oneself up to them. However, such affirmations turn sentimental precisely to the extent that one's openness for the joy and suffering of others is *refused*, but refused *in* a seeming affirmation of it. In sentimentality one *emotionalises* one's feelings, privatises them, turns them in on themselves. Thus, instead of going unto the other whose plight has moved me – in helping him or, if that is impossible, simply in the compassionate thought of him – I focus on how terrible his plight makes *me* feel. Instead of going out onto the one I love, embracing her, being with her in whatever way I can, I step back from her, focusing on my tender feelings for her, letting myself be both elated and pained by the sentimental thought that "no words can ever express how much I feel for her". As this last example indicates, the apparent

affirmation of one's openness to others in sentimentality is actually a distancing of oneself from them in sadomasochistic enjoyment of the thought of one's isolation from them.[128]

The essentially negative view of emotions I present may give the impression that I am arrogantly dismissing emotions as a topic for philosophical investigation at a point in time when valuable philosophical work on the topic is finally starting to appear, after a long period of philosophical neglect.[129] This is not my intention. I am not dismissing philosophical investigations of the emotions, on the contrary, I am engaging in such an investigation. Clearly, the criterion of the truth or fruitfulness of a philosophical investigation cannot be that the phenomena investigated be presented in a "positive" light! Note also that I am nowise implying that emotions are a trivial matter; on the contrary, I am insisting on their pervasive presence and crucial importance everywhere in our life. As we shall see in Chapter Four, our moral life is a matter of feeling and emotions through and through – and by "moral life" I do not mean a separate "part" of life (life has no such "parts"), but simply life insofar as it is seen in terms of good and evil, and so brought under specifically moral descriptions.

As I will explain, we feel the *evil* in evil actions only because, and to the extent that, we love our neighbour, and this feeling is what we name "conscience". On the other hand, the evil expresses itself *in* our emotional reactions – of hatred or envy, irritation, disgust, shame, and so on. As I said, our difficulties with love express themselves as emotional reactions; we turn away

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[128] I will return to sentimentality in Chapter Four.

[129] Among the already substantial, and growing, literature in this field in Anglo-American philosophy, one might mention for instance Michael Stocker and Elisabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue; Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Åsa Carlson (ed.), *Philosophical Aspects on Emotions* (Riga: Thales, 2005). – In the Continental tradition(s), the subject of emotions and feelings has perhaps never been as absent from the scene as it was for some time in the English-speaking world of philosophy. Heidegger's reflections on the centrality of *Stimmung*, attunement, is a case in point. Another interesting example is Max Scheler's attempt to work out a non-empirical emotional ethics, a "logic of the heart", in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Werthetik.* Vierte Durchgesehene Auflage. Hrsg. von Maria Scheler. Gesammelte Werke Band 2 (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1954 [1916]). A recent, more historically oriented, discussion of the subject as a whole is Michel Meyer, *Philosophy and the Passions. Toward a History of Human Nature* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). A useful account of the classic, Aristotelian-Thomist, view of the role of emotions in (moral) life can be found in Patrick O'Brien, C. M., *Emotions and Morals. Their Place and Purpose in Harmonious Living* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1950). It should be noted that this tradition never denied the centrality of emotions, even if it insisted that emotions should follow reason's lead rather than lead it.

from each other not in a neutral, unemotional way, but rather *in* envy, for instance. At the same, the love we *also* feel for the person we envy – and we do feel this love regardless of what we would *like* to feel or tell ourselves about the state of our feelings – makes us feel bad about envying her. It would be wrong to say that there is, on the one hand, the envy, and then on the other our feeling bad about it. Rather, what we feel is *envy* – that destructive, guilt-ridden, ambivalent and never quite fully acknowledged emotion – and not just some neutral pain or "con-attitude", only *because* of the love we also feel. The presence of love is manifested in our inability to be straight-forwardly, unambiguously envious, in our inability to envy with a good conscience.

– Love as self-denial: Weil and Kierkegaard –

I will close this chapter with a discussion of Simone Weil's view of friendship, which is akin to my own in that she, too, thinks that the drama of friendship is played out within a fundamental *tension*. The way Weil articulates the tension or dynamics of friendship, is very different from the way I see it, however. It seems to me that her view is marked by a confusion which, although it comes out in an uncommonly uncompromising form in her writings, is present in much thinking about friendship and love. Towards the end of the section I will discuss Kierkegaard's views on love as an instance of that same confusion.

Weil sees friendship, "provided we keep strictly to the true meaning of the word", as an exemplary form of human relation, "a personal and human love which is pure and which enshrines an intimation and a reflection of divine love".[130] For Weil, friendship is "a supernatural harmony, a union of opposites" (p. 132), the opposites being "necessity and liberty, the two opposites God combined when he created the world and men" (p. 134). Necessity enters friendship in the guise of the *need* we feel for our friend, the feeling that "we cannot do without" him, which on Weil's view belongs essentially to friendship; if that is lacking, she thinks that the bond is too weak, the relationship too trivial, for it to amount to friendship proper (p. 131).

[130] Weil, *Waiting for God.* Translated by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins, 2001 [1951]), p. 131. Page references given in the text of this section will be to this book, which includes the text I will primarily use, Weil's essay on "Friendship".

Need may come in many forms: as Weil points out, even such a seemingly innocent thing as "bonds of affection", a "combination of sympathy and habit", may "join human beings together with ... the iron hardness of necessity" (p. 132 f.). The problem with need is that it is a form of bondage – "We are in the power of that of which we stand in need, unless we possess it" (p. 132) – and this introduces a destructiveness into relationships in which need plays a part. As Weil notes, we tend to "hate what we are dependent upon", and to "become disgusted with what depends on us" (p. 136). However, as she also notes, we all possess "a whole arsenal of lies with which to put up a defence" against having to face the truth of our bondage; we constantly "manufacture sham advantages where there is only necessity" (p. 133). We are like prisoners who prefer to forget they are locked up and instead praise the comforts of their cells.

As Weil points out, if one feels a need for another person, one may be tempted either to try to bind the other to oneself through force, or to give up one's own freedom. Think, for instance, of the emotional extortion –the hurt feelings, the accusations – people may resort to in order to make their friend "choose" them over others, and the loss of freedom involved if one succumbs to such extortion "in order not to lose the other's friendship". As Weil says, such subordination has no place in friendship (p. 134). I think Weil is right about this, and also about the great and destructive role played in our relationships by necessity in the form of need. However, I disagree with the further steps in her reasoning. Weil writes:

> When a human being is attached to another by a bond of affection which contains any degree of necessity, it is impossible that he should wish autonomy to be preserved both in himself and in the other. It is impossible by virtue of the mechanism of nature. It is, however, made possible by the miraculous intervention of the supernatural. This miracle is friendship. [...In friendship] each wishes to preserve the faculty of free consent both in himself and in the other. (p. 134)
> Friendship is the miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is necessary to him as food. (p. 135)

The opposition of "the mechanism of nature" and "the supernatural", which actually informs all of Weil's thinking, will no doubt seem dubious to many, but it is not what worries me in the passage I quoted.[131] What I find problematic

[131] Weil sees human life as lived out in the constant tension between "gravity and grace", where gravity (that is, natural necessity) is statistically overwhelming, but grace (the supernatural) is a

is rather the way she pictures the "miracle" of friendship. She conceives of it as *refraining* from approaching the other. In the same way, in describing the "undefinable influence of the human presence", Weil writes:

> The human beings around us exert just by their presence a power which belongs uniquely to themselves to stop, to diminish, or modify, each movement which our bodies design. A person who crosses our path does not turn aside our steps in quite the same manner as a street sign, no one stands up, or moves about, or sits down again in quite the same fashion when he is alone in a room as when he has a visitor.[132]

Why does she speak of turning aside our steps when we meet someone rather than of going up to them; of stopping one's movement, as in staying one's hand raised to hit someone, rather than of starting a movement, as in extending one's hand to caress someone? Weil says that we should not

> seek from (or wish to give) the people we love any other consolation than that which works of art give us, which help us through the mere fact that they *exist*. To love and to be loved only serve mutually to render this existence more concrete, more constantly present to the mind.[133]

As she says, "a beautiful thing" such as a work of art "involves no good except itself", and we are "drawn towards it without knowing what to ask of it"; it simply "offers us its own existence" and we "do not desire anything else" (p. 105). Her thought is that we are, or should be, drawn towards our friends in the same way, "without knowing what to ask" of them, without, that is, asking anything in *particular* of them – or rather, without making all the particular things we do ask of them the centre of our relationship, allowing our satisfaction in getting what we asked for or the disappointment at not getting it weaken our desire for them, our desire that through our life together we be

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constant, although quite incalculable and unmanageable, possibility, beyond the reach of necessity. One of her most penetrating articulations of this theme is the essay "The *Iliad*, poem of might", reprinted in the *The Simone Weil Reader*. Edited by George A. Panichas (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1977), pp. 153–183. She saw the validity of the gravity/grace-opposition proven in her personal experiences of friendship, too; cf. her letter to Father Perrin, reprinted in *Waiting for God*, p. 46 f. – Weil's ideas are a shock to the "scientific" and humanist sensibility of the average contemporary intellectual, who feels that she is engaging in unsubstantiated religious and metaphysical speculations which his intellectual honesty forbids him. I will return to the question of the supernatural in the Conclusion.

[132] *The Simone Weil Reader*, p. 157.

[133] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*. Translated by Emma Craufurd (London & New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1987 [1952]), p. 58.

made "more constantly present" to each other. This far I would accept what Weil says, as my argument so far should have made clear.

However, I think a confusion is indicated by Weil's referring to what one longs for in love as the other's "presence *to the mind*", a purely spiritual contact, as though your presence in flesh and blood were not the central thing. I would say, however, that in human beings spirit has *become* flesh, and it is known only in touching and being touched by the human being of flesh and blood; in hearing her voice, meeting her eyes, and so on.

For Weil, however, it is apparently inconceivable that goodness could lay in approaching the other, in the desire to be near her, to touch him. In this, Weil sees mere vile need – and the fact that the other might *like* one's touch because he is driven by some vile need of his own to be touched does not make things better. "To soil is ... to touch", Weil states bluntly, while "to love purely is to consent to distance, it is to adore the distance between ourselves and that which we love".[134]

Since Weil believes that the desire one feels to be with one's friend – and she does not deny the desire is there – can only degrade the friends, she thinks it must be checked by respect for the distance between them. On this picture, friendship appears as something like a marriage in which the spouses desire to rape and defile each other, but are kept from doing that by the respect they at the same time feel for each other. Such terrible and explosive contradictions of feeling can no doubt exist in marriages and other relationships, and sexual moralities which stress female purity must indeed tend to pervert the relation between spouses in just such a direction. To put it as bluntly as it must be put to make the issues clear: a man has either to marry a whore or fuck an angel, and both options are really contradictions, for the woman as for the man – and it remains quite unclear who the *man* is supposed to be, in relation to the whores and the angels. People can live with such contradictions, but they will be torn apart by them; they are certainly no image of "supernatural harmony".

Weil says that "the bonds of affection and necessity between human beings" must be "supernaturally transformed into friendship" so that these bonds are not "allowed to turn into impure attachment or hatred" (p. 136 f.). But how does one transform a desire to rape someone into something good? Again, the Victorians in fact pretended that something like this would or should actually come about in marriage, so that sex, that vile thing, as such fit only for

[134] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 58.

whorehouses, would suddenly become, when engaged in within marriage, something respectable and perhaps even "beautiful". This magical trick could only be accomplished by pretence, by changing the names of things – if you allow me to be blunt again: angels don't fuck, they "make love", spouses don't fuck, they "share the nuptial bed". As far as I can see, Weil's idea of the "miracle" of friendship is simply one more such trick.

The basic problem with Weil's conception is that she places the goodness of friendship in the *renunciation* of desire, rather than in desire itself. Weil sees friendship and love essentially as self-denial, but it seems to me that this self-denial in fact amounts to *denying love*, to withdrawing from the other.[135]

Weil does not call the impulse she thinks needs to be renounced "love", but "need". Essentially the same problem I have identified in her thinking reappears, however, when it is claimed that love, although perhaps a necessary part of good relationships, is not sufficient in itself, but must be limited, or disciplined, or complemented, or somehow transformed by something else – respect for instance – in order to become truly good. It turns out that the so-called "love" which one claims is not enough – which corresponds to Weil's "need" and is often qualified as "natural" love, to distinguish it from a supposedly "purified", more or less "divine" version – is not *love* at all, but rather some more or less unfortunate inclination.

Kierkegaard seems to me to be an example of a thinker who speak in this confused way of "natural love" and its alleged "better self", "Christian" or "ethical" love. I want to make a few brief comments on this, starting with Kierkegaard's view of the love of neighbour in *Works of Love*. The first thing to note is that contrary to what is often alleged, Kierkegaard does *not* defend a view of Christian love as duty pure and simple. As M. Jamie Ferreira rightly stresses, this standard reading misses the crucial point that "from the opening prayer of *Works of Love* to its conclusion, the appreciation of the human *need* to love and to be loved is front and centre in Kierkegaard's mind".[136] Supposing we have this need, however, what role can the talk of duty and a commandment to love our neighbour play at all? Ferreira admits that it is "paradoxical that we should require a commandment at all, given the strength of our need to love and

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[135] At the end of Chapter Four, I will return to Weil, and more particularly to the role played by *self-hatred* in conceptions such as hers. I say "conceptions such as hers" rather than just "her conception" because the role of self-hatred in this connexion is conceptually, rather than merely psychologically determined.

[136] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving. A Commentary on Kierkegaard's* Works of Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 27, emphasis added.

to be loved".[137] She explains the paradox by claiming that, according to Kierkegaard, we have all of us indeed received the gift of love, but we need to be guided in the right *use* of it, which is what the love-commandment does:

> A command as such ... cannot create the love it demands. The dynamism of need or desire must be assumed prior to the commandment that will guide its expression. ... In creating us, God implanted love in our hearts, and the command presupposes that love. The commandment does not tell us to love; we don't need a commandment for that. Rather, it *guides* 'how' we love and requires us not to restrict it preferentially.[138]

On Ferreira's reading, Kierkegaard holds that while we all have an inborn need to love, we normally – that is, where the Christian commandment to love is not heard or heeded – express or live this love in the wrong way, selfishly. "Love as such is not commanded; it can only be commanded to direct itself unselfishly", she says.[139]

However, this presupposes that we can make sense of the idea of a *selfish love*, and that idea seems senseless to me. For note that we are not supposed to be talking of a selfish *attraction* of some kind, but of *love*, which is said to be God's greatest "gift" to us. It is not difficult to understand what someone means if they say that our hands or eyes, for instance, are gifts from God which nonetheless we often choose to use for destructive purposes, but love cannot be conceived of as an "instrument" we can use at will for good or ill; it is rather an orientation of our whole being. Love is certainly not selfish. It does not *check* our selfishness, but rather opens us up to, and orients us towards, the other, in a movement which simply *leaves no place* for selfishness.

I agree with Kierkegaard that love, the desire to be with others in openness, is indeed in one sense "in" all of us, but as far as I can see there is no such thing as expressing love in the wrong way. There *is* such a thing as falling away from love into, for instance, jealousy, despair, self-pity or unforgivingness. If someone refuses to forgive his friend for something she has done, this is not just a fact to be noted which in no way puts the love he feels for her in question, nor does it show that his love is "selfish". It shows that he is *lacking* in love for her. It is not as though one could say "His love for her is very strong, it is just that he finds it

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., p. 41. – As Ferreira notes (p. 38), there is also a different idea of the sense of the love-commandment to be found in Kierkegaard: the idea of the commandment as encouragement or promise.
[139] Ibid., p. 104.

hard to forgive her", for what loving a person *means*, in the context of her having acted callously towards one, is that one desires, through the pain and anger one feels, to forgive and be reconciled with her. That someone can be very strongly *attracted* or, again, *attached* to someone, yet be quite unforgiving with them, is obvious – Shylock's relation to his daughter in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is a striking case. But insofar as this is so, it obviously shows a lack of love in the attachment or attraction.

The confused idea that there is such a thing as "love in itself" which yet is "not enough" in itself, distorts not only Kierkegaard's view of Christian love in the *Works of Love*, but also his – or his pseudonym's – view of marriage in the "ethical" writings.[140] There, marriage is said to presuppose, if it is to be more than a bad joke, that the spouses are actually *in love*; it must be infinitely more than *mere* duty, or a marriage of convenience.[141] Being in love is a "natural", "immediate" and "sensuous" feeling which nonetheless involves, Kierkegaard thinks, a sense that the lovers are meant to be with each other "eternally".[142] The natural immediacy of this love must be transmuted into a "higher form" by one's "decision" to enter into marriage, to take on married life as a "task".[143]

If, however, there is a sense of the "eternal" already in the feeling of love, then how can one at the same time claim that it is nonetheless merely a "natural" feeling, that is, an ephemeral "inclination"? And if being in love *is* merely an ephemeral inclination that needs to be steadied by a decision or commitment, then why should the inclination be essential at all? To claim that an inclination is essential to marriage seems about as sensible as claiming that one *must* find the person one is to marry *charming*, although that is "naturally not enough" for marriage. If one allows love really to be *love*, on the other hand, if one does not reduce it to an inclination of some sort, then what work is there for the will with its "commitments" to do?

These quandaries about love are, it seems to me, a typical instance of philosophical problems which arise because one has first accepted a rending, a

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[140] The central Kierkegaard-texts in this connexion are Judge William's discourses on marriage in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*. How far Kierkegaard himself espouses the views expounded by his pseudonyms is, as always, a tricky question, but it need not concern us, since what is of interest here are the views presented, regardless of how far Kierkegaard himself would defend them. An excellent summary and critique of the view of marriage presented in these writings is Knud Hansen, *Søren Kierkegaard. Ideens Digter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel/Nordisk Forlag, 1954), pp. 93–109.

[141] Kierkegaard, *Samlede værker. Bind 1-20.* 5. udgave (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), *Bind 7*, p. 140 f.

[142] *Samlede værker, Bind 3*, p. 25 f.

[143] *Samlede værker, Bind 7*, p. 143.

division into two opposing entities or aspects, of what is originally a unity, the way "feeling" and "commitment" are a unity in love. One feels that they "must" somehow be "combined", because one's understanding of the phenomena one is trying to account for philosophically is in fact an understanding of the original unity of *love*. At the same time, one has allowed oneself to look at love from the outside, from a position of alienation, where things have come apart for one, where one is torn between what one *now* comes to describe as, for instance, feeling *and* commitment ("I have made a commitment to Anne, but I feel that I love Jill"). And then one wonders how one is to "combine" the two things which have their very being in their tense *opposition* – an opposition which only appears, however, because the wholeheartedness of love has been rejected.

Let us return, briefly, to Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Christian understanding of love. Sylvia Walsh says that what Kierkegaard sets himself against is "the tendency ... to view Christian love in a superficial and directly positive manner and to assume its commensurability with the universally human forms and understanding of love", and that in doing so his intent was "not to negate the positive understanding of Christian existence as a life of love but to show how this must necessarily include the act of self-denial".[144] This is a fair characterisation of Kierkegaard's declared intent, but there is still a question to be asked about what it *means.*

Certainly, Kierkegaard is right to reject all manner of *rosy* pictures of love, to point out that love is not to be understood in terms of what is sweet or agreeable or convenient or "fulfilling", answering to one's private wishes or needs. Love is not agreeable, nor is it deserved or fair or reasonable. Nor does it guarantee anything, or protect one from anything, or offer one consolation. It should be noted, however, that love is not a blind, violent, dark force, either. That, too, is one of the self-deceptive illusions of selfishness, comfortable in that it seems to furnish arguments both for those who try to justify the actions and reactions their jealousy and lust for domination and destruction – all loveless things – express themselves in, and for those who are, for quite different reasons, frightened of love, and need an alibi to stay clear of closer involvement with others.

Insofar as love has been presented in such terms, or falsified in some

[144] Walsh, *Living Christianly. Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Christian Existence* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 80. – As Walsh notes, in Kierkegaard's view, it is as true in love as "in everything Christian", that "the positive is known and expressed through the negative and must be viewed as the inverse of the merely human or natural conception of this quality" (p. 79).

other way, and Christian love has then been presented as merely a version – perhaps an even more fulfilling version – of the same thing, everything has indeed gone awry. But the problem then is not that "the universally human understanding of love" has been confused with Christian love, but rather that *love* (no qualifications) has been falsely presented, deliberately misunderstood, so as to make it suit our selfish fears and wishes, the pettiness and destructiveness of which love in truth plainly and mercilessly exposes.

II
– The subversion of morality –

At the end of the last chapter, I pointed out that the unity or wholeheartedness of love cannot be reached by combining different elements, say "feeling" and "commitment". The result of such combination is not a unity but always only an uneasy compromise, a *modus vivendi* whose precariousness bears witness to the lack of wholeheartedness. This appears as paradox and confusion on the level of philosophical description; on the level of lived experience, it betokens a fall from love, a distrustful alienation.

In this chapter, I will show in more detail how the unity and openness of love and friendship contrasts with the alienation and divisions of unfriendly, loveless ways of thought and feeling. More particularly, the focus is on showing how *morality*, as that term is often, indeed standardly, understood, is in fact an *expression* of such lovelessness. Morality aims to preserve the divisions into *yours* and *mine*, and obeys a *retaliatory* logic according to which I am in my full rights to do no better by others than they have done by me, whereas in openness the divisions are overcome, a central "mode" of this overcoming being forgiveness, in which the spirit of retaliation is overcome.

The unity of friendship is thus subversive of morality, and conversely, to bring moral considerations into friendship is to subvert the unity of love by introducing divisions into it. The point is not, however, that friendship and love would be "beyond good and evil" in the usual sense, where the idea is that we are dealing with "blind" inclinations or passions which, while they may have a certain sublimity, can lead one to evil as easily as to good. On the contrary, my thought is that the wholeheartedness of love and friendship is a goodness completely free of evil.

By contrast, if one allows concepts such as respect or altruism – both of which *contrast* with love, rather than expressing it – to play the central

normative role in ethics, the corresponding conception of the good will be a very impoverished one. It will be a second-best at best, in the same sort of way as it can be no more than a second-best, a lesser evil, if an embittered marriage ends in a divorce. It may certainly be what is best for the spouses and their children, in the sense that the divorce may be less horrible than their embittered life together, but it is the best thing conceivable only as long as the spouses feel unable to forgive each other, to find love again.

– *Respect* vs. *love (Kant)* –

Kant's view of friendship is interestingly similar to mine (and Weil's), in that Kant, too, sees the drama of friendship played out in a field of tension between contrary forces or perspectives. The tension is partly even described in the same terms in which I see it: as a struggle between our desire for openness and our aversion to it. Kant understands the significance of this tension quite differently than I do, however. He connects it with what he sees as a conflicted but fundamental dialectics of *love* and *respect* in our lives. In the context of my argument, discussing Kant's view of friendship is of interest primarily because the question of the role of respect in love and friendship is important. Given that Kant's ethics is usually thought to be focused exclusively on "reason" and "respect", however, it will also be both illuminating and perplexing to realise that he actually gives the question of both friendship *and* love a central place in his ethics.

One can easily get the impression from many discussions critical of the universalism and formalism of Kantian ethics that Kant considered friendship, which is always a concrete relationship to particular others, a morally speaking irrelevant or even reprehensible phenomenon. Even Kant's defenders often do not seem to realise how far from true this is. In one of the few articles, and certainly the best known one, on Kant's view of friendship, H. J. Paton thus characterises the topic as "limited", that is, as of minor importance to an understanding of Kant's ethics as a whole, and says that in Kant's discussion of friendship we meet "not so much with the Critical philosopher as with the sage of Köningsberg – almost, one might say, with Kant in slippers"; Paton indeed thinks that the point of examining Kant's views on friendship at all is mainly

that it may show us "that neither in his life nor in his teaching was he so cold and inhuman and blind as is commonly supposed".[1] One gets the impression that in his discussion of friendship Kant has managed to write some kind of "human interest" story on himself.

If one considers Kant's text, however, a rather different picture emerges. The topic of friendship does not seem of "limited" or *merely* personal interest at all. Kant says that the striving for friendship "considered in its perfection" – as the "ideal of each participating and sharing sympathetically in the other's well-being through the morally good will that unites them", as "a maximum of good disposition towards each other" – is a duty for everyone, and "no ordinary duty" at that, "but an honourable one", because it is a striving for the morally speaking *most perfect relationship human beings can have to one another*, namely "the most intimate union of love with respect".[2]

So Kant is very much aware of the fact that respect by itself, no matter how strongly felt and mutually shared, does not make people friends. In some sense, love is also needed. Combining love and respect seems to be a tricky thing, however, since they are, as Kant rightly says, forces opposing each other: "Love can be regarded as attraction and respect as repulsion, and if the principle of love bids friends to draw closer, that of respect requires them to stay at a proper distance from one another" (p. 585/6:470). It should be noted that

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[1] Paton, "Kant on Friendship" in Neera Kapur Badhwar (ed.), *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 145. – Treatments of Kant's views on friendship can also be found in Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 275–282, and in Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] Kant, *Practical Philosophy* [The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant]. Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 584 f./6:649. Page references in the text of this section will be to this one-volume edition of Kant's complete works in moral philosophy, and will be given in the form (p. 584 f./6:649) where the first number refers to the consecutive pagination of the *Practical Philosophy* volume, the second to the corresponding volume- and page-number of the standard edition of Kant's works in German, the so-called Akademie edition. There are two extended discussions of friendship in Kant; the one I will chiefly be quoting from occurs towards the end of *The Doctrine of Virtue* (*Tugendlehre*), which is the second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's last great work on moral philosophy from 1797. The second discussion is in Kant's earlier 1775–1780 lectures on ethics. These are not included in the *Practical Philosophy* volume; I use the translation of Louis Infield: Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). – The most obvious difference between the two discussions is that in the *Lectures* Kant does not see friendship as "the union of love with respect", but rather as the union of what he at that time saw as "the two motives to action in man"; "self-love" and "love of humanity", the latter of which he also calls "the moral motive" (*Lectures on Ethics*, p. 200). It is interesting that even here Kant works with the same formal structure as later in the *Tugendlehre*, seeing friendship as a relationship in which basic, and otherwise conflicting forces or tendencies are combined into a union, although the forces in question are different. I discuss Kant's earlier view in the next section.

according to Kant it is not only in friendship, understood as a particular class of relationships, that this seemingly impossible combination of the opposite forces of love and respect is demanded. On the contrary, Kant sees the whole of our moral life formed by the constant play of the "*attraction*" of love and the "*repulsion*" of respect;

> The principle of *mutual love* admonishes [human beings] constantly to *come closer* to one another; that of the *respect* they owe one another, to keep themselves *at a distance* from one another; and should one of these great moral forces fail, "the nothingness (immorality), with gaping throat, would drink up the whole kingdom of (moral) beings like a drop of water"... (p. 568f./6:449)[3]

Kant grants that love and respect can in one sense exist apart: "one can love one's neighbour though he might deserve but little *respect*, and can show him the respect necessary for every human being regardless of the fact that he would hardly be judged worthy of love" (p. 568/6:448). Nonetheless, Kant appears to think that when love and respect come apart, it is always a moral problem. Strictly speaking, they should always appear together, and even if now one, now the other, may play the leading role, as it were, they are "basically always united by the [moral] law into one duty" (ibid.). Thus, helping a poor man in need is a duty of love, but the help must at the same time be given respectfully; in such a way that the man does not feel demeaned by having to receive help:

> [Since] this kindness also involves a dependence of his well-fare upon my generosity, which humiliates him ... it is a duty to spare the recipient such humiliation and to preserve his self-respect by treating this beneficence either as a mere debt that is owed him, or as a small favour.[4]

This means that Kant's division of duties into duties of *love* and *respect* does not name two classes of dutiful actions, but rather indicates two aspects of every morally good act. One could say that the spirit of friendship, in which we have "the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect", is actually, for Kant, the ideal in the light of which every human encounter is to be seen and

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[3] Kant is quoting, or paraphrasing, the poet Haller.

[4] Here, I use James W. Ellington's translation of the *Tugendlehre* in *Ethical Philosophy*. Second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994 [1983]), p. 112f., rather than Gregor's in *Practical Philosophy* (p. 568/6:448 f.), which in this case is a bit cumbersome. Cf. the German original, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Hrsg. von J. H. v. Kirchmann (Leipzig: Verlag der Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, 1870), p. 298.

measured. An ideal is not actuality, however, it is what measures it, and Kant insist that the ideal of friendship is "unattainable in practice"; in his remarks on the subject he wants chiefly to "draw attention to the *difficulties* in perfect friendship" (p. 584 f./6:469 f.).

As a claim about Kantian ethics, what I have just said will probably sound strange, and perhaps downright perverse. It is nonetheless a fact, I think, that throughout his ethical writings Kant is aware, as he should be, having received a good Christian upbringing, that love is in some sense quite fundamental to our life and our morality. Whereas he is very eloquent in speaking about respect, he never quite knows what to make of love, however. This is true also of the account in the *Tugendlehre*: it remains unclear what Kant actually means by the "love" he is speaking of. [5]

After characterising love as one of the two "great moral forces" of our lives, Kant immediately goes on to say that love in this context is *not* to be understood as "*feeling*" or as "*delight*" in others, but must rather be understood in the technical sense he sometimes gives to the word, meaning "the maxim of *benevolence* (practical love), which results in beneficence" (p. 569/6:449). This statement is puzzling because just a page earlier Kant has described love and respect precisely as "the *feelings* that accompany the carrying out" of the duties of love and respect (p. 568/6:448, emphasis added). More importantly, reading "love" in the way Kant suggests, as the name of a principled decision to be beneficent, seems to make nonsense of the whole metaphor of moral *forces*

[5] A trivial reason why commentators have not paid much attention to either the place of friendship or the conflict between love and respect in Kant's ethics, and why it sounds strange to emphasize it, is that the *Tugendlehre* where Kant discusses these matters, has generally been neglected, as has the whole of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, in favour of the earlier *Groundwork* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, where respect takes centre stage, friendship is barely mentioned and love seems to be treated only in order to dismiss it as morally irrelevant, except in the form of the benevolence from principles that Kant calls "practical love", which obviously is no *love* at all, but precisely a benevolence from principles. For Kant's remarks on love of neighbour in the earlier works, see *Practical Philosophy*, p. 54 f./4:399 (*Groundwork*) and p. 207/5:83 (*Critique of Practical Reason*). – However, the idea of a love and respect as two elemental forces is foreshadowed already in the *Lectures*, where Kant says that man has "by nature two impulses, to be esteemed and to be loved" (p. 185), but here, as in many other connexions, Kant seems to be quite dismissive of love, claiming that respect is the more fundamental "force", and the only truly moral one. Similarly, Kant says in *The End of All Things* that in moral matters "Respect [rather than 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" (*Religion and Rational Theology* [The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant]. Translated and edited by Allen W. Wood & George di Giovanni [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 230/8:337). This statement is from 1794; I do not know whether Kant ever denied (what he calls) love equal moral status with respect after the writing of the *Tugendlehre* (1797).

(*Kräfte*) around which the passage revolves. A force *moves* you, as Kant suggests that love and respect do when attracting us to and repelling us from each other; a maxim does not, it rather expresses *our decision to move* in certain ways or patterns rather than others.

It is clear that "love" in this context cannot be understood in a naturalistic way, either, as a private inclination making one prefer the company of some people over others, for instance, for Kant is explicitly talking about fundamental *moral* forces. He is not talking about "laws of nature", even laws of *human* nature understood in a naturalistic sense, but of "laws of duty", and he is simply using the forces of the physical world as an "analogy" for depicting those of "a moral (intelligible) world" (p. 568/6:449). So what could he mean by "love" here?[6]

The same question, "What does Kant really mean by love?" is also raised by a passage in the "Introduction" to the *Tugendlehre*, where Kant enumerates four "predispositions on the side of *feeling* [for being] affected by concepts of duty" which, he claims, "lie at the basis of morality, as *subjective* conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty" (p. 528/6:399). This passage, which is hardly ever commented on, is to my mind the most intriguing one in all of Kant's ethical works. The reason is that Kant includes "*love* of one's neighbour" among these necessary conditions of morality, explicitly *contrasting* it with "benevolence" (ibid.). Whereas benevolence can be, and is, a *duty*, Kant's main point in this passage is precisely that it cannot be a duty to "have" the basic predispositions he enumerates, "rather, every human being has them, and it is [only] by virtue of [having] them that he can be put under obligation" (ibid.). And one of these "predispositions" of *feeling* which "every human being has" (p. 528/6:399), the lack of which would render a person "morally dead" (p. 529/6:400), is, Kant explicitly affirms, a "love of human beings [*Menschenliebe*]" (p. 530/6:401).

This means that the point of Kant's statement, to be found in the very passage we are discussing, that "a *duty to love* is an absurdity" because one "cannot be constrained to love" (p. 530/6:401), which is always quoted as proof that Kant dismissed love as morally irrelevant, is the exact *opposite* of such a

[6] Robert Johnson, "Love in Vain", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36 (1997), 45–50, gives a different interpretation of what Kant means by "love"; he thinks that the passage about the two great moral forces is not about love at all: "What Kant calls love here is itself just a form of respect" (p. 45). Johnson's interpretation is ingenious, but I do not think it works. Since my main purpose here is not Kant-exegesis, however, going into this further would be a sidetrack. – For a sketch of a rather different perspective on this, but one I do not find very illuminating either, see the short remarks in Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 271 f., and footnote 18, p. 398.

dismissal. It is meant to highlight the fact that anything that *can* be a duty – as mere beneficence can, for instance – is a much *less* important phenomenon, morally speaking, than the *felt love* without which there would be no such thing as morality in our lives at all.

This startling claim is there in the text, but no one seems to have noticed. The commentators are silent about it, and so, one might say, is Kant himself. To my knowledge, this passage is the only place, apart from the passages about the "two great moral forces" of love and respect which I have quoted, where Kant gives love such a basic role, and even in the passage itself, there is a curious asymmetry between what Kant says about love, and what he says about the other three predispositions of morality he enumerates, "moral feeling", "conscience" and "respect for oneself (self-esteem)" (p. 528/6:399). These three predispositions can all quite naturally be fitted, as love cannot, into Kant's law-conception of ethics, and so it causes him no problems to extol them.[7]

About moral feeling Kant says that "every human being (as a moral being) has it in him originally" and so there can be no duty to acquire it, but "only to *cultivate* it and to strengthen it through wonder at its inscrutable source" (p. 528 f./6:399 f.); about conscience that "every human being, as a moral being, *has* a conscience within him originally .. it is ... an unavoidable fact [*Tatsache*]" (p. 529/6:400); about self-esteem that "the law within [a man] unavoidably forces from him *respect* for his own being" (p. 531/6:403). However, when Kant elaborates on the fourth predisposition, love, there are no such positive statements about how everyone actually "has" or "feels" love, or about how morality presupposes love in us, or about the wonder we should feel at the fact of our feeling this love which comes from some "inscrutable source". Some such thing *should* be there; we are led to expect it from the introductory statements to, and the logic of, the whole passage, but it is not to be found. Instead, we get only the negative part about the absurdity of supposing that there could be a *duty* to love. We get parallel reductio arguments regarding the three other basic feelings – "It cannot be said that [a man] *has* a duty of respect toward himself, for he must have respect for the law within himself in order even to think of any duty whatsoever" (p. 531/6:403), for instance – but because they are framed by the positive remarks, they make a very different impression.

[7] Kant gives "moral feeling" a sense so general – it is merely a feeling for morality – that it could be fitted anywhere. "Conscience" he understands in terms of the application of the moral law to concrete actions and situations, while "respect for oneself (self-esteem)" is interpreted, as always in Kant, in terms of the dignity conferred on human beings by their capacity for moral law-giving.

To my mind, the gaps of this crucial passage reveal Kant's difficulties with love – difficulties which can hardly be *merely* conceptual. I think it is in one sense quite clear what Kant *means* by "love"; he means real *love*, the thing we find depicted in the Gospels. At the same time, he cannot admit that this *is* what he means without exploding the whole edifice of his ethical thought, which he in fact builds on respect alone. The basic problem is, as we shall see, that respect itself, and the *respectful* kind of friendship that Kant and others praise, is an attempt to *protect* oneself from love. It is an attitude that cannot admit to its own true character.

Love is indeed a positive "force": it is a desire for the other person, a desire to open oneself to her and for her to open herself to one, a desire for every distance between oneself and the other to be abolished. Respect, by contrast, essentially means keeping a respectful *distance* to the other, as Kant says; respect is similar to fear in this regard. Out of respect I let the other alone, I let him have his way, I respect his privacy. "I keep myself within my own bounds so as not to detract anything from the worth that [he...] is authorized to put upon himself", as Kant says (p. 569/6:450). In respecting another I see him, both physically and in a broader, more figurative sense, as surrounded by a *zone of inviolability*.[8] He is someone I *could*, and for that very reason *must not*, violate. I see that if I were to move in too close to him, for instance touch him, or ask too personal a question, it would be a violation, even if only in the mild form of indiscretion.

So respect makes us keep a distance from one another. Of course there are also many other motives that make us do that, for instance finding someone boring, or irritating, or frightening. And to feel *contempt* for someone, which is the very opposite of respecting them, also typically implies that one avoids contact, at least intimate contact, with them: one might shudder at the very thought of associating with "such despicable characters". If I feel *no* respect for someone, it means that I feel that he cannot be *violated*, although his life can of course be interfered with. Thus, although I would feel no desire to read such a person's private diary, if it turned out to be necessary in order to get some important information, I would read it without compunction, although perhaps with revulsion ("Such filth!"). By contrast, what keeps me from reading the private diary of someone I respect is not the thought of the distasteful things it might contain, but rather the simple fact that *he does not want me to*, that he has

[8] I borrow this phrase from K. E. Løgstrup; see the essay on "Urørlighedszonen" in his *System og Symbol. Essays* (Gyldendal, 1982), pp. 161ff.

chosen to keep it private. His motives for doing so are not something that I need speculate about, and it is indeed part of respecting someone not to pry into the motives they might have for not wanting to do or divulge certain things: their motives are and should remain as inviolably private as their diary.

Analogously, if I find someone despicable or disgusting I feel that *I* would be somehow dirtied by contact with them, that it would be shameful for me to associate with them, whereas if I respect them it means that I feel that my approaching them disrespectfully – approaching them in a particular manner or on a particular occasion, or perhaps at all – would not only be a violation of *them*, perhaps in the form of "dirtying" them, but would somehow show *me* to be dirty or despicable in thus disregarding what deserves my respect.

It might seem that it is arbitrary to define respect negatively, as a matter of keeping a distance and refraining from doing things, as I agree with Kant that we should define it.[9] Can one not *approach* someone in a respectful way? Certainly, but what kind of way is that? Suppose one talks about some intimate matters with someone in a respectful way. Does not the *respect* in such a case announce itself precisely in one's being careful, tactful, discreet, about what one expresses to the other? Thus, one respectfully refrains from asking about something one wonders about, but senses that the other does not want to talk about. Again, I may respect your wish or decision by doing something rather than by refraining from action: by doing what you ask me to do, for instance. What makes this into an instance of *respecting* you, however, is not what I do as such, but the *spirit* in which I do it, and this spirit is marked by my *refraining from questioning your wish*, by my feeling that you have a right to make your own personal decisions, and that I and others must respect this.

Note that this is very different from doing what you ask simply because you ask me to, in cases where this is *not* the expression of a respectful *refraining* from questioning your request, but a manifestation of my *trust* in you, of my lack of suspicion of you (and so of your request), which makes me feel that even if your request does not make immediate sense to me, you would try to explain it to me if I asked you about it. I see such trust as an expression of the spirit of friendship, but it is not an expression of respect.

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[9] This objection is raised in two of the very few discussions of Kant's views on love and respect that I know of: Marcia Baron, "Love and Respect in the Doctrine of Virtue", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36 (1997), 29–44, and Marguerite La Caze, "Love, that Indispensable Supplement: Irigaray and Kant on Love and Respect", *Hypatia* 20 (2005), 92–114. Personal communication with La Caze on the issue of love and respect has been very helpful in my work on this section.

Yet another possibility, very different from respectfully refraining from questioning your wish, is doing what you ask me to because in the unity of love's desire your desire *becomes* my desire. In this case, the very fact that you want to do something makes me want to do it *with* you. Thus, your asking me to go for a walk with you awakens in me the desire to go with you: I come to desire this particular thing, the walk, because I already desire, with the wholehearted desire of friendship, to be with you. When you suggest a particular way of being together, I follow. I am not saying I *must* follow your lead; I might also suggest something else, perhaps a swim instead of a walk, or a walk tomorrow – but whatever the case, insofar as we remain in the spirit of friendship my rejection of your original suggestion will not be meant by me, nor taken by you, as a rejection of you, as a sign that my desire to be with you is weak. And I *will* often take up on your suggestion. When I do, it is not because I respect your wish, but because I come to share it.[10]

In respecting someone, I keep my distance to them because I feel that they do not want me too near. Here we should note a very simple, but decisive, point: if they *want* me to come near, there is no room for respect. If I notice that my friend is unwilling to talk about some important matter, I might respect her wish to keep her thoughts to herself, but her thus closing herself to me is itself an expression of her lack of faith in my friendship, of her distrust – a distrust she may be right to feel, of course. If, on the other hand, she wants to speak quite openly with me, *there is nothing for me to respect*: all I need to do is listen to her, that is, enter the openness she invites me to. In this sense, respect is at best only a *necessary evil*, something friends need insofar as the openness between them is lacking. Insofar as their love, the openness between them, is wholehearted, there is simply nothing for them to respect.

If you are open with me, but I continue to relate to you in terms of respect, my very respectfulness becomes a way of rejecting you, closing the openness of love. Thus, while I can respect a child's wish *not* to be taken up or touched, if the child *wants* to be taken up and I refuse to do it because I feel that there would be something not quite respectable, something undignified in such closeness between us – imagine that this happens at some rather solemn

[10] Kant says that duties of *love* are duties "to make others' *ends* my own (provided only that these are not immoral)" (p. 569/6:450). He does not, as far as I understand, mean that one actually comes to share their ends, but rather that one devotes oneself to helping them realize *their* ends, the moral point being precisely that one furthers ends which one does *not* feel any desire of one's own to see realised, but furthers because others desire them. In short: Kant speaks about doing things *for* others, I about doing things *with* them because one desire to be with them.

reception, for instance – I have rejected the child. And if I take up the child "out of respect for her wishes", if *that* is the correct description of the spirit in which I respond to her, I act *unlovingly*; in fact I still reject the child, because I treat the embrace as something I do *for* her, as a wish I grant her, rather than really *embracing* her, that is, opening myself to her as she has opened herself to me in wanting to be taken up.

I agree, of course, that we cannot speak of friendship in any real sense between people who lack respect for each other in the sense of despising each other, and insofar as we move on the continuum between respect and contempt, respect is obviously to be preferred. My point, however, is that the spirit of friendship, love itself, moves beyond that continuum altogether. The thought that "respect is the backbone of love", as Mary Midgley has it,[11] makes sense only on the assumption that love of itself would tend to contempt and violation: that would be what respect wants to protect us from. In this vein, Marguerite La Caze writes:

> love must be based on respect to be genuine. Otherwise the lover can even justify a suffocating and restrictive relationship on the grounds of the strength of their love, whereas a basis of respect will always limit such claims ... there must be a basis of respect and then the openness of love is possible.[12]

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. My basic objection to the idea that love must be based on, or limited by, respect, is precisely that this idea presupposes a view of love as some sort of egoistic craving to possess the other or to be possessed by her, or some similar urge. If love was like that, it would indeed need to be limited – or better yet, eradicated altogether, for on that conception, it seems quite mysterious why anyone would want love to exist, why our life would collapse if there was no love in it, as Kant rightly says it would.

As I see it, love is a desire for openness, and that is obviously the very antithesis of everything suffocating or restrictive. What is more, love does not lead one to try to *justify* anything at all. It is we, in the *weakness* of our love, who try to justify all kinds of lovelessness by reference to all kinds of things, for instance the so-called "strength of our love", or our "legitimate demand for

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[11] Midgley, *Heart and Mind. The Varieties of Moral Experinence* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 95. – She thinks Kant was "absolutely right" to say so (ibid., p. 96).
[12] La Caze, "Love, that Indispensable Supplement", p. 101.

respect". It is true that we are, time and again, tempted to violate each other, but that is so precisely insofar as we *lack* love. Respect is needed to check not love, but all the other things that appear on the scene when love disappears. Insofar as a sense of respect limits one's desire to humiliate someone, for instance, it is a good thing, relatively speaking, but it is never simply *the good*, which would be love itself. If one loved, there would be no desire to humiliate that needed checking. The need for respect is not part of love or friendship itself; its presence rather marks the weakness of our love and friendship.

It is, when one thinks of it, truly extraordinary that one should connect love with contempt and violation. Certainly, I do not feel contempt for, or want to violate, the ones I love, and that is not because I not only love them but *also* respect them, but simply because I *love* them. To love someone *means*, among other things, not wanting to force anything on them or to make them feel imposed or trampled on, slighted or put down in any way. In this sense, love includes in itself a wish to protect all the good things respect protects, but in love, all these negatives, these *I don't want to*'s are, as it were, no more than the shadows cast by the light of one's desire to be with the other in openness. They are not to be understood as separate desires accompanying or limiting the desire to be with the other.

Love's desire for the other does not need to be tempered by respect for the other's free consent to what one wants to do with her, because in love *what* one wants *is* the other's freely opening herself to one as one opens oneself to her. If I love you and realize that you do not like what I do to you, I will stop *because* I love you; because I do not want to have anything from you that you do not want to give me. It is not that love includes a sense that one must not allow oneself to take by force what one would want to have from the other, it is rather that in love one does not *want* to *take* anything from the other, to force her in any way.

Thus, insofar as my desire to stroke your hair is an expression of my love for you, I will stop *wanting* it if I notice that you do not want me to do it, whereas if I just want to do it for some private reason and there is no love in my caress, it is an open question how I react if I notice that you do not like it – and if I am very much caught up in my desire I may not notice it at all. My possible responses to your unwillingness will depend on what exactly I want in stroking your hair: if I want to make a good impression on you, I will stop and apologise, perhaps; if I want to annoy you or if I just feel very drunk and sentimental, for instance, I will go on. This is an aspect of how love's desire for the other is, as I

noted above, not a specific desire alongside others, but rather a desire that can express itself in other kinds of desire, transforming them as it does so.

I said that insofar as my desire to stroke your hair, for instance, is an expression of my love for you, I will stop *wanting* it if I notice that *you* do not want me to do it. But this needs to be qualified, for even if I do love you, your merely indicating that you do not want me to do something does not *necessarily* mean that I will refrain from doing it. I will refrain if you simply find a particular form of contact, for instance my stroking your hair, uncomfortable or uninteresting or undesirable in some other way, but the situation is different if your unwillingness is itself an expression of your drawing away from *me*, from love's openness, rather than from a *particular kind* of contact. You reject openness if you do not want *any* kind of contact with me, or if you always insist on limiting our contact to only some particular kinds of contact. It is not, of course, that my love would then drive me to try to *force* a contact you do not want, for if I love I do not want a forced contact. But I do want contact, and I want it more than anything else – that *is* the desire of love – and this means that I will *not respectfully*, *politely*, accept your rejection of me.

It is, as I noted above, an open question what someone moved by the spirit of friendship or love will do in a particular situation if she notices that you are shying away from her. She might leave you in peace, giving you time to gather the courage or humility to be open. Or she might confront you; she will not, because in her love she simply *cannot*, let you remain undisturbed in your rejection of her and your closing of yourself. She might become angry with you, or rude or scornful or even physically violent. *What else is she to do* if you are just sitting there, refusing to come out of your shame or vanity or hurt pride or self-pity, or whatever self-centred reaction it is that you indulge, thus closing yourself to love? She loves you, and so she does not see your life as "your business" – that would be indifference – nor does she worry about whether she has a "right" to interfere if she sees you throwing your life away.

Here we should note that the demand for *respect* can itself be a means, more or less consciously adopted, of hiding from the challenge of love's truthful openness. The indignant cry "You have no right to talk to me in that tone!" or "What I do with my life is my business!" is often uttered by someone who feels uncomfortably challenged in their self-deception by what the other has said.

This is one reason why what I have said cannot be dismissed as a simple trick of apparently dispensing with the need for respect, while in fact including

it in the definition of love. For although love, as I said, includes in itself a wish to protect all the *good* things respect protects, it also quite disrespectfully disregards many of the limits respect insists on, for instance limits on how personal one "can" get in one's criticisms of one's friends. Many of the things that love makes people do will appear scandalous from the perspective of the respectful attitude. From the perspective of love, the point is rather that love is not *timid*, as respect always is, insofar as it wants to put limits on love.

In love and friendship, we feel *free* in regard to each other in a way which leads us to act in ways which could, from the perspective of respect, be described as our allowing ourselves untoward "liberties" with each other, even imposing on each other. Thus, at a party a friend may fill up his friend's glass with more wine without asking him if he wants more in a way which would be indiscreet if he did it to someone he does not know; or he might take a sip from his friend's glass, which would definitely be a rude, disrespectful thing to do to a stranger. This obviously does not mean that the friends are in fact being disrespectful in behaving as they do towards each other. However, they are not being respectful either; they are simply free of the worries that otherwise make us feel the need for respect. They know, with the certainty of their faith in each other's friendship, that they may approach their friend, thus involving him in all kinds of ways in all kinds of things, without first asking whether he wants to be approached and become involved.

In fact, even *asking* itself – asking a person how they feel about something or asking them for help, for instance – is a way of approaching the other, and it may be experienced as indiscreet and disrespectful, and may be met with the offended cry "Who do you think you are, asking me a question like that!" Where the freedom of friendship is lacking, one should really be able, per impossible, to ask the other person if one may ask the first question before one asks it. Insofar as there is a lack of trust between people, every approach, every initiative is undertaken in uncertainty, in anxiety over whether the other person wants this kind of approach or not. This anxiety is the mirror image of the anxiety one feels for one's own part about whether one really wants the response of the other, and it comes out in an uncertainty about how to take, how to "read" or interpret, the responses already given, not only in the uncertainty about what will come next.

I have discussed the relation between love and respect. I will now move to a more direct discussion of the place of *openness* in Kant's account of friendship. It is remarkable that Kant, virtually alone among philosophers, sees

the desire for openness as a central question in friendship, and in human life generally; a discussion of this desire lies at the heart of his accounts of friendship both in the *Tugendlehre* and the *Lectures*. In the *Lectures* there is a passage which more or less formulates the guiding thought of my thesis;

> In ordinary social intercourse and association we do not enter completely into the social relation. The greater part of our disposition is withheld; there is no immediate outpouring of all our feelings, dispositions and judgments. We voice only the judgments that seem advisable in the circumstances. A constraint, a mistrust of others, rests upon all of us, so that we withhold something, concealing our weaknesses to escape contempt ... But if we can free ourselves of this constraint, if we can unburden our heart to another, we achieve complete communion. That this release may be achieved, each of us needs a friend, one in whom we can confide unreservedly ... from whom we can and need hide nothing, to whom we can communicate our whole self. ... We all have a strong impulse to disclose ourselves, and enter wholly into fellowship ... This is the whole end of man, through which he can enjoy his existence.[13]

In the *Tugendlehre*, Kant gives an account in substance identical to the one I just quoted, and then adds that unless one finds a friend to whom one can "reveal himself with complete confidence", one is "completely alone with his thoughts, as in a prison" (p. 587/6:472). Kant says that what nonetheless keeps a person from revealing himself to his friend is the fear that "he would lose something of the other's respect by presenting himself quite candidly to him" (p. 587/6:472). Kant himself does not explicitly identify the desire for openness with love, but the logic of the situation is the same as before, with two forces opposing each other: love, or the desire to *reveal* oneself to the other, and respect, or the desire to *conceal* oneself from the other. As before, Kant chooses respect over love, from the start limiting the openness in friendship by the demands of respect, defining it as "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*" (p. 586/6:471, emphasis added).[14]

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[13] Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 206 f.

[14] In this connexion, Kant says that the openness between friends "is not just an ideal but ... actually exists here and there in its perfection" (p. 587/6:472). This contrasts with his earlier insistence that perfect friendship cannot actually exist, but can only be striven for. I suppose that Kant saw no contradiction here because in the passage just quoted (from §47 in *Tugendlehre*) he speaks of what he calls "moral friendship" whereas earlier (in §46) he talked about friendship "considered in its perfection" (p. 584/6:469). The difference seems to be that while in "perfect" (and impossible) friendship one "burdens [oneself] with the ends of others", making the welfare

I said that Kant chooses respect over love, and it is indeed crucial to realise that while Kant may seem impartial in his view of respect and love, giving both their due, he in fact he looks at the matter from the perspective of respect. From the perspective of love itself, the idea that we would need respect or anything else to limit love makes no sense at all. For lovers (or friends), love is enough, or rather, they desire to love ever more, they feel that they cannot love enough, that there are all kinds of forces at work in them that limit the love, the openness, between them, and they would find absurd the suggestion that there was too much love, or that it needed somehow to be limited.

Kant's ethics is often criticised for being formalistic or intellectualist, failing to taking feelings and emotions seriously. This is in some ways correct, but when it comes to Kant's discussion of friendship the point is rather that Kant feels – note the word! – a need to restrict the free play of feelings by means of a call for respect precisely because he takes feelings so very seriously. He writes:

> Although it is sweet to feel [a] possession of each other that approaches fusion into one person, friendship is something so delicate ... 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 ... rules preventing excessive familiarity and limiting mutual love by requirements of respect. (p. 586/6:471)

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of one's friends one's business, linking one's own happiness to theirs, "merely" moral friendship is *only* about speaking openly with each other (p. 587/6:472). It is, Kant says, "the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other" (p. 586/6:471). Kant says that it is "a heavy fate to feel chained to another's fate and encumbered with his needs" and that therefore "friendship cannot be a union aimed at mutual advantage but must rather be a purely moral one", in which friends should show their "heartfelt benevolence" not so much in doing all they can for each other and sharing their sorrows, as in being "generously concerned with sparing the other his burden and bearing it all by himself, even concealing it altogether from his friend" (p. 586/6:470 f.). As this last quote about concealment should indicate, however, there is a problem (to put it mildly) about thus wanting to limit openness by demanding that it *not* demand anything from one, that it not involve one in the life of one's friend, "chaining" one to his fate. It actually amounts to reducing openness to having *safe* conversations. – It should be noted that the main problem Kant sees in the friends' revealing their neediness to each other seems not really to be that it may be experienced as burdensome to help others, but rather that it is unbearable to *accept* the other's help because in accepting it one loses, Kant thinks, the respect of the other: "if one of [the friends] accepts a favor from the other, then he may well be able to count on equality in love, but not in respect; for he sees himself obviously a step lower in being under obligation without being able to impose obligation in turn" (p. 586/6:471). In the *Lectures* this is expressed more concretely: "A friend who bears my losses becomes my benefactor and puts me in his debt. I feel shy in his presence and cannot look him boldly in the face. The true relationship is cancelled and friendship ceases" (p. 204 f.).

Friendship is, then, something so *delicate* that it cannot survive too much familiarity or too strong expressions of feeling. Kant writes scornfully of "uncultivated people" who "fight and make up", who, that is, are not delicate enough about themselves for an "interruption" to result in a permanent "split" (p. 586/6:471). Such people do not realise, as cultivated people do, that "once respect is violated, its presence within is irretrievably lost" (p. 585/6:470). It seems to me that respect, which sounds like a very stern and even sturdy thing, is actually a virtue for very brittle people; for those who are so delicate that they cannot stand being laughed or even smiled at, found undignified or in some way wanting, even once. It is a virtue for people who are very emotional, and very much afraid of their own emotions; in short, for very touchy people.

I would not deny that we *are* all of us more or less touchy, and so stand in need of the protection against being touched that respect brings. I do not deny that the alternative to respect would often *in fact* be something worse: disrespect, contempt, violations of different kinds. What I insist on is simply that there is a third possibility which lies beyond, or if one likes "before", the contrast respect-disrespect, namely the openness of love, which cannot be understood in the terms of respect, cannot be derived from or limited by it. Often we feel unable to be open with others, but this is a lack in *us*, in you and me, not something attributable to "the human condition" as such, or to some other necessity.

Think here of the way children may sometimes approach a stranger quite openly, trustingly and with a real interest in the other, perhaps asking questions which adults would normally feel it quite inappropriate to ask because they are too "private" or "frank". I would see that as an example of love, and if one says that this kind of approach is "impossible" for adults, then one must ask in what sense that is so? Why is it that children "can" be open like that? Is it because they "don't yet understand how the world works"? Have they then misunderstood something, and do they become wiser when they learn, as most of us do, to be more reserved, more respectful? Is it not rather we who would have something to learn from the children on this point? That is, is it not rather the case that things would be better if we could "become like children" in this regard?

– *Reciprocity* –

The unity of love in friendship is broken up not only by demands for respect, but also by demands to have one's rights or interests taken into account, in which the focus is not on maintaining a certain *respectful spirit*, but rather on *reciprocity*, the *balance of give-and-take* in the relationship.

There is distance and caution, distrust and selfishness, in demands for reciprocity as much as there is in demands for respect. The two may also easily be mixed together, as when a friend says to his flatmate: "You have no respect for me, you let me do all the household chores, but you give me no credit for it, you don't even seem to notice! I will not stand for it, from now on you have to start doing your share around the house!" Here one sees how *paying respect* or *giving credit*, as we aptly say, is considered a transaction which can be written up on the credit-side in a game of *moralised bookkeeping*, where the concern is that there should be a rough balance of give-and-take between the parties, and where doing the household chores (something of plainly practical value) can be exchanged for respect and thanks (which have moral "value").

I would say that the good of friendship and love can be thought of *neither* in terms of reciprocity *nor* egoism *nor* altruism, because in all these ways of thinking – which in their many variations cover most of what passes for moral thinking, from the "lowest" to the "highest" – "my" good is in one way or other opposed to and played out against "yours", which is precisely not the case in friendship. Friendship is, as I tried to explain in Chapter One, and will elaborate on further here, a union in which the distinction between "yours" and "mine" loses its meaning.

It is often taken for granted friendship is by definition a *mutually shared and recognised* attitude, for as Aristotle rhetorically asked, how could we call two people friends, no matter how well-disposed they might be towards each other, if they did not know that the other shared their attitude?[15] It is certainly true and essential that the desire of friendship is the desire for a relationship with another who desires the same relationship; there can be openness between us only if both you and I are open to each other. Nonetheless, it is of course possible, and it happens all the time, that one person desires openness, and in so far as it depends on her *is* open to the other, while the other refuses her invitation to openness. It may concern some relatively isolated matter, as when

[15] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155b30 ff.

one friend wants to ask the other about some incident and the other reacts by turning defensive, or there may be a general reserve, an avoidance or aggression, in one friend's way of responding to the other's approaches. Whatever the case, the other's rejection raises the question how one will react to it.

Thoreau does not hesitate to give *his* answer. He imagines friendship and love – for him the highest forms of love and friendship seem indistinguishable – as an immediate and complete unity of being, a being of one mind which needs no words. "A lover never hears anything that is *told*, for that is commonly either false or stale, but he hears things taking place", Thoreau says; one friend may even say to the other: "I require that thou knowest everything without being told anything."[16] Note that small word: *I require*. Thoreau's whole perspective hinges on it, for if the total but fragile understanding he requires is broken for even one instant, he considers everything ruined: "I parted from my beloved because there was one thing which I had to tell her. She *questioned* me. She should have known all by sympathy. That I had to tell it her was the difference between us, – the misunderstanding...."[17] This is Thoreau's response to a letter from a certain "Friend R----", who complained about not having heard anything from Thoreau for a long time: "I do not feel addressed by this letter of yours. It suggests only misunderstanding. Intercourse may be good: but what use are complaints and apologies? Any complaint *I* have to make is too serious to be uttered, for the evil cannot be mended."[18]

I suppose most readers feel that demanding such complete understanding as Thoreau does is demanding too much; that cutting off a friendship when the first misunderstanding appears is an extreme over-reaction. But an over-reaction is still a reaction of the same kind, in the same direction as, the reaction one feels would be proper, and Thoreau's stance merely gives us the standard view in a more uncompromising form. The standard view is that there are *limits* to everything, so that although friends should of course try to adjust to changes in their own or their friend's interests and aspirations which produce cracks in the shared understanding the friendship has rested on and maintained, they will simply have to go their different ways if the differences prove too great.

This seems to me not just a misunderstanding, but a lie. I do not deny, of course, that it is a *challenge* for friendship if the friends have a hard time

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[16] H. D. Thoreau, *Essays and Other Writings* (London: Walter Scott, n.d.), p. 141.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., p. 252 f.

finding their feet with each other, if they have to struggle to make sense of each other. But from the perspective of friendship this becomes a *problem* only insofar as the difficulties assume the form of a *strained* communication, and difficulties of understanding or even massive disagreements do not by themselves result in that. As long as there really is a struggle to understand, a desire to communicate openly with the other, even great bewilderment in the face of what the other brings forth, fierce gainsaying and severe criticisms do not threaten the friendship, although they obviously make *easy* relations impossible. There is a real problem only if one or both of the friends start to draw back from each other, not voicing their doubts or bewilderment about the views the other has expressed, for instance, but keeping their unease to themselves. The communication gets *strained* precisely because this drawing back is itself noticed, *felt* by the other, even if the exact nature of the reaction which is not openly admitted remains unknown to him. Often, of course, the reaction can be clearly seen, too, as when someone sneers disdainfully at what one has done, but says nothing. It is not that this drawing back of the friends from each other will *create* problems for the friendship; rather, the drawing back *is* the problem.

A lack of openness, a closing of oneself to the other, is always a problem in friendship. However, when one says that there are limits to everything, even in friendship, one wants precisely to reserve a "right" to close oneself to one's friend if one does not like what he does or the direction he changes in. This is of course normally expressed in terms that seemingly have nothing to do with openness – the whole point being to disguise the real character of the difficulty. One will say, for instance, that there must be a rough balance between give and take in our relationships, that our friendships should be, to quote one of the more productive contemporary writers in the philosophy of friendship, "a fair exchange of emotional, moral, and intellectual goods".[19] It will also be said that no one can demand that one should continue to be friendly with someone who does not return one's friendliness. That last claim is undoubtedly true, but who has said that friendship is about what can be *demanded?*

If the idea of friendship as a reciprocal, fair exchange were true, friendship would be just as selfish a business as the *patently* unfriendly calculations of the flattering careerist who is just out to "win friends and influence." *Reciprocity* is just a thinly disguised form of egoism, the egoism

[19] Neera Kapur Badhwar, "Introduction" in Badhwar (ed.), *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 27.

that is not mad enough to want to have or decide *everything*, but is happy to let others have their way or get their share, as long as that does not get too much in one's way or diminish one's own share. The champions of reciprocity are saying, in effect, that we stay together only as long as both of us are satisfied with the bargain, and I am right to dump you, my friend, if I do not get what I want out of associating with you. In a way this sounds eminently reasonable, of course. After all, there is no point in going on with a relationship one feels one gets nothing out of, or in which one feels one is being used, is there? And is not living in relationships precisely about learning to *compromise*, about accepting that if we are to live together we cannot get everything we want?

Well, that is how people think in business and in politics, and if they did not, business or politics as we know them would not exist. The same thinking is formalised in the egalitarian philosophy of autonomy, rights and contracts, that has been the mainstay of political and moral philosophy in modern times, and has become so dominant today that it is less an opinion than the background against which opinions are formed. Naturally, one can also think in the same terms about one's private relationships, and to a greater or lesser extent most of us do. We assume, that is, that what *I* want most, what would make *me* happy, is doing whatever it is I like to do, and for you it is the same; if we are lucky our wishes are not in conflict, so that we can both get what we want. If our wishes conflict we have to *negotiate*, to use a contemporary catch-word, both of us showing *consideration* by considering what the other wants and how we can come to an agreement that will satisfy both of us, instead of just trying by brute force or some sort of manipulation to get our way.

This is an unfriendly way to think about one's friendships, however, because one thinks of one's life and good and freedom as essentially *private property*. One assumes that being free means being free to determine one's life for oneself, *autonomously*; that it means being free *from* others, rather than being free *with* them. Certainly, one insists precisely on the fact that we have to live with others, and therefore have to learn to make compromises, but one takes it for granted that life with others is a matter of having to *sacrifice* some of one's personal freedom and goods in order that life together not become unbearable. One gives up some of what one wants in order not to lose it all in a war of all against all.

One looks, then, on one's good in such a way that giving others a hand or simply doing things with them – talking, dancing, whatever it is – is primarily seen as a regrettable "cost", a sacrifice that must be compensated by one's

getting something out of it for one's own part. What the compensation is may vary: it may be assurance that one will be helped oneself later on, or a piece of interesting information, or a boost to one's vanity, or a feeling of being needed, or whatever. It should be obvious, however, that the logic of this attitude is not less selfish even if the things one is after are in some sense "higher" or "better" than sordid things such as money or flattery. If, by contrast, one is moved by the spirit of friendship, one thinks of one's good primarily as *being with one's friend in friendship*, in the freedom of an unreserved openness, and that clearly is no sacrifice. One will also do what is needed to be able to be with one's friend, and that may involve giving up things one would otherwise like to have (such as, to take a trivial example, the money it costs to go see one's friend abroad), but then one gives them up as naturally as anyone does the things they need to do to get whatever they most want.

I am not saying that a friend will or should always do everything for his friend, should carry all his burdens and pay all his bills. He will do it if he has to, if his friend simply cannot help himself. But in the normal case there is no call for such sacrifices, and friendship is rather characterised by a rough de-facto equality in the sharing of burdens and costs of various kinds. Thus, if I see my friend carrying two heavy shopping bags, I offer to take one of them, not both. Why should I take both, supposing there is no good reason for it, such as his being very frail? I have no reason to want to spare him every least trouble: why should I want that? I simply want to help him with his load, and I do. In the same way, if he has bought me some drinks, I will probably buy him some; I do not want him to pay for everything, for he needs his money as much as I need mine.

But perhaps he has much more money than I? That is neither here nor there, as long as I have enough money to buy some rounds too. But perhaps he has money, while I have none? In that case, if we are good friends, it will not be a problem for him *or* for me to let him pay for the night out; we are having a good time, I do not want to leave and he does not want me to leave, so why should he not pay for both of us? He will not feel that this *entitles* him to *demand* anything from me in return, nor do I feel *obliged* to pay him back, or bound by any "debt of gratitude". Certainly, if next week the situation is reversed, and I have money while he has none, I will pay for him. Not, however, because I *owed* it to him, but because I *want* to, just as he wanted to pay my bill the week before. To be exact – for obviously no one *wants* to pay bills as such – he wanted *me to stay*, and so he paid my bill.

It might be said that I am simply repeating what no one denies, that as long as there is a rough balance of give-and-take, everyone is happy, and there is no problem; strains appear only when one of the friends is no longer in a position to give as much as he takes. It will probably also be said that if we are tempted to think that friendship is not subject to the logic of fair exchange, it is precisely because the fairness tends to take care of itself, without anyone having to worry about it, so that it *looks* as though no one engaged in any "bookkeeping". The point would be, as Lorraine Smith Pangle says, that "when all is going well, the claims of justice are so overlaid with generosity that no one seems to be thinking about justice at all"; it is only

> when difficulties and conflicts arise that we feel the force of our friend's claims upon us, and it is when they let us down that we realise we have all along been assuming ourselves to have claims upon them, claims of justice that are not less but greater the stronger the love between us has been, and the more selflessly we have given in the past. /.../ Perhaps it is only the small change that is ever really forgotten, and perhaps even then, the fact that it was forgotten is not forgotten and can generate claims of its own.[20]

I am not sure whether the irony of the last sentence is intentional, at any rate it is very revealing. The point would be that nothing *is* ever really forgotten, it is just that claims do not need be stated if they are met anyway. This would clearly mean, however, that what appears to be friendly generosity is really no such thing, that what we give each other are not the free gifts we pretend they are but in fact, as Aristotle remarks, just disguised loans.[21]

My point is precisely that this need *not* be the case. It is perfectly possible that no such demands are aired even in the most extreme situations, for instance when a friend's desperate circumstances demand that one make great sacrifices in order to help him, just as it is perfectly possible that there were no such unspoken demands in the everyday situations, but simply a desire to be with the other, and *therefore* also to help if the other needed it. Insofar as both friends feel this way, they will adopt a very matter of fact-attitude towards questions such as who pays for drinks: these are simply practicalities to be arranged in the most convenient manner. There may arise questions about how much to spend on drinks rather than on something else, just as they may arise if one is out

[20] Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 80.
[21] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1162b30–35.

drinking all alone, but the point is that the question of who spends whose money will not introduce any particular problems or embarrassments.

The point is not that a friend would accept that his friend uses him; it is rather that he will not think he is being *used* in situations in which a person caught up in selfishness would think so. As soon as the thought that one is being used makes itself felt, it indicates that a *self-centredness* has crept into the relationship, either from one's own side, from the side of one's friend or from both sides. One friend perhaps starts thinking about the nice things *he* could do with his money, instead of spending them on paying for his friend's drinks. This may be a very natural thought, but it indicates that being with his friend has come to seem less important to him than doing something on his own, and so it is not an innocent thought at all. The matter certainly cannot be described as a "purely economic" one. An example of something that really is a purely economic matter, precisely *because* it indicates no strain in the relationship between people, would be two friends who decide to leave the pub and go home to have more, but less expensive, drinks.

Note that the self-centredness may also be revealed in the much nobler thought or fear one of the friends may have, that she would be acting selfishly, would be imposing an unfair burden on her friend, if she let him pay for her drinks. For his part, her friend might in fact feel that it was "a bit much" that he should pay for all the drinks; if so, it means that the problem is his selfishness, his small-mindedness. Naturally, this is not to say that unwillingness to pay for more drinks is necessarily selfish as such, for there are perfectly good, unselfish reasons for not wanting to spend all one's money on drinks – the need to save some money for the rent, say. The selfishness appears only in one's not wanting to pay for one's *friend's* drinks, in the indignant thought "Why should *I* pay for *him*?" Again, it is also possible that the self-centredness comes in precisely in one's suspicion that one's friend *would* feel imposed upon by having to pay for more drinks, whereas she, noticing one's awkwardness, might say "But of course I will pay, how could you ever think that I would not?"

Montaigne is perhaps the writer on friendship who has most forcefully rejected the logic of fair exchange. He says that in true friendship the "services and good turns" which strengthen other kinds of relationship "do not even merit being taken into account",

> For just as the friendly love I feel for myself is not increased ... by any help I give myself in my need, and just as I feel no gratitude for any good turn I do to myself; so too the union of ... friends ... leads them to lose any awareness

> of such services, to hate and to drive out from between them all terms of division and difference, such as good turn, duty, gratitude, request, thanks and the like. Everything is genuinely common to them both: their wills, goods ... honour and lives; their correspondence is that of one soul in bodies twain ... so they can neither lend nor give anything to each other ... there is nothing to divide or to split up between them.[22]

This is not to say that there is some sort of total fusion or confusion of the identities of the friends. As I have said before, you and I do not disappear in the openness of friendship, but on the contrary it is only in this openness in which we hold nothing back that we become fully ourselves. Kierkegaard expresses it quite exactly when he says that in love "there are a *you* and an *I* and yet no *mine* and *yours*", for "without *you* and *I* there is no love, and with *mine* and *yours* there is no love."[23]

The friend says "What is mine is yours", and actually means it. She is constantly giving away what is hers, and moreover giving it away in such a way that no trace remains of it having once been hers, of her having given it away. The point is not, absurdly, that she suffers from some sort of amnesia, that she somehow manages to forget that the book she just gave you belonged to her and that she gave it to you, for example. The point is rather that when she gives you a gift it really is a gift, that is, a thing to the giving of which *no strings are attached*. This means that she will not, if she does not fall away from openness, remind you later on of the fact that she gave you that book, letting you understand that she expects something in return from you. It is not that she does not remember what she gave you for your birthday; the point is only that she is not inclined to make that resentful comparison between what she gave and what she got. That shows that what she gave you really was a gift, whereas often we are just engaged in an informal kind of exchange.

The radical, anarchic character of the abolition of "yours" and "mine" in friendship is not to be denied: in one stroke, it makes an end of what normally passes for moral thinking, insofar as in that thinking we are concerned precisely

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[22] Montaigne, *On Friendship*. Translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 13. – Montaigne actually says: "Everything is genuinely common to them both: their wills, goods, *wives, children*, honour and lives..." But human beings cannot of course *belong* to anyone as external goods can, and so their being "common" to two friends must be understood – regardless of how Montaigne may have understood it – in terms of *their loving the people their friend loves*. If someone is upset by Montaigne's apparent claim that someone else could have a right to *his* wife, he should stop to consider that he himself has no such *right* to her; she belongs neither to him nor to anyone else.

[23] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love.* Translated by Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 248.

with who has a "right" to what, who "owes" what to whom, who is in a position to "demand" what from whom, who should "pay" whom for this or "thank" them for that, and so on. It is striking how much of our moral life is governed by this quasi-economic thinking in terms of "debts", "payments" and "performances" by which a certain moral "balance" of "give-and-take" is to be achieved and maintained. In view of this, it was not so far-fetched for Nietzsche to aver that our moral thinking may originally have come from the economic sphere.[24] This is putting the cart before the horse, however, because the idea of something being an "economic transaction" at all presupposes that one views one's relationship with the person of group one is dealing with in a *particular* moral light, a light that makes one demand something in return for what one does for them. But it is not self-evident at all that one should demand anything: one might simply give someone a helping hand, for instance, or invite them to share one's dinner, without thinking that one should be compensated for it. That *is* how we treat each other, insofar as we are moved by the spirit of friendship.[25]

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[24] Cf. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Essay II, §§ 4 ff., especially §§ 6 and 8.

[25] Derrida, in his writings on "the logic of the gift" – cf. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) – makes much, as is his habit, of the paradoxes and aporias opened up by the play between different perspectives or language-games, in this case that of exchange or or "economy", where the distinction between "yours" and "mine" reigns supreme, and that of the gift, where that distinction is abolished, as it always is in love's unity. Derrida plays skillfully with the impossibilities created by looking at the world of exchange from a point outside it, but he appears not to want to say anything in positive terms about the point from which he is looking at things. I would say that it is only because we are not stranger's to love's unity that Derrida or anyone else can see the moral paradoxes of the "economic" way of thinking. Derrida, however, prefers to focus on how, by looking at the gift from the perspective of exchange and vice versa, *both* appear *impossible*. In saying this, I am actually repeating my basic criticism of Derrida's play with the concept of a friendship as "a community without community" above. It should go without saying, however, that Derrida's understanding of the economic perspective is far superior in sophistication to that of the naive proponents of an "economic" morality of "like for like", who see no problems in it at all (and that includes most moral philosophers, unfortunately). – In the context of critiques of "economic" modes of thinking about morality and human relations, one might also discuss Nietzsche's notion of a "gift-giving virtue", and Bataille's critique of "economic reason", both of which have a more positive, constructive aspect than Derrida's deconstructive work. I will not go into these questions here, however. A final point to note is that the teachings of Jesus are of course saturated by an anti-economic way of thinking which has no doubt inspired most later critiques of the logic of exchange. I will return intermittently to the teachings of the Gospels throughout this chapter and those that follow.

– *The demanding spirit* –

In *demanding* things, in raising *claims*, pressing one's presumed *rights*, one uses *force*, be it of a "moralised" kind, and the use of force does not belong in friendship. One obviously cannot get another's friendship by force, just as out of friendship one cannot want to force another to do anything. Friendship cannot be demanded, it can only be given and received as the gift it is. Whenever a *demanding spirit* makes itself felt between friends this shows a problem in their friendship, and this is so even if no demands are explicitly made but are just felt to be there, if one simply feels one "must" do something because one's friend would be terribly disappointed, would feel betrayed, if one did not. The problem is still there, even if one does not feel that it is one's friend who demands anything from one, but rather one demands something from oneself as a friend, for the problem lies not in *who* does the demanding, nor in *what* specifically is demanded, but in the demanding spirit itself. Whether I say "*If* you are my friend, you will..." or you say "Since I am your friend, I *must*..." we take the name of friendship in vain, we make it an instrument of power rather than a gift given in freedom.

When the demanding spirit turns outward, to the friends' relations with others, it will demand *loyalty*. I will discuss the problems that this introduces in Chapter Three. When the demanding spirit looks inward it will demand that one be a "faithful" friend and not break the other's "trust". Trust and fidelity do belong to friendship, but as soon as they are thought of in a demanding spirit, they are turned into something very unfriendly. Then, fidelity is taken to be essentially a matter of one's not disappointing the *legitimate expectations* one's friends have built up in the course of a shared history. The trust of friendship is understood, correspondingly, as the trust that one's friends will not disappoint one's own legitimate expectations. On this view, to describe a relationship as trust is, as Olli Lagerspetz puts it, "*to make a statement about what a person has a right to expect, even require, from us*", so that if I say I trust my friend, I imply that "our relation is such that I am in a position to require that [my expectations of good-will be respected]".[26] Normally, such requirements and expectations are not explicitly formulated in advance; rather, one realises, as concrete and perhaps quite unexpected situations arise, that a certain course of action would constitute a breach of trust; or one's disappointment, one's feeling

[26] Lagerspetz, *Trust*: *The Tacit Demand* (Dodrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 81 f.

betrayed and "insulted by betrayal", reveals to one that one had trusted others not to do what they did.[27]

The fact that I acknowledge your "right to expect, even require" something from me "binds" me to you.[28] What I may *want* is irrelevant, for you have the *right* to expect a certain behaviour from me. That right of yours comes from the past: because *these* things happened, or because you did *that*, I am now bound to do *this*. Our past would, then, determine our future, and fidelity would essentially be *accepted unfreedom*. This whole way of looking at things, in which the friends' past would in a manner constantly blackmail them to do what they would rather not do, seems absurd to me. Fidelity and trust are not about unfreedom but about freedom; not about what we *have* to do but about what we *want* to do; not about the power of the past but about openness to a future together. The love of friendship lays no burdens on us. For how could it be a *burden* to *love* someone, how could love limit one's freedom?[29] And how could loving someone entail a will to bind them to oneself, limiting their life, making them unfree? The idea is absurd.

Naturally, I do not deny that all sorts of expectations, legitimate and illegitimate, articulate and inarticulate, conscious and unconscious, arise between friends, as they arise in every relationship. But the point is that friendship itself, with its trust and fidelity, is something different from all these expectations that arise and pass within the relationship; it is not their sum and they are not what keeps it in existence. Neither is it the friendship as such that gives rise to these expectations; instead, the openness of friendship will change the friends' attitude to them, in a certain sense relativising their importance.

Suppose, to take a quite banal example, that you agree to go on a trip with your friend, but then something makes you not want to go after all. It might be said that a promise is a promise, that you have undertaken an obligation to go, and that is that. Perhaps, but let us ask what would make the keeping, or indeed the making of such a promise an expression of *friendship*? It seems that your promise can be such an expression only insofar as you were being open with your friend in making it. In the context of our example, your being open would imply that you really wanted to go on the trip with your

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[27] Cf. Lagerspetz, p. 20 ff. on realising only "posthumously" that one trusted. The quote about the insult is from p. 81.
[28] Lagerspetz, p. 81.
[29] Cf. Kierkegaard's astonished response to the idea that if someone changes for the worse one is exempted from loving him: "What a confusion in language: to be exempt – from loving – as if it were a matter of compulsion, a burden one wished to cast away!" (*Works of Love*, p. 169).

friend in the first place, and were not just being polite, or trying to please her, or get peace from her entreaties ("OK, I *will* come") or some other such thing. Even if some such thing was the case, your promise would of course still be a promise, and your friend might be quite confident that you will keep it. She might, for instance, know full well that she had provoked your promise by her nagging, and that really she would have no right to be angry with you if you called it off, but she also knows that you are too stubborn or proud not to keep your word once you have given it. Obviously, if under these circumstances she "trusts" you to keep your promise it has nothing to do with the trust of friendship, just as your keeping it has nothing to do with fidelity to her. You are "true" to *your word*, not to her, as one might put it.

It may also be the case that your friend feels that since you promised, she has a *right* to expect that you turn up regardless of why you promised in the first place or how you feel about it now. Such an attitude is obviously a form of extortion, working with moral weapons rather than guns, but no better – in a way almost worse – for that. There might of course, in a particular case, be practical considerations that make a friend insist that her friend should do what she promised to do, but insofar as her insistence was not contrary to the spirit of friendship, these considerations would really be *practical*, not "moral". The point would not be that because a promise was made she had a *right* to expect something from her friend, but that in fact she *did* expect that he would do what he said he would, and if he now does not, she will be in trouble. The appeal "So please, do it", is a friendly one precisely to the extent that it does *not* play on the fact that this thing was *promised*, but rather simply points to the unfortunate consequences of not doing it; the force of this appeal is no greater and no less than the force of any other request. A friend does what her friend asks her to, not because she had promised to, but because her friend needed her to do it.

My point is not, naturally, that it is alright for friends to "promise" each other things without the slightest intention of keeping their "promises". It is no part of openness to deceive others, or to talk idly; being open means, on the contrary, that one means what one says, that one speaks truly – for instance that one does not make half-hearted promises or promises one feels forced to make. The point is simply that if things come up that make one want to change one's plans, one will not hesitate to tell one's friend that one wants to call the thing off – as out of politeness one often does with others. This lack of hesitation is also part of openness. But of course, if it turns out that it is more important than one had realised to one's friend that one stick to plan, then one will do so, for

one does not want to leave one's friend in the lurch. That too, is part of openness. In all of this there is, however, no reference to what one friend has "a right to expect" from the other, there is just the attempt to arrange things for the best for everyone. "You got me into this, now you get me out!" and "You got yourself into this, so you get yourself out!" are no part of a friend's speech, for in friendship there is no "yours" and "mine", there is just our life together.

If my friend does not come to a meeting we agreed to, I will not react with indignation, I will wonder what happened to her. I will worry, or think that she must have been delayed by some important business, or perhaps think, with gladness, that she has probably stumbled across some good thing, an unexpected party, say, that explains her not being here with me. If this last option sound outrageous, irresponsible, that is an indication, it seems to me, of the small-mindedness characteristic of much of our life, which makes us ready to sacrifice *joy* instantly if threatened with an accusation of "irresponsibility".

But, it will be asked, what if my friend has *really* acted irresponsibly, that is, callously? What if she just "forgot" about me as soon as some small amusement came up? That is possible, of course, and it is not a friendly thing to do. My claim is certainly not that friends would or should accept everything from their friend, that however callously one's friend acts, one should accept it in the name of friendship. That idea is obviously corrupt and absurd, although the champions of loyalty do to some degree or other make it in regard to the callousness one's friends may show *others*; in such cases, the claim goes, loyalty demands that we should refrain from reproaching our friends.[30] But it is no part of friendship to accept callousness in any form from one's friends, either towards others *or* oneself.

So I agree with the champions of reciprocity, and others who speak of friendship in a demanding spirit, that there are indeed things friends cannot and should not accept from their friends, but I disagree about the sense in which this is so. First of all, it cannot, as the idea that there are limits to everything tends to suggest, be a matter of *more or less*, of determining, whether through some sort of balanced judgment or a gut-reaction, that things have reached a point at which the friend's behaviour is simply too much to accept. Of course we often say things like "I could accept that you would disappoint me one and even two times, but this is the third time, and that is one too many" or "One doesn't have

[30] It will no doubt be said that this is not necessarily implied by a defence of loyalty, that it is, on the contrary, a corrupt conception of loyalty. I disagree; I think that the very concept of loyalty is corrupt. I will return to this question in the next chapter.

to agree about everything, but with him I disagree all the time, so there is no point in our really talking about anything". But we need to ask what the significance is of such statements.

If they really say what they seem to say, that one can accept a little bit of something one does not like – disappointment or disagreement – but at some point one feels it is not worth it, then we merely have an expression of arbitrary preference. Why not accept a bit more, or a bit less? Or on the other hand, why accept any of it at all, why not take Thoreau's line and cut friendship off as soon as the least crack appears in the complete agreement one demands? "Well, that would simply be demanding too much; life is full of compromises, and it is childish to think that one could have everything one wishes for." This sounds reasonable, perhaps, but note that it assumes that being full of demands is no problem as such; one only has to accept – wisely? sadly? magnanimously? – that life will not grant them all. This is no small assumption to make.

It may also be the case, however, that what seems to be an arbitrary complaint about there simply being "too much" disappointment or disagreement, for instance, is in fact a confused way of trying to express something quite different, namely a dawning sense of the *character* of a friend's attitude. Thus, you may feel that the character of your friend's disagreements with you have changed; it is not just that there are now more of them than before, but that he seems to *want* to pick a quarrel with you, that there is meanness or spite in his wish to disagree – and of course it may also happen that you have to admit to such a character in your own disagreements with him. In the same way, the fact that your friend has repeatedly let you down in some connexion may be explained by similar strains in your relationship.

The essential point is that what is at stake are *qualitative* or categorical differences, not quantitative ones. It is not as though a little disagreement or callousness was alright, but too much of it was unacceptable. The point is rather that *any* amount of callousness is too much, while disagreement as such may be either good, bad or indifferent, depending on its character, on what it arises from, what it is about, and what are the attitudes in play. This point about the non-quantitative character of moral distinctions is so far merely formal, however: the question is *what* the qualitative difference is that makes the difference in terms of friendship or love. What is it that love cannot accept?

Love accepts, and not only accepts but takes joy in, everything except one thing: lovelessness. This is what we always need to keep clearly in view. In

terms of the difficulties we experience in our friendships, this appears as the distinction between those difficulties that are due to one's having particular wishes and expectations which one's friend does not answer, perhaps because she does not share one's most cherished opinions or does not spontaneously like the same things as oneself, and those that are due to *her* closing herself, treating one in an unfriendly, cold way.

Difficulties of the first kind reveal what Kierkegaard calls one's "fastidiousness",[31] that is, one's *lack* of friendship or love, and in regard to them what one is called upon to do is not to try to change one's friend so that she suits one's taste better, or to exchange her for someone who does, but rather to *change oneself*, to rid oneself of one's fastidiousness, to open oneself to one's friend instead of rejecting her in dismay, disgust, irritation. In regard to difficulties of the second kind, however, there can be no question of trying to change oneself so that one would be able to affirm or even accept the unfriendliness of one's friend; that would mean betraying friendship rather than affirming it. If you try to hurt or bully me, or even just start avoiding me, and I let you have your way, I am not acting as a *friend* would, I am letting our friendship go to waste.

In a sense there is only *one* difficulty in friendship, which can be seen from two sides. The trouble is *always* fastidiousness, in the general and perhaps rather stretched sense of a feeling that the other is not the way she should be for one to be willing to open oneself to her in friendship. The alternative is, simply, love or fastidiousness, openness or closure. If I am being fastidious, and my friend is not, then while I simply feel uncomfortable in her company because she is not the way I would want her to be, she will experience my fastidiousness as what it is: an unfriendliness, a rejection of her. So what is for me a difficulty of the first kind – for instance, my being irritated with her for asking too many question – is for her a difficulty of the second kind; she sees my irritation as a defensive measure revealing my unwillingness to speak truthfully with her about some matter, for instance.

The point is not, then, that there are "limits" to how "much" one should accept from, or is able to love in, a friend; as I said, the issue is not a matter of degree at all. What I am called upon to do is to root out my fastidiousness *completely*, for only insofar as that happens can I wholeheartedly say to my friend: "I want to be with you, I want to know you." But at the same time I must

[31] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* p. 161 ff.

refuse just as completely to accept any unfriendliness in my friend – although not in the manner of Thoreau, by breaking up our friendship at the first sign of trouble, but rather by *confronting* my friend when trouble appears, instead of glibly, listlessly, out of fear or pride or a desire for comfort, letting her walk or drift away from me. These are not two different things, but two aspects of the same categorical refusal to accept any unfriendliness between us, whether it have its origin in me or in my friend. And that refusal is not primarily something I "must" do or even something I am "called upon to do"; rather, it is what the spirit of friendship "works in me", insofar as it is indeed in me.

I have been claiming that friendship opens a dimension beyond that in which demands are raised, reciprocity expected and rights insisted on; where one sets oneself apart from the other person, treating her in effect not as a friend but a stranger, someone on whom one uses "moralised" force to get her to do what one wants. The spirit of friendship, by contrast, moves beyond the sphere of force and power altogether. I am not saying that we do not *in fact need* to use such moralised force in our friendships; we obviously often do need to remind our friends of our rights, and ourselves of our obligations to them. What I am saying is that the need we feel for this does not come from friendship itself but from the *weakness* of *our* friendship, from the fact that we are indeed not only moved by the spirit of friendship but also by all kinds of other "spirits".

While the appeal to rights may be the best we can come up with to deal with a situation of conflict, the fact that rights are needed indicates a shortcoming, a lack of love, in at least one party to the conflict, and often in all parties to it. And as we will see later on in this chapter, there *are* other ways to respond to such conflicts. The *friendly* reaction to a friend's having used one or treated one badly in some other way is not moral indignation, but sadness and/or anger; an anger that is the first step on the road to forgiveness and reconciliation. It is never out of friendship that one insists on one's rights.[32]

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[32] Neera Kapur Badhwar suggests that, contrary to what I imply, we need to contrast *demands* and *rights*, and that although "the language of demands" is indeed "peculiarly ill-suited to friendship", rights *do* belong in friendship, the point being that "some things to which we have a right are things which we *cannot* get in response to a demand – 'cannot' in the sense that, if it is only the demand that brings the response, what we get is not after all what we had a right to" ("Introduction", p. 27). For example, Badhwar says, "I have a right to expect that my friend give me more of her time than she gives mere acquaintances, but to get this time as the result of a demand would be self-defeating. For what I really want, and have a right to expect, is not simply that she give me more of her time, but that she do so *because she wants to.* And this is not something I can get simply as the result of a demand. Friendship necessarily involves rights and justice, but rights may be expressed – and pressed – in different ways: sometimes as demands ... but typically in friendship merely as reminders of legitimate expectations" (ibid.). I agree that we

– *Beyond gratitude?* –

In the passage I quoted about the way friendship abolishes "yours" and "mine", Montaigne claimed that even "gratitude" and "thanks" are among the "terms of division and difference" which friends know nothing of.[33] This suggestion probably sounds outrageous, or perhaps just confused. But consider a very simple example: I realise when I am about to pay for my groceries that I am a little short of money; to my surprise a stranger standing behind me in the queue gives me the money I need. I am very grateful: to think that he helped me out, just like that, a total stranger! If I had gone shopping with a friend, by contrast, I would not have hesitated to ask him to give me the small sum I needed, and I would not have felt grateful to him for giving it to me; I would have taken it as a matter of course. Is it not obvious that the fact that this sort of thing occasions no gratitude among friends is not a *problem* in their relationship, but precisely an indication of how *good* things are between them? The point about gratitude would be, then, that the more goodness we expect from one another, the better, and the *less* room there will be for gratitude, because we feel grateful only for goodness we did not expect.

Someone might agree that we feel grateful to strangers for doing us good turns we take it for granted friends would do – that much is indeed obvious – but object that this is not, as I claimed, because we "expect more goodness" from friends; *goodness* does not come into it at all, for friends just help each other out as "a matter of course", as I put it. That they do so may show that *things are good between them*, but it certainly does not show that the friends are particularly good people. The stranger, on the other hand, showed goodness precisely insofar as what he did could not be expected as a matter of course, and gratitude *is* the natural response to goodness.

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cannot get friendship in response to a demand, but I can make no sense of the contrast Badhwar is proposing, for I do not see how reminding one's friend of one's "legitimate expectations" would be any different in principle from asserting one's rights in the most aggressive manner (Badhwar even speaks of "pressing" one's rights in the former case, too). As far as I can see, the contrast here can at most be one of psychological tactics, the question being how to get what we feel we are entitled to. That question has, as far as I can see, no philosophical or moral interest.

[33] Montaigne, *On Friendship*, p. 13.

I do not think this is right. There is indeed, as we shall see, a sense in which goodness is never just "a matter of course", but this does not mean that goodness must be unexpected, or that one must react to it by feeling gratitude. Rather than responding directly to the objection – I will return to it in a minute – I would like to move to another example, however.

Suppose you arrange a party for your friends. Something is evidently wrong if it is more important to you that your friends attend to the fact that *you* are the one who organised the party and thank you for it, than that they have a good time, rejoicing in each other's company. You might say the *most* important thing is of course that they have a good time, but admit that you also would feel disappointed if they did not somehow thank you for arranging the party. But why would you feel disappointed? Is it not the case that your need to be thanked for arranging the party will decrease the more you yourself enjoy the party? If you really have a good time, if you really open up to the goodness of partying with your friends, you could not care less whether or not anyone thanks you for arranging the party. Arrangements are something you worry about beforehand, but once you actually get into the festive spirit, that part does not interest you in the least: what interests you are the people at the party.

And is not exactly the same thing true of the guests: the more they enjoy each other's company, the less they will feel that they should thank you for throwing the party. This does not mean that they somehow *disregard* or *neglect* you, it only means that they do not give you a particular *kind* of attention: the grateful attention given by guests to their host. And is it not in fact only at boring parties, at "parties" in name only where people remain at a respectful distance from each other, that there is never any doubt about who are guests and who is the host? If the party is a joyous one, the distinction between host and guests loses its importance, just as the arrangements lose their interest, because everyone is so glad to be there partying with their friends – and even if they did not know each other before, the festive spirit *makes* them friends. You, the host, are just one of the friends: no one treats you any different from the guests. It may seem that this indicates some sort of disregard: are not your guests somehow making light of your efforts as host by treating you as "just" one of them, as one of the friends? But again, that is only how it will seem to you if you yourself do not enter into the joy of the party. If you do, you will feel that it is incomparably better to be one of the friends than to be that lonely character: the host.

I am not saying that if the party is a good one, the guests will not thank you for arranging it. However, might they not do it in a spirit which was itself

an expression of the same joy in being together with you *and* the others that they felt at the party? It would not be a "Thank you" followed by "...how can I (ever) repay you?" or even "...and next time it is my turn to be the host", but rather by "...we had such a good time, we must do this again!" If one wishes to call this kind of thanking an expression of gratitude, too, I have no objection, as long as we are clear that the spirit of this kind of gratitude is indistinguishable from the joy in being together with others that belongs to friendship. I am not quibbling about *words*, I am trying to indicate a difference between two kinds of spirit, and for the purposes of this discussion I will refer to only one of them, the one that is obviously *not* identical with joy, as gratitude.

A fundamental difference between gratitude and the joyful reaction to goodness shown, is that while gratitude is focused on one's benefactor, or on the relationship between him and oneself established through his generosity, the joy is, like everything that manifests the spirit of friendship, *open*; while not forgetting the benefactor, it does not focus on him or on "us" to the exclusion of anyone else. This difference comes out in the fact that while I can of course invite others to agree that what you did for me was a fine thing and deserving of gratitude, I cannot invite anyone to share my gratitude, nor extend my gratitude to others than you: *you* did this for me, and it is *you* I feel grateful to. If, by contrast, I react to what you did simply by feeling glad for and warmed by it, my good feeling is not limited to you but opens me to others.[34]

It will probably be said that my discussion is lopsided because I chose a party as my example. The point, it may be said, is that gratitude is appropriate precisely or at least primarily in cases where someone does something for you that *they* could not enjoy, as pone can enjoy being part of the fun at one's party. We should think rather of cases where someone has to give up something for you, where she does something laborious or irksome or unpleasant or just plain boring for you: then there can surely be no question of her "entering into joy", and precisely for that reason you should be grateful that she nonetheless did this thing for you.

I do not think this is right – I will explain why in a minute – but it does alert us to the crucial point that I can only be grateful for what my friend has *done for me*; not for her simply being there and wanting to share her life with me. For

[34] The gratitude I feel towards you may of course be extended to people who have some special connexion with you; your children, whom I may feel that my debt of gratitude to you obliges me to help, for instance. But the decisive thing is that your children come into it because they are *yours*.

that I can only be glad, not grateful. If I am grateful to you for a talk we had, for instance, I focus on what the talk *did for me*, or on what you did for me in talking to me in this way: perhaps you managed to cheer me up, or to set me straight on some issue, or you just sat there listening, allowing me to spill my heart on some issue, or whatever. But this implies that the talk was *not* really a good, open, friendly one, or at least I do not look back on it in that spirit now, for if I did, I would not think that you were there *doing something for me*; rather, I would feel we were both opening up to each other in speaking and in listening.

If I feel I had a good talk with my friend – which does not necessarily mean an enjoyable talk: it might have been a very upsetting talk, and even in the cases where it might sound like just an enjoyable talk, it means something much more than that – I would never think of thanking her for it, for my feeling that it was good *is* essentially a feeling that it was as good for her as for me, that she "got" as much from it as I did. Obviously, that does not mean that I have somehow compared what she got and what I got from the talk and found out that we both got just as much: the point is rather that I feel that we were open to each other and were united in the talk; its goodness consisted precisely in the fact that it was *not* me sitting over here with my private thoughts and her sitting over there with hers, each getting this or that from our exchange.

Even in cases where you are really doing something *for* me in the sense that what you do is not as such something we are united in – and such cases of course exist – gratitude is not the only possible reaction. We already had an example of this in the situation at the grocery store: my friend giving me the money I need to pay for the groceries is not something that unites us in the way a good talk does; rather, my friend is seeing to it that we get this practicality with the payment out of the way so that we can go on talking, or whatever it is we do together. In not being grateful, I let the practicality remain a practicality, that is, something essentially insignificant. Feeling grateful would have focused my attention on the practicality you took care of for me, and on your person as the one who did it, and so would have taken it off the openness we had entered into in our talk.

By contrast, when the stranger paid for my groceries, his action did not in this way interrupt anything we already had going between us; on the contrary, by unexpectedly helping me out, he stepped out of the anonymity of being just a fellow-customer and made personal contact with me; maybe I had not even noticed he was standing there before he offered to help me with the money. This being so, I could not react to what he did in the same matter-of-fact kind of

way that I react to my friend's paying for me. This does not have to mean, however, that I feel grateful to the stranger; the point is simply that whereas I am already in conversation with my friend, and so need not pay any particular attention to the transaction with the money, the stranger's offering to give me the money I need is in itself his way of opening a conversation between us. To be exact: it is that insofar as there is goodness in his giving me the money I need – for he might also have given it to me in an irritated manner, for instance, just in order to get the queue moving, to get me out of his way.

Insofar as there is goodness in what the stranger did, this means, again, that his action does not focus attention on the money he gave me, but rather flows from his openness to me, his having *seen* me, as one might put it. He did not just see my *need*, he saw *me*, and *therefore* also my need. And his having seen me, in the sense in which goodness can be said to consist in seeing someone, *means* that his interest in, or responsiveness to, me is not limited to this or that particular thing, for instance to helping me out with money, but is rather of that all-embracing, but not at all vague, kind that I have been calling a desire for the other.

Suppose I react with gratitude to the stranger. Insofar as this is a different reaction from my just gladly, openly turning to him, the way he turned to me in helping me; insofar as there is in it an element of my feeling *obliged* to the stranger for what he did for me, it seems that *in my very gratitude* I in a certain sense *reject and undo* the goodness I react to – at least I dare not fully open myself to it. Let me explain what I mean. Anyone will admit that insofar as the stranger really was good to me, he did not want to bind me to himself in any way, and he did not feel that what he did for me in fact bound me to anything; it is obvious that *if* someone does me good demanding, frankly or secretly, that I thank him for it, the "goodness" of his action evaporates and we are left with a quasi-commercial transaction in which he trades his help for my thanks.

This may seem to lead to a kind of paradox of gratitude: as soon as one demands gratitude, or even just thinks one deserves it, one does *not* deserve it anymore – but as long as one does *not* think that one deserves it, one *does* deserve it, and the person one benefited will actually, if there is nothing wrong with her, feel grateful, feel bound to her benefactor in gratitude. As Rousseau says: "The heart receives laws only from itself. By wanting to enchain it, one releases it, one enchains it by leaving it free."[35] This account is untenable,

[35] Rousseau, *Emile or On Education.* Translated by Allan Bloom (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 234.

however, for what Rousseau points to is not just an apparent, merely verbal paradox, but a real contradiction between the goodness of the benefactor and the reaction of gratitude it calls forth; a contradiction arising from a refusal to receive the gift in the spirit in which it is given. In my gratitude I am responding to the stranger's open turning to me, in which he precisely does *not* want to bind me to himself, by binding myself to him in gratitude, putting myself in a "debt" of gratitude to him. When Nietzsche said that it is "the nature of human gratitude" to "*misunderstand* its benefactors",[36] he might have been more right than he knew.

Does not the gratitude I feel to the stranger in fact show that I lack faith in his goodness, that I cannot really *believe* that he was so good to me, although I must confess that it seems he was? What I cannot believe may be that *anyone* could be so good, or that *he* could be so good, or that anyone could be so good to *me*, or that *he* could be so good to *me*. Whatever the case, the point is that what is expressed in gratitude is this wavering between belief and disbelief, this "Is it true? It cannot be! But it is! But how can it be?" If I really had faith in the other's goodness, or rather, faith in goodness between us, which includes me as well as him, I would not waver, I would simply accept the goodness he showed me as the gift it is, *without gratitude* – which, again, is not to say *ungratefully*.

Note also that it would be priggish condescension – that is, not genuine gratitude at all – if I felt very grateful to the stranger for helping me out, while thinking that *I* would *of course* have given some money to him if he had needed it; I would in effect be saying that I was pleasantly surprised that someone else lived up to my high moral standards. And so if my gratitude is to be genuine, it seems to imply that I am not at all sure that I would have acted as kindly as the stranger did, or perhaps I am certain that I would not have done so. My gratitude would not, then, just show how little I expected from the other person: it also reveals how little I expect from myself in the way of goodness. And could one not, in that case, see gratitude as akin to, or as a form of, *feeling guilty*? My reaction of surprise at the goodness another shows me reveals my own lack of goodness, and makes me feel guilty. If this is so, then one might, on the other hand, see and experience gratitude as a kind of *remorseful confession* of one's own sinfulness, and to this extent as something good.

Be that as it may, someone may object that, regardless of the variations I have introduced, the grocery store example in its banality only depicts *one* kind

[36] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 108.

of case. It is different in cases where one really makes a *sacrifice* for one's friend. This seems to me obviously a case of believing, confusedly, that a mere change in quantity could create a change in quality – but let us look into it. Suppose, then, that you work as an accountant and I need a lot of help with the books of my small company, but lack the money to pay for your services. You help me anyway, because you are my friend, slaving away at the books for many a late night. Would it not be very ungrateful of me not to be grateful to you for doing this? Well, I would certainly be very glad that you did this for me, and I would probably ask you if I could do something for you instead. But must this imply that I feel I *owe* it to you as a "debt of gratitude"? Could it not also be simply a matter of my seeing how hard the work is on you, and wanting to ease your burden? And could I not have asked, in the *same* spirit, if I can do something for you, even if the books you slaved away over where *your own*? *Must* it make a difference to how I look at helping you that I know your troubles come from helping *me*?

It might seem obvious that I would be acting much worse if I did not help you when you had just helped me, than if I did not help you in a situation in which you had done nothing for me, and in fact we tend to react less strongly to "simple" indifference or egoism, than to ingratitude – "of all crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural", according to Hume.[37] We should note, however, that insisting that one crime is worse than others is a dangerous business, because it implies that the other crimes are not so bad, and one does not really want to claim that it is not so bad if one refuses someone help, saying "He has done nothing for me, so I owe him nothing!" I am not denying that ingratitude is a horrible thing, I am just saying that there are reactions to the goodness one is shown that are neither grateful nor ungrateful, but move in a different dimension altogether. It also seems to me that we misunderstand what *is* horrible about ingratitude if we see it from the perspective of gratitude.

As I see it, what is horrible about ingratitude is that it is an instance of a person being so unresponsive to the goodness he meets that he goes on to act selfishly towards someone else – but the fact that it is towards his *benefactor* he acts like that does not in itself make the thing any worse. Suppose he was shown goodness, and went on to do something nasty not to his benefactor, but to a third party; or suppose he had just witnessed how someone was good to

[37] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. 2nd Revised Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 466.

someone else, and went on to do something nasty to someone. Would this not be just as bad as ingratitude? I take it that the answer is yes.

The good response to witnessing goodness, whether one is the immediate beneficiary of it or not, is gladness, an opening oneself to it, which *means* that one will oneself *do* good; more exactly, one will be uplifted, energised, by the goodness one witnessed, and this energy of goodness will animate one's actions – in all directions, as it were, while actions done from gratitude are directed to one's benefactor. "Give for nothing, as you have received for nothing". The Bible-verse does *not* add: "To the one who gave to you."

– Goodness, modesty, and the easy life of altruism –

I said above that there is a sense in which goodness is never just a matter of course, not even among friends, and I want to make it clear that, even though my discussion might perhaps have seemed to suggest it, I do not think that it belongs to friendship to belittle the goodness one's friends show one, *or* the goodness one shows them. Objecting to the idea that friendship would essentially be about friends helping and supporting each other, C. S. Lewis says something that may *seem* to make exactly the point I have been making about gratitude. He says that even though it is true that one would be "a false friend" if one did not help "when the need arouse",

> such good offices are not the stuff of Friendship. The occasions for them are almost interruptions ... the role of benefactor always remains accidental, even a little alien, to that of Friend. It is almost embarrassing ... We are sorry that any gift or loan or night-watching should have been necessary – and now, for heaven's sake, let us forget all about it and go back to the things we really want to do or talk of together. Even gratitude is no enrichment to this love. The stereotyped 'Don't mention it' here expresses what we really feel.[38]

While I agree with Lewis that gratitude is "no enrichment to this love", but rather evinces a lack of faith in friendship, I suspect that he actually objects to gratitude on dubious grounds. Why does he find helping a friend "embarrassing"? Why does he want to "forget all about it"? I would say that

[38] Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1974 [1960]), p. 65 f.

this is not at all what someone moved by the spirit of friendship feels about what she has done for her friend; she does not feel it is somehow inappropriate or awkward to talk about it; she *has* nothing to "forget". Because her thoughts were with her friend, she never thought that her help would reflect somehow favourably on her person, on her moral status – or unfavourably, in a humiliating way, on the one "forced" to receive help. One feels embarrassed by mentions of the good one has done, one feels a need for *modesty*, precisely to the degree that one fears such reflection – precisely insofar as one *lacks humility*, that is. If the humility was there, there would be no need for modesty. One needs to be modest about one's own supposed merits, but to be humble means to be open to others, and so not to think in terms of merit at all. This is no doubt why Jesus, who taught humility, not to let "one's left hand know what the right one is doing", felt no need to recommend *discretion* in doing good, but instead encouraged his disciples not to "hide" away their "light" but let it shine abroad among others.[39]

It seems to me that the need for modesty may have a motive which is existentially speaking more serious than a sense that it would be conceited to boast of one's goodness. Or perhaps the sense that it would be conceited to boast is just a false front for a sense of something else, of another kind of danger. What I have in mind is the fact that the help friends give each other, insofar as it really is an expression of friendship, always has two aspects: on the one hand there is the actual help with this or that (the gift or the loan or the night-watching), on the other hand, there is an additional, invisible, gift, a "bonus" as Kierkegaard ironically says, that is given with all these particular, concrete actions, namely the friend's love itself, and this bonus is, "strangely enough" – that is the irony – "worth *infinitely* much more than that to which it is related as a bonus".[40]

This is true not just of help given, but of everything that is done in friendship, whether it is sharing a meal, telling a joke or telling the friend off for something she did. But it *is* true of the help, too, and in this case it may be harder than when we are occupied by "the things we really want to do or talk of together" (Lewis) to write it off as something one did just because one had one's quite private reasons for wanting to do it. In short: in the case of doing things that are evidently not pleasurable in themselves it may be harder to keep the *love* of friendship in the background (I do not say it must be harder, only

[39] Matthew 6:3 f. and 5:14 ff.
[40] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 176.

that it may be; on the other hand, serving others may also, as we shall see, be a way of hiding oneself).

What we feel for each other often embarrasses us not just when the feelings are bad or negative ones, but when they are good. Strangely, we are embarrassed by the goodness that is in us and between us. When we become aware of it, we often try to belittle it, trivialise it, explain it away. Thus one says "It was nothing" when one has done something that was very far indeed from being nothing, or "Anybody would have done it" when it is obvious that one was the only one who did anything, or one tries to explain away one's being touched by someone's plight or by their goodness by referring to one's being such a sentimental person, or "a person who has been brought up always to...".[41] It seems to me that Lewis' finding the help given to a friend embarrassing might be an expression of the same difficulty, the same need to hide away what is really good in our relationships, namely our love of each other.

Nietzsche depicts this difficulty strikingly:

> When dealing with people who are bashful about their feelings, one has to be able to dissimulate; they feel a sudden hatred towards anyone who catches them in a tender or enthusiastic or elevated feeling, as if he had seen their secrets. If one wants to do them good in such moments, one should make them laugh or utter some cold, jocular sarcasm: then their feeling freezes and they regain power over themselves. But I am giving the moral before the story. There was a time in our lives when we were so close that nothing seemed to obstruct our friendship and brotherhood, and only a small footbridge separated us. Just as you were about to step on it, I asked you: 'Do you want to cross the footbridge to me?' – But then you didn't want to any more; and when I asked again, you were silent. Since then, mountains and torrential rivers, and everything which separates and alienates, have been cast between us, and even if we wanted to reach each other, we couldn't anymore! But when you think of that little footbridge now, you have no words anymore – only sobs and bewilderment.[42]

One of the most striking thing about this striking passage is the conflict between the story and the "moral" supposedly drawn from it. The moral is supposed to be "Get your act together, it is no use getting emotional", but that sounds hollow indeed, since the tragedy was precisely that one of the protagonists lacked the humility to *let go* of his "power over himself" in opening himself to the other in love.

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[41] Cf. the discussion in Hannes Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul. An Ethics of Conscience* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002), pp. 350–4.

[42] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §16.

An upshot of the discussion in this section is that *modesty*, which might otherwise seem to be if not a virtue, at least a very sympathetic character-trait, appears in a problematic light, for it prevents one from opening oneself to love as effectively as do pride, vanity and other forms of self-consciousness. While the proud person will not accept love because he wants to keep the proud distance to others that love in its shame-free directness abolishes, and the vain person will feel flattered by another's love, thus misunderstanding it completely, as though love was just a species of appreciation, the modest person does not want to have attention focused on *him*, he wants to keep in the background. But someone who loves you cannot possibly allow you to keep in the background, for "she has eyes only for you". For her, everything else becomes the background against which *you* stand out, but in your modesty – that is, in your secret self-contempt – you perhaps cannot stand this kind of wholehearted attention.

It seems to me that there is an important connection between, on the one hand, this problematic modesty which just to avoid attention will shut itself out even, or first of all, from love, and, on the other hand, the identification of morality and goodness with *altruism*, with sacrificing one's interests for the benefit of others. This has been the prevalent view of morality in our Christian culture. It comes from a particular reading – I would say a fatal *misreading* – of the love of neighbour as presented in the Gospels, and even if the talk of pleasing God by serving one's neighbour has long since been dropped in favour of secularised jargon, the basic idea has remained the same. Whereas the Greeks thought that the good person was the person who took, and deservedly took, the best in life for himself, we tend to think that the good person is the person who spends her life – and the change of gender is fitting here – giving what she has in serving others. To put it crudely: whereas for the Greeks the question of ethics was "How does one become happy?" for us it is "How does one make others happy?"

The Victorian female ideal that Virginia Woolf termed "The Angel in the House" is a striking example of this altruistic mindset;

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was utterly unselfish. ... She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.[43]

[43] Woolf, "Professions for Women" in Woolf, *Killing the Angel in the House: Seven Essays*

This kind of self-denying service may seem akin to love's openness, but it is actually completely different from, and even inimical to it. I do not now have in mind the obvious fact that the one thus spending her life in serving others may very often nurture a secret, or perhaps not so secret, resentment against those she feels she "must" serve, experiencing her servitude at the same time, and paradoxically, as both voluntary *and* a hateful imposition. It is clearly crucial to understand such dynamics of resentment if one wants to know what a great part of our moral life is actually like.[44] From the point of view of friendship, however, the decisive objection against assuming the attitude of self-denying servant remains even if we imagine a servant quite free of resentment. The problem is that the servant is not, *as* servant, there for her own sake, but for the sake of those she serves; she is not supposed to be noticed, but to notice others with their needs. How can there be friendship with someone who in this way *absents* herself, who is not there?

Hannah Arendt said that "an original courage", the courage to take the initiative, is "already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is in disclosing and exposing one's self",[45] thus answering in word and deed "the question asked of every newcomer: 'Who are you?'"[46] The life of a servant is a strategy to protect oneself from the risks inherent in revealing oneself in word and deed, a strategy born of diffidence, or more exactly of distrust of others. No matter how much drudgery it may involve, the life of a servant is an *easy* one precisely insofar as in it one need not reveal oneself to others; one does not challenge them by revealing "a mind or a wish of one's own" (Woolf), and so is not challenged oneself by their response to what one revealed. And for the same reason life *with* a servant is an easy one. The servant is not exceptional, of course, she simply does in quite a marked way what we all do insofar as we are not open with each other – and in being polite, for instance, we present ourselves as acting for the sake of those we are polite to; we absent ourselves, concealing "the mind or wish of our own" in order to spare them embarrassment

The parable of Martha and Mary in *Luke* can be read as a commentary on the question of the servant. Martha, you will recall, invites Jesus to her house; while she is busy making practical arrangements, her sister Mary just sits

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(London: Penguin, 1995), p. 3.

[44] Nietzsche's analysis of the role of resentment in morality, especially in the first essay in *The Genealogy of Morals*, is a central text in this connexion.

[45] Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 186.

[46] Ibid., p. 178.

listening to Jesus speak. Martha, impatient, asks Jesus to tell her sister to help her in the kitchen, but Jesus answers: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."[47] It may seem that Jesus is being unfair to Martha, who is actually *doing* something for others, rather than just listening to fine words about love. However, we should note that Jesus did not send Martha off to the kitchen; she had chosen that part for herself, and what he did was only to refuse to send Mary off to the kitchen where Martha implies she belonged. He said, in effect: "I am your guest, and I feel that you, Martha, are making unnecessary fuss for my sake, but if you feel you must, then at least let your sister sit here with me."

It seems to me that Martha's impatience is an example of the impatience with the "merely" personal encounter and the need to *get something done*, whether it is getting tea and biscuits on the table, or bread for the poor. It is not that having tea and biscuits on the table or bread for the poor would not be good things – of course they are – it is just that there is a spirit of attending to those things in which one loses sight of the people one is supposed to be doing them for and gives oneself no time to be there with them. Thus one can imagine Martha being so busy arranging things for her guests that she never got a chance to talk to them, nor they a chance to talk to her.

Mother Theresa, who knew that preaching about love was no substitute for love itself, said: "There should be less talk. Then what should you do? Take a broom and sweep someone's floor clean. That's enough." But she *also* insisted that sweeping floors and getting useful things done was as such not much better than empty talk; the point, she said, was the love that should be there *in* the sweeping of a floor, as it should, and could, be there in the preaching and in everything else, too: "Always give the children, the poor, everyone who suffers and is lonely, a friendly smile. Don't just give them your care and attention, give them your heart, too."[48] However, giving someone your heart means stepping out of the comfortably anonymous role of servant, it means reaching out to touch them, taking their attention off the practical things one may be doing for them, focusing it instead on what one quite personally feels for them.

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[47] Luke 10:41 f.

[48] The quotes are taken from Sven Stolpe, *Vreden, och andra essayer* (Borås: Norma, 1989), p. 74. Stolpe gives no source; I have translated the quotes from his Swedish translations.

As it happens, the parable of Martha and Mary follows immediately on the parable of the Good Samaritan in *Luke*. That may be a coincidence, but it is certainly no coincidence that the latter has had so much more attention from theologians and moral philosophers. For the Samaritan's action seems to conform neatly to the scheme of altruistic, self-denying love: the Samaritan got something done (he took care of the wounded man) and got nothing out of it himself (no one thanked him for his trouble). In short: he acted like Martha, rather than Mary, who got nothing done but got "the best part" out of it for herself. Those who take a Samaritan thus understood to be the paradigm of the love of neighbour are, in effect, siding with Martha against Mary – and Jesus.

I think that the parable of the Samaritan is *reassuring* to us because of the apparent anonymity of his action: there is no indication that the wounded man he helped ever spoke to him or even woke up to look at him, or that they ever saw each other again. The Samaritan did not only do something for an anonymous stranger, but was himself allowed to remain an anonymous stranger. It was not only the case that he "got nothing out of" doing what he did; in an important sense he did not have to *give* anything either. To be sure, he gave of his time and his resources, but insofar as the wounded man never responded to him in any way – and the story is silent on that – the Samaritan did not have to give *himself* in the way one may when responding to another's response to one. Beyond the fact that the man needed help and the Samaritan helped him in a quite practical sense, the personal question who they were to each other was perhaps never raised.

– The dirty secret of sacrificial purity –

To my mind, Emmanuel Levinas is one of the most important moral philosophers of recent times. His ethics is also extremely problematic, however, because it remains a traditional ethics of self-denying service – even though it is given a form so extreme that compared to it even Woolf's "Angel of the House" might seem a petty egoist. For Levinas, being good means sacrificing one's own good – one's happiness, interests, and so on – for the other, giving *precedence* to the other; he always insists on "the *priority* of the other in relation to me" as

the cornerstone of ethics.[49] From "the simple 'After you, sir'" all the way to giving to the other "the bread out of one's mouth and the coat from one's shoulders",[50] goodness consists in an endless "service" to the other "indifferent to remuneration".[51] It is essentially "a sacrifice without reserve", a sacrifice which "takes on its full meaning only in stripping me of what is more my own than possessions", "making a gift of my own skin".[52]

It seems to me that Levinas is quite wrong to describe goodness as a sacrifice, but my objection is not the standard one raised against him in the name of reasonable reciprocity or legitimate self-esteem, that he demands *too much* of us. To my mind, it carries no interest to quibble about how *much* can be demanded, for that takes for granted that ethics is a matter of *demanding* things, that goodness is a matter of sacrifice, whereas the point is precisely that this whole perspective is false from the start. Levinas goes wrong not in demanding too much but rather in being satisfied with much too little, with a life without love.

Levinas does not like to talk about love that much; he does not like to use that "worn-out and ambiguous word", preferring instead to talk about "responsibility for the other".[53] Nonetheless, he is sometimes willing to give to this responsibility, which to him is what goodness is, "the harsh name of love", if precisely the *harshness* is emphasised and it is remembered that this love is "commanded", that it is "a love without concupiscence".[54] As I have stressed, however, love is not essentially harshness or sacrifice, it is desire. Certainly, loving someone may in practice come to entail giving up many things for the sake of love; career-opportunities or old habits, say. And this may be called a sacrifice, but in love a sacrifice is never an end in itself; it is made only for the sake of safe-guarding the life together of the lovers, and that shared life *itself*, the life for which sacrifices may be demanded, cannot be seen as a sacrifice, for where there is love, life with the other is fundamentally a joy, no matter how

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[49] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind.* Translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 91.
[50] Levinas, *Otherwise than Bein*g *or Beyond Essence.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 55 f.
[51] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), p. 185.
[52] *Otherwise than Bein*g, p. 14, p. 55 f., p. 138.
[53] Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other.* Translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), p. 108.
[54] Ibid., p. 174, p. 108, p. 169.

much inconvenience and grief it may contain; it is what one most desires, and doing what one must to have what one most desires is not really a sacrifice.

In Levinas' conception, by contrast, goodness has nothing to do with desire. His analysis of the *desire* for "the other" – an analysis he gives a central place, and the formal aspects of which I made use of in describing the desire of friendship in Chapter One – in fact delineates the desire *not* for other *human beings* but for God, "the Other" *par excellence*. In relation to human beings, however, sacrifice becomes, for Levinas, the very mode and substance of life with them. In its infinity, with no end in sight, sacrifice is *all that life will ever be*, for the sacrificial love Levinas speaks of "brings neither promise nor relief, but the absolute of a requirement".[55] However, one's life with others will turn into an endless sacrifice for them only insofar as one feels no *desire* to be with them, feels no love for them. I would not *want* to speak to him; I would not *like* to dance with her, but nonetheless I feel I *have* to, I have to make the sacrifice. The sacrifice is made possible only by my *lack* of love. The thing Levinas calls goodness – the responsibility I feel for the other and my service to him – is indeed, as Levinas himself says, "the non-erotic *par excellence*"; the human other I serve is, in essence if not always in practice, "the nondesirable, the undesirable *par excellence*".[56]

This is an extraordinary statement, coming from someone who is known for his "glorification" of the face of the other person, who sees in it "holiness" and a "trace" of the "transcendent" which from its "height" demands a total sacrifice from me – these are all central term for Levinas – and who has indeed to some of his readers seemed to be engaged in a positive deification of the other, an exercise in idolatry.[57] Now it turns out that this "glorification" is actually premised on seeing the other person as positively detestable, hateful. How is this strange inversion to be explained?

As far as I can see, Levinas, who is in many ways a thinker who has opened up new avenues for reflection on ethics – we will return to some of these later – has at this point got entangled in a quite traditional confusion. All its insights notwithstanding, his ethics is in substance a religious ethics of the familiar type in which the central question is how to ensure the "purity" of the

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[55] Ibid., p. 172.
[56] *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p. 68 f.
[57] Thus Roland Paul Blum, who claims that Levinas' position "would seem to lead him to a disturbing kind of idolatry" ("Emmanuel Levinas' Theory of Commitment", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44 (1983), p. 167). As we will see presently, this charge rests on a misunderstanding.

religious man's love of God, purging it of all mercenary motives, ensuring that he loves God without hope for reward of any kind. In order to ensure this, Levinas first of all insists that one can go towards God *only by way of one's neighbour*, that there "can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men", because God, who is "invisible" and "unimaginable", is only "accessible in justice", so that "*ethics* is the [true] spiritual optics".[58] Against all otherworldly mysticism and all dreams of an immediate communion with God, Levinas declares that true religion consists only in serving one's neighbours. "The Other's hunger – be it of the flesh, or of bread – is sacred", he says, and even asserts that "the entire spirituality on earth" resides in "the act of nourishing".[59]

This insistence on concrete service to others as the meaning of religion, gives Levinas' ethics a very down-to-earth aspect, all the talk of transcendence notwithstanding. At the same time, however, this remains a *religious* ethics, whose meaning is not reducible to the concrete service rendered to others, but must be seen in the desire for God which calls it forth.[60] For Levinas, God always remains a "third person", the "He at the root of the You [*Tu*]",[61] whom I can address only indirectly, *in* addressing my neighbour. But in addressing my neighbours, in serving them, I am indeed addressing God, and the "hospitality" I show others in fact "coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent [i.e. God]."[62]

It is, then, only *in* serving one's neighbours that one can lead a truly religious life, that one can love God. In order for this love to be "pure", however, the service rendered to others must not, Levinas thinks, be desirable in itself, and this is why the neighbour must be presented as detestable:

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[58] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 78.
[59] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p. xiv.
[60] As Richard A. Cohen puts it, in Levinas' scheme it is not the case that "religion is reduced to intersubjectivity, in the manner of a Feuerbach, but rather that intersubjectivity is raised to religion"; the point is that "for Levinas *G-d imposes Himself on humankind, commands humans, by way of and exclusively by way of interhuman relationships*" (*Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* [Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994], p. 187). On this point, Levinas' religious ethics is structurally identical to Kierkegaard's; cf. *Works of Love*, p. 158 f.
[61] *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p. 69.
[62] *Totality and Infinity*, p. 171 f. – Levinas is careful to point out that he does *not* mean to say that the other person *is* God, which would indeed be idolatry. He only claims – but this he claims emphatically – that "the dimension of the divine *opens forth from* the human face"; the other is "not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed" (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 78 f.).

> In order that disinterestedness be possible in the Desire for the Infinite, the Desirable, or God, must remain separated in the Desire; as desirable – near yet different – Holy. This can only be if the Desirable commands me to what is the nondesirable, the undesirable *par excellence*; to another.[63]

Levinas assumes that the purity of one's love of God actually "requires an *ingratitude* of the other [person]" whom God ordains one to serve, for the "radical generosity" in which the service must be rendered would "lose its absolute *orientation* if it sought recompense", would be "reversed and become reciprocity", losing its purity in "calculations of deficits and compensations, in book-keeping operations".[64]

This is familiar terrain. In the history of thought on Christian love, too, people have felt a need to make love "pure" by severing its ties with any kind of fulfilment for the lover, making it completely "gratuitous".[65] As I see it, the basic confusion at work in the drive to "purify" love is the idea that there would be something selfish, and so impure, in the desire for a return of love. This is not so; on the contrary, it is of the essence of love that it seeks such a return. This is the topic of the next section; here I want to stay with the point that the "purification" of love demands a very unloving view of those that are to be loved "purely". Consider Luther's classic formulation of the distinction between "ascending" and "descending" love, between a love (*agape*) that is divine, pure and disinterested, and one (comprising *eros* and *philia*) that is worldly, impure and selfish. Luther writes:

> Just as God in the beginning of creation made the world out of nothing ... so his manner of working continues unchanged. Even now and to the end of the world, all his works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, he makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living. On the other hand, whatever is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living, he makes to be nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dying. ... Therefore his eyes look only into the depths, not to the heights ... and the farther one is beneath him, the better does he see him.
> The eyes of the world and of men, on the contrary, look only above them ... This we experience every day. Everybody strives after that which is above

[63] *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, p. 68.
[64] *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 92.
[65] For two rather good shorter historical and analytic presentations of the theological problematic of "pure" love in Christianity, see the chapter on "Love" in Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediæval Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), pp. 269–303, and the one on "Pure love" in John Burnaby, *Amor Dei. A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, [1938] 1947), pp. 255–300.

> him, after honor, power, wealth, knowledge, a life of ease, and whatever is lofty and great. And where such people are, there are many hangers-on; all the world gathers round them, gladly yields them service, and would be at their side and share in their exaltation. ... On the other hand, no one is willing to look into the depths with their poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery and anguish. From these all turn away their eyes. Where there are such people, everyone takes to his heals, forsakes and shuns and leaves them to themselves; no one dreams of helping them or of making something out of them. And so they must remain in the depths and in their low and despised condition. ... Therefore to God alone belongs that sort of seeing that looks into the depths with their need and misery, and is near to all that are in the depths.[66]

Thus, Luther concludes, "God's work and his eyes are in the depths, but man's only in the height."[67] According to Luther, the Christian's love of neighbour is to be fashioned after the model of this divine love, or actually it *is* this same love, which is first received from God in faith, and then passed on by the Christian to his neighbours in charity.[68] Luther is obviously right to stress that real love will not shun real problems, and will not be frightened off if life with the beloved becomes difficult, marked by affliction in one form or another. But *identifying* love with "looking into the depths" is as misguided as to see it as a bed of roses; in some ways it is even more absurd. For love sees the beloved and life with her as wonderful even in the midst of "poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery and anguish". The whole contrast between "ascending" and "descending" in fact belongs in a *worldly* way of speaking, and this is so even if one prefers, perversely, to go down rather than up. For love itself, by contrast, there is only a going *towards the beloved* wherever she may be: in a sick-bed or a rose garden.

The basic perversion in the traditional idea of "pure" love is the one we saw at work in Levinas. It is the paradox that one can purify love only by *dirtying* as much as possible the human beings that are to be "loved", that is, by

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[66] Martin Luther, *The Magnificat. Luther's Commentary.* Transl. A. T. W. Steinhauser (Minneapolis Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), pp. 11–13.

[67] Ibid. p. 15. The twenty-eighth thesis of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, which Anders Nygren describes as "one of the main passages for Luther's doctrine of love" (*Agape and Eros*. Translated by Philip S. Watson [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953], p. 725, footnote 3), formulates the same thought as the passage from the *Magnificat* i have quoted, but in more abstract terms, the main point being that whereas "man's love is caused by its lovable object", God's love "does not find, but creates, its lovable object", which can be seen from the fact that Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners"; "sinners are lovely because they are loved; they are not loved because they are lovely" (quoted in Nygren, ibid.).

[68] On this aspect of Luther's doctrine of love, see Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp. 733–737.

looking at them in the most *unloving* way. A striking example of this is A. E. Teale's explanation of why in moral matters, or indeed in life in general, human love – he calls it "sympathetic feelings" – is not enough. He writes that "selfish, envious, spiteful, savage, disease-ridden, stinking humanity would stand a poor chance of charity but for some small spark in most men of a love divine" which must "rest on vastly different grounds than human affection, inclination, and desire".[69] Teale illustrates with the example of a doctor who specialised in "a disease mostly found in poor neglected old people who will not keep themselves clean", who once told Teale "that the stench from these people often made him physically sick, and sometimes produced within him a revulsion of feeling amounting almost to loathing".[70]

Teale may be right that the doctor who thus has to force himself to help those he loathes, does better than someone who does not want to have anything to do with them at all, and simply abandons them to their affliction. However, Teale does not even consider the morally, humanly, existentially, speaking crucial possibility that someone could help the sick *without* loathing them. Why does he not consider it? Because he takes it for granted that *no one could* see the sick in that way. And this means that Teale, without realising it, has accepted an *evil* (I do *not* think the word is too strong) way of looking at the sick people he imagines, and indeed at people in general, as this "selfish, envious, spiteful, savage, disease-ridden, stinking humanity". There is also a secret, or not so secret, Pharisaism at work in the background, for what Teale wants us to admit is how very "worthy"[71] the doctor in his example is, who keeps helping even such loathsome patients.

There is a Pharisaical streak in Levinas' thought, too. For Levinas, "to be an I means ... not to be able to escape responsibility, as though the whole edifice of creation rested on my shoulders".[72] Here, as so often, Levinas is applying to human beings as such a characterisation of the Jew found in the rabbinical literature; indeed he applies the very idea of Jewish *chosenness* to all human beings: "Every person, as a person – that is to say, one conscious of his freedom

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[69] Teale, *Kantian Ethics* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 139 f. – Teale's purpose is to defend Kant's imperative ethics, but he takes Kant at this point to be in complete agreement with "the clear teaching of the Gospels". He is right that there is an agreement here, but it holds only for the confused, and to my mind quite unbiblical, notion of the love of neighbour as a "pure", self-denying love.
[70] Ibid., p. 140.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 97.

[that is: his responsibility], is chosen."[73] Levinas says that a Jew – and remember, we are all, or may all be, "Jews" – is "accountable and responsible for the whole edifice of creation", his is "the exceptional fate of being the man who supports the universe", which means that Jewish identity, although it is "like a day-today expression of happiness or the sense of having been chosen", is very far from being "a serene self-presence"; it is rather "the patience, fatigue and numbness of a responsibility – a stiff neck that supports the universe"; the Jew "listens and obeys like a guard who never expects to be relieved."[74]

This religious ethics or ethical religion is truly a "religion for adults",[75] who have renounced all hope for "the child's heaven", for life ever being good to us, and "appeals instead to the full maturity of the responsible man".[76] The obedience of the responsible man implies, Levinas says, "no other recompense than [...the] elevation of the dignity of the soul" of one who is strong enough to obey and serve without asking anything for himself.[77] In that very formulation, "no *other* recompense *than*", everything is given away: the point is that there *is* a recompense, namely the consciousness of the elevation and dignity of one's own soul. Even if the formulation I quoted was a mere slip of the pen on Levinas' part, it would be significant. But it is no slip; Levinas often speaks of the just man in the pharisaic language of shame and pride, of dignity and indignity. For him, the just man is placed in a "heroic situation" in which God, by demanding the superhuman of him – an endless, gratuitous service – "establishes an equality between God and man at the very heart of their disproportion", and so it is not out of place for Levinas to describe his ethical religion as "an adoration that coincides with the exaltation of man!"[78]

This kind of proud exaltation of "man" in the singular inevitably turns into the proud exaltation of some men, namely the "just" ones, over others, namely the unjust, the evil or merely weak ones. Levinas quotes with approval the words attributed to a fictional character, a Jew belonging to the Warsaw Ghetto resistance, spoken in the hour of defeat:

> To be a Jew means ... to swim eternally against the filthy, criminal tide of man ... I am happy to belong to the most unhappy people on earth, for whom the Torah represents all that is most lofty and beautiful in law and morality ...

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[73] *Difficult Freedom*, p. 137 f.
[74] Ibid., p. 50 f.
[75] Ibid., p. 11.
[76] Ibid., p. 143.
[77] *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 185.
[78] *Difficult Freedom*, p. 145.

> Now I know that you are really *my* God, for you could not be the God of those whose actions represent the most horrible expression of a militant absence of God.[79]

As far as I can see, this *glorying* in being the only one who does God's will among this "filthy, criminal" lot, thus "supporting the universe" with one's "stiff neck", has nothing exalted about it. It is a typical instance of an understandable but small-minded resentment at being "the only one who seems to take any responsibility around here", which we all know from first hand experience. It is the dear old self despairing over the loveless hell one's life has turned out to be, that one has oneself helped turn it into, taking, as Nietzsche says, an "imaginary vengeance" on the level of morality.[80]

Let me now try to bring together the argument of this section with earlier portions of this chapter. What I called the *demanding spirit* corrupts, I said, our relationships, making us jealously defend our interests, our time, our freedom, our privacy against others – and privacy only comes into being *in* this defence of it, while our freedom and the rest are *privatised* in it. Instead of desiring to know others, to know who they are, it makes us reject them for not being what they "should" be, whether the standard for this "should" is taken simply from our private tastes or is "moralised", in which case our rejection of others takes the form of pharisaically judging them.

I would interpret altruism and sacrificial love, as practiced and as theorised about, as the deformed demeanour resulting from a clash between the demanding spirit and conscience.[81] One's bad conscience tells one that one's demandingness and judgmental attitude are evil. If, however, one does not open oneself fully to the perspective conscience invites one to, but prefers to stay within the perspective of demands and judgments, one may, in an effort to appease one's guilty conscience, as it were turn the tables on oneself: instead of demanding everything from others and judging them, one demands everything from oneself and judges oneself for failing to live up to the demand. As we just saw, however, this self-judgment conceals a deeper self-justification and self-defence: one congratulates oneself on being such a responsible and perhaps

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[79] Ibid., p. 144, emphasis added.

[80] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 170.

[81] As an experience, conscience is known to all of us; as a concept in philosophical ethics, it badly needs to be articulated. I will try to do so in Chapter Four; here I simply use it without further explanation.

even loving person, at the same time as one's life in service of others allows one to remain comfortably anonymous.

Levinas' ethics is an uncommonly pure specimen of this turning of the tables on oneself. In the extremity of its demands it may seem very strange to us, but in fact it only presents us – just as Thoreau with his extreme demands on his friends did – with something we all do, purified of the subsidiary motives and considerations it is usually mixed with. In so doing, it shows us *the absurd essence of normality*. For we do of course all admit that morality and friendship demand things of us, and that we should sacrifice *some* things for the good of others, just as we think we have a right to demand some things from them. We just do not like the uncompromising word *everything*. But regardless of the disagreements about the limits of the sacrifices that can be demanded, the perspective remains one in which *someone* – be it you or me or, in a compromise, both of us – always has to sacrifice something. That view of life seems to me very far from goodness.

– Love's desire for the other's love –

The champions of a "pure", sacrificial love distrust love as it is in fact experienced by human beings, insofar as those who love desire a return of love. Levinas, typically, can only see an expression of "egoism" in the "promise of happiness" of "erotic attraction".[82] He puts his objection to erotic love as follows: "If to love is to love the love the Beloved bears me, to love is also to love oneself in love, and thus to return to oneself. Love does not transcend unequivocally – it is complacent, it is pleasure and dual egoism."[83] Where, however, is the *egoism* in desiring to open oneself completely to the other in love? And why is it bad to "love oneself in love"? Should one hate oneself? Certainly, I can see that I should hate that in me which is evil, that which is *a refusal of love*, but if I hate "all" of me, am I not then precisely refusing love, letting it be understood that no one could or should love "someone like me" and also – does this not follow? – that I cannot love anyone either, since anything *I* could offer must be hateful in itself.

[82] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 137.
[83] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 266.

As I said above, the basic confusion at work in the drive to "purify" love is the idea that there would be something selfish, and so impure, in the desire for a return of love. This confusion, in turn, comes from confusing the selfish seeking of "reward" that is obviously no part of love even, as we have seen, in the seemingly legitimate form of reciprocity, with the wish for one's love to be answered, which *is* part of the very definition of love. For love, including the love of friendship, is *not* some kind of well-wishing that "only wants what is best for the other" while not caring at all how the other responds to one. It is not that love can never be as "pure" as that, but rather that love is not as *insipid* as that. Loving someone means desiring her, wishing with all one's heart to be with her, in openness, in a spirit of truth, with no reservations. By comparison with that mere well-wishing seems a listless attitude indeed, and even the most ardent and self-denying service seems to presuppose or create a terrible distance between those who could have been united in love.

Suppose your friend is dying; you hurry to his death bed. It would be confused to claim that your action is an expression of "pure" love only to the extent that you do it out of a concern for *him*, that you do it "for *his* sake", as though you did it without any thought for yourself. Insofar as something like that that really is the case, and you feel no longing to see your dying friend, then the love, the goodness that *would* have been manifested *in* that longing disappears, and we are left with self-defeating ideas about your having an *obligation* to go see your friend, or of his somehow *needing* your presence. That these ideas are self-defeating can be seen if one considers what your *friend* might feel about your coming to see him not because you longed to see him, but because you felt *obliged* to, or because you thought *he* needed it. It would make him bewildered, sad, and perhaps angry to learn that you apparently felt a stranger to him, that you act as though you were on a *courtesy call*. Visits in this spirit are certainly not anything he needs, and he will tell you not to feel obliged to come, precisely *because* you feel *obliged* to come, rather than coming because you long to see him. And if you feel that you are a very good friend in being thus "unselfishly" concerned about his needs or your obligations as a friend, then you are self-deceived and conceited.[84]

[84] Michael Stocker makes some apparently related points using a similar example in his well-known article "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories", *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1976), 453–466; cf. also the discussion in his "Values and Purposes. The Limits of Teleology and the Ends of Friendship", *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 747–765. Stocker's discussion is quite formal, however, as most discussions in Anglo-American ethics are; he is more concerned with the abstract logic of action-descriptions than with understanding the moral-existential significance

The point is that the seemingly so "pure" and unselfish way of regarding what one does as service done for the other, turns out on closer inspection to be a very unfriendly, unloving way to see it. There is goodness in one's going to see one's friend only insofar as one goes out of friendship, out of love, that is, insofar as one goes for one's own sake *as much as* for his – which is not to say, *partly* for his sake and *partly* for one's own, as though what one's going meant for him and for oneself were different, private things. When you both sit there crying at your friend's deathbed, is he crying for a different reason than you? No, you are both crying because you are going to lose each other, there is no meaningful distinction to be made between "yours" and "his" here.

To love someone is essentially to want to be with her *in* love; only secondarily is it to want to do her good or to want what is good for her in abstraction from this life together in love. And to want this life in love with the other is not a selfish wish, because in love "my" good and "yours" are one and the same thing: that good is no other than this life of love itself, in comparison with which all other goods seem like nothing to the lovers. To delimit love equally from the selfishness of reciprocity *and* from the perversion of sacrificial "purity" we may say: Love seeks the love of the beloved; if it did not, it would not be love – and love seeks no "return" other than the love of the beloved; if it did, it would not be love.

We should also note that this is not something that is true only of "human" love, marking its deficiency in comparison with a supposedly more perfect, "divine" love. It is true of love *as such* that it seeks the love of the beloved, and if God *is* indeed love, as the Bible teaches,[85] then the difference between God's love and ours cannot be that he would not want us to love him as we want those we love to love us; on the contrary, the difference can only be that God is, as Eckhart puts it, "a thousand times *more* eager for you than you for him".[86]

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of various possible attitudes, his main purpose in the latter article being to show that acting "out of friendship" is not reducible to a teleological description in terms of the purposes aimed at in the act. I find his discussion quite irrelevant to mine, insofar as he does not ask what it *means* to act out of friendship, apparently takes it for granted that if one visits a friend in the hospital one does it "for his sake", and denies that "such modalities as warmth, spontaneity and the like" could be used to mark the distinction he is interested in ("Values and Purposes", p. 755, footnote 15). To my mind, Gabriel Marcel's discussions of the problematic this kind of example announces comes much closer to the heart of the matter, comes closer to the *heart*, that is. See the essay "Creative Fidelity" in Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*. Translated by Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002 [1964]), especially pp. 153 ff. on the difference between "fidelity" and mere conscientiousness or "constancy."

[85] *1 John* 4:16.

[86] Eckhart, *Breakthrough. Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*.

To see the absurdity of the thought that the only pure love is one in which "one gives all and gets nothing for oneself", consider that paradigmatic gesture of love and friendship, the embrace. The embrace is incomprehensible in terms of the logic of exchange, of sacrifice and reward. It is not that I give "an" embrace to you, and get one back from you; it is not possible, for instance, to make a bargain by "getting" an embrace without giving one in return, as one can get one's back scratched without scratching someone else's in return. We are *one* in our embrace, "yours" and "mine" disappear, as always in the unity of friendship and love. Of course one may try to reinterpret the embrace in terms of what you and I individually get out of it – pleasurable sensations, boosts to our ego, or something else – but insofar as one does so, one loses the "point" of the embrace, which is precisely our being united in desire for each other. We embrace not to achieve any purpose, but because the love we feel for each other moves us to want to touch and be united with each other.[87]

What could it mean to embrace someone in such a way as to "get nothing out of it for oneself"? It could only mean rejecting the other or being rejected by her; in either case the embrace, the love, would be refused. The embrace is "fulfilled", is the expression of love that it is meant to be, only if both of us enter it wholeheartedly, opening our arms and our hearts to each other. When

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Introduction and Commentaries by Matthew Fox, O. P. (New York: Image Books, 1980), p. 242. Cf. also the quotes on p. 134. – Even Kierkegaard, whose view of love often seems to be a very sacrificial one, writes in his *Journals*: "God is love, and God wants to be loved – this is the Christianity of the New Testament", and again: "God ... is such pure passion and pathos that he has only one pathos: to love, to be love, and out of love wanting to be loved", where the Christian's love is to be formed in the likeness of this love wanting to be loved. The quotes are given in M. Jamie Ferreira, "The Glory of a Long Desire: Need and Commanment in *Works of Love*", in Ingolf U. Dalferth (hrsg.), *Ethik der Liebe. Studien zu Kierkegaards "Taten der Liebe"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), p. 141. – I will return to the question of God's love in the Conclusion.

[87] Someone may say that this is unwarranted generalization, that we may embrace for all sorts of reasons, for instance because it is a conventional thing to do, or in order to embarrass someone, or to try to convince someone that we are friends. That is of course true, but irrelevant. All sorts of secondary manoeuvres can naturally be undertaken with the embrace, just as with a smile or a word, but these get their sense from the primary significance of the gesture in question, and demand that one takes up a distancing, instrumentalising attitude to it. In the case of trying to convince someone that we are friends this is quite obviously so: we can do that by embracing only because those who really are friends embrace without any such purpose. And the same sort of analysis would apply to the case of the embrace as conventional sign. To get rid of the idea that we are dealing with *mere* conventions here, one might consider whether the gesture of punching someone in the nose, for instance, could be used to convey the same conventional significance as the embrace? And in the case of embarrassment, one should consider whether the embarrassment occasioned by an unwanted or unexpected embrace, or by an embrace given in bad faith, with intent to embarrass, might not have much to do with the parasitic relation of this action to the openness of the "primary" embrace.

this happens what you "get" cannot be distinguished from what I "get", nor what you "give" from what I "give", nor what either of us "gets" from what we "give", for there is no exchange, there is a unity, the unity of love embracing both of us. There is simply no place for a sacrificial act of a supposedly "pure" love, here, in which one gives without getting anything for it. The acts of such "pure" love would in fact obey exactly the same worldly logic as any other exchange: it is always a matter of who gives what and who gets what, and what the balance is. Given this basic agreement it makes no great difference whether I give everything and get nothing, or the distribution of costs and benefits is different. Love moves on a different level altogether.

It is a confusion to think that one *could* give everything in love while the other gives nothing back, for what one "gives" in love, to revert to that misleading way of expressing it, is oneself, and one can "give" oneself only in opening oneself, in touching and being touched by the other. If the other refuses my touch, I cannot touch her other than in a forced way, which is not love's way. So if the other does not "give" herself to me, I cannot "give" myself to her. All I can do – but that I *will* do, if I love – is to invite the other to be open with me. I can stretch out my hand, and do it wholeheartedly. But it is for the other to decide whether she wants to take it. I cannot force her to take it, nor try in any way to "get" her to do it, because such manipulation would contradict the very desire for openness that is the essence of love.

If the one you invite to be open responds by being open to you, then love is consummated, although not in the sense of having reached its goal, being over and done with, or having reached its destination. As I have said, love's desire for the other knows no end, it has neither goal nor destination. Therefore one cannot really say that love when answered is "rewarded", for one cannot pick out anything specific from the relationship of love and point to it as the reward that love sought, or even received without seeking it. What the lovers desire, the only thing that could be called the "reward" of love, is the openness or unity which exists only because, or rather precisely to the extent that, they desire to be with one another. In openness, the openness itself and the desire for it are indistinguishable.

Because love is all about desiring an open response from the other, it may be very misleading to say, as some do, that "love is its own reward". Etienne Gilson, for instance, notes (quite correctly) that it is strange to quarrel about whether disinterested love is possible, when it is obvious that "if it is to be real love all love *must* be disinterested"; and then says:

> Love seeks no recompense: did it do so it would at once cease to be love. But ... love would no longer be love if it renounced its accompanying joy. Thus all true love is at once disinterested and rewarded. ... Who seeks nothing in love save love receives the joy that it brings; who seeks in love something other than love, loses love and joy together. Love, then, can exist only if it seeks no reward, but once it exists it is rewarded.[88]

This seems to me misleading. I agree that there is an essential connection between joy and love; the openness of love is fundamentally a joyous one, to love someone is to feel joy in her company. It is also true that there is a sense in which love is always a blessing, even if it is not answered. Thus, lovers cannot wish to be rid of their love, even if they would then be spared all sorts of afflictions – for instance the pain of seeing their beloved suffer or reject them. However, to say that love is "rewarded once it exists" gives the appearance that it makes no difference to lovers whether their love is answered or rejected – and that is certainly not true. Consider this passage from Simone Weil:

> There are two forms of friendship: meeting and separation. They are indissoluble. Both of them contain the same good, the unique good, which is friendship. For when two beings who are not friends are near each other there is no meeting, and when friends are far apart there is no separation. As both forms contain the same good thing, they are both equally good.[89]

This is true in the sense that longing for an absent friend is no less an expression of friendship than the joy one feels in her company. But on the other hand, one *longs for* the absent friend, one wishes that one could be with her, so that looked at from the perspective of friendship one clearly cannot say that "the one thing is as good as the other". In another place Weil writes:

> Love of God is pure when joy and suffering *equally* inspire gratitude. The handshake of a friend on meeting again after a long absence. I do not even notice whether it gives pleasure or pain to my sense of touch; just as a blind man feels objects directly at the end of his stick, so I feel the presence of my friend directly. The same applies to life's circumstances, whatever they may be, and God. This implies that we must never seek consolation for pain. For felicity is beyond the realm of consolation and pain, outside it.[90]

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[88] Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediæval Philosophy*, p. 280 f.
[89] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*. Edited by George A. Panichas (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1977), p. 445.
[90] Ibid., p. 416 f.

But how is one to regard the *coldness* shown by a friend? Because the reason one does not notice whether the handshake gives pleasure or pain, considered merely in its physical or aesthetic aspect, is that one feels with all one's heart, with all one's being, the warmth of the friendly encounter. One is completely open to one's friend, and so has no time to worry about the tactile qualities of his handshake, just as one does not even notice the colour of his shirt. But the quality of his *response* to one cannot be ignored in this way; a cold response from him does *not* make one just as happy as a warm one. When Karl Barth claims that the lover does not love "for the sake of an answer", but that love is its own "bliss", so that the lover will be as happy in his love even if the beloved does not answer his love in any way, but remains "dumb as a stone wall",[91] we obviously cross into plain nonsense. The life of a lover whose love goes unanswered is not bliss, it is torture.

Worldly sorrows and afflictions can be "borne", or one can at least try to bear them; they can be taken as character-building "trials" and it can be seen to be both unfortunate and small-minded, and also the expression of a kind of stupidity, to allow oneself to get bogged down in resentment or despair over them. Brentano's reaction to his blindness is a model example of how one may not just bear such afflictions, but even come to be thankful for what the affliction helped one see;

> When friends commiserated with him over the harm which had befallen him, he denied that his loss of sight was a bad thing. He explained that one of his weaknesses had been a tendency to cultivate and concentrate on too many diverse interests. Now, in his blindness, he was able to concentrate on his philosophy in a way which had been impossible for him before.[92]

Friends and lovers will bear worldly afflictions in this sort of way, because they have love, and in comparison with that blessing all worldly troubles pale into insignificance –it is strictly speaking senseless to talk of a comparison here at all. But a friend's death or her rejection of one cannot be borne like that; there is nothing in comparison with which *it* could appear as insignificant, as something one should not "allow oneself to get bogged down in". I mean that for a *friend* there is no such thing; for a proud man there is of course his pride, to which crying over another appears humiliating; for a reasonable man there is the order

[91] Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. Band IV/2 (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag Ag. Zollikon, 1955), p. 895.
[92] The anecdote is related in D. Z. Phillips & H. O. Mounce, *Moral Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1970]), p. 57.

and stability of his reasonable world, his "health" in a general sense of that word – and so on. But for the friend or the lover there is no place to hide from the pain, there is no *consolation*.

In the face of a friend's death or her rejection of one, "high-minded" reflections on the general fickleness or tragedy of all things human, in the style of a philosophical resignation or an epic aestheticism, will seem like mockery, as will any attempt, in the cynically optimistic spirit of theodicy or political realism, to "justify" what has happened as a necessary element of "the greater good of the whole". A lover is, because his desire is always for the beloved, incapable of seeing things "on the whole"; there is no room for a *Weltanschauung* in love, and no background against which the loss of the beloved could seem to be not so bad after all; there is nothing to mitigate the loss. This is the "wretchedness" of love.[93] It is true that this wretchedness is simply the other, painful, side of the blessing and joy of love, but the painful side is nonetheless there, as a possibility if not a reality – which is not to say, of course, that friends would or should go around *worrying* about it.

Commenting critically on Augustine's responding to the death of his best friend by (apparently) turning away from earthly loves to the "love" of the eternal, never to be lost God, C. S. Lewis writes:

> There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one ... lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket ... it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell. ... We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armour. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it.[94]

If love really was endless self-denying service, *or* an attitude which in itself was bliss, there would be no risk; one would be safe in one's attitude regardless of what might happen or what others might do; one would know already what life

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[93] I borrow this expression from Ladislaus Grünhut; cf. the discussion of "*das Elend der Liebe*" in his *Eros und Agape. Eine Metaphysisch-Religionsphilosophische Untersuchung* (Leipzig: C. L. Hirschfeld Verlag,, 1931), pp. 107–126.

[94] Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1974 [1960]), p. 111 f. – Cf. Augustine's *Confessions*, Book IV:vii ff.

will be; endless toil or bliss, or perhaps bliss *in* the endless toil. Here love itself would be turned into the imaginary armour against affliction that "wisdom" has always been presented as in our tradition. But love is no armour, it is the very opposite of that; in love, one *opens* oneself to the other, that is, one gives up every defence, every protection against what the encounter with her may bring.

– *Evil as retaliation* –

In our average moral thinking we take it for granted that some sacrifices will have to be made and can be demanded of us in terms of helping others and accomodating to their legitimate claims, but such sacrifices are assumed to take place in the context of a basic reciprocity in which I do no more for others than they have done, or can be expected to do, for me. So if they treat me badly, I am in my rights to treat them accordingly; if not repaying in kind, punching the one who punched me, then at least refusing them kindness. This is taken for granted to such an extent that Adam Smith can describe it as a law of nature:

> As every man doth, so shall it be done to him, and retaliation seems to be the great law which is dictated to us by Nature. Beneficence and generosity we think due to the generous and beneficent. Those whose hearts never open to the feelings of humanity should, we think, be shut out, in the same manner, from the affections of their fellow-creatures, and be allowed to live in the midst of society, as in a great desert where there is nobody to care for them, or to inquire after them. The violator of the laws of justice ought to be made to feel himself that evil which he has done to another...[95]

This certainly sounds very reasonable in its way, and if goodness was about being reasonable, perhaps goodness would look like this. But in fact goodness does not look anything like this. What we constantly, indeed quite "naturally", display in our thinking and actions is a terrible callousness and self-righteousness, as Smith's words bring out. How could one think it fair and even a duty to see to it that a fellow human being should be forced "to live in the midst of society, as in a great desert where there is nobody to care for them, or to inquire after them"? – "Well, seeing what he did, he deserved it!" – I will not

[95] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* Edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 82.

dispute that; perhaps he did deserve it, but then that just goes to show what terrible callousness there can be in giving people what they *deserve*.

Jesus rejects the spirit of retaliation completely, of course: "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you."[96] Appearances to the contrary, I would say this has essentially nothing to do with sacrifice or self-denial, although it will certainly seem like self-denial to someone in the grips of the spirit of retaliation. And since we are all very familiar with that spirit, the words of Jesus sound unreasonable and absurd.

Note, however, that they are not unreasonable and absurd in themselves; there is nothing illogical or unthinkable in what Jesus says. On the contrary, his "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise",[97] of which the injunction to love our enemies is as it were a special application, is quite as plain and logical as Smith's "As every man doth, so shall it be done to him." In *both* cases there is a kind of self-evidence about the maxim, something which might make us say "*Of course* I will do to you what you did to me" or "*Of course* I will do to you what I want you to do to me". Nonetheless, what Jesus says seems absurd, while what Smith says seems natural. Why? An obvious thing to note is that it seems natural that I should do to you what I want you to do to me only insofar as we imagine a case in which we have had no particular dealings with each other, and have no particular reason to distrust each other – or else a case in which I know you and trust you. Then I naturally would do as I want to be done by. As soon as we imagine that you have already done something bad to me, however, retaliation suddenly appears as the natural thing.

This is why the most radical formulation of the love of neighbour in the Gospels is precisely the injunction to love one's enemies. As Anders Nygren rightly says, if one takes "sympathy with human misery" to be the essence of love, this gives it a "sentimental", and therefore very safe, character, whereas the challenging point and the centre of love is "a will for fellowship that overcomes all sin and wrong".[98] Being kind to strangers who are in a worldly

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[96] *Luke* 6:27 f.
[97] *Luke* 6:31.
[98] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p. 326. – Nygren is talking specifically about Marcion's conception of divine love, which he criticises because Marcion holds that God primarily loves the *stranger*, rather than the *sinner*, which is the central idea in primitive and orthodox Christianity. Another reason why the parable of the good Samaritan is so popular, beside the one noted above, may be that the Samaritan loves a stranger rather than a sinner. The Samaritan's actions do not strike us as absurd in the same way as the actions in the parables which tell about unaccountable

sense "nothing" to one may be a challenge because it is bothersome; it may be hard work and perhaps disgusting, and it keeps one from doing the things one would like to do. But for us in our lovelessness, the hardest thing is to love someone who has been cold or positively mean or cruel or spiteful. In other words, the central difficulty of love is *forgiveness*.

It is perhaps necessary to point out specifically that it would be a misunderstanding of the injunction to love one's enemies to think that the way we love our friends is alright as it is, and what we are enjoined to do is start loving a new group of people, our enemies, in the way we already love our friends. It is not only that the people we consider our friends today may do something tomorrow which in our eyes makes them into enemies, so that a person's status as one or the other is nothing decided once and for all. The important point is that the very fact that we divide people into friends and enemies shows our attitude to *both* to be wrong; because we are in both cases guided by the spirit of retaliation, being friendly to the friendly, hostile to the hostile. To love one's enemies is to move beyond that attitude, to free oneself of the spirit of retaliation, and it implies loving those one calls one's *friends* in a new way, too.

Retaliation might perhaps come to seem less obviously legitimate and "healthy" if we consider that the *evil* we perpetrate is generally speaking to be characterised as retaliation; it is revenge, direct or indirect, taken on others for some suffering or injustice we claim they have visited on us. The suffering or injustice itself may be real or imaginary, but in both cases it is seen in the false, egocentric light of self-pity. No matter what one *says* about it, and how one experiences it consciously, the evil one does has its motives, its explanations, its spurious "justifications", in what one has suffered at the hands of others. I do not mean this as a metaphysical or psychological hypothesis. My point is rather that it makes no sense to suppose that someone who had *nothing against anyone*, who did not feel in any way that they had been made to suffer unjustly, would do evil.

Certainly, one need not take revenge on the person or persons one feels have wronged one, but may instead retaliate on others closer at hand. The phenomenon of *vicarious revenge* is an extremely pervasive one, and through it evil – that is, meanness, callousness; all the various modes in which we reject each other – spreads from one person to the next like a contagious disease. A

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forgiveness, of goodness in spite of everything.

typical example: the man gets a scolding form his boss, he gets home and shouts at his wife, who in her turn gives their son a hard time; the son retaliates by beating up another boy at school; the victim happens to be the son of the boss, and he retaliates by giving his parents a hard time, and so the boss becomes even meaner to his underlings – and so it goes on.[99]

Vicarious revenge accounts for much evildoing that would otherwise seem quite unrelated to revenge, such as being mean to someone who has done absolutely nothing to one. It should also be noted that the person whom one makes suffer vicariously may well be *oneself*; self-destructiveness, masochism, is no minor factor in this connexion. Many more cases can be seen to have the character of revenge if we remember that often one cannot really assign the blame for one's sufferings to particular persons; one simply feels that life in general has treated one unfairly. One can point one's finger at that person there, this one here, but one does not feel that it is only these people, or anyone in particular, who is to blame; it is rather that life has not been what one expected and hoped for it to be, and so one needs someone to take the blame for this, one needs a scapegoat to hang one's general frustration and anguish on.[100]

Here we should note, by the way, that the reaction of feeling *humiliated* is not at all innocent, as though the evil would appear only with the desire to take revenge. For it is not as though it was a *surprise* that such a desire comes out of a feeling of humiliation. Rather, vindictiveness is a typical reaction – not the only possible one, of course, but a typical one – to humiliation, and the fact that humiliation breeds vindictiveness is part of our understanding of what both humiliation and vindictiveness are. This means that feeling humiliated is itself already a destructive, and in this sense evil, reaction – and the fact that what one feels humiliated *by* may be evil, and that this reaction may be very understandable, does not alter this. It is an integral part of the evil of evil, of its destructiveness, that it tends to call forth evil responses in others, but the fact that one's evil is a response to another's does not make it any less evil.

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[99] The centrality of such patterns was emphasised by Simone Weil, cf. *Gravity and Grace.* Translated by Emma Craufurd (London & New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1987 [1952]), pp. 2 f., 5 ff., 64 f. and passim. R. F. Holland, who acknowledges Weil's influence on his thinking at this point, has a good discussion of the topic in the essay "Good and evil in action" in his *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

[100] The importance of the phenomenon of *scapegoating* in our lives has recently been emphasised by René Girard, for instance in *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977 [1972]). One recent application of Girardian insights, which clearly merit close study by moral philosophers, is James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong. Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

This is not to say that I would *blame* a person who is made to suffer some blatant form of abuse and reacts by feeling humiliated. It would obviously be grotesque to blame a rape-victim if she feels humiliated, for instance. Blame does not come into this at all. The point is rather that the person who feels humiliated has succumbed to accepting precisely the evil way of looking at herself which the person who was out to humiliate tried to foist on her. By "treating her like dirt" he wanted to make her feel that she *is* dirt, and in feeling humiliated – degraded, disgraced, *soiled* or *besmirched* – she accepts that he has in some measure succeeded in turning her into dirt. In feeling this she thus allows his evil intention to succeed by accepting his perspective on her. Her desire to take revenge on him or someone else for having been "made" – in fact, having allowed herself – to look at herself in this humiliating way, is a natural continuation of this original evil.[101]

One could also say that the person who feels humiliated comes to see the encounter in terms of *power*; those are the terms in which the person trying to humiliate her sees it, and tries to make her see it. He feels, and wants her to feel, that through his superior power he can reduce her to nothing, to someone with whom he can do as he pleases while she is reduced to desperate, hopeless fury at her powerlessness. His evil designs will be frustrated if his would-be victim does not react in the way he envisages; if, for instance, her *pride* is so strong that she refuses to be victimised and responds to his attempts to break her with open *contempt*, letting him feel that in her eyes, *he* is "nothing". In this case, the would-be victim plays the same game of *spiritual power*, of pride and shame, honour and disgrace, cleanness and dirtiness, as the would-be victimiser. She *accepts* his challenge and defeats him, or lets him understand that she considers him to be so far beneath her that he is in no position even to issue a challenge to her.

There is also another possibility, however, that of *humility* rather than pride, in which the whole game of power and honour is simply passed by, and

[101] Here it might be said that feeling humiliated is a spontaneous reaction someone cannot help having or lacking, and which is in this sense beyond, or rather before, good and evil; the moral issues come in only with the question what a person *makes of* her first spontaneous reactions, the way she allows or refuses to allow the feeling of humiliation to grow on her and to poison her life with bitter vindictiveness, for instance. I reject this assumed contrast between a first, innocent, reaction, and the subsequent, responsible or irresponsible, way of dealing with it. I will return to this question in Chapter Four. Here, let me only note that the reason for there being, morally speaking, anything to "deal with" in the first place, is obviously that the first reaction itself already has a morally speaking evil, destructive orientation or tendency, and so it can hardly be called innocent. It should also be noted that one may very well have a bad conscience about quite spontaneous reactions, because of what they revealed about oneself.

in that very passing-it-by its essential futility is revealed. The humble response to the would-be victimiser does not reveal the superior power of the humble person, but rather her insight into how terrible, how terribly deluded and meaningless, it is, both for her *and* for the would-be victimiser, that he should want to exercise power over her, that he should feel that he *is* "something" only if he can make her feel that she is "nothing". Whereas the proud person closes herself, presents an impregnable wall to the aggressor, the humble person as it were opens the door for him, and through that very gesture raises the question – infuriating and humiliating in its humble directness which simply allows for no "answer" in the terms of power – of *what* it is the aggressor thinks he is breaking into, and what he hopes to achieve by it.

In humiliation and revenge, one passes the evil one has been made to suffer onto others. The point I insist on, however, is that being treated unjustly or made to suffer does not of itself lead one to feel a humiliated or indignant need to take revenge. There is nothing *necessary* in the impulse to retaliate, one *must* not pass the evil on. What happens is rather that we constantly fall for the temptation to do so. We may well speak of *hereditary sin* here, but that is not to be understood as something we are just saddled with through no fault of our own; the point is rather, I would say, that our sinfulness *consists* in our "inheriting" the sins of others by passing them on in the form of revenge; in thus trying to pass on the sin we in fact *make it our own*.[102]

There is another possibility to deal with the suffering which others bring on one, however. As Simone Weil said, while evil consists in "changing suffering into violence", the response of goodness to evil is to "change violence into suffering".[103] This is part of what it means to "turn the other cheek". It does *not* mean that one would be somehow indifferent to the blows one receives, to the meanness, the spite, the indifference; that one would not suffer from it. One does suffer, but one does not allow the spirit of revenge to take over, does not fall for the temptation to defend oneself against suffering by making someone suffer.

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[102] Kierkegaard's grappling with the concept of hereditary sin in *The Concept of Anxiety*, a book whose subtitle is "A simple psychologically orienting deliberation on the dogmatic issue of hereditary sin", shows how very hard it is to think straight about it. The difficulty does not merely attach to the concept, but to the moral-existential problematic it names: how the sins of others impinge on the individual. See Kierkegaard, *The concept of anxiety*. Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII. Edited and translated by Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[103] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 65.

– *Trust and hope* –

Why does one turn the other cheek? Well, insofar as one really turns the other cheek in the existential sense – insofar as we are not just dealing with a failure to defend oneself explained by weakness or resorted to out of calculation; insofar as one's response expresses humility rather than humiliation or cunning – the answer to why one acts as one does, is simply that one loves the person who delivered the blow and one sees the destructiveness of hitting back. What moves one is the desire in spite of everything to be with the other. One does not do it because one believes one "should" do it. Turning the other cheek is simply part of what it *means* to feel love or friendship for someone, it is what love *will in fact* "work" in one, insofar as its work is not undone by other forces. The injunctions to love our enemies become absurd if they are taken as imperatives, as demands, for no one has the right to demand of anyone that they should, for instance, go an extra mile with someone who already forced them to go where they did not want to go.[104] But if you *love* the person who forced you, and you do not want to lose her, then what *can* you do but to walk along with her?

One turns the other cheek because one does not want to wage war with the other even if she fired the first shot. In doing that she was indeed asking for one to return the fire, but her asking for it obviously does not force one to give her what she asks for. To turn the other cheek is to respond to her, but not in the way she asked for, not in the way she expected to be responded to. It is to remain open to her even as she closes herself to one, and in so doing to refuse to let the future be determined by the past as it appears to the destructive logic of retaliation, according to which one is destined to continue the spiral of hostility if once the other started it.

If one is moved by the spirit of retaliation, one is always looking back towards hostilities in the past which are supposed to justify one's hostile response *now*. Turning the other cheek, by contrast, means looking to the future. Not just to any future, but to the future of friendship or love, where the enmity that is now between us will be no more. As Kierkegaard says, insofar as the lover "abides" in love and does not reject his beloved even if she rejects and

[104] Matthew 5:41.

keeps rejecting him, one can say that he "knows no past; he waits only for the future".[105] To him, "the relationship which another considers broken is a relationship which has not yet been completed"; if his beloved tells him she will never speak to him again, he is not deterred: "we shall still speak with one another, because silence also belongs to conversation at times", he says – and even if it was years since they spoke, "Can anyone determine how long a silence must have been in order to say now, there is no more conversation"?[106] Again:

> Does the dance cease because one dancer has gone away? In a certain sense. But if the other still remains standing in the posture which expresses a turning towards the one who is not seen, and if you know nothing about the past, then you will say, "Now the dance will begin just as soon as the other comes, the one who is expected".[107]

There is no limit beyond which a lover, or a friend moved by the spirit of friendship, would not go to salvage a faltering relationship, no point after which she would stop turning the other cheek, no point beyond which she would lose her faith in friendship, her hope – even if it be a hope against all odds – that friendship may be renewed. Every declaration of friendship or love is also a declaration of *faith* in the other's love, even if she has for now withdrawn that love from one. It may be quite unreasonable to go on hoping for friendship in the face of what the other – and/or oneself – has done, but then there *is* nothing "reasonable" in feeling friendship in the first place.

To "go on loving" someone who rejects one in the *absence* of faith and hope can mean only that one's "love" is merely some sort of infatuation or bondage of need, in which case one feels that one "cannot" stop "loving" the other, but is helplessly tied to him, at his mercy, no matter how he abuses one. However, if one's love is more than this, if it is really *love*, then to go on loving the other will mean *forgiving* him, *that is*, appealing to him to let go of his hostility, to reunite with one in love's openness. And one's appeal is possible, is a real appeal and not just the resigned repetition of an ineffectual wish, only insofar as one has faith that, however things may look, one is not speaking to deaf ears, that there is in the other a *love* that one's appeal speaks to or, as one

[105] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 285.
[106] Ibid., p. 284 f.
[107] Ibid., p. 285

may also put it, that *he* is still there to be spoken to, behind all the hostile apparatus of rejection that in his fear or shame he has built up.

Note, however, that hoping that the other would end the estrangement or the enmities does not necessarily or essentially mean that one entertains any *particular* thoughts or expectations about the likelihood that she will do so; it may well be that one admits that nothing at all speaks for it, that it would be sheer foolishness, for instance, to make plans based on the supposition that she will. Hope is not a *prediction*, it is an *openness*; it means that, faced with a situation which may tempt one to give in to bitterness or cynicism, one does not do so.

It is not that one turns to the other, asking for her friendship, only because one has made a calculation that there is still some chance, however slim, that she might not reject one. The point is rather that if one's turning to her is wholehearted, an expression of friendship rather than an empty gesture, then this *means* that one does hope for an answer from her. One has no grounds for this hope, and this hope is not a ground for one's still desiring the other. On the contrary, *hope* is simply another name for one's desire, for one's love, for the turning to the other. Here we see once more how the apparent distinctions introduced when one tries to indicate in different ways what is involved in friendship, turn out to be inessential.

If *hope* is another name for the desire for the friend, and the same is true of *forgiveness* and *turning the other cheek*. The latter is not the name of a program of practical steps which help one deal with hostility; turning the other cheek does not mean, for instance, pestering someone who shows clearly that she does not want to see one with endless visits in a "conciliatory spirit". One's turning the other cheek *might* come to outward expression in one's refusing to leave the other person in peace, but it might also consist simply in the fact that one does not think with bitterness of a friend who, out of some selfish motive, angrily cut off relations with one, and whom one has not heard from since. Here, turning the other cheek means simply what it *essentially* always means, whatever outward actions it may issue in: remaining open to resuming the relationship with the friend who broke with one – I mean resuming it outwardly, in actual intercourse with the other, for inwardly one never broke it off, in one's heart one never refused the other.

In general, loving one's friend, being open to her, does *not* mean believing that she would never do anything wrong or let one down. To love someone is *not* to *trust* her, in this sense. This is obviously not to say that loving

someone means *distrusting* her. Not being distrustful of one's friend – not harbouring suspicions regarding her, not feeling anxious or jealous or afraid about telling her something or asking something of her, and therefore rejecting suspicions out of hand if someone tries to insinuate them – may be a manifestation of the openness in which one moves with one's friend. On the other hand, the lack of distrust need not be an manifestation of openness, it may on the contrary be a form of wishful thinking, or of complacently taking the other for granted – in short, it may betray one's lack of openness. It will no doubt be said that trust must be distinguished both from complacency and wishful thinking. But how exactly is the difference to be indicated?

We should note that what someone sees as trust, and a good thing, someone else may see as a deplorable case of wishful thinking, and there is no neutral perspective from which to decide who is right – there is never a neutral perspective from which to decide anything in moral and existential matters. This does not mean, however, that there is nothing more to say, in philosophical terms, about possible differences between conflicting perspectives. To my mind, the decisive difference between a trust that is a manifestation of openness, and one that is not, can be indicated by saying that while the latter kind of trust, call it "closed trust", is essentially blind, openness is the very opposite, for being open really means being *open*, opening one's eyes and ears and one's whole being to the other.

It is certainly true that *all* trust goes "blindly" forward, is a "belief in things unseen", in the sense that the trusting one cannot by definition give sufficient grounds for her trust in the other. If she could, or indeed wanted to, she would not *trust*, but *rely* on the other, having judged her – rightly or wrongly, reasonably or not – to be *trustworthy*. If I find you trustworthy, I believe I have good grounds for expecting a certain kind of behaviour from you. If I trust you, I have no such grounds, I simply *do* expect you to behave in certain ways – and often the negative expectation is the more important one; I do *not* think that you would ever behave in certain ways.[108]

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[108] The distinction between *trust* and *reliance* is discussed in Lars Hertzberg, "On the Attitude of Trust", reprinted in his *The Limits of Experience.* Acta Philosophica Fennica Vol. 56 (Helsinki, 1994); Olli Lagerspetz, *Trust*: *The Tacit Demand* (Dodrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), uses this distinction to expose the confusions and downright stupidity involved in the wish to find grounds for deciding when, if ever, trust is "legitimate" or "reasonable"; a wish shaping most discussions of trust in Anglo-American philosophy. Josef Pieper, "Über den Glauben: Ein philosophischer Traktat", reprinted in his *Lieben, hoffen, glauben* (München: Kösel, 1986), is another useful discussion of questions connected with trust and faith. – None of these authors see trust in the light of the question of openness, however, and to my mind this leaves a void, as it

Important as this contrast between trust and reliance is, it will not allow us to distinguish closed trust from openness, however. So far, we have taken both trust and reliance as attitudes manifested in one's making certain assumptions about the future behaviour of the other person; in the one case the assumptions have a ground, in the other they do not, but in both cases there *are* assumptions. Being open is not a matter of assuming anything, however. Whereas closed trust is, in one way or another, explicitly or tacitly, a belief in a "perfection" in one's friend, or in one's relationship to her, which renders it *unthinkable* for one that she would do what one trusts her not to do, openness is not a belief *in* anything, it is not an *anticipation* – even in the form of a tacit expectation – of the friend's future behaviour. It is an orientation to the future, or rather an orientation unto the friend, a humble desire for the other which prompts one ever again to go up to her, offering her one's love and asking her to love one back.

The difference between closed trust and openness is shown not by how certain one is that the other will not let one down, but rather by how one reacts *if* the other nonetheless lets one down – which she, being only human, may of course do, however shocking it may be to the trusting. Insofar as there is a lack of openness, the trusting one will feel *betrayed*; she feels that what the other did has somehow turned their whole relationship into a lie; "I trusted you, and now you do this..." The breach of trust will therefore raise – although it will not answer – the question whether the friendship can continue at all. And even if the party who feels betrayed decides that it can, it is precisely a decision that she thinks is hers to make; *the other* was the one who broke the trust, so he has no right to expect that she will trust him again; it is for *her* to decide whether she "can" or will "accept him back".

Looked at, and experienced from, the perspective of openness, the situation appears in a different light. If a person closes himself to the openness his friend invites him to, this may certainly come to expression in actions which from the perspective of closed trust would be experienced as a betrayal; bad-mouthing one's friend behind his back, for instance. The closure does not consist in those actions themselves, however; they are rather the symptoms and expressions of one's having closed oneself to one's friend, and that closure may also come out in ways which could not be described as breaches of trust at all. If your friend asks you about something out of a friendly desire to know how it is with you, and you refuse to talk to her about it, you are closing yourself to

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were, at the very centre of their otherwise excellent discussions..

her, but what you do could not be described as a betrayal of her trust in you. It is not that you show by your actions that she cannot trust you; rather you show that *you* do not trust *her*. There is no betrayal, but there *is* distrust, a lack of openness between you.

While the friend who feels her trust has been betrayed lays the blame at the door of her traitorous friend, the friend who is open does not apportion blame in the same seemingly self-evident way. From the perspective of closed trust the fact that my friend has deceived me means only that he has callously taken advantage of the "blindness" which my trust in him has induced in me; he has taken advantage of the fact that I did not check up on him or take any other precautionary measures in regard to him. I acted thus "gullibly", as it *now* seems, because in the goodness of my heart I trusted him. Or so I would have it. But again, this raises the question how trust is to be distinguished from the *naivety* of wishful thinking, from a refusal to see the signs that the other is not being open with one? From the perspective of openness the fact that my friend has deceived me raises a question about my own role in allowing myself to be taken in by the deception; how was it that I was blind to the fact that he was lying to me, closing himself to me? Must that not mean that I myself was not quite open to him, that something made me prefer to turn a blind eye to his manipulations? For how could it be that one person is completely open to the other and yet does not notice that the other closes himself to her?

Furthermore, insofar as I am open to my friend, the fact that she has closed herself to me, and perhaps acted very callously towards me, does not render it doubtful whether I want to go on being her friend. To be open *is* to desire life with the other, it is to desire, and to go on desiring, one's friend, not "someone perfect" – which, again, is not to say that one does not care what kind of response one gets from one's friend.

Let me sum up once more the main point in regard to the question of love and the response it seeks. It has often been thought that love must *either* be some sort of "gratuitous" attitude which is somehow independent of, *unmoved* by, the response, if any, one gets from one's friend, *or* an attitude which is *conditional* on one's getting a particular response one wishes for from one's friend (and if one does not get that response, one will simply leave her and try to find someone else who satisfies one's requirements better). Neither of these attitudes is love, however. In love, one wants nothing but the other's love, and precisely for this reason one will stay and keep asking for that love "for ever". You do not turn the other cheek because it is all the same to you how I respond

to you, but precisely because it makes all the difference in the world to you, because you want to be with me, in openness.

– *Anger* –

Turning the other cheek might seem passive, while hitting back seems active; one does something, instead of doing nothing. That is an illusion, however. In hitting back one lets oneself passively be blown by the spirit of revenge "where it listeth", while in turning the other cheek one actively refuses this easy way. It is an equally superficial view to think that turning the other cheek must always be a meek, gentle, thing.

In one sense it is never gentle, but always provocative. If I want to fight, it provokes me much more if you respond by refusing to fight – *if* you do it out of love, not out of cowardice – than if you fight back as I expected. Friendship or love is always provocative in this radical sense, because it moves in a dimension beyond the forces it challenges without opposing (you can oppose only what is on your level). If you hit me and I hit back, action and reaction are on the same level, in the same dimension, and if I do not hit back but beg for mercy, or run away, or try to "take" the beating while minimising the damage, I still remain on the same level, I am just employing different strategies for survival. But turning the other cheek means moving into another dimension altogether; it means that one is not concerned about survival, or about affirming or gaining power, but instead desires to live in openness with the other, even if she by her actions has made it clear that she is intent on rejecting one. Turning the other cheek is not a strategy, it is an expression of love, and so an appeal to the aggressor's heart or conscience.

Turning the other cheek is, then, never gentle in the sense of making it *easy* for the aggressor; it is the most challenging thing imaginable. This is true even in cases where the actions of the person turning the other cheek are gentle, non-violent, in their outer manifestations. Anger and violence, too, may be ways of turning the other cheek, however. Surprising as it may sound, in (physically) smiting me you may in fact be turning the other cheek (existentially speaking). Anger and violence, too, may be manifestations of friendship –

although most often they are not, of course, but instead manifest selfishness, unfriendliness.

Seen from the perspective of friendship, there are basically two kinds of anger – and the fact that they are often mixed up together in a friend's actual angry reactions does not in any way make the distinction itself uncertain. One is the *self-centred* anger where I become angry with my friend because I feel that she has in some way got in the way of my getting what *I* want. Such anger reveals that I have fallen from the unity of friendship in which there is no "yours" and "mine". But there is also a different kind of anger, one that is awakened in you by my having in some way disregarded or violated the friendship between us. Here, 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. Such anger is, as C. S. Lewis says, "the fluid that love bleeds when you cut it."[109]

Selfish anger is the way the demanding spirit manifests itself when its demands are denied. What one angrily demands is the moral recognition one thinks due to one from the other because she has failed to act in a way one had "a right to expect" (anger is distinguished from equally self-centred reactions of mere frustration or irritation by its being thus *moralised*, framed in the language of morality). By contrast, the anger that is an expression of friendship makes no *demands* at all. This may sound absurd, because is it not, as John Casey says, "part of the nature of anger that one make certain demands, that one seek a certain response", and is not the angry man someone who "claims that his feelings and attitudes be taken seriously", who "considers himself justified"?[110]

It is certainly true that in anger one seeks a *response* from the other, and that one insists that one's feelings be taken seriously, but it does not follow that one thinks in terms of justification or demands at all. To make use of some remarks of Simone Weil's, we might say that the angry friend does not cry "I have the right..." or "You have no right to..." but rather "What you are doing to me is not just"; in his anger one hears no "shrill nagging of claims and counter-claims" awakening "the spirit of contention", but rather "a cry of protest from the depth of the heart", awakening the spirit of friendship in which the two friends belong together.[111]

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[109] Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1966 [1964]), p. 98.
[110] Casey, *Pagan Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 13.
[111] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, p. 325 f. – In the passage I quote from, Weil is not speaking

The angry friend is asking for what love always asks for, the other's love, and that is not something that *can* be demanded, or in any way enforced. He cries out to his friend: "Please stop what you're doing!" giving no reason why the other should stop beyond the appeal to friendship itself. This is not to say that he implies that *as a friend* he has a right to anything. He is not demanding his rights, he simply asks: "I want to be your friend, don't you want to be mine?" One might also say that his cry is "Why do you treat me this way?" He is not, of course, asking for an explanation, he is appealing to the heart or conscience of his friend, that is: to the feelings of friendship, to the desire for openness that the friend refused in closing herself to him.

A friend's anger is from the start animated by the desire for *forgiveness*, rather than by v*indictiveness*. The desire for retaliation – understood as the desire to "get even" in the everyday sense of that phrase, or in the apparently more "exalted" sense of a desire that the offender who arouses one's anger be justly punished, or that the injury inflicted on one's dignity or self-esteem be repaired – has often been taken to be the defining purpose of anger.[112] But an angry friend is not, insofar as she remains open to her friend, intent on getting

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about anger or friendship specifically.

[112] This is Aristotle's view, and Aquinas follows him in his analysis of anger. A clear statement of the Aristotelian-Thomist view of anger, which may rightly be termed classic, can be found in Patrick O'Brien, C. M., *Emotions and Morals. Their Place and Purpose in Harmonious Living* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1950), pp. 131–158. The view makes room for, and indeed insists on, a distinction between morally speaking "good" and "bad" anger, but that distinction is not, of course, made in terms of openness or its lack, but rather in terms of whether or how far the angry reaction conforms to "reason" or "law". As O'Brien explains, the angry man seeks "vindication for himself, and punishment of his offender", and if his anger is to be justified he must first of all "have a right to be angry" (which he might lack, for instance "he has no right to want to 'get even' with ... one who has given him what he deserved"); secondly, he must "seek just and reasonable punishment proportionate to the magnitude of the offence" (p. 140 f.). Unlawful anger manifests "the inordinate desire for revenge", where the angry reaction is "*too* violent under the circumstances, and out of reasonable proportion to the stimulus", as when someone "flies into a rage merely because his toe has been stepped on in a street-car" (p. 142 f.). These passages illustrate clearly both the *retaliatory moralism* of the Aristotelian way of doing moral philosophy (everything is about good people giving bad people what they deserve), and the essential *arbitrarinesss* of the determinations which it relies on to distinguish good from bad; for who is to say what is "*too* violent" or what is a "*reasonable* proportion" between action and response? This arbitrariness is not overcome, but merely hidden from view, by referring, as Aristotle himself explicitly does, to the determinations agreed upon *in fact*, and more or less instinctively, by "us", or by the "reasonable" or "virtuous" or "wise" among us whom, it should be noted, "we" are assumed to recognise, which must mean that we ourselves count ourselves wise, for it takes one to know one, and fools cannot really tell wise men from fools. – On Aristotle's view of anger, see also the last chapter in Michael Stocker (with Elisabeth Hegeman), *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University ress, 1996). For Aquinas, see his discusssion in Qestion XII of *On Evil*. Translated by Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 371–388 (for references to comparable passages in the *Summa Theologica*, see the index on p. 526).

even, but on reaffirming, re-establishing the openness that she feels was violated by her friend's selfish actions.

The fact that a friend's anger is not animated by a demanding spirit does not mean, however, that it is gentle or submissive: becoming angry *means* that one *cannot* submit to things as they are, and will not give up without a fight, and there is no such thing as fighting gently.[113] Precisely for this reason – because all anger is, in an obvious sense, *violent*, and violence frightens us – it will no doubt be asked why we should get angry at all? Could one not, and would a true friend not, react to his friend's callousness by simply feeling *sad* rather than angry? Thus one would get the *concern*, but without the violence of anger.

In answer to this I would point out, first of all, that violence *as such* is not inimical to friendship. For friendship is the desire for real contact with one's friend, and the contact *can* take violent forms. *Ill will* and *destructiveness* – which are actually synonyms: ill will being a will to destroy, to lay things waste, and only the presence of such a will turns mere destruction, considered as a natural process, into destructiveness – can never be expressions of friendship, but there need be nothing of these in the violence of anger. I am angry with my friend because I care about him and what he has done has put our world out of joint; the realisation that he could do such a thing has left me bewildered, and the violence of my anger is really the urgency, perhaps even desperation, of *my search for an affirmation from him* that this is *not* what he *really* wants things to be like. The appeal of my anger is like a "Please tell me it's not true!"

What frightens us in the violence of anger is not just what it might make others do to us or make us do to others, but the very violence of the reaction itself, the strength of the *charge* between us – a better word than "bond" in this connexion – that it reveals. As always, the violence does not come from friendship or love itself, however, but rather from the "collision" between love and forces inimical to it. Imagine a friend who is desperately angry with his friend who has betrayed him in cold blood, and shows no signs of remorse, perhaps explaining in a very detached, "rational" way that circumstances were such that he simply had no choice but to take the opportunity offered to him,

[113] The theologian James E. Gilman, who wants to claim anger as a Christian virtue, but evidently feels violence of any kind to be somehow un-Christian, actually proposes the nonsensical idea of "*gentle feelings of anger* that inspire care and compassion for the victim of injustice ... and reproof for the the unjust offender in hope of redeeming him" (Gilman, *Fidelity of Heart. An Ethic of Christian Virtue* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], p. 116, emphasis added).

apparently not caring at all about the disaster this brought on his friend. It would obviously be very misleading in such a case to say that the violence enters only with the betrayed friend's angry reaction; the real, unrelenting, merciless, violence lies in the brutal rejection of him by the cold, "rational" friend. An analogy: if someone who is taken away to be shot fights back, he is not the one who starts the violence; he simply introduces an element of disorder into the orderly proceedings of organised brutality ("Just calm down now, Sir, and come with us").

The violence of a friend's anger is simply the reflection of the violence the other has unleashed, which may have been of the "cool" or "hot", frank or sneaky, primitive or sophisticated type. But it is not the mere reaction of retaliation, staying on the same level as the original violence, for in the desire to reunite with the other, in the appeal to the other's conscience that speaks *in* the violence of the friend's anger, the anger constantly points towards a dimension beyond that of strife and violence; it points towards forgiveness.

– *Forgiveness* –

Philosophers have always been suspicious of forgiveness.[114] This is in large part because if you think of yourself as someone striving for *wisdom* in something like the sense this word has carried in most of our philosophical and spiritual tradition, you will concern yourself with your *personal* "spiritual progress" in such a way that what will seem crucial for you is not forgiving others but rather ridding yourself of the hurt feelings and resentment which make you think that there *is* anything to forgive in the first place, and you will speak – or at least think that you *should* speak, and would, if you were wiser – in the manner of the Sufi-mystic Rumi, who said that he was *grateful* even to thieves and robbers,

[114] This is not to say that philosophers have not written on forgiveness. Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), gives a judicious over-view of the contemporary discussion of the topic in English-speaking philosophy. In classical philosophy, forgiveness is not much in evidence, however. Hannah Arendt is one of the few thinkers of stature to have seen the importance of forgiveness for an understanding of human affairs; see *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 236–243.

> because they have done me such generous favors. Every time I turn back toward the things they want I run into them. They beat me and leave me in the road, and I understand again that what they want is not what I want. Those that make you return, for whatever reason, to the spirit, be grateful to them. Worry about the others, who give you delicious comfort that keeps you from prayer.[115]

This may be an admirable, and in its own way even sensible, attitude, but it is certainly not very friendly, for friendship is not about one's "personal progress", spiritual or otherwise, but about what one feels for others, and a friend cannot be grateful if his friend turns to robbing and thieving.

Certainly, there are many things – mistakes and misdemeanours, unpleasantness of all kinds and other trivialities – we should *excuse, overlook, forget*. One should excuse all that is excusable, although it is of course another question whether one *can* do it, or is small-minded enough to find it impossible. But there is also the inexcusable, the crimes against love which cannot be excused, but can only be forgiven. To excuse something is to say either that what someone did, although serious, was not something she can properly be held responsible for doing, or it is to say that what she did was really not so bad, that it is not anything one should get stuck on. Forgiveness, by contrast, becomes possible *and* necessary, for victim *and* perpetrator alike, precisely in the situations in which there is no question that the perpetrator is responsible for what he did, and one would be lying if one said that it was "not so bad".

One feels the need to *ask* forgiveness precisely when one realises that the mess one has made of one's own and other people's life really is of one's own making, that this is not an evil that *had* to be, but one that now *is* because one brought it into being. One may try to talk oneself into believing that *in general* everything happens of necessity, and so innocently, but as soon as one considers the rotten things one has done *oneself*, the self-deception involved becomes obvious.[116] And the same thing happens as soon as one tries to pretend that evil perpetrated by one's friends or loved one's – or in fact, if one thinks it through, by anyone at all – is "innocent". That is arrogant and listless at the same time: one presumes to put oneself above others in not deeming it worth taking them to task for what they have done, and in thus letting them slip away into evil, one reveals the tepidity of one's feelings for them.

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[115] Quoted in Patrick Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice", *Ethics* 109 (1998), 119–153, quote from p. 125, footnote.

[116] Cf. Eugen Drewermann's discussion of this point in *Strukturen des Bösen. Band III*. 5. Auflage (Ferdinand Schöningh: München & Paderborn, 1984-6), pp. 105–118.

We cannot and should not be reconciled with evil, with callousness, with unfriendliness; what we need is to be reconciled with *each other*, and so with life, *in spite of* the evil we do and suffer. Reconciliation does not mean denying or excusing evil; it means not letting it destroy everything, not letting it put out joy and hope. And only forgiveness can help us here. As Eugen Drewermann says, in order that there be reconciliation, we need to believe not in "the necessity of evil", but in "the freedom of forgiveness".[117]

Philosophers generally discuss morality as though what was needed for goodness was only the good will to make the best one can of one's situation, trying to do what is right and to work on one's shortcomings, on "becoming a better person". They speak as though one could always say "Cheer up! Keep trying! No use crying over spilt milk! Better luck next time!" But what about the person who through negligence kills someone in a road-accident, or those who are left to mourn the dead? Are they to cheer up or keep trying? *What* is it they should keep up? What kind of person should they work on becoming? The kind who does not kill people through negligence? The kind who are not torn apart by grief when a loved one is killed? These are meaningless suggestions. The challenge facing the bereaved is to grieve without sinking into despair, becoming depressed, taking to drink, and so on. As for the negligent driver, he certainly *should* become less negligent, and his attitude to driving will, if he is not very callous, be quite changed after what happened, but the point is that what he has to try to live with is *what he did*, and whatever he achieves in terms of becoming less negligent in the future, will not help him with this task.

In reflecting on cases like this one is struck by the superficiality, the existential irrelevance, of Greek and most modern ethics, with their mundane talk of virtues and vices, of nobility, utility, rights, duties, aspirations, self-realisation, and so on. All those words seem ludicrously inadequate to the occasion, while Christianity's grand words, faith, hope, love and forgiveness – and also: guilt and sin and hell – seem not at all too big, but the only kind that can even begin to address the situation. To someone who has done terrible things and does not know how to go on living now, mundane ethics can only say "You should not have done it" and "You shall not do it again" – as though he did not know that! – and then perhaps add that meaningless "Keep trying!", when his problem is how to come to terms with his past, which he cannot even try to change.

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[117] Drewermann, ibid., p. 115.

In forgiveness, the crippling hold of the past on our future is broken. In my unforgivingness, I look back upon what you did and declare that no future is possible for us now; we will both have to go our separate ways. I declare that the past has won, that the future has already and irrevocably been decided – or, as one could also say, I keep the past present, I refuse to let it go, I declare with Faulkner that "The past is never dead, it is not even past".[118] In forgiveness, by contrast, we free ourselves from this destructive fixation on what has been, we re-enter the openness which your callous deed and my unforgiving reaction to it had locked us out from. In unforgivingness one as it were goes backwards into the future in the manner of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history", with one's eyes always fixed on the offences of the past, while one reduces everything good in one's path to "a pile of debris".[119] In forgiveness, one turns around to *face one's friend*, and in so doing, one also turns around to face the future, the future of friendship, in which one longs to be with one's friend.

Unless one forgives, one can go on living with one's friend only in the closed world of bitterness and distrust. This is not to say that one forgives *in order to* be able to go on living with her in another way. In contrast to cases where one tries to "normalise" things, to lay the accusations aside for the sake of making life together bearable, there is no calculation in forgiveness. Forgiveness is *not* a normalisation, it does not mean that one goes back to one's old ways or settles for a *modus vivendi* of some sort; such things are possible and necessary only where there has been no forgiveness and no reconciliation – or one could say that such things are what reconciliation is reduced to in the absence of forgiveness.

The discussions carried on by moral philosophers and others about the "limits" of forgiveness, about what "should" be forgiven, about when it would be "reasonable" or "morally legitimate" to forgive, are completely beside the point.[120] It is not, after all, as though the problem was that there was too much forgiveness in the world, that people were tempted to forgive things all too

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[118] Quoted in Hannah Arendt, "Home to Roost: A Bicentennial Address", *The New York Review of Books* 22/11 (June 26, 1975), p. 6. – Arendt gives no source for the quote.

[119] Cf. "Theses on the Philosophy of History", § IX, in Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1992 [1973]), p. 249. – Benjamin uses the picture in a discussion very different in character from mine.

[120] Cf., for instance, Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). A sense of the range of attitudes to "the unforgivable" to be found among intellectuals can be gleaned from the responses collected in the symposium in Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower. On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness.* With a Symposium edited by Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman. Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Shocken Books, 1998 [1976]).

easily, and needed to be told to cut down on it. It is true of course that we are very often tempted to excuse what is inexcusable in our own conduct and in that of others. We do not dare an open confrontation and prefer to turn a blind eye to the injustice and callousness we witness. However, such situations are not examples of forgiving too much, for they are not examples of *forgiving* at all, but rather of self-deception.

Where *forgiveness* is involved, the problem is not that we forgive too easily, but rather that we know we *need* to forgive and be forgiven, but feel we cannot do it. Forgiveness comes into view, one could say, only as an impossible possibility: what one needs to forgive is precisely that which, before one in fact forgives, seems unforgivable, too terrible even to be contemplated. Taken in this sense Derrida's paradoxical claim that "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable" is quite correct.[121]

Forgiveness cannot be *discussed*, any more than other manifestations of openness. When someone asks: "How could you forgive him for doing what he did?" it is not a demand for reasons, for justification; it is a question only in form, in substance it is an exclamation, an expression of disbelief: "Don't you see how terrible it was?" We *can* discuss what should be done to redress grievances that one person or group has against another, we can discuss the fairness of compensations and punishments. But all this presupposes that we can meaningfully weigh things against each other, that *this* is equivalent to *that*, that one would be satisfied to get *this* in recompense for *that*. Forgiveness, by contrast, comes into play precisely where what was done seems so terrible that nothing could ever make up for it, make it good again.

Thus, if your negligence causes a minor road accident in which my car is wrecked, I may be very angry with you, but we can discuss what the compensation should be, and if you are sorry for what you did, it would be small-minded of me not to accept your apology. But if your negligence causes the death of my child, you obviously cannot compensate me for this; there is nothing to *discuss*, and an *apology* from you will take us nowhere. If we are to be able to go on living after this tragedy in a way which is not permanently maimed by it – as it necessarily will always be *marked* by it, for the death of a loved one cannot be forgotten – I need to forgive you, and you need me to forgive you, as you also need to forgive yourself. This is what we desperately need, and the only question is whether we *can* forgive.

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[121] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 32.

Forgiveness seems impossible as long as one is stuck in the question "How could *this* (this terrible thing that was done) be forgiven?" To forgive is not to come to see that what was done was not so bad; *that* means to excuse it, to see that there was really nothing there to forgive. In forgiveness, by contrast, one does not in any way downplay the evil of the deed. The point is that forgiveness changes one's focus; instead of staring in horror at what was done, one comes to see the person who did it, the human being behind the deed, the sinner behind the sin; one always forgives the sinner, not the sin. It is not, of course, that in one's unforgivingness one did not see the sinner at all, but only the sin; on the contrary, one's thoughts are never so focused on, so helplessly tied to, another person as they may be in unforgiving bitterness. But the point is that in unforgivingess the sinner is swallowed up by his sin; I see you always only as "the person who did this terrible thing".

Someone might say that the distinction between the sinner and the sin is quite theoretical, that it gets no purchase on the actual difficulty of forgiveness. For insofar as we are small-minded, envious, mean, greedy, cruel and so on, we need to be forgiven not just for particular acts but for those traits in our persons. And forgiveness is most difficult in the cases where one needs to forgive the whole way in which someone close to one has treated one and relates to one; where one needs to forgive *who* this other person has been and continues to be in relation to one; where the "sin" really *is* the "sinner." Think of a daughter who needs to forgive her father, a totally unreliable and violent alcoholic who has made her childhood a nightmare. It is not this or that act she needs to forgive, but *her father's being who he is*, his being the person he has allowed himself to become.

It is certainly true that the father's sin is his whole person. *But he is not his person*. As long as he goes on drinking and 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.[122] When one confesses one's sin and asks for forgiveness, one is separated from one's sin, freed from one's person. In acknowledging what one has done, who one has been in relation to the other, and that one does *not* want to go on like that, one's relationship to one's past is changed, for the first time the past really becomes *past*, one becomes free in relation to it. Earlier one had ensnared oneself in one's past. Thus, as long as the

[122] Cf. the discussion above, p. 79 ff.

father does not want to acknowledge what he has made of his and his daughter's life, he cannot talk openly about it; if his daughter brings it up he turns defensive about it, tries to escape into hostility or self-pity, or some other attitude. He might also say, "What's done is done, it is past now and there's no use in opening up old wounds" – thereby revealing precisely that it was *not* past yet, but still haunted their life together, making things literally *unspeakable* between them.

Suppose the father asks his daughter to forgive him. If she remains unforgiving, this means that she is unable to see his asking for forgiveness as anything more than a show he puts on, for her and for himself; she feels that he has not really understood *how* bad it has all been. And she may be right, but the point is that the difficulty with forgiving is precisely *believing* that the person asking for forgiveness really *wants* it, that he does not just want to be told that he is loved just as he is and does not need to question himself, but really repents in his heart – and in doing so has become another. The difficulty is the same for the one asking forgiveness and the one asked to forgive. Both the father and the daughter thus find it hard to believe that he could be, and in a sense already is, someone other than the sinner he has proven to be; that *she* could be someone other than the hurt and unforgiving daughter she now is; and that their relationship could be renewed, that there could be openness between them despite the ordeals they have been through.

From the perspective of excusing, patience, forbearance and magnanimity, it is essentially irrelevant how *you* – the person I am to excuse, be patient with, and so on – respond to me. If you show no appreciation of my patience with you, that may test it further, giving me yet another thing to try to be patient about, but my task remains essentially the same: to be patient. In forgiveness, by contrast, your response makes all the difference in the world. For what I desire in my forgiveness is that we be reconciled, that the openness between us be re-established, and even if I forgive you there can be no reconciliation unless *you* want to *be* forgiven.

When we say that there cannot be any reconciliation before the other party asks for forgiveness, what we mean is often something quite different, however. We mean that we will not forgive before the other "shows us that she is sorry"; we think that we are the party who was hurt, or who was hurt more, or first, and that this gives us a moral right to demand that the other back down from the confrontation first. Such an attitude clearly has nothing to do with forgiveness; it is all just a moralised game of power in which one will give no

more than what it would be *obviously* small-minded not to give; "Come on now, he paid for the damage he caused, and he said he was sorry; don't you think it's time that you forgave him already?"

In one's unforgivingness, one feels that one is innocent, or at least not as guilty as the other party. One says, in effect "*He* got the whole conflict started by doing ... or being so..., and I would live on the most friendly terms with him if it was not for – *him*." *He* will probably not accept this view of things, however, rather he will say about me the same thing I said about him, and we should not overlook the obvious fact that in close relationships the accusations, the bitterness and the need for forgiveness is normally something *both* parties feel, which makes it very misleading to discuss forgiveness taking as one's model a situation such as a mugging, in which one party appears clearly to be the guilty one and the other innocent. As we shall see, the appearance of asymmetry is deceptive even in such cases, but at this point I will only stress the fact that in most cases where there is need for forgiveness the accusations are mutual from the start, we are quarrelling.

A typical scenario: I am angry with you for doing something; you point out that I did the same thing to you the day before and so I was the one who started it all; I admit what I did, but claim that the circumstances were different and what I did was not at all as bad as what you did now, or I remind you of something you did even longer ago – and so we go on bringing up ever new counts in the prosecution we have started against each other, digging ourselves ever further back into our unforgiven past, expanding the case to cover third parties and our characters, rather than just our deeds. "You and him are so full of yourselves; you have always treated me like air!" and so on.

If one reflects that all this might have started from some very trivial dispute, it seems quite bizarre, but of course it did not really *start* from that dispute; rather, that dispute was only the occasion which we needed to unleash our unforgivingness, our desire to hurt each other and/or to prove our own "goodness" by exposing the other's badness. We will never find out who started the quarrel, find out who is *really* to blame, for we are not engaged in a *bona fide* investigation to determine who really did what, we are out to *justify ourselves*, to prove *in a general way* that we are in the right and the other is in the wrong. We are digging back into the past for evidence to prove that the other is worse than we are, that we are innocent. Of course, our *doing that*, our demeanour in the present, shows clearly that we are both of us very far

from being innocent. Our trying to prove the other's guilt thus only proves our own.

Forgiveness is the (re)awakening of love in those possessed by the spirit of retaliation and justification. It puts a stop to the quarrel's destructive, and by its own logic endless, spiral of mutual accusations. It is not just that in forgiveness one sees this destructiveness; *that* much the parties to a bitter quarrel will have seen already. They *know* that it is no use quarrelling, that it will never lead anywhere, but they still cannot bring themselves to give it up. Forgiveness is not merely the realisation that we *can* give up accusing each other, as though there would then still remain the additional question of whether we will in fact do it; it *is* giving up the accusations.

"Forgive and forget", we say. It is necessary to add the thing about forgetting precisely to the extent that there has *not* been any forgiveness. One might of course have *said* "I forgive you", but even if one said it sincerely, one has not said it wholeheartedly, forgivingly. In effect, one has only agreed to "write off" what the other did, one has decided, for whatever reason, that this is what one should do. But decisions and intentions are, no matter how "good" they may be, psychological surface phenomena, and the mere fact of deciding or intending something says nothing about how, at what level of one's being, one is or is not involved in this deciding or intending. And so we find that forgiving does not happen just because we have decided we want it to – or, as one should perhaps rather put it, it does not happen just because we imagine that we would want it to happen. On the contrary we find, as C. S. Lewis says, that "the work of forgiveness has to be done over and over again";

> We all know the old joke, "You've given up smoking once, I've given it up a dozen times." In the same way I could say of a certain man, "Have I forgiven him for what he did that day? I've forgiven him more times than I can count." ... We forgive, we mortify our resentment; a week later some chain of thought carries us back to the original offence and we discover the old resentment blazing away as if nothing had been done about it at all.[123]

As I see it, the real point is that as long as one sees forgiveness as something one has to *work* on, the work will *never* be done; the reason why forgiveness is not something one can "achieve" or "finish" is not that the work on it is endless, but that is not a matter of work at all. What one calls working on forgiving

[123] Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1973 [1961]), p. 26 f.

someone amounts, however necessary it may be to achieve any kind of *modus vivendi*, to no more than keeping one's unforgivingness, one's bitter resentment, from expressing itself too openly. One takes care of the symptoms, but the disease is still brewing inside; the root of evil is intact, regularly bringing forth fruit by which we easily know it. And then we have to grit our teeth and set to work all over again.

Such work seems hard, but perhaps it is rather convenient for us? Perhaps we have nothing much against working on forgiveness – as long as we do not have to *forgive*? And is not the whole perspective in which it appears that we have to work on forgiving someone else in fact the perspective of unforgivingness? In that perspective, I still picture myself as being the innocent victim and you as the guilty party who should ask my forgiveness; it is only given this self-righteous view of the situation that I can decide that I "should" forgive you. I do not doubt my moral superiority, and your inferiority; in fact I find it so hard to forgive you precisely because I am so very impressed by this alleged difference in our moral standing. "Nonetheless I should forgive him", I tell myself, and proceed to "work" on it, thus convincing myself even more of what a righteous person I am. As long as I think that morally speaking I stand above you, I can never forgive you.

This claim may sound absurd, for must I not, in order to be in a position to forgive you, think that you have wronged me and should by rights ask my forgiveness, and that I am in my rights to grant it to you? If I did not think that, then how could I presume to forgive you? Is the view that one stands morally above the other not, then, the necessary condition for forgiveness? So it would seem, and yet that is precisely how it is not. For to think in terms of moral "positions", of who has a "right" to "grant" what to whom, is to exclude forgiveness from the start. Given *that* perspective, the most one can do is *pardon* someone, show them indulgence in the way a person in authority may, waiving her right to mete out punishment. A pardon does not lead out of this unforgiving perspective. In pardoning a person, one makes an exception to the rule of retaliation, but the fact that one made it is not forgotten, and so the rule is in fact strengthened, "proven" by the exception to it. Thus one might say, if the person one pardoned repeats her offence, "I forgave you once, I will not do it a second time", and be more unforgiving than before because the person one "forgave" once proved so "ungrateful."

Pardoning is simply a particular move inside the game of calculating moral credits and deficits. Forgiveness, by contrast, takes one out of that game

altogether, it leaves one with no claim to any moral "position" at all. John Patton puts it very well when he says that "I am able to forgive when I discover that I am in no position to forgive", and that "the central problem with human forgiveness" is "how one gives up the power to forgive" – the power, that is, of the quite imaginary moral authority vested in one by one's self-righteous resentment.[124] In forgiving someone, I am not addressing him from on high, delivering him of his guilt by my authoritative word. Rather, in saying "I forgive you" I am also, if my words really manifest forgiveness, saying "Forgive *me*!" Forgiveness is not something I grant the other; it comes equally to us both.

But, it might be asked, what is it I am supposed to ask the other to forgive me for? After all, *he* was the one who did the deed: he was mean to me, stole from me, killed my friend, or whatever. I did not do anything! Did I not? What, then, about the resentment and unforgivingness I felt towards him after what he did? Was that nothing? You might say it was nothing compared to what it was a reaction to, or at least quite justified in view of it. And perhaps that is so, but the point is that if I finally come to forgive him, *I* do not feel that my earlier unforgivingness was nothing; to forgive means precisely to feel how terrible one's unforgivingness has been, how it has blinded one to the other person. It means more than coming to feel that it is no use wallowing in bitterness and in fantasies of revenge, or that it is degrading for one to do so; those feelings one would express by saying, about the person one resents, "He's not worth it". But in forgiveness one does not feel that the other person is not worth it; on the contrary one is sorry that one had come to look so callously on him – that is: one comes to see him now with love; one wants to embrace him. Forgiving someone means: opening one's heart for them, feeling sorry that one rejected them.

In forgiveness, the distinction between your guilt and mine is overcome, as the distinction between "yours" and "mine" always is, when we relate to each other in the spirit of friendship. The separation of people into "good" and "bad", "righteous" and "unrighteous" is undone, and our belonging together without distinction is reaffirmed. But for that very reason, forgiveness appears a moral scandal to every responsible and respectable person; it is an outrage to the Pharisee in us. As Karl Barth points out, what most infuriated the respectable

[124] Patton, *Is Human Forgiveness Possible? A Pastoral Care Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), pp. 16, 14.

about Jesus was precisely "that from him the best found only forgiveness, and the publicans and harlots found forgiveness too".[125]

[125] Barth, *Ethics*, p. 341.

III
– Friends and strangers –

In the face of my identification of goodness with the openness and unity of friendship, it will no doubt be said that no matter how extravagant claims I make with regard to the goodness of friendship, it remains the case that friendship is an exclusive relation between two people, and so it is quite impossible to give an account of *moral* goodness, which is essentially defined by a requirement of impartiality or justice for all, from the perspective of friendship. Whereas from the point of view of friendship, "you" and "I" are somehow "sufficient unto ourselves", justice, or for that matter love of neighbour in the Christian sense, is about treating *everyone*, *each person one meets*, justly or charitably.

The main contention of this chapter is that it is a confusion to contrast friendship with justice or love of neighbour in this way. It betokens a confused – confused because corrupt – conception *both* of friendship and justice. How we relate to our friends and to strangers are not two separate questions, but the same question seen from two sides, and insofar as we try to establish a closeness between us by closing ourselves to strangers, distancing ourselves from them, thus creating a "we" in opposition to a "they", we pervert our relationship to each other. Insofar as we do *not* do this, but remain open, there is no "we" or "they", there are just you, I, he, she and so on, according as new faces turn up, all moving in the openness of friendship. Showing how this is so will pave the way for the main contention of the last chapter, which is that what we call *conscience* – that in us which gives us our sense of good and evil – is in fact another name for the spirit of friendship, or love, or openness.

– *Forster's challenge* –

"If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country", E. M. Forster said in an often quoted remark. He conceded that such a choice "may scandalize the modern reader, and he may stretch out his patriotic hand to the telephone at once and ring up the police", but he was not deterred: "Love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of the State. When they do – down with the State, say I, which means that the State would down me".[1] I think Forster was right, perhaps more right than he knew. Many people think he did not know what he was saying. Judith Shklar's comment is typical; she thinks that Forster's remark "trivializes the bitterest of conflicts because it says nothing about the kind of 'state' involved or how one's friends might betray it", and that if Forster meant what he said and "if he really loved this personal friend, who might be charming, well read, and good looking", he would have to "fly to his defense and help him escape from the rigors of the law" even if he was "organizing ... an anti-Semitic riot" – an attitude Shklar unsurprisingly finds "self-righteous" and "mindless".[2]

Shklar does not stop to consider whether there might be good reason *not* to focus on the differences between states, undeniable as they are, but instead on the nature of political or more generally group identities and social power as such, distinguishing it – *all* of it – from personal relations. That she does not is connected with her view of personal relations, which comes out very clearly in her easy talk about "really loving this personal friend, who might be charming, well read, and good looking". This says all that needs to be said about her view of friendship, and here the characterisation "mindless" really does seem apt. Just try inserting Shklar's phrase into Forster's original remark: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my charming, well read, and good looking friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country". How does that sound? It is not just that the remark loses its rhetorical effectiveness, it loses its sense.

On Shklar's view, the problem seems straightforward: there are different kinds of human communities – some larger, some smaller, some more personal, others more impersonal – but all of them have their claims on their members'

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[1] Forster, "What I Believe" in his *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1951), p. 78.
[2] Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1984), p. 156 f.

loyalty; if these claims conflict, as they obviously can, the question arises which claims one should honour, and it cannot be settled "without first knowing about the particular context: the kind of country, the kind of friendship, the kinds of betrayal at issue and their probable consequences".[3] This is of course the standard view of the matter: it is taken for granted on all sides that although friendship may often be a good thing, it may also be very bad, especially if the friends associate to further some bad purpose. Given this view, it would, as Paul Gomberg puts it, be irresponsible not to "make our friendships conditional on their relationship to other goods", such as the good of one's political community, or not to "cut off a friendship if we thought the friendship contributed to something very bad".[4]

Gomberg is a consequentialist, and his aim in the paper I just quoted from is to defend consequentialists against the charge that a they cannot "love their friends for their own sake". He says they can, even if they try – the fact that they, like the rest of us, have "a subjective life with special attachments and concerns" notwithstanding – to see their friendships "as part of a bigger picture" and to fit them in "the context of a life that contributes as much as possible to making the world better".[5] It seems to me that Gomberg does not succeed in his defence of friendship any more than other consequentialists do; but his discussion does bring out how the contemporary critics of consequentialism can make no better sense of friendship, since they are *themselves* in fact consequentialists of a kind, who make the continuation of friendship conditional upon its being "for the good". The good they have in mind may not be "making the world better", whatever that means, but some other, more or less "moral" kind of so called "value". From the perspective of friendship it does not matter what one cites as the *reason* for betraying a friend, however; the point is that one *in fact* betrays him.

Obviously one will not oneself *call* one's action a betrayal; one may speak of this in highly moral terms, perhaps explaining, with Lorraine Smith Pangle, that one's former friend had gone so thoroughly "bad" that there was just no "hope of restoring him to virtue and to equality with oneself", and that "continuing to associate with him" would have been a "danger to one's own

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[3] This is not Shklar, but Mike W. Martin, explaining what has to be assessed before we can determine whether Forster's remark is "morally grotesque", or on the contrary "an admirable call for heroism" (*Everyday Morality: An Introduction to Applied Ethics* [Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995], p. 299).
[4] Gomberg, "Friendship in the Context of a Consequentialist Life", *Ethics* 102 (1992), p. 553.
[5] Ibid.

morals".[6] Or one might say, to adopt the less moralistic language of many contemporary critics of consequentialism, that one did what one had to do to protect one's "integrity", one's "core commitments" or "ground projects".[7]

This kind of talk is confused all through, for the idea that friendship *could* "contribute to something very bad" is morally speaking a piece of nonsense. It is of course clear that *others* can do terrible things to friends simply because they are friends – and here we need not think of political repression; just think of what a jealous husband may do to friends of his wife – but in this case it is obviously not friendship but the fear and hate of it that leads to something bad. More importantly, it is clear that people who call themselves friends can do terrible things to others or to themselves in the name of friendship, but for that to prove anything it would have to be shown that what they do can really be seen as a true expression of friendship. And that is, I will argue, impossible.

It will probably be objected straight away that I am pretending to solve the very real and painful problems of conflicting obligations by simply refusing to *call* anything friendship that leads people to do things that do not meet my standards of moral goodness, whatever they may be. I will try to answer the objection by and by; let me now just point out that for me it is not a matter of having friendship meet some preconceived standards of moral goodness, but rather of letting a reflection on friendship shed light on the question of goodness – and of morality, which need not have much to do with goodness at all, as we shall see. I claim, firstly, that friendship and goodness are two names of the same thing, of the openness that in one sense always exists between us, and unfolds if we dare to open ourselves to it, and secondly that opening oneself in friendship to one human being means, in principle, opening oneself to all. As Simone Weil said,

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[6] Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 138, commenting on, and agreeing with, Aristotle's advice (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1165b15) on how to treat friends gone bad. – In the same spirit, Shklar says that the moral question raised by Forster's remark is whether one can "ever say in advance ... that *one's character ... would be morally better*" if one always stood by one's friend, or might not be "*tarnished*" by it instead (*Ordinary Vices*, p. 158, emphases added).

[7] The terms are from Bernard Williams, perhaps the most influential among the contemporary critics of consequentialism. Jeffrey Blustein, *Care and Commitment: Taking the Personal Point of View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), is a systematic development of Williams' line of thinking. – A central topic of this chapter is the moral confusion introduced if one includes one's friendships themselves among these "core commitments", and insists on one's "right" *not* to reject a friend who has gone bad, but to defend him and his actions even though one admits them to be indefensible; "Right or wrong, he is *my* friend".

> Friendship has something universal about it. It consists in loving a human being as we should like to be able to love each soul in particular of all those who go to make up the human race. As the geometrician looks at a particular figure in order to deduce the universal properties of the triangle, so he who knows how to love directs upon a particular human being a universal love.[8]

Just to indicate how this can be so, think of two white friends in a racially segregated society, one of whom also becomes friends with a black person. If the other friend cannot accept this because to her blacks are "not like us" and are to be "kept in their place", this means, given that her friend really has become friends with the black person, that she will have to break with her old friend, declaring in effect that being white means more to her than her friend does. If she refuses to accept a black person as a friend, this means, *eo ipso*, that she will also accept friendship with whites only on certain *conditions* – namely, that her friends do not mix with blacks. And that means that she really does not open herself in friendship with *anyone*, but always keeps a reservation in her heart even against those she calls her friends.

I gave this as a first indication how goodness and friendship might be connected, but in fact it seems to me to be a virtual "proof" of their identity, of the *universality* of friendship *in* its very focus on the individual friend. I realise, however, that many people will not be convinced by this, and that is why I put "proof" in inverted commas. It is not that *this* particular proof happens not to be wholly convincing, but that the point at issue is not one which anyone can be convinced of by proofs. And on the face of it Kant probably sounds much more convincing than Weil when he says:

> Friendship is not of heaven but of the earth: the complete moral perfection of heaven must be universal, but friendship is not universal, it is a peculiar association of specific persons; it is man's refuge in this world from his distrust of his fellows, in which he can [for once] reveal his disposition to another and enter into communion with him.[9]

Note, however, that this need not be in conflict with what Weil says. For she does not claim that friendship consists in actually loving everybody without distinction, but rather in "loving a human being *as we should like to be able* to love each soul in particular", in "directing upon *a particular human being* a

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[8] Weil, *Waiting for God.* Translated by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins, 2001 [1951]), p. 135 f.
[9] Kant, *Lectures on Ethics.* Translated by Louis Infield (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 206 f.

universal love". It is a fact that we are not friends with everybody, and that our relationships are pervaded by distrust, but the question is how we are to understand the friendship that may sometimes come into being between particular people, be allowed by them to unfold; the question is what we take the perspective opened up by that love to be. In particular, the question is whether we see this as a matter of openness at all, or rather think of it as the *closedness* of people who, for whatever reason, feel comfortable with each other while disliking and distrusting others.

If friends conceive of their friendship in that way, they may obviously be tempted to all sorts of evil with regard to outsiders. But they will also, for the same reason, be tempted to deal callously with each other *if* the other changes in a way which makes them feel uncomfortable, for on this conception, the terms *friend* and *stranger* are quite relative and changeable: a friend is anyone who makes one feel comfortable, a stranger or enemy anyone who threatens one's sense of security – which one perhaps calls one's "morals" or "integrity" or "core commitments".

– *Friendship* vs. *society* –

Let us return to Forster. On the face of it, he puts the question in the same terms as Shklar and those who think like her, for he speaks of a hypothetical choice between putting friend or country first. However, unlike them he does not talk about the complexity of such cases or the difficulty of making up one's mind. Instead he says: "I hope I should have *the guts* to betray my country". That is, he rejects – rightly, it seems to me – all talk of assessing and weighing things up; for him, the difficulty in a situation of this kind is not knowing what would be the right thing to do, but having the courage to do what one knows to be right. One could say that there is a choice here, but no question: there is something to see and acknowledge but nothing to discuss. In short, for Forster what happens is that one is *tempted* to go against one's conscience, and the temptation comes from the side of "the State", while the voice of conscience *is* the voice of friendship.

This means that Forster did not think that the conflict was between different loyalties, between different claims that would have to be weighed

against each other to determine the *justice* or *legitimacy* of each. Instead, he saw it as a question of *power* or *force*, but not in the sense that the force of the State would be pitted against the force of friendship. Rather, he thought that while "all society rests upon force" friendship means living in "the intervals when force has not managed to come to the front",[10] that in friendship there is an inherent resistance to every kind of force, even, and in a sense primarily, to the force of *definition* by which people are pinned down and made accountable to some authority or other: "All the words that describe [friends] are false, and all attempts to organize them fail".[11]

What does this mean? And what is the "force" that society according to Forster rests on? He does not say, but it seems to me that every form of social group, every "we", whether spontaneous or institutionalised, organises the people belonging to it in the sense that it makes them "know their place". The group remains in existence only as long as people act and think and feel more or less as "one" is supposed to, where this "one" can refer to something more or less specific or general, from assuming a well-defined position of authority or subordination to being a person of a certain social "kind" – perhaps "an educated, urban person with leftist leanings" – to reacting as "anyone" would. It would be misleading to say that the group needs this kind of organisation *in order* to function, for the point is that the group only comes to exist with, or rather *as*, this kind of organisation: the group's identity consists in its members identifying as members of it, that is, in their living as "one" is expected to.

Without conformity, there would be no group, and the force that Forster talks about is, it seems to me, the *pressure to conform*, to be as "one" is supposed to be, which means that the group will remain *one*, no one breaking free from it. I will return to the basic question of where this pressure originates, but let me note immediately that since groups only exists as a certain kind of organisation of individuals, the pressure cannot come from outside those individuals, from others, for there are no "others", there are just the individuals making up the group. The pressure is one we, as a group, exert on ourselves, by relating to each other and ourselves *as* a group, as "one".

Friendship or love is a stepping out of the group, a movement in which two people drop the "one" and say "I" and "you" to each other. Everyone agrees that friendship is a *personal* relation, but it is rarely realised quite how radical the implications of that fact are: it means that you and I do not let others

[10] Forster, "What I Believe", p. 80.
[11] Ibid., p. 82 f.

determine for us how we relate to each other, even in the abstract form of letting prejudices about what "one" should think or feel or accept determine what we in fact think, feel and accept from each other. Allan Bloom says of love that it has "a natural cosmopolitanism" that "knows no bounds of propriety, whether laid down by family or country", and that is equally true of friendship.[12]

Insofar as the group itself is defined by its members' acceptance of ideas about how "one" should live, friendship by its sheer existence constitutes a "betrayal" of the "country" to which the friends *also* belong, for whether or not they ever come to do anything that their group finds particularly objectionable, their friendship is an implicit denial of the authority of the group's claims to determine what is and is not acceptable. Friendship is subversive by nature. This is so not because it aims to install a new regime, a different kind of conformity in place of the old one, but because it is truly anarchic, calling into question every kind of conformity, however spontaneously it might arise.

Friendship seems, then, a "betrayal" to the group not just because it unites the wrong kind of people, but because it unites even the right kind of people in the wrong kind of way; on their own terms, rather than on the group's. Friendship's uniting the wrong kind of people and its uniting the right kind of people in the wrong way are actually two sides of the same movement in which the friends are freed from the sense that there are certain ways in which one "must" not behave, people of certain "kinds" one must not associate with. Such freedom from social prejudice calls forth anxiety in those beholden to prejudice, however, and becomes a matter of public concern. As soon as "one" starts feeling that the intercourse of two friends is really quite free from any worries about what is seemly or appropriate, their relationship thus ceases to be a *private* matter: precisely when the friends stop worrying about what "one" thinks of them, "one" cannot accept that what they do is just *their* business; "one" can accept and even protect people's privacy only as far as "one" feels that what they do with it does not radically challenge what "one" does oneself.

The subversive character of friendship is easy to miss or to misunderstand because much of what goes by the name of friendship is not subversive at all, but merely the kind of smaller community with its own conformity and its own demands of loyalty that Shklar and others think friendship always is. That kind of clique is sometimes experienced as a danger to the larger group, but normally it is accepted as the way that the larger group's

[12] Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 276. – Bloom speaks specifically of "love in Shakespeare" – as opposed to what, I wonder?

life is itself organised, and the idea that friendships, understood as private attachments, have a certain moral right to exist, and that they may impose moral demands on friends which can run counter to the demands of the larger group, thus creating conflicts of allegiance, actually belongs to the standard understanding of social morality itself – with the exception of the most totalitarian kind of social moralities, such as the one envisioned in Plato's *Republic*, where any private attachment between members of the group is looked upon as a threat to social unity.

This creates the possibility that a moral conflict between friendship and the demands imposed by one's polity, or by other groups one belongs to, is framed in a way which is *social* through and through, and so does not touch on the real, radically personal, question of friendship. A good example of this is the way Crito reacts when his friend Socrates, who is in jail awaiting execution, refuses Crito's offer to help him escape. Crito says:

> Oh! my beloved Socrates, let me entreat you once more to take my advice and escape. For if you die I shall not only lose a friend who can never be replaced, but there is another evil: people who do not know you and me will believe that I might have saved you if I had been willing to give money, but that I did not care. Now, can there be a worse disgrace than this – that I should be thought to value money more than the life of a friend? For the many will not be persuaded that I wanted you to escape, and that you refused.[13]

Crito is certainly very fond of Socrates; it is not that he is a cold opportunist who does not really care whether his friend lives of dies, and only thinks of what others will think of *him* if Socrates refuses his help. Nonetheless, he immediately *also* thinks of that, of the *disgrace* which according to "the many" – that is, to social morality – is brought on someone who values his money more than his friends. Crito sees friendship as a social role with given expectations and demands, which "one" should live up to. He as it were looks away from Socrates, *and* from *himself* in his personal relation to his friend, and thinks instead of what is expected of "one" as "a" friend. Thus he eliminates the *personal*, and *therefore* subversive, dimension of the situation, a dimension which is opened up, as we shall see, by the call of *conscience*.[14] Here, we should also note that the fear of *disgrace* remains just as socially determined,

[13] Plato, *Crito*, 44b–c. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. In *The Dialogues of Plato. Volume 1* (New York: Random House, 1973).
[14] I will return to the question of shame and conscience in Chapter Four.

just as impersonal, even if we replace Crito's fear that he should be *thought* to value money more than the life of a friend with the thought that it would be shameful, quite regardless of what others *actually* think of him, to *be* someone who values money more than the life of a friend. For the social dimension comes in with the perspective of *shame* itself, even if one thinks of it in terms of "shame before oneself".

"The many" will have no difficulty understanding Crito's "painful" position, since Crito's self-understanding *is* that of "the many"; he looks on his situation as "any decent person" would. The obvious contradiction in the fact that the same "decent" people who eagerly condemned Socrates to death will now, just as eagerly, condemn Crito for not helping him escape, apparently does not bother Crito and other decent people much, the reason being that this contradiction is a price one pays gladly in order to escape from a much more existentially threatening contradiction; that between the personal dimension opened up in friendship and one's social belonging.

The reason that "any decent person" will understand Crito's situation as he himself does, is precisely that it is understood as one which *anyone* could land in with a bit of bad luck – the implication being that finding oneself in that situation is not a personal matter, since it could happen to anyone. The situation is also understood to be one which does not, since both the demands of friendship and of the larger group are seen as in principle legitimate, allow of any fundamental solution. If and when a case of conflict arises, one simply has to decide *ad hoc* on which "side" – that of friendship or the demands of the larger group – the more weighty consideration lay. The *comforting* thing about this view, which seems so very "responsibly" to refuse any "easy solutions", is that it relieves one of raising any fundamental existential questions about *who* one is in relation to one's friend and the larger community; there is only a negotiation in a given situation about how the conflict is to be handled *this* time (for of course, one has to *act* in one way or the other).

We will return to the question of "moral dilemmas" in the next chapter. Here, the point I want to underline is that my contrasting the personal dimension of friendship with social belonging does not at all depend on seeing society with its morality as a monolith. On the contrary, it must be stressed that the pressure to conform is not primarily a force tending to make everyone alike, but a force of *differentiation* as much as of unification and levelling. It is in fact the one precisely *in* being the other.

To take a very basic social category, *gender*, it is obvious that keeping men and women in their respective places is a matter of men and women defining themselves as "one and *not* the other". What a man is supposed to be is defined by what a woman is supposed to be, both in the sense that what women are is what men are *not* supposed to be, and in the sense that a man is defined by how he treats and relates to women. Even in the case of his relating to other men the fact that they are all men and not women comes into their self-understanding; just think of how much of what is quite appropriately called male bonding consists in talking about, or at least referring obliquely to women; complaining about them or whistling appreciatively at them, being relieved that "they" are not here or wishing that they would be, and so on. The same is of course true, *mutatis mutandis*, of being a woman.

The general point is that the group is a unity-in-multiplicity. The society we all belong to consists of, among other things, men and women, who understand themselves to be different "kinds" of people, to form their own groups, but whose identity is defined in contrast to the other sex which they are related to as their "opposite". Men are made alike by being made unlike women, and vice versa, and the two belong inextricably together *in* their very difference from each other.

This kind of logic is at work in all social determinations, from the most general to the most refined and specific. Thus being a man, although by definition opposed to being a woman, can mean more than one thing: there are different kinds of men, not just in the sense that there are conceptions of manhood that challenge prevalent conceptions in the way that being gay or being a very sensitive man may be said to challenge a more traditional kind of manhood, but also in the sense that even among traditional men, individuals differ in all sorts of respects; in what kind of things they like to do (some like football, others do not) as well as in their personalities and characters (some are quick and lively, others more pensive, and so on). But all the time, the logic is one whereby "I and people like me" get defined in contrast with others who are unlike us.

Since social categorisations allow for individual variations within each category, since one is free to express a universal such as being "a man" by being the particular kind of man one finds it congenial to be, the pressure to conform to the categorisations need not be experienced as a force restricting one's freedom of expression. Here it may be asked if it is not absurd to speak of a pressure to conform that is not experienced as such, of a force that *forces* no

one to anything? It would be, if the conformity never in any way manifested itself by actually forcing people. But in fact it does so all the time. Thus, to use the same example again, in a racially segregated society friendships between members of the same group are not generally a problem, and people can indulge in them without in any way having to be forced to do so. The force that lurks in the background shows itself if a friendship starts forming across the racial boundary, and the violence of the reaction against that will reveal the illusory character of the "freedom" of what goes on otherwise. We allow ourselves and others to associate "freely" only as long as the limits of propriety are respected.

The social force exists as routine patterns of action and reaction between the subgroups in the society, as the spontaneous fear, distrust, disgust, alienation, aversion, shame, guilt, superiority or inferiority felt by the members of different groups towards each other; and these negative responses to the "others" are mirrored in the safety, the relief one feels in the company of one's own kind. And precisely because the force keeping different kinds of people apart is embodied in the members of the society themselves, in *their own* reactions, they will not generally feel that they are *forced* to mix only with their "own kind"; because of their fear and dislike of the others they have no desire to mix with them. But fear, disgust and so on are themselves forces witnessing to our lack of freedom; there is clearly a difference between simply not feeling any desire to do something with someone that one could nonetheless do if need arose, and not wanting to do it because one is afraid to do it, or disgusted by the thought of doing it.

A classic literary example of the conflict between friendship and society with its morals, is Mark Twain's story of Huckleberry Finn and the runaway slave Jim. Huck helps Jim flee to freedom; he has no motives for helping, he does it out of friendship, out of his heart's goodness. But his conscience will not leave him in peace, it keeps telling him that what he is doing is terribly wrong. To be exact: he is told this by what he *calls* his "conscience", which is really just the pressure of the internalised norms of his society – and as we shall see in the next chapter, taking this for his real conscience is a very confused way of thinking. At one point in the story, when Huck has written but not yet sent a letter denouncing Jim to his owner, Miss Watson, Huck describes his inner conflict in the following words:

> I felt good and all washed clean of sin ...[I] laid the paper down and set there thinking – thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to

> thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind...[15]

When Huck's eyes fall on the letter he has just written he tears it up, saying to himself: "All right, then, I'll *go* to hell".[16]

The first point to note about this rich example – I will return to it again in the next chapter – is that what makes it impossible for Huck to denounce Jim is simply the thought of *him*: "I see Jim before me all the time". He is not influenced by any moral principles about helping slaves or ideas about his being "the kind of person" who could not do such a shameful thing as denouncing someone. *Those* kinds of ideas come to him from the side of what he calls his "conscience", it "grinds" him with the thought of how his people would look at him if they knew what he had done; "If I was ever to see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame".[17] The judging eyes of his society appear in Huck's imagination as the eyes of God; he is scared to death by the thought that "there's One that's always on the lookout" and who will see to it that "people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire".[18] He tries telling himself that he cannot be too much blamed because he is the kind of badly brought up boy one can expect nothing better from – "wickedness ... was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't"[19] – but it does not help.

Here one sees how social morality expresses itself in terms of certain *kinds* of actions expected from, permitted and forbidden to certain *kinds* of people in relation to other kinds of people, with *shame* threatening those who dare to break the rules keeping people "within their bounds", that is: *away* from each other. "One" is "always on the lookout" for people who do not behave as "one" expects "them" to behave. And having a place of one's own, even if it is in itself a relatively shameful place, such as being the son of the village drunk, which is Huck's social position, still seems better than having no place at all, than total exclusion from the group: "everlasting fire".

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[15] Twain, *The Advetures of Huckleberry Finn*. Edited by Peter Coveney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 283.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 281.
[18] Ibid., p. 282.
[19] Ibid., p. 283.

While it is the thought of *Jim* that makes it impossible for Huck to turn him in, Huck's social "conscience" does not use first names, it present Jim not as himself, but always only as "that nigger", just as it presents Huck as an exemplar of "people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger"; its whole aim is to create a *Verfremdungseffekt* – to use Brecht's term in an unbrechtian sense – in which both Huck and Jim appear as *strangers* to each other.[20]

The activity of Huck's social "conscience" is in a sense very abstract and ideal, for it tries to take his attention off Jim and direct it to the fact that he is a being of a certain kind, a slave. As Plato noted, although the master and the slave are always, in fact, concrete human beings, it is only because of the relationship of the "idea" of mastery to that of slavery that they can be master and slave.[21] Huck's social "conscience" manifests, then, the power ideas can have over people. This "ideal" power is at the same time very concrete and real; we are not talking about any abstract "in principle"-considerations here: Huck is *tormented* by his "conscience". The way social power eats itself into the very bodies and senses of those subjected to it, is well brought out in George Orwell's graphic description of "the real secret of class-distinctions in the West", which, he says, "is summed up in four frightful words ... *The lower classes smell*";

> That was what we [middle-class children] were taught ... And here, obviously, you are at an impassable barrier. For no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a *physical* feeling. Race-hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code can be got over; but physical repulsion cannot. You can have an affection for a murderer ... but you cannot have an affection for a man whose breath stinks – habitually stinks, I mean. However well you may wish him, however much you may admire his mind and character, if his breath stinks he is horrible and in your heart of hearts you will hate him.[22]

However, the point to note about this physical revulsion is, as Orwell himself points out, that it was something *taught* and did not correspond to any *objective* degree of dirtiness in people; "even 'lower-class' people whom you knew to be quite clean – servants, for instance – were faintly unappetizing. The smell of their sweat, the very texture of their skins, were mysteriously

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[20] On this characteristic of social morality, see Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul: An Ethics of Conscience* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002), p. 375. – He also discusses the example of Huck and Jim, and my discussion is very much indebted to his, as will become evident in the next chapter.
[21] Cf. Plato, *Parmenides*, 133d–e.
[22] Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [1937]), p. 112.

different from yours", Orwell says.[23] The "essential thing", he notes, "is that middle-class people *believe* that the working class are dirty ... and, what is worse, that they are somehow *inherently* dirty".[24] That belief is inculcated all the way from "the early training in which a middle-class child is taught almost simultaneously to wash his neck, to be ready to die for his country, and to despise the 'lower classes'".[25] This is one example of how concepts and conceptual thought are, as Wittgenstein says, part of a "form of life", of a way of relating quite concretely, in actions and reactions, in feelings and sensings, to others and oneself; how the conceptions we are taught really form us and become "second nature" to us.

The process Orwell describes was an integral part of the moral education of middle class children, just as the ways in which whites like Huck were taught to despise "niggers" was part of theirs. The very point of social morality is to learn what "sort" one belongs to, and what other "sorts" of people are "like", for instance "dirty" – or, again, as the working classes might condescendingly say of the middle classes, so "fine" that "their farts don't even smell". These examples of moral education should alert us to the plain fact that in bringing up children we do not just or even primarily suppress their badness, but also their goodness, and we do that not as an aberration but systematically.

The problem is not just that *some* regimes of moral education happen to inculcate the wrong, exclusionist values, but rather that social morality which aims to teach people their "proper place" and the "proper limits" of how one may approach the other, is excluding, *confining*, in its very essence. This terrible aspect of our moral education is, however, hidden from view in our theorising when the suppression of the bad and the good get lumped together into one monolithic "civilising process" in which the piece of "nature", the bundle of inclinations and emotions, that children are on *this* picture reduced to, is moulded into a well-mannered, responsible, "moral" individual.[26]

In the world of social morality, as in the works of all those theorisers who take this world for granted, acting morally is primarily taken to mean unselfishly putting the demands of the larger group before one's own private interests. I find this a corrupt and superficial view. I think Simone Weil was

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[23] Ibid., p. 113.
[24] Ibid., p. 114.
[25] Ibid., p. 115.
[26] Aristotle's ethics is a classic formulation of this view. Sabina Lovibond gives an uncommonly clear, or perhaps one should say uncommonly unguarded, contemporary statement of it in her book *Ethical Formation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

closer to the truth when she said that "the social" was "irremediably the domain of the devil", and that while "the flesh impels us to say *me* ... the devil impels us to say *us*; or else to say ... *I* with a collective signification".[27] But even that is perhaps not putting it strongly enough, for the point is that the selfish *me*, the "flesh", the unruly "nature" in us which "culture" is supposed to discipline, is itself only a *correlate* of the "responsible" *I*, the *I* which always does what "one" is supposed to do, which always "says *I* with a collective signification".

How so? Think of the average misdemeanour or crime: it may certainly be said that it expresses a kind of selfishness. Someone embezzles funds, for instance, thus selfishly taking for himself what belongs to all. But if we ask *why* he does it, what he is really out to get by getting the money, the answer will be – I am speaking of the average case – that he does it because he wants to buy himself social prestige of one sort or another; he wants to achieve a respectable life-style, or be envied for his money, or liked because of what it allows him to buy others, or whatever. His selfishness, then, does not at all show his ruthless independence of the group, but on the contrary his helpless dependence on it, on the recognition of others. As Allan Bloom aptly says, the selfish man "when dealing with others ... thinks only of himself, and on the other hand, in his understanding of himself, thinks only of others".[28] Selfishness is the name "one" gives to a preoccupation with the opinion of others about oneself when it drives a person to break the rules of social morality, harming the interests of others. When that same preoccupation drives one to *keep* those rules, for instance to work very hard for one's employers instead of embezzling money from them, it is not *called* selfishness, although the driving force behind the behaviour is precisely the same.

I am not denying that selfishness really is selfishness, and so a bad thing. It is indeed a bad thing – not, however, because it would be a refusal to play along with others in the game of social morality as "one" should, but rather because or insofar as it means that one acts *callously* towards someone. And one can do *that* just as much by playing along as by breaking the rules, as Huck would in fact have acted callously, with a view to saving his own neck, in doing his social duty and turning Jim in. The "unselfish" propriety that social morality puts forward as the good alternative to selfishness is just another form of it;

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[27] Weil, *Waiting for God*, p. 12.
[28] Bloom, "Introduction" in J. J. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education.* Translated by Allan Bloom (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 5. – Bloom is describing the psychology of the *bourgeois*.

social morality itself *is* our attempt to justify our selfishness by agreeing on "legitimate" forms for it, on forms of selfishness agreeable to us.[29]

Insofar as we are moved by the spirit of friendship, we struggle to free ourselves from society with its pressure to conform to its values – a pressure which may express itself in more or less "moral" terms. As Hannes Nykänen points out, it would be misleading to describe this as "a struggle between the individual and society", for it is really "a struggle *within* the individual *about* among other things the meaning of 'society,' 'individual,' 'human being,' 'value,' etc".[30] By contrast, if one sees the basic conflict of our lives as a conflict between the individual and society, between selfishness and selfless devotion to the "greater good" – or, for that matter, between "nature" and "culture" – one has in fact already falsified things, in effect accepting the perspective of social morality.

Because the struggle between friendship and social morality is a struggle not between the individual and society, but a struggle *within* each of us, friendship cannot be thought of as any kind of "solution" for the world's ills, as anything one could *escape* into from the pressures of society. The point is not just that people who are persecuted by society and choose to protect themselves by hiding from the world easily fall into the self-deception of escapism. As Hannah Arendt points out, this happens as soon as the fugitives forget that "they are constantly on the run, and that the world's reality is actually expressed by their escape".[31] Thus, Arendt says that the friendship between a German and a Jew under Hitler degenerated into a "mere evasion of reality" if the friends chose simply to ignore "the intolerably stupid blabber of the Nazis" and pretended that their national identities did not matter at all since they were both

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[29] This was articulated very clearly by Plato in the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus in the second book of the *Republic* (357a–367e). Glaucon and Adeimantus are saying: Look at "morality", if this is the way it works, how can one have anything but contempt for it! Modern contractarian theories give us the same picture of morality, but naively or cynically – one can put it either way – failing to see anything objectionable in it. Actually, their worry seems to be that morality does not (yet) work *completely* according to this selfish logic where one is "good" to others only because on the whole it is the best policy for oneself: the point of the imaginary exercise in "founding" a society in the "state of nature" or the Rawlsian "original position" is to ensure that *no one will be in a position to complain* about the "deal" struck there about the moral-social-political rules to be adopted.

[30] Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 375. – Nykänen is speaking about the struggle between *conscience* and what he calls "*false* conscience", exemplified in what Huck in Twain's story *calls* his "conscience". As we shall see in the next chapter, this is in fact another name for the conflict that I here describe as one between friendship and social morality.

[31] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Harcourt Brace: New York, 1968), p. 22.

friends; by contrast, if they said "A German and a Jew, and friends", then "a bit of humanness in a world become inhuman had been achieved".[32] exercise

This is true, but to avoid misunderstanding I should add that to the friends themselves their national belonging really makes no difference insofar as they are open to each other. The point, it seems to me, is that any need of the friends to pretend that the persecution going on all around them is not there, would not only amount to self-deception about the reality "outside", but would also reveal a lack of openness in their relationship to each other, an unwillingness on the part of one or both of them to face the challenge that their friendship, if fully lived out, would in fact constitute to their social identities. They dare not face the question how they can at the same time be friends *and* maintain friendly relations with "their" people (who are, in the case of the persecutor, people who persecute people like his friend and, in the case of the persecuted, people who will not accept any kind of friendship with "one of the persecutors").

Note that the problematic sense of "maintaining friendly relations" at issue here is not outward behaviour, but the friends' sharing to some degree the feelings of their respective groups about their friend, which shows that they have not freed themselves from their social identities, that they have not entered into the openness of friendship where one ceases, existentially speaking, to belong to any *group*, because one is wholly open to the individuals one befriends.

To see the contrast between the freedom of the strictly personal relationship of friendship or love, and relationships marked by social bondage, think of lovers kissing in some public place: entwined in the kiss, they are oblivious of their surroundings, of the people around them, who may be very disturbed indeed by their kissing. As long as the lovers see each other, they do not care who sees them; they do not have to look for privacy, for seclusion from the world, because they have already left the world behind and entered into love. The disapproval they meet with from others may make them sad and angry, but they are not *embarrassed* by it, for they do not share its worldly perspective. If, by contrats, lovers kissing cannot help feeling embarrassed if someone enters the room, this shows that their love is weak, that it does not have the force to make them give up worldly thoughts about the way their love appears to others. Being careful not to be seen by others may of course be a purely cautionary measure in the face of a hostile world, but then it would have nothing to do with embarrassment.

[32] Ibid., p. 23.

To put the point in another way, the significance of which will become apparent in the next chapter, one could say that love knows no shame. That is obviously not to say that love would be *shameless* in the ordinary sense of that word. Whereas love is really *free of shame*, shamelessness is merely an attempt to defend oneself against one's shame by, as it were, attacking it straight on in doing what one is most ashamed of. The person who feels a need to act shamelessly remains just as trapped in the unfreedom of shame as the most conventional person. That is why she can always be brought to shame, but never a lover, as long as he remains *in* love.[33]

In itself, the spirit of friendship moves in complete freedom from worldly ways of thinking, from any ideas about how "one" ought to behave and what "kind" of person one is or can associate with. To use a Christian formula, friendship allows the friends to move freely with each other *in* the world precisely because their relationship is not *of* the world. We ourselves are moved by many forces other than the spirit of friendship, however, and so we will have to struggle against the world *within ourselves*, against our own worldly ways of reacting, feeling and thinking. As Alberto Memmi puts it: when he tried to escape an oppressive society into love, he soon discovered that "the couple is not an isolated entity, a forgotten oasis of light in the middle of the world; on the contrary, the whole world is within the couple".[34] We may also say, however, that as long as the world is indeed within the couple, there *is* no couple, in the sense of love's unity in openness. As long as others speak in us we do not speak ourselves. We must struggle against the voices of others in us in order that we may hear our own, and that of our friend. In friendship, I will

[33] The Marquis de Sade's perverse heroes are a grotesque image of that unfreedom: they seem, as Camille Paglia says, to act "in response to the question, how may I outrage as many conventions as possible?"- "Sodomized as she rapes her mother, the ingénue Eugénie cheerfully cries, 'Here I am: at one stroke incestuous, adultress, sodomite, and all that in a girl who only lost her maidenhead today!" (*Sexual Personae* [New York: Vintage Books, 1991], p. 240). Whereas love is something positive through and through, a desire for the other, not a matter of will or intellect, Sade describes a purely negative, destructive movement which has the character of something perversely thought out and willed. There is, as Paglia notes, "no Dionysian self-abandonment in Sade", his libertines "retain Appolonian intellect in nature's surging Dionysian flux ... In fact, they never stop talking. Learned disquisitions go on amid orgies", "Moderate delirium may occur at orgasm (Madame de Saint-Ange: 'Aië! aië! aië!'), but words generally sail on through ejaculation" (p. 239). The destructiveness of Sade's attitude is shown both in the extreme callousness that makes his heroes commit murder as an intellectual experiment, and in the frightful *monotony* characterising all their devilish experimenting.

[34] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized.* Translated by Howard Greenfeld (London: Earthscan Publications, 1990 [1957]), p. 5. – The oppressive society in Memmi's case was colonial Algeria.

only speak *for myself, to you*, and the struggle in friendship is, precisely, about finding one's own voice, which implies, if I may so put it, finding one's own ear, for there is no speaking without listening.

– Exclusivity and loyalty –

It seems to me that the great danger in our friendships is that, instead of freeing us from worldly ways of thinking, we use our friendships to build our own private worlds within the larger social world, small worlds with their own norms of behaviour, thought and feeling. As I said, the social pressure to conform does not make everyone alike, but rather operates by drawing like to like in a process of differentiation into smaller groups defining themselves against each other. The process has no end-point, but is rather a kind of constant fluctuation of attraction and repulsion. The norms of how "one" is supposed to be inside a friendship may in some ways be even more restrictive than the norms outside, because they are more intimate. We do not normally feel the restriction *as* a restriction, however, because it has not been imposed on us from outside, but is rather expressive of the particular kind of people we are; we have sought the company of our friends precisely in order to escape from the friction of having to live with people who are unlike us, to get away from the tensions in *ourselves* that being with those uncomfortable others bring out. In the company of our friends we therefore feel free rather than restricted. And by all means: if freedom means that everything goes smoothly and one is not challenged by anybody, then here we have it!

C. S. Lewis gives a good first description of the worldly kind of friendship characterised by the desire to mark a distinction between "us" (the friends) and "them" (the outsiders);

> A particular slang, the use of particular nick-names, an allusive manner of conversation, are the marks. But it is not constant. [...] People think they are in it after they have in fact been pushed out of it, or before they have been allowed in: this provides great amusement for those who are really inside. It has no fixed name. *The only certain rule is that the insiders and outsiders call it by different names*. From inside, it may be designated, in simple cases, by mere enumeration: it may be called "You and Tony and Me". When it is very secure and comparatively stable in membership it calls itself "we".

> When it has to be suddenly expanded to meet a particular emergency it calls itself "All the sensible people at this place". From outside, if you have despaired of getting into it, you call it "That gang" or "They" or "So-and-so and his set" or "the Caucus" or "the Inner Ring". If you are a candidate for admission you probably don't call it anything. To discuss it with the other outsiders would make you feel outside yourself. And to mention it in talking to the man who is inside, and who may help you in if this present conversation goes well, would be madness.[35]

That such exclusive groupings exist everywhere is obvious: the question is only whether such exclusivity is a manifestation of *friendship* or not. I claim that it is not; on the contrary, *the spirit of exclusion*, as I will call it, is the very opposite of the openness of friendship. In open friendships the exclusion of others is, as C. S. Lewis says, "in a sense accidental", whereas in friendships determined by the spirit of exclusion it is "no accident: it is the essence"; the friendship "exists for exclusion".[36]

Certainly, the friendship of Huck and Jim will, no matter how open they are to each other – or rather precisely in proportion to their openness – necessarily exclude everyone who remains loyal to a white society built on the principle of excluding blacks, but the exclusion is "accidental" to their friendship in the sense that *they* have not asked for it. In general, the more open two friends are, the freer they also are from social prejudices about how one "should" live, and this means that those who dare not be as open, as free from prejudice as the friends are, will feel excluded from their friendship; they will be scared away from associating with them, finding them "weird" or "immoral". The point is, however, that the friends themselves do not, as far as they are open, *aim* at this nor take pleasure in the fact that others feel excluded; they do not think they are so "special", they are not putting on any airs, even if that is probably how those frightened by their freedom will describe them. On the contrary, insofar as they are open to each other they will also, as I will try to show, be open to others. To put it differently, the distinction between "them" and "others" has no interest for them, and if someone invites them to think in those terms, they refuse the invitation.

Whether *confidentiality* between friends, in which the confidants withdraw from the company of others to deliberate on their own, does or does not express a spirit of exclusion, depends on whether one takes it to be a

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[35] Lewis, *Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (Collins/Fount, 1978 [1965]), p. 30 f., emphasis added.
[36] Ibid., p. 38 f. – Lewis, too, takes the essentially excluding kind of friendship to be corrupt, but he does not say anything about openness.

necessary evil, or actually derives satisfaction from feeling that others are excluded from what one shares with one's friend. In the latter case, the confidentiality itself is a kind of *conspiracy*, even if there is nothing in particular one conspires to do. Augustine famously averred that his youthful theft of the pears would not have come about if he had been by himself; what tempted him was the camaraderie of crime, the exciting feeling that he and his friends could, together, do what they knew to be wrong. I would say that the particular crimes and misdemeanours that a conspiratorial gang of friends might commit are never the essential thing, but rather the spirit of conspiracy itself, whose natural expressions the crimes are.[37] That spirit is the spirit of exclusion, a spirit which makes one say – that is its whole point – that this, that or the other person is "nothing" to "us".

The spirit of exclusion is manifested in its most extreme and systematic form in aristocratic moralities, in which all of life is lived by a double standard, one for "us", the *aristoi*, the "good" or "best" ones, and one for "them", the common people. Nietzsche described it without euphemisms:

> these 'good' ones ... these same men who, amongst themselves, are so strictly constrained by custom, worship, ritual, gratitude, and by mutual surveillance and jealousy, who are so resourceful in consideration, tenderness, loyalty, pride and friendship, when once they step outside their circle become little better than uncaged beasts of prey ... they revel in the freedom from social constraint and compensate for their long confinement in the quietude of their own community ... we can imagine them returning from an orgy of murder, arson, rape and torture, jubilant and at peace with themselves as though they had committed a fraternity prank – convinced, moreover, that the poets for a long time to come will have something to sing about and to praise. /.../
> Hesiod ... could cope with the contradictions inherent in Homer's world, so marvellous on the one hand, so ghastly and brutal on the other, only by making two ages out of one and presenting them in temporal sequence; first, the age of heroes and demigods of Troy and Thebes, as that world was still remembered by the noble tribes who traced their ancestry to it; and second, the iron age, which presented the same world as seen by the descendants of those who hade been crushed, despoiled, brutalized, sold into slavery.[38]

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[37] Augustine's discussion of the theft starts in *Confessions*, Book 2, section 9; the allure of camaraderie is taken up towards the end of the discussion, at 2:16 f. – What puzzles Augustine is that he did not want the pears he stole to begin with: his question is *what* it really was he was after. For one interpretation of the motive for and conclusion of Augustine's discussion, see Scott MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, the Beginning of all Sin: Augustine's theft of the Pears", *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003), 393–414.

[38] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals.* Translated by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), Essay I, § 11, p. 174 f. – I can see no grounds for thinking that Aristotle would have found anything objectionable in the appalling

The brutality may not be as extreme in its expression, but the same moral schizophrenia is inherent in any morality that differentiates between "us" and "them", and Nietzsche's reference to the fraternity prank is actually quite revealing. The point is not that the aristocrats treat something terrible as though it was something innocent, but rather that a fraternity prank is *not* innocent. Even if it does no great harm to anyone, the whole spirit of the fraternity is corrupt from the start: its pranks are about the fraternity affirming their belonging together by having a bit of "innocent fun" at the expense of others. It is never innocent to do anything *at the expense of others*, however, and we can easily imagine a seemingly harmless prank "running out of hand" and actually ending in murder, arson, rape or torture *without* any essential change in the spirit of the thing; rather, what happens in such a case is precisely that the original spirit of the prank is allowed to break free from the controls imposed on it by the conscience of the pranksters, or just by their sense of decency, of social limits.

The desire to exclude some people from one's friendship, to view them as people who do not belong to "us", involves a basic untruthfulness, a self-deception. Excluding people means closing oneself to them, refusing to listen to them, and that in itself is an untruthfulness, for it means that one arbitrarily decrees that truth cannot come from *them*, that one has nothing to learn from them. As for the reason why one might decree this, I can see two possibilities. It might be that the people one will not listen to have so far really had nothing worthwhile to tell one, and at some point one just gives up on them, feeling that they never will say anything worthwhile. That might be understandable, but nonetheless it shows a callousness, a lack of love for the people one gives up on – to see this one need only consider parents giving up in this way on their child, saying that he "had his chances". On the other hand, it may be that what the others have to tell one is actually a truth one does not want to hear, which is precisely the reason why one tells oneself one has nothing to learn from them – and here I am not only or primarily thinking of learning from *words*, or of the truth of what is *said*, but of what one person can see in and learn from another in the broadest sense.

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callousness to "outsiders" described by Nietzsche. On the contrary, such callousness belongs by definition to the aristocratic morality that Aristotle's *Ethics* describes. For the same reason, Aristotle's analysis of what he calls "perfect" friendship, the most famous and influential discussion of friendship in the philosophical literature, is in fact a show-case of the falseness, the corruption introduced into friendships by the spirit of exclusion. I will discuss Aristotle towards the end of this chapter, efter a more direct discussion of the corruption of friendship by the spirit of exclusion.

This self-deceiving rejection of what challenges one takes countless forms, as we have seen all through the discussion in this thesis; the case I want to focus on here is the challenge of those one has made one's *victims* in some way. As long as one refuses to repent of one's injustice, asking one's victims for forgiveness, they remain by definition people whose solicitations and accusations one simply will not listen to, because listening to them would *mean* repenting, hearkening to one's conscience. A crucial point to note here is that whatever seeming "openness" there may be between oneself and those one considers one's *friends* is also limited by one's refusal to listen to anything that would tend to show that one was not in the right against one's victims. One's "friends" are in effect defined for one as those one can rely on not to "turn against" one by lending an ear to one's victims. If they do, they too are shut out, showing how illusory the "openness" with them was.

The exclusion of one's victims will mark and limit all one's intercourse with others in the form of a proviso, a threat: "If you are not with me (against those others) you are against me". This threat is there even in the most unflinching trust that this or that person will in fact stay with one against the others, for the trust is a trust in this person being and staying exactly as one wants her to be, not questioning one's callousness. This means that one's "love" of her is reduced to the egocentric gratefulness one feels to her for filling a need in the psychic economy of one's self-deception.

The deceitful logic of exclusion is already at work every time one takes *sides* in a conflict, for this *means* that one engages in double-play. One does not simply react to what one sees someone doing to someone else; rather, one asks *who* did this to *whom*, and one's reaction to what was done will depend on how it affected the person whose side one is on, and on whether she was the agent or the patient of the act. To act and react *justly*, by contrast, means *not* taking sides, but seeing and acknowledging things just as they are, in terms of right and wrong. Justice is another name for the spirit of truth that belongs to love and friendship; when we speak of true friendship this is not just a figure of speech, for friendship is a desire for truth, for justice.

The impartiality of justice is not to be confused with *neutrality*. Neutrality is a political concept in the widest sense; to remain neutral in a conflict means to comport oneself in such a way that neither party feels one to be a *threat* against them. Impartiality, by contrast, is a threat to those who think of themselves as "parties", as having taken sides in the conflict. Impartiality is a desire for justice or truth, and it becomes an issue at all only because someone does not *want*

justice to be done, the truth to be known. If one then insists on the truth this person will not see one as neutral at all, but claim that one is taking the side of those she is in conflict with. In her self-deception, she either has made herself believe that she is in the right, that truth is on her side, or she refuses to see the whole thing as a question of truth at all, simply insisting that it is a simple choice between loyalty and betrayal: "If you are my friend, you will stand by me in this".

Very likely the other party to the conflict will be just as self-deceived, and will take one's acknowledgment that in this or that respect the accusations or claims of tone's friend are unjust as a sign that one has sided with him *against* one's other friend; if one then points out the injustice of *his* claims, he will be bitterly disappointed and accuse one of betraying him. He will probably also accuse one of indifference to him. But that is a lie. To be impartial is the very opposite of being indifferent; it is a desire for a truthful relationship with those involved in the situation. *Not* to care about this is indifference.

Loyalty, which is often taken to be the characteristic virtue of friends, means sticking to the side one has once chosen. It is epitomised by the thought "Right or wrong, he is my friend". Loyalty is therefore a form of injustice, of falsity; it is in itself a destructive rejection of openness. We must reject even the seemingly moderate view most people probably hold, that the demands of loyalty are legitimate as far as they go, although one must not allow them to trump those of justice, that loyalty "is indeed a virtue, but it must be qualified by higher virtues".[39]

When we call someone a loyal friend we mean that they can be counted on to support us in a conflict with someone else. If there are just you and I, you cannot be loyal to me, nor of course disloyal; these possibilities arise only if a third party enters the scene and somehow threatens me. What the threat is and what your motives are for standing by me, is left open by the description of your stance as loyal. One can show loyalty by not questioning a friend's obviously horrendous acts; a loyal friend might attack anyone who even suggests that what his friend did was not alright. The motive for his remaining thus loyal may be that he is too frightened of his friend to dare confront her, or that he does not want to admit that *he* has anything to reproach himself for (perhaps he himself participated in those horrendous acts he does not now want mentioned). In either case, his loyalty would be an expression of cowardice, a move in a game of self-deception.

[39] Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, p. 198.

It is incompatible with a desire for openness to be an accomplice to someone's self-deception. My openness to you may show itself, just as loyalty does, in my not abandoning you if you are attacked in some way, for my openness means that if you are attacked I will not look on it as a calamity befalling you that I may take up this, that or the other attitude to, making it my business or not. Rather, I will feel that it *is* my business from the start; there is no question whether it *should* concern me or not, for it *does* concern me, just as your sadness makes me sad and your gladness makes me glad. That is what being open means. My openness to you will not only come out in my defending you against injustice from others, however, but equally in my refusal to accept that *you* are unjust to others. This means that my defence of you against attacks, although it may have the appearance of an act of loyalty, will in fact be animated by a completely different spirit from the spirit of loyalty.

It will doubtless be said that I mistake corruptions of loyalty for the thing itself; that although loyalty *may* indeed be morally corrupt – that can hardly be denied – it *can* sometimes be a virtue. And certainly one may use the *word* "loyalty" in a way which makes justice the presupposition of "true" loyalty. However, it seems to me that every example one cites to show that loyalty may be a good thing can be described *without* bringing in the concept of loyalty – and in fact its *goodness* can only be clearly seen if it is described in that way.

Thus, if I defend my friend against slander there is no need to call my actions loyal, it is enough to say that my friend was slandered: slander is unjust by definition, and one should defend anybody from it. If I defend my friend against slander because I am a loyal friend, if *that* is what is at stake, this implies precisely that slander as such does not concern me too much. I might, for example, resort to slander myself in order to defend my friend against it. And if that is the case, there is no goodness in my defence of my friend; the goodness is absent from my actions not in spite of their loyalty, but precisely *because* of it. [40]

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[40] Olli Lagerspetz suggested, in discussion of an earlier draft of this chapter, that the fact that the victim of the slander is my friend may be important in explaining my taking action in *this* particular case of slander, while remaining passive in many other cases that I know about, for instance from reading the newspapers which are full of slanderous allegations. My inaction in such cases cannot be explained, but only be explained away, by saying that one cannot make it one's business to right all the world's injustices, for even if that is obviously true, the fact is that very often I do not care enough about the victims to do even the little I *could* very well do to try to help them. I agree with Lagerspetz that given this lethargy in the face of much injustice, it may be true that if the victim of slander had not been my friend, I would in fact probably not have been moved to defend him. Even so, there is a crucial distinction to be made between the different spirits in which I may come to my friend's defense.

By contrast, if I am moved to defend my friend in a spirit of openness, my caring for him and my caring for justice will be indistinguishable. I want my *friend* to get justice, but because what I want for him is really *justice*, I cannot want to deny it to anyone. One can want to have the rights of one person respected while not caring at all about the rights of others, but one cannot want *justice* only for one person. Rights are *yours* or *mine*, but one cannot speak of justice as *yours* or *mine*; justice is by definition "for all". If I defend my friend in a spirit of openness, and it transpires that the allegations I took to be slanderous were in fact true, I will not go on defending him against them, as a loyal friend might. I will be sad and angry that he has deceived me and others about what he had done, I will confront him over his deception – and as I noted in Chapter Two, the deception also raises a question about my own role in allowing myself to be taken in by it, about how open I have in fact been to my friend.

Philosophers have not been very interested in the concept of loyalty; Josiah Royce is the only philosopher that I know of who has attempted to articulate an ethics starting from the concept of loyalty.[41] Royce is, however, able to do so only because he confusedly imagines a loyalty that does not have conflict with others with *their* loyalties as its fundamental presupposition. Royce holds, on the contrary, that "loyalty is a supreme good", that therefore "the mutually destructive conflict of loyalties is in general a supreme evil" and that "the bitterest woe of humanity has [indeed] been that so often it is the loyal themselves who have ... blindly and eagerly gone about to wound and slay the loyalty of their brethren. The spirit of loyalty has been misused to make men commit sin against this very spirit, holy as it is".[42] This thought rests on Royce's confused claim that "the worst of the evils of a feud is the resulting attack, not upon the enemy's comfort or his health or his property or his life, but upon the most precious of his possessions, his loyalty itself".[43] Royce misses the obvious point that it is only in a "feud" that one's loyalty is demanded in the first place; the "feuds" are the birth and the lifeblood of loyalty, not its destruction. A particular person may of course betray his loyalty in the struggle, but only because the struggle is the place where loyalties come into play, are

[41] G. K. Chesterton is another thinker who should be mentioned here; I discuss him briefly below. George P. Fletcher, *Loyalty: An essay on the morality of relationships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) discusses loyalty in the manner typical of analytical philosophers, as one special concept or "area" among others in ethics.
[42] Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (Nashville & London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995 [1908]), p. 55.
[43] Ibid.

honoured *or* betrayed. The "bitterest woe of humanity" is not that the loyal "blindly and eagerly go about to wound and slay the *loyalty* of their brethren", but that they, precisely because they are blinded by the spirit of loyalty, eagerly go about wounding and slaying *their brethren*.[44]

Because being loyal *means* that one is prepared to act unjustly if the interests of one's friends demand it, it is no coincidence that it is only in criminal contexts, in gangs like the *Hell's Angels* or organisations like the *SS*, that an *absolute*, unswerving loyalty is demanded: loyalty is *measured* by how far one is willing and able to silence one's conscience in the face of the demands of loyalty. In ordinary cases of loyalty, there will be a limit beyond which one is not prepared to go, a point at which one will feel that although "loyalty is indeed a virtue it must be qualified by higher virtues" (Smith Pangle). One may slander the enemy of one's friend, but one will not consider murder as a way to silence him. For the *Hell's Angels*, by contrast, murder is an option, too, and they will find the ordinary varieties of loyalty cowardly compromises – which they indeed are, although not for the reason the *Hell's Angels* allege. The real point is that loyalty as such is a compromise with one's conscience motivated by the fear of truth, fear of what an open confrontation with one's friend over her actions might bring into play.

While loyalty, the willingness to sacrifice truth for one's allegiance to one's friend, may seem an index of the strength of one's love for her, it actually shows its *weakness*. It is not our love for others but our lack of it that drives us to lie and deceive ourselves about them. Suppose a father is unable to admit to himself that the son he would "do anything for" is not the musical talent he had always hoped he would prove to be. In the case of any other child this would be

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[44] Chesterton for his part speaks of a "primary and supernatural loyalty to things", of "a sort of universal [or cosmic] patriotism" (*Orthodoxy* [London: John Lane, 1909], pp. 124, 122). His use of these phrases is obviously metaphorical, however, and in fact in using them he wants to indicate a demeanour essentially opposed to loyalty in the normal sense of that word, in which one takes the side of some people *against* others. Chesterton's purpose is precisely to combat the choosiness of the pessimists who presume to be dissatisfied with life as it is given them, liking perhaps some bits of it but mostly just disliking it; against such small-mindedness he points out that every man "belongs to this world before he begins to ask if it is nice to belong to it ... To put shortly what seems the essential matter, he has a loyalty long before he has any admiration" (p. 118). Chesterton's central point here is really the one I too have been insisting on, that one does not *love* – as one does admire, like and dislike – for *reasons*; rather, one loves earthly beings but "with a transcendental tie and without any earthly reason" (p. 120). Putting this in terms of loyalty only confuses things. I suspect Chesterton does it out of a corrupt motive: in order, namely, to rally "us" behind "The Flag of the World" (this is the title of the chapter of *Orthodoxy* I have quoted from), while making us feel that we are somehow on the right side, on the side of life, against the ungrateful "pessimists" who are against life.

obvious to him, but it is not so in regard to his son. "His judgment is clouded, he is blinded by his love", we say. But there is certainly no difficulty in imagining loving parents who are not self-deceived in this way about their children's abilities. The father's self-deception seems to indicate an unwillingness to accept that life has not taken the course he hoped it would, that his son will not fulfil the hopes he staked on him – hopes having to do, for instance, with taking a kind of revenge by proxy on life for its "unfairness" in not allowing the father himself to study music. Having a son seems not to be enough for the father, if the son cannot or will not give him what he hopes of him. Is this not clearly a *lack* in the father's love for his son, an unwillingness to receive the *blessing* of a child, as love does?

Let me add a brief note about the so-called *moral dilemmas* of conflicting obligations often thought to arise from friendship, or rather from the clash between friendship and something else, such as the demands of loyalty to one's country (in other cases the conflict is supposed to originate from the incompatible demands of different friendships). I will discuss such dilemmas more thoroughly in the next chapter. The point I want to note here is that if one thinks of friendship terms of loyalty – a way of thinking I have argued is corrupt, determined as it is by the spirit of exclusion – the problem of conflicting demands is built into the game from the start, for such a conflict is asserted in any demand for loyalty. In demanding loyalty, one demands that one's friend side with one against someone else; the devilishness of the game is precisely that one tries to force one's friend to *choose* between oneself and someone else: "It is either me or him!"

If someone demands that I choose between her friendship and that of a third party, I know that what she offers me is *not* friendship, however; she is, quite simply, engaging in a form of blackmail where the choice pressed on me is between becoming her accomplice or her enemy. Unlike the kidnapper's "Give us a million dollars or we will kill your daughter", the blackmail of loyalty does not use naked, immoral power; it works precisely by – fraudulently, of course – moralising one's immorality. One claims that one's friend is *bound* to do what one asks her to do, that she would *betray* one if she did not.

Demands for loyalty create no genuine moral dilemmas, there is no question whether one *should* be loyal or act justly. If your friend tries to blackmail you by demanding loyalty from you, that in itself is a *moral problem*, however: it is a moral shortcoming *in your friend* that she does so, and it creates a moral problem, or rather a task, for you insofar as it is something you

must confront her with. *Yours* and *mine* are abolished in friendship, and that includes moral problems: the evil your friend does is not just *her* problem, it is yours, too. This is not to say that you share the guilt or the blame for what she has done – sometimes you do, but then it is because of what you yourself have done or left undone – only that you cannot remain indifferent to what she does, for as friends you are together "in sickness and in health". Friendship does not, however, give rise to agonising moral choices between friends or between friendship and something else.

– *Jealousy, marriage, sinfulness and finitude* –

Whereas openness is epitomised in the friends' looking into each other's eyes, the corrupting spirit of exclusion is epitomised in the friends' exchanging *meaning looks* when a third party says or does something that shows he is not one of "us". Here one can see the essentially *impersonal* and *distrustful* character of exclusivity, all its confidentiality and intimacy notwithstanding. When we look into each other's eyes, there is no reference to anyone else: there are just you and I; nothing and no one else can tell us what we are to each other. When we exchange meaning looks, by contrast, we are not looking straight at each other, but rather cast a quick glance at each other while ostensibly looking at or attending to someone else. And our doing this does not just show our attention to that *other* person to be ambiguous, false; the same goes for our attention to each other, in the sense that what we are to each other comes to be determined by how we happen to relate to the third party, to what he says and does; we exchange glances precisely in order to confirm that we do both find him strange, pathetic, ludicrous, disgusting or "not like us" is some other way – to confirm, that is, that "we" really do belong together *in* excluding him.

We want to have this confirmed not primarily because we distrust *him*, the "outsider" – although we obviously do that too; if we did not we would look him in the eye and tell him what we think. We need to confirm that we are at one mind in excluding him primarily because we do not trust *each other*. We do not trust the friendship we feel for each other, and so we need to have our meaning something to each other "proven" by our agreeing that someone else means "nothing" to us. This "proof" is of course quite illusory, for the doubt is about what we feel for each other, and that is not silenced by determining what

we feel or do not feel for others. Nonetheless, we are constantly tempted by this kind of illusion. We feel matters are getting weighty, we are thrilled or become solemn, if someone lowers their voice and tells us, in a confidential tone of voice, "You are the only one I am telling this to" or "I have not told So-and-So this, but...", as though the secrecy itself could give the matters kept secret weight, and as though what was not kept secret from *someone* could not be very important at all. In an open talk, on the other hand, what you tell me gets its weight from your really wanting to say it to me, not from your wanting to keep it secret from someone else.

Insofar as friends are open to each other, they are not afraid to let third parties into their talks and their life; they are open to each other and so are not torn by fears that in letting others near they would lose each other. The desire for exclusivity, by contrast, comes from the friends' lack of trust in each other, from their suspicion that someone else may take their friend from them, which is why they need constantly to confirm that others are nothing to them; that this woman here and that man over there are *not* going to come between them.

This suspicion may be overt and desperate, or hidden beneath a surface of apparently unflinching trust in the other. But even in the latter case the primacy of suspicion comes out in the fact that *what* I put my trust in is that my friend would never side with anyone else against me or let someone else become as important in her life as I am now. Thus, my whole perspective is a *comparative* one: my importance to my friend is expressed in terms of a ranking of myself and other people, in which I come out as "the only one" or at least as "one of the chosen few". And even if I feel confident that I will never lose that position, the very act of determining one's position in comparative terms is an expression of distrust, for it shows a need to have the importance of my friendship measured by reference to something outside it.

This illusory kind of measuring is particularly obvious in the case of sexual fidelity, where we often speak and act as though the most important thing was that one's partner has no other partners, although it is clear that if the sexual desire is weak or lacking between two people, the fact that they do not have affairs does not make things any better. As Robert Solomon puts it, in such a case "'fidelity' ... becomes the rather desperate denial of the possibility that someone else may provide what this love has already lost".[45] Merely having affairs would not make anything better either, of course: the point is precisely that the problem has nothing

[45] Solomon, *About Love. Reinventing Romance for our Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), p. 327 f.

directly to do with what the lovers do with other people, but concerns what they do, and do not do, together, what they feel and do not feel for each other.

Jealousy, which is what is at issue in the demands for sexual fidelity where they are not just a matter of social decorum, appears precisely because one believes that the feelings of one's partner cannot be trusted: it is only because there is a distrust between *us* that we feel jealous at *others*. And jealousy exists between friends, too, although it is not as characteristic here as between spouses or sexual partners, partly due no doubt to cultural norms having to do with sex, but partly also to the fact that friendships are often, in fact, not as all-embracing as sexual, erotic love-relations. That is: friendships are often implicitly limited to some areas of one's life, which means that the openness and the resistance or provocation it engenders, are limited, too.

The idea that someone could come from *outside* and destroy a friendship or a marriage is nonsense. It is true, of course, that a marriage that ends in divorce after one of the spouses has had an extra-marital affair might have lasted for life if the third party had not been there. That does not mean that it was the third party who destroyed the marriage, however, for *two* people, one from outside and one from *inside* the marriage, are needed to make an affair happen in the first place, just as two people are involved, this time *both* of them from inside the marriage, if an affair becomes the occasion for a divorce. The "rival" as such is never the problem; he is just the catalyst making the spouses' problems tangible. The man flirting with the wife becomes a *rival*, someone who comes between the spouses, only insofar as the wife or the husband or both see *her* as being actually tempted by him to betray her husband: it is not the man's advances on her but her response to them that makes the husband jealous. And infidelity does not just mean "having sex with him"; it may but need not involve that, and even if it does, the sex is not the central thing, but the fact that the wife enters a relationship that she herself thinks of as a betrayal of her husband.

The rival can enter only because the spouses have not dared to be open with each other: what the wife is looking for, no matter how confusedly, in the relationship with the rival is *either* the openness that she despairs of experiencing with her husband because he does not want to be open with her, *or* something else that the husband cannot give her which, because of his jealousy or her not daring to tell him about her desires – in any case, because of the distrust between them – becomes something she must try to get secretly or against his will, from someone who becomes, therefore, a "rival". By contrast, if the spouses dared to be open with each other, there would be nothing to feel jealous about.

The point is quite general: if two people, spouses or friends or whoever, are open with each other, they will not feel jealous, they will feel no need to be *possessive* about each other, because they will not feel threatened by anyone. They have no need for the possessive "He is *my* friend!" – although they may say "He is my *friend*!" in rejecting a corrupt invitation to treat their friend callously; an invitation typically issued by someone implying that one should consider *her* one's real friend and forget about "that other person"; "Let's go ahead with it, we don't need to ask John, he really doesn't understand these things; you and I on the other hand..."

In saying this I do not mean in any way to present jealousy and possessiveness as insignificant factors in our actual life as friends; on the contrary, I think it would be hard to overestimate their importance. As Freud insisted in his discussions of the Oedipus-complex, jealousy is a basic and formidable force in our life from our earliest years on: the boy is jealous of the father because he wants to have the mother for himself, as the girl is jealous of the mother; siblings are jealous of each other about the attention the others get from the parents, and so on – there are many variations. Analogously, the Bible tells us that humanity's first crime after the expulsion from Eden was motivated by Cain's jealousy towards his brother when it seemed to him that God the father loved his brother more than him. I think Freud and *Genesis* are right, and that friendship and life in general would not be the *difficult* things they in fact are for us if we were not jealous; but my point is that it is a confusion to see jealousy as itself an expression of friendship or love. It is, on the contrary, because our love is *weak* that we are jealous.

Someone might say, however, that while it may be true of friendship as we normally think of it that jealousy shows not its strength, but a weakness or pathology in it, this cannot be true of the monogamous erotic, sexual love which is what many of us hope and long for most, and a discussion of exclusivity, possessiveness and jealousy is seriously incomplete if it does not say anything about this monogamous love of the couple, or as one might simply call it, *the love of marriage*, in which one person becomes, as Karl Barth says, "in human terms indispensable to the other in both soul and body", so that "one cannot think of his own life any more without a definite relation to this other ... without accompanying this other in everything".[46]

[46] Barth, *Ethics*. Edited by Dietrich Braun and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 230.

I agree with that the love of marriage merits discussion. To explain how I see the issue, let me return to Montaigne's famous depiction of his friendship with Etienne de la Boëtie. Montaigne thought that most people never experience anything like this friendship, "so perfect and so entire"; "it is already something if Fortune can achieve it once in three centuries".[47] There was, he says, a complete openness between the two friends; they revealed "the innermost recesses of [their] minds with no reservations",[48] and there was a "total interfusion of ... wills"[49] in which both desired "with an equal hunger"[50] to enter ever more into their union. Although the friendship lasted only a short time – the two men met late in life and Boëtie died only four years later – Montaigne confesses that

> in truth if I compare all the rest of my life – although by the grace of God I have lived it sweetly and easily ... to those four years ... it is but smoke and ashes, a night dark and dreary. Since that day when I lost him ... I merely drag wearily on. ... I was already so used and accustomed to being, in everything, one of two, that I now feel I am no more than a half. ... There is no deed nor thought in which I do not miss him – as he would have missed me...[51]

What Montaigne describes here is really the love of marriage, except for the fact that there was apparently no sexual desire, or at least no consummation, involved. Montaigne himself implicitly admits that this was a lack in this otherwise perfect friendship; he claims that women are not in fact capable of friendship – of that there is "no example yet" – but he grants that *if* they were, and one could have a friendship, "willing and free", in which it was not only the case, as in his relationship with Boëtie, that the "souls" had this "full enjoyment" of each other, but "the bodies too shared in the union – where the whole human being was involved – it is certain that the loving-friendship would be more full and more abundant".[52]

Montaigne insists that while "common friendships can be shared", this is impossible in the "unique, highest friendship" he is describing,

> For [it] is indivisible: each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another: on the contrary, he grieves that he is not two-fold, three-fold or four-fold and that he does not have several souls,

[47] Montaigne, *On Friendship.* Translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 2 f.
[48] Ibid., p. 16.
[49] Ibid., p. 13.
[50] Ibid., p. 10.
[51] Ibid., p. 18 f.
[52] Ibid., p. 7. – Homosexual love would of course accomplish the same completion of the loving-friendship.

> several wills, so that he could give them all to the one he loves ... in this friendship love takes possession of the soul and reigns there with full sovereign sway: that cannot possibly be duplicated ... It is a great enough miracle for oneself to be redoubled: they do not realize how high a one it is when they talk about its being tripled.[53]

This seems to me right in one sense; there is something absurd in imagining a marriage of *three*. We need to be clear about what the impression of absurdity arises from, however. Clarifying it will also, I think, make it clear how the "indivisibility" of the love of marriage does *not* make the love of the spouses *preferential* or *jealous*, does not infect it with the spirit of exclusion, and in general does *not* limit the openness they can enter into with other people. On the contrary, they will be more open with others than couples whose love is weaker are, precisely *because* in one sense they are and remain for each other "the only one".

Where, then, is the absurdity in supposing that there could be a marriage of three? Love or the spirit of friendship *by itself* cannot make it absurd. How could it, since that spirit is simply the desire to be open with others? I would say that the absurdity results from the *conditions* under which love and friendship have to break through into our life. In these conditions I include two very different things: on the one hand, there is our *finitude* as such, the fact that our time is limited, that we can only be at one place at a time, and that our arms are not large enough to hold all the people we might want to embrace. On the other hand, there is our *sinfulness*, the fact that we are all of us *weak in love*, full of temptations, of evil thoughts, of shame and anxiety.

There has been a recurrent and very influential tendency in the history of philosophy and religion which may be called the *temptation of Gnosticism*, to identify sinfulness with finitude, with the fact of our embodiment as such, or at least to explain the former as an inevitable consequence of the latter.[54] Gnosticism betrays a confusion, in fact a self-deception; what one tries in bad

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[53] Ibid., p. 15.

[54] As Rudolf Bultmann notes, Gnosticism is "a phenomenon which appears in a variety of forms, but always with the same fundamental structure"; "a religious movement of pre-Christian origin, invading the West from the Orient as a competitor of Christianity", it has "appropriated all sorts of mythological and philosophical traditions for its expression", but "all its forms ... arise [as Hans Jonas has said] from 'a definite attitude to life and an interpretation of human existence derived therefrom'" (*Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*. Translated by Reginald H. Fuller [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980 (1949)], p. 162). A central feature of the Gnostic conception is, as Bultmann goes on to say, that the body and the world are "not only an alien abode [for man], but a prison, a dark noisome cave", and that man has been "flung into this cave *without any fault of his own, and before he was capable of any conscious choice*" (p. 164, emphasis added).

faith to do is make one's quite personal shortcomings out to be somehow part of *our* "make up" or "predicament". The simple truth is, however, that while I was indeed born with this body of mine, I was not born with my greed or vanity, for instance; those are disfigurements I have brought upon myself, and continue to bring upon myself each moment I remain greedy or vain.

Having said that, however, we can add that our sinfulness is not, just as little as our finitude, a mere empirical fact in the ordinary sense, a fact which we could well imagine to have been otherwise. If we were not sinful, that is, if we were *all love*, if we felt no fear of openness, if we never had to struggle with selfishness and shame, our life would not just be changed in this or that respect but revolutionised, it would be "made new". It is not that some of us happen to sin sometimes; rather, we are all steeped in sin. Even if we happen not to do anything spectacularly bad, we are not spectacularly good either, and *that* – the puniness of our love, the lack of energy that shows in the pettiness of most of what we do – is the decisive thing. As even Jesus himself confessed, "none of us is good but God above". Of course this does not show that sinfulness is really just a consequence of our finitude or embodiment, for while we *are* embodied, sin is still something we *do*, and even if we in fact all do it, it patently does not follow, as the Gnostics pretend, from "We *all* do it" that none of us really *does* it, that we are somehow just saddled with it.

To see how sinfulness and finitude both impose limits on openness, but in quite different ways, consider what it can be like to arrive at a party where both friends and people one knows less well are present. Let me sketch three possible attitudes one may take, or rather two attitudes and one possibility that is no attitude at all. One possibility is that one is on the lookout for interesting people to meet; if one gets bogged down somewhere with old friends one gets impatient because one wanted to meet new people, not always just the same old faces. Another possibility is that one does not want to meet new people; on the contrary, one looks around anxiously for some old friends to talk to, perhaps because one is tired and just wants to sit down and relax with people who do not demand anything from one.

These two attitudes, which on the face of it are opposites, are obviously both just as closed; in both cases one's way of relating to others, of approaching and moving away from them, is determined by one's private agenda, by one's preferences, one's hopes and fears and expectations; the agenda is different in the two cases, but it is there, as it always is in any approach that can be

described as an *attitude*.[55] Now consider a third possibility, in which one has no attitude at all, but is simply open. How would this come out? By definition it cannot come out in any particular, describable, typical way, for describing any such way of relating to others amounts precisely to describing an attitude. We can, however, indicate what openness means for instance by saying that in one's gladness to be with others one does *not* feel that they are exactly "what one wished for", and if one is pained by their company what one feels is not an impatience, an irritation at their turning out not to be what one expected, but rather a pain at their closing themselves to one. Positively, we can say that openness is simply a desire for and interest in the people one happens to meet at the party. Chesterton said about St. Francis that what characterised him was that "from the Pope to the beggar ... there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in *him",* and that is what it feels like to meet the open look of love.[56]

If one is open, it may be that one spends the whole party with the person one happened to bump into at the door, whether she be an old friend or a stranger, for if she is as open as oneself, there is nothing to stop the encounter going on for ever, the friendship deepening endlessly; no one gets bored or impatient or anxious. As I said in Chapter One, it is the mystery of love that no matter how far we go into the openness with each other "it will never end". However, when this endlessness of love's desire to know the other is confronted with the conditions of finitude, when the spirit of love becomes incarnate, as it were, it creates a kind of paradox, because while love is the desire to know *others*, without any limitations put on it – it is not as though there were some people one would *not* want to know – it turns out that there is, in a sense, not enough time to know *even one*, since while no time is too long for love to spend in the company of the beloved, our time on earth is in fact limited.

To be sure, insofar as we are sinful – that is, weak in love – this is not *our* main problem. For us the problem is rather that the time we spend with others,

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[55] Cf. the discussion of attitudes in above, p. 269 ff.

[56] Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.), p. 110. – This is what Chesterton has in mind in describing St. Francis as "the world's one quite sincere democrat" (p. 7). In St. Francis, this openness to others in their individual being – the openness of love is always an openness to *individuals* – extended even to animals and plants. For him, Chesterton says, "nothing was ever in the background ... He saw everything as dramatic, distinct from its setting, not all of a piece like a picture but in action like a play" (p. 98 f.). "In a word, we talk about a man who cannot see the wood for the trees. St. Francis was a man who did not want to see the wood for the trees. He wanted to see each tree as a separate and almost sacred thing, being a child of God and therefore a brother or sister of man. ... He did not call nature his mother; he called a particular donkey his brother or a particular sparrow his sister" (p. 99).

whether we are married to someone or are just talking to them at a party, all too often seems all too long. Nonetheless, it remains true that the desire for openness, although in itself not excluding anyone, will in fact, under the conditions of finitude, have to "pick out" some people, while "leaving out" all the others, all those one did not have time to talk to or never even had a chance to meet. The inverted commas are meant to indicate, however, that there is no picking and choosing, no excluding on the part of the person desiring openness. Who it is she comes to spend her time with is dictated to her by chance, or by circumstances she does not attach any decisive importance to. As Augustine said, speaking of the love of neighbour, it is not for you to decide who your neighbour is; instead, it is decided by a kind of "lot" who "happens for the time being to be more closely connected with you",[57] and what you are called upon to do is *love* this neighbour allotted to you, whoever he or she is.

Note two things, however. First, the point is not that the "lot" puts you under an *obligation* or a *demand* to love someone. The situation will present itself to you in that light only if you have already fallen away from love; if you love, you will simply feel a *desire* to get to know whoever it is you happen to encounter – I will return to the relation between desire and demand in Chapter Four. Secondly, there is of course one crucial aspect of the situation that cannot be assimilated to the accidental features of it, and that is the *response* you get from the person you encounter. If she is cold to you, or anxious to please or evasive or self-absorbed, or in some other way closes herself to you, that is obviously not something you should or could take as just a feature of the situation or of her. Her closing herself is *not* an aspect of "the person she happens to be" who you are to love, for to the extent that she closes herself to you she refuses to be known by you, in a manner *refuses to be there for you to love*. You offer yourself, but she will not give herself; she only gives you a cold or ingratiating look instead, or she avoids your eyes, or she does not even notice you. You will of course – assuming, all the while that you are really open to her, that you do not fall away from love – try to make her feel that you are open to her and want her to be open, too, but it may be no use, and openness cannot be forced on anybody, the movement must come from oneself.

The feeling that one is more "attuned" to some people than to others is a way of speaking marked by the confusion of openness with ease of communication that I spoke of in Chapter One, and in our party-example, both

[57] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* I: 28, quoted in Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship. A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 19.

the person looking for interesting new faces and the one who sticks to the company of his old friends may say that they feel more "attuned" to those whose particular company they seek. However, the open person, too, will say that she cannot get through to some people because they will not "receive" her. It is not a matter of her "choosing" to be only with people who are open, as though that would be a possible preference among others. The point is rather that someone who is open will be with the people she meets *as far as they will let her*. There is no one at the party she does not want to talk to, but there are many, probably, who will realise very soon that *they* do not want to talk to her, because they fear her openness.

To return to the "paradox" that love "does not have enough time" even for one single person: the fact is that once you have met and become friends with someone, you are "bound" to that person, not in the sense of being somehow duty-bound or in some other way *forced* to go on seeing them, but in the sense of *wanting, longing* to see more of them. And this will mean that you will not in practice be able to pursue friendships with new acquaintances in quite the same way as you might otherwise have wanted to. You would love to go on talking all night with the person you bumped into at the party – and I am now imagining that this is not just a polite phrase but something you really feel – but there are also other people at the party you really want to meet; perhaps a friend who has been out of town and who you long very much to see again.

You might of course introduce your new friend to your old friend. There is, as yet, no need to say goodbye to anyone because you long to see someone else; on the contrary, it will in itself be a joy for you to see your old and new friend together, and to be together with both of them. And if yet a fourth person joins your conversation, you will not, assuming that you are still speaking *openly* with each other, react to the newcomer with irritation or dismay, you will not feel that he is *intruding* on you, for you are not trying to prove your intimacy by excluding others. You *cannot* welcome the newcomer if *he* is not open, because that means that he does not *want* to be welcomed, but wants something else instead, for instance to impose himself on you, forcing his own private agenda on you; "Well, *I* have never been interested in the thing you are discussing, but listen to *this*..." If he is as open as you are, however, you will welcome him into the talk. Thus, an openness of four people is born where before there was an openness of three.

I do not see that one could decide how many people there may be in a talk before the limit is reached beyond which one cannot say anymore that all

those involved got to know each other, and "the" talk in fact dissolves into separate encounters in which some people "connect" to some others, but many people do not have an opportunity to get to know each other at all. But it is obvious that the limit is reached at some, not too far off, point. And it is just as obvious that no matter how open one is, one simply does not have time *really* to get to know very many people in one's life.

However, the fact that one cannot truly know very many people is one thing; it does not prove that Montaigne was right to claim that friendship or love in the fullest sense "cannot possibly be duplicated". And as far as I can see there can be no basis for ruling out as impossible *in principle* a life in which three friends or lovers lived together in a perfect openness of love, in a kind of marriage of three. Nonetheless, it is very hard to believe that such a threesome could *in fact* exist. The difficulty of imagining this cannot, however, be ascribed to the limitations of finitude as such, but is rather due to our sinfulness. For the problem we instinctively feel in the scenario of a marriage of three is not that there would not be enough *time* to learn to know two people as one would wish to, and therefore one will have to settle with marrying just one. If *that* were the worry we would have to consider the desire of a couple to have children as in itself a sign that their love for each other was somehow weak, and we do not think that – it *might* be such a sign, of course, as it is when people try to save their marriage by having a baby, for instance, but it *need* not be that.

The problem is rather that we find it hard to imagine that two lovers would be "in human terms indispensable to the other in both soul and body" (Barth) and yet not be jealous of each other at all, if a third person entered the picture, not just in the way children and friends do, but as a second wife or husband. The crucial thing to note, however, is that the difficulty of imagining a perfect marriage of three is in fact the difficulty of imagining a *perfect marriage* at all, a marriage where love has fully "taken possession of the souls" of the spouses and "reigns there with full sovereign sway" (Montaigne). For as I said, a *rival* can only drive a wedge between a couple insofar as they *allow* him to do so, and it is precisely insofar as we cannot imagine that there would be no jealousy at all between two lovers that the introduction of a third party into the most intimate life of the lovers seems like a recipe for disaster. It seems to be something lovers could not dare to risk, given that what they, as lovers, want most of all is to go on being together in everything.

So given our sinfulness there is a need for monogamy. Having said that, I must insist that this does *not* mean that a person who loves wholeheartedly

would say to his beloved: "I will love no one else but you. No one has a place in my heart except you". Rather, what they say is: "No one can take your place in my heart". *All* love – everything that is really *love*, whether it is for spouses or children or friends – is in essence an openness to the beloved which excludes any need for her to *compete* for one's love with anyone else. This is not because one has given her all one's love, leaving none for others, but because love is *in itself* "indivisible"; it is not like money or food to be parcelled out to different recipients in some distribution or other, but an openness to *each* person one loves. And precisely because this is so, someone who really loves *one* person will love others, too, without that in any way putting her love for the first person in question.

As soon as there is a division of her love for the first person – as soon as there is something in her way of relating to him that is *not* love – the appearance of a third person will introduce problems, however. Divisions do *in fact* constantly appear, more or less and in one way or another, and precisely insofar we feel that our love and the love of those we love is in fact *not* wholehearted but rather divided in this way, we ever again feel a need to limit the expressions of love we can allow ourselves towards third parties, as it were keeping back our love, "reserving" it for those we already have a relationship with, in order not to provoke jealousy and crisis. It would be misleading, however, to say that we are protecting love, as though love needed or could be protected; it is rather that we are protecting ourselves from our own lovelessness. It is only because we feel jealousy, shame, anxiety, vanity, small-mindedness and other loveless reactions already stirring in us that we fear provoking them further.

The stronger the love between two people, the more it actually approaches to being indivisible, not in the sense of being "reserved" only for the other, but in the sense precisely of needing no precautionary measures, no keeping back in regard to anything or anyone – the greater in short the openness between the lovers is, the greater will be their openness to others. Thus, being a friend of a couple who love each other wholeheartedly does not mean being shut out from an open relationship with them. One could think that only if one has a false idea of openness as something like the field of my possibilities of action in regard to others, so that if, for instance, I meet a woman who might consider having sex with me or marrying me, there would be, at least potentially, more openness than if she will not consider those possibilities.

If the reason that she would not even consider them is that she *despises* people like me, for instance, she *would* indeed be closing herself to me, but her

considering these possibilities obviously need not show any greater openness; she might consider them because she despised her *husband*, or because she *admired* people like me, for instance, and openness is not about despising *or* admiring anyone. More importantly, her *not* considering having sex with or marrying me might not be a rejection of me: it may be simply an expression of her already loving someone else with a wholehearted love that has made that other person "indispensable to her in both soul and body" (Barth).

She is already married, she is already "one flesh" with her lover, and this *means* that there is no question of her abandoning him (or her, if her lover is a woman) in favour of me. She might consider doing all kinds of things with me, but nothing that would constitute closing herself to her lover, whether in secrecy or in a frankly displayed disregard. It is not that she would very much like to do something with me, but feels she cannot because unfortunately she has already promised herself to another; *that* thought can enter only as a *temptation* which would as such reveal a *division* in her love. But as long as her love remains undivided, there is nothing unfortunate about her not considering going away with me: it does not *limit* her in any way, she is not *forced* to give up anything in doing so, she is simply doing what she wants to do with all her heart; "accompanying" the love of her life "in everything" (Barth).[58]

Furthermore, if what *I* feel for her really is *love* then I will not feel that her reaction forces *me* to give up anything, either, for when I see how she and her lover love each other, I cannot possibly want that to end. If, on the other hand, what I want is just to "possess" her in some way, then I will of course feel disappointed, perhaps unhappy, perhaps slighted, about her making this impossible, and I will *envy* her lover's good luck in "finding her before I did".

[58] To avoid a possible confusion, I should perhaps note explicitly that having sex with someone and marrying them are obviously not possibilities on the same level. Monogamy need not mean having sex only with one's spouse, and the fact that spouses sleep with others need not as such throw any more doubt on their love than their talking with other people does. Conversely, in a context of distrust "just" talking openly to someone may be considered as grave an infidelity as having sex.

– Preferential "love", and seeing a friend in the stranger –

The monogamous love of marriage has nothing to do with *preferences*, or with loving someone *more* than others. Thinking in such terms introduces a comparative and self-centred perspective which is precisely what the indivisibility of love excludes. If I stay with my wife because I prefer living with her to living with someone else, this implies that a comparison with what it would be like to live with someone else has announced itself to me; that is, that I am tempted, however fleetingly, by the thought that I might leave my wife, which means that my love for her is not wholehearted. If we love each other we see that the "lot" of life has given us each other to love, and we experience this essentially as a *gift*, no matter how much pain and struggle loving each other may also involve. There is nothing for us to prefer or to decide, apart from "deciding" – that is: desiring and daring – to receive this gift, to love each other. Love makes the very idea of measuring or ranking love in terms of who one loves "more" or "less" seem absurd. How could you *compare* the importance to you of two people you love? Do you love your wife more than your children, or one of your children more than the other? What could that mean? To say "I love Jane more than Jill" is like saying "I find talking to Jane more interesting than talking to Jill". In both cases one lets one's personal inclinations determine whom one chooses to spend one's time with, which means that one is open neither to Jill *nor* to Jane, that one has not opened oneself to love at all.

Suppose that you break up with your girlfriend, and start seeing someone else, whom you convince yourself you are completely in love with, until one day you realise that you still feel strongly for your old girlfriend. What is revealed to you here is not that you love your ex-girlfriend *more* than your new one, but that you were afraid to own up to the love you felt for your ex-girlfriend, and that consequently the relationship with your new girlfriend has from the start been built on false premises, on your wanting to get away from the love you feared. What has happened is actually that you have used your new girlfriend as a pawn in the game of self-deception you play in regard to your relationship with your ex-girlfriend, and if your new girlfriend loves you, if she wants to be open with you, she will realise this, and will refuse to play a part in this private game of yours. Of course, it may also be the case that you are afraid of "committing", of opening up to anyone, and for that reason you feel you would rather be back with your ex-girlfriend as soon as things start getting serious with the new one. And there are other possibilities. The point, however,

is that there is no need to introduce the confused idea of loving some people *more* than others in order to make sense of what is going on in such cases.

However, *if* one takes "love" to be an inclination, some kind of liking, it will be preferential by definition, for without an implied comparison with what one does not like or is not inclined towards, it makes no sense to speak of liking or inclination; I like this kind of music better than that kind, this person better than that one, and so on. Hume took love to be a species of liking, and so he said, quite correctly from his perspective, that there is "no such passion in human minds" as the love of human beings "merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself".[59] Using the word *love* in Hume's sense, and taking one of his examples, we may say of an Englishman who is homesick in Italy that he would love to meet Englishmen, but when he is back home he does not love Englishmen, but loves some of his countrymen and dislikes others. In the same way, Hume said, "perhaps a man wou'd be belov'd as such, were we to meet him in the moon" – if one is alone, *any* company will do – but as long as we remain down here, where there is plenty of people to choose from, we love some, perhaps, but not others.[60]

What Hume is saying, then, is that my feelings for and interest in you are determined by the comparisons that happen to announce themselves, so that the love two friends feel for each other has no independent reality of its own. Its existence in fact depends on their both disliking other people, in contrast to whom they find each other's company preferable. The fact that the "love" Hume's homesick Englishman feels for his countrymen evaporates once he is back in England, reveals that it was only the shadow cast by his desire to get away from the Italians. The "love" he thinks he feels for the English is a figment of his fantasy, which is set in motion by the dislike he actually feels for the Italians.

In fact it would not be surprising if his motive for going to Italy in the first place was his desire to get away from his disagreeable countrymen, for the primary thing in his attitude to others is the dislike, the revulsion; the "love" is only a transitory effect of this, which latches onto different imaginary objects depending on who it is one is in contact with, and finds disagreeable, at the moment. If I dislike your company, my dislike will express itself in my projecting hopes and fantasies onto others, whose company I imagine would be

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[59] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature.* Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. 2nd Revised Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 481.
[60] Ibid., p. 482.

so much better than yours. Only my desire to get away from you is real, my desire for the others is merely the shadow it casts, and if I actually spend some time with the others the weakness of my desire for them will be revealed. In my self-deception I will, however, interpret this as a revelation – once again – of how disappointingly disagreeable *others* are.

This logic, this eternal restlessness of liking and dislike, is well expressed in the saying that the grass is always greener on the other side. It is obviously at work in countless cases when couples break up because one of the parties has fallen in love with someone else, but this "love" quickly evaporates as the fantasy of life with *someone else* becomes the *reality* of life with *this* particular person. In *romantic* conceptions of love, "love" is indeed defined as a passion obeying precisely this logic – as, in Montaigne's words, "a mad craving for something which escapes us" which "languishes and grows faint" as soon as the lover actually possesses the beloved, for "to enjoy it is to lose it".[61] As Montaigne notes, this most certainly is not true of friendship which, on the contrary, "can spring forth, be nourished and grow only when enjoyed".[62] Actually, it is true only of false conceptions of love that contact with reality makes "love" evaporate. Love is precisely desire for real contact. It is not a fantasy game.

"He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"[63] It seems to me that the simple point of that rhetorical question is precisely that love is not a fantasy game; it is not about imagining someone one would like to meet, be it "God" or some other imaginary person, but about opening oneself to those one actually does meet. I am not saying that "God" is necessarily the name of an imaginary person; I am saying that this is what it becomes if one engages in dreams of a mystical union with the divine while having a heart full of resentment against all those real people one has met and who have not answered to one's expectations. How come one is so certain that God will not be just one more annoying bastard in the long line one has already had the dubious pleasure to meet, and has turned down? "He couldn't be like that, because he's God!" And who is God? Someone who is certain to answer to one's personal expectations? Someone at last who can live up to one's high standards?

Preferential conceptions of love start from the assumption that personal love must be about loving some people more than others; otherwise, it is thought, love

[61] Montaigne, *On Friendship*, p. 5 f.
[62] Ibid., p. 6.
[63] 1. John 4:20.

will be reduced to some sort of weak, impersonal and most likely hypocritical attitude, a feeling-the-same-for-everyone which in fact means not feeling very much for anyone. Ironically, preferential conceptions end up with is an attachment which is not strictly speaking personal at all, but consists in my *kind* of person liking your *kind* of person more than other kinds, a fact which is actually more accurately expressed by saying that I *dislike* your kind less than other kinds.

Analogously, when people say, with Aristotle, that wrongs committed are "aggravated in proportion to the degree of intimacy" between perpetrator and victim, so that "it is more serious to defraud a comrade than a fellow-citizen, and to refuse help to a brother than to a stranger, and to strike your father than anybody else",[64] they ostensibly want to underline the importance of the moral claims of friendship and other personal relations, but in fact they only manage to *undermine* our sense of right and wrong in general. In effect, Aristotle is saying that it is *not so bad* to wrong people you do not know. His remark trades on a brutal cynicism, on the thought that we can act in the most callous ways towards strangers and that therefore – since if we acted like *that* against each other no one would call us friends – there must be special obligations between friends. In this spirit, I have heard it said that it was particularly bad that Jesus was denounced by one of his disciples, one of those closest to him. But does one really want to say that it would have been less upsetting if someone else had denounced an innocent man to be tortured and put to death by the authorities? I hope not.

The idea that injustice grows worse in proportion as the degree of intimacy between perpetrator and victim increases, in fact expresses a fundamental narcissism, the implied thought being that what happens to others, including what my actions do to them, is of concern to me only in proportion to their closeness to *me* and *my* concerns. Hume makes this thought explicit when he says that "in the original frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confin'd to ourselves; our next is extended to our relations and acquaintance; and 'tis only the weakest which reaches to strangers and indifferent persons".[65]

Given the narcissism and callousness inherent in the idea that we have special, especially strict moral obligations to friends, it is perhaps not surprising that the idea is sometimes formulated in an openly immoral way, which apparently contradicts the "moral" phrasing of the idea, but in substance

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[64] Aristotle, *Ethics (The Nicomachean Ethics)*. Translation by J. A. K. Thomson, revised by Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1976 [1953]), p. 273.

[65] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 488. – Hume thinks that it is to remedy this "partiality of our affections", which he takes to be "natural", that the "artificial virtue" of justice, the respecting of certain rules of property and right, is needed (p. 489 and passim).

actually repeats it. In the immoral formulation, it is said that the claims of friendship sometimes "override" or "silence" those of "morality". Those who protest against this, obviously grotesque, idea, often do so on very confused grounds, however. Most of the contemporary debate about whether or to what extent the claims of friendship are compatible with the impartiality demanded by morality is a non-starter, because it works with confused conceptions *both* of friendship *and* of moral impartiality. Friendship is assumed to be a preferential love and impartiality is assumed to mean some sort of abstract moralism of principles – and it does not matter much whether the principles are of a consequentialist or Kantian or some other kind.

The standard complaint against moral impartiality thus conceived is that it is too *demanding* or too *severe*, but this way of putting it only confuses matters. The real point is that the kind of moralism one has in mind in fact makes the most *callous, immoral* things out to be required by "morality". There is no need to discuss any *special* moral dispensations for friends, for this kind of morality has no rightful claim to allegiance anywhere, not even with regard to one's dealings with strangers. This point is quite lost on those who debate, for instance, whether it could be alright not to report a friend to the police for some crime – on the assumption that this is what one should *obviously* do in the case of strangers. A minute's reflection should reveal that law-abidingness as such can never be a moral duty, nor, certainly, can informing on others.

On the conception of friendship and morality shared by all sides in most debates over impartiality, morality is seen as essentially a matter of limiting the partiality inherent in our partial affections and preferential attachments – which friendship is though to exemplify. Thus, it will be said that "the important thing is that our sense of right and wrong sets limits to the lengths that we are prepared to go in order to pursue the objects of our affections"; that while there is, for instance, "nothing wrong with having benevolent feelings with respect to friends ... there is something wrong with not having a backgrounding sense of right and wrong that makes us refrain from lying and stealing ... for the sake of those friends".[66]

As I see it, however, friendship is not a preference but a desire for openness, while impartiality in the morally crucial sense denotes a desire for justice and truthfulness in one's relations with others which is part and parcel of the desire for openness itself. I would say that the problem with someone who

[66] I quote from Johan Brännmark's apt characterisation of Barbara Hermann's Kantian position in Brännmark, "Commentary to 'Transforming Incentives'" in Åsa Carlson (ed.), *Philosophical Aspects on Emotions* (Riga: Thales, 2005), p. 46.

mistreats others to help his friends is not that he feels too much affection for his friends but rather that he feels too little affection for those he mistreats, at the same time as his feelings for his friends are perverted into favouritism. The problem is not that a "sense of right and wrong" which should "set limits" to his feelings of friendship is lacking, but that there is something lacking *in* his feelings for others, friends *and* strangers.

In denying that we have especially strict moral obligations to friends and others close to us, I am not denying the obvious fact that friends are involved with each other in more intimate ways than with strangers, and so become vulnerable to betrayal in ways they are not vulnerable with strangers; only someone I have confided in can divulge my secrets, for instance. Neither do I deny that we are in fact often cynical about each other and may not expect anything good from strangers, so that if they act callously it makes no great impression on us, whereas if a friend lets us down we may be crushed by it. There is obviously much of this trust-against-a-background-of-general-distrust in the relations of friends. But again, the basic thing to notice here, the basic problem or tragedy, is not how terrible it feels to let friends down or be let down by them, but how *little* it impresses us when we let others down or are let down by them. – And note that this cynicism, this distrust is also revealed in how glad and surprised we may be when sometimes a stranger shows us a little kindness: a simple smile from a bus driver, which of course should be the most natural thing in the world, may seem like, and in one sense be, something extraordinary.

The fact that we often expect so little from each other obviously does not make it alright for us to *give* others no more than the little they expect. Anyone would admit this faced, for instance, with someone who tried to justify not returning a wallet he found by saying, perhaps quite rightly as far as the facts go, that the person who lost it will not expect that it should be returned; "After all, we live in a big city, where people usually...". However, the same thought might very well appear somehow alright if put in a more general form, and especially when one starts speaking in terms of *groups* of people, as when we hardly react to news of the authorities' treating tramps or other "social cases" brutally, because we assume that "people like that" are used to being treated like that.[67]

Again, that may well be true, and people's reactions to brutality will certainly change with time: the first time the police beat you up you will

[67] There is a good discussion of the blindness of "respectable" people to tramps in Olli Lagerspetz, *Trust*: *The Tacit Demand* (Dodrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 155 f.

probably react very strongly, feel outraged, humiliated, terrified; the third or tenth time it happens it comes as no surprise, and your reaction is likely to be less dramatic. However, this does not mean that the brutality has somehow been lessened or made alright by your experiencing so much of it. It is not a *good* thing about brutality that one gets used to it; on the contrary, it is an aspect of its evil that it will *brutalise* perpetrators and victims alike, so that they become "used", that is insensitive, to it.

Such lessening of sensitivity is never a straightforward or irreversible process, however. Getting used to brutality is thus not like getting used to driving a new car. In *that* case, what happens is simply that the awkwardness disappears as one gets to know and learns to move about in the new surroundings. In the case of brutality nothing just disappears, as the awkwardness did; it is rather a matter of suppressing one's primal reactions to doing or suffering brutality, because allowing them out would simply be too painful for victim *and* perpetrator. The difference comes out for instance in the fact that someone who seems to have got completely used to brutality, completely brutalised, may at some point "snap", break down and be unable to go on with it. What happens is that all the suppressed reactions suddenly burst forth at once with an overwhelming violence, revealing the level of violence the person has in fact had to apply to herself in suppressing them. Obviously, such things do not happen in the car-case; "Suddenly, John snapped, overwhelmed by the accumulated strangeness of the new car he had for so long tried to deny, pretending that he had become quite used to it", is the nonsensical stuff of a Gary Larson cartoon.

What I have said is meant to indicate some of the reasons why in morally charged situations *de facto* expectations are not decisive. This is not to deny that there is a sense in which the applicability of descriptions such as "brutality", "betrayal", "letting someone down", "treating someone unjustly", or "partiality" *are* relative to the expectations of the people involved, which in their turn are partly dependent on the particular history they share, and partly on the general expectations about behaviour that are taken for granted in the culture they share, making it the culture it is. For instance, in giving Christmas presents to my own children but not to other people's children I am not, normally, unfairly favouring my own, whereas it would normally be not just unfair but cruel of me to let one of my children go without a present while the others all got presents. It is also clear that there can never be any question whether it is alright to be, for instance, partial to friends, for it is by definition wrong to be partial; the

question can only be what *constitutes* partiality – or brutality, betrayal, injustice and so on – in a particular case.

People may differ on that: someone may consider it right, and even a duty, to act in a way which to someone else looks like a clear case of partiality, for instance. Merely noting the fact that people may differ about such things takes us nowhere, however: we must ask what these differences actually look like, what they stem from and express. The mere fact that two people differ does not of itself imply that the views of both deserve to be taken seriously, for one of them, or both, may deceive themselves about the character of the situation, and in particular about the nature of their own involvement in it.

Suppose I do not invite a friend to a party to which I invite most of my good friends. This may well be wrong, as it is not wrong of me not to invite people I do not know at all. Whether it is wrong or not will depend on *why* I do not invite my friend: if I want to make him feel left out and miserable, it is obviously wrong. If it is rather because I fear that his presence at the party would somehow be inconvenient or embarrassing, the situation is more complicated, which is not to say that there is no right or wrong here, only that we need to say more about what it is I actually fear before we can say what is what is going on in this case, morally speaking. Perhaps the friend I do not invite always gets too drunk and actively sabotages parties, picking fights with people, and so on. Even if that is the case, it still does not settle the issue, however, for there is the question of why he does what he does, and in particular of how it is connected with the way I and other friends relate to him. Just to sketch one possibility, he might have good reason to be angry with me and others because we have always treated him condescendingly: if I then pretend that I do not want to invite him because *he* always makes trouble, I am deceiving myself about where the problem really lies, and there will be an element of falseness in our partying without him: we are in an obvious sense betraying him in leaving him out.

I said that these kinds of moral difficulties and questions do not arise at all concerning my not inviting people I do *not* know to the party. This needs to be qualified, however. Suppose that a next door neighbour I barely know happens to walk by while we are partying in the garden, and I just smile politely at him: I might then have a bad conscience for not inviting him to join us. I am not now thinking of a case where I feel that he expected me to invite him in, or that "one" could have expected me to do it, so that I was being rude in not inviting him. I am imagining a case where I feel bad about *what I did*, not about

the way my neighbour or someone else might *look at it*; I feel bad about the indifferent or apprehensive or downright disdainful way *I* looked at him. That prick of bad conscience tells me that I *could* indeed have seen him in that way too, since in fact I see him like that now: in my bad conscience I feel precisely that I *do* want to invite him to share our joy, and if I do not refuse that feeling again, for instance by turning it into a sentimental reflection on my personal badness or on "the difficulty of life in general and our isolation from each other", I will in fact go and ring on his door and invite him to join us.

The point is not that while I invited my friends to the party just because I *wanted* to, now I feel that morally I *should* invite my neighbour, too. Conscience does not tell me that I "owe" or "must" do something in regard to strangers that I do out of free inclination in regard to my friends. Rather, *conscience shows me strangers as friends*; I have a bad conscience because I treated my neighbour as someone who was "nothing" to me, but now I feel that he is someone I want to invite in. We cannot legislate what conscience may and may not speak to us about, and therefore the current *de facto*-expectations of myself and others cannot decide what is or is not a case of rejecting someone, letting them down. If I know in my heart that I in fact rejected my neighbour on a particular occasion, then it *is* so, even if everyone seems surprised at my feeling that way, and tells me that what I did was perfectly alright and I have nothing to blame myself for.

We can make no final distinctions, but only quite temporary and provisional ones, between what we owe to strangers and to friends. This is so for the simple reason that "friend" and "stranger" do not name two distinct categories of people, but rather two ways of relating to the same people. In helping the stranger who had been robbed, the Good Samaritan related to him *as* to a friend, but although he showed uncommon goodness in doing so in these particular circumstances, what he did was in one sense not special at all. We have all accomplished the same feat of treating strangers as friends when we befriended those who are now our friends – for of course they were all strangers to us when we first met them.

The very idea of a love of neighbour is often questioned on the ground that we can supposedly *love* only those we know, but if that were so, if love could *not* go out to strangers, then there would be no love among us at all, for the original situation of all of us is that of arriving in this world as strangers and being taken care of by strangers; we know no one and no one knows us. What our parents want, however, is precisely to get to know us, to learn *who* this child

of theirs is, just as we want to get to know them. What is revealed in the relationship of parents and children is, then, the concrete, aboriginal fact that "friend" and "stranger" do not name categories of people, but rather the ever-present poles of the never-ending movement of the spirit of friendship itself, in which one moves from being a stranger to someone to knowing her. And the poles are the same in the opposite movement of closing oneself to others, in which we *make* ourselves strangers to each other in rejecting and fleeing from each other.

To sum up: preferential attachment, which seems at first sight to be a very personal thing, turns out to be at the same time self-centred and impersonal, anonymous, while the love of neighbour, which seems at first somehow anonymous, turns out to be the very movement of love itself; the desire to know the stranger as a friend, thus turning anonymous relations into personal ones.

– *Socratic justice and the order of reason* –

My rejection of the idea that loyalty is a virtue, and that friendship could demand injustice towards third parties, seems to place my view close to that of (the Platonic) Socrates and his followers. Their conception of the actual connections between justice and friendship differs radically from mine, however, because of the key role played in the Socratic conception by the concepts *reason* and *order*. Socrates famously denied the sophists' claim that one should use one's influence and resources to help one's friends to escape justice – the sophists advertising themselves as the ones who could teach one to do it – and claimed that it was, on the contrary, "a man's duty to denounce himself in the first place for his misdeeds and next any of his family or friends who may do wrong, bringing the crime out of concealment into the light of day in order that the wrong-doer may be punished".[68] Conversely, if one really wanted to harm an enemy one should, Socrates said,

> make every effort ... to prevent his being brought to book and coming before the judge at all ... If he has stolen a lot of money he must not pay it back, but

[68] Plato, *Gorgias.* Translated by Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin, 1971), 480c.

> keep it and spend it on himself and his family without regard to God or man ... The most desirable thing would be that he should never die, but live for ever in an immortality of crime...[69]

The sophist Callicles' astonished reaction to this is: "Tell me, Chaerephon, is Socrates in earnest about this or is he joking?" and to Socrates: "If you are serious and what you say is true, we shall have human life turned completely upside down; we are doing, apparently, the complete opposite of what we ought".[70] That is precisely the case, in Socrates' view. He believes that "wickedness" is the "supreme evil",[71] that evil is a terrible sickness of the soul, that being "chained to an unhealthy body is a far less miserable fate than the companionship of an unhealthy, rotten, wicked, impure soul",[72] and that it is only by being brought to justice that the wrong-doer may "regain his health".[73] In unjustly furthering our friends' private interests we are indeed doing "the complete opposite of what we ought", not because we let concern for our unjust friend and his good override the more important concern for justice, but because we fail to see that justice *is* his true good and that the person towards whom he was unjust was not the only victim of his injustice, but that he harmed *himself*, too, in acting unjustly. Socrates says that for his own part he fears acting unjustly more than suffering injustice, and one will naturally also try to protect one's friends from what one fears most for one's own part.[74]

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[69] Ibid., 481a. – It is clear that Socrates puts forth this second case as an ironical "per impossible" one; it is only for the sake of argument that he accepts the "hypothesis", which for his interlocutors seems self-evidently true, that "it is ever right for a man to inflict injury on an enemy or on anyone else" (480e ff.); he does not really believe that a good man *has* any enemies, in the sense of people he would want to harm. Note, however, that being forced to harm someone in a just cause, defending oneself against unjust attack, for instance, is quite different from *wanting* to harm them.

[70] Ibid., 481b–c.

[71] Ibid., 480d.

[72] Ibid., 479b.

[73] Ibid., 480c.

[74] It should be noted that Socrates does not claim that it a matter of indifference whether one or one's friends suffer injustice or not, he only claims that "the greatest of all misfortunes is to do wrong" (ibid., 469b). To the astonished question whether he "would rather suffer wrong than do wrong", he replies: "I would rather avoid both; but if I had to choose one or the other I would rather suffer wrong than do wrong" (469c). It is clear from everything Socrates says, however, that he does not think one can somehow weigh up the badness of the consequences of suffering and doing wrong against each other and conclude that doing it is worse than suffering it. There is no common measure here, and the judgment that the greatest misfortune is to do wrong is an unconditional one. Or perhaps one should rather say that it is no judgment at all; it is rather the very heart of the whole Socratic perspective. I will return to the lack of common measure below.

So far, what Socrates says seems to be in agreement with what I have said about the spirit of friendship, but on closer examination his view of what is actually at stake turns out to be rather different from anything I would associate with friendship – or goodness. Socrates views goodness and justice as primarily a matter of achieving self-control, understood as a balance or harmony or order in the soul, a harmony that is a mirror image of the beautiful order of the cosmos. Socrates believes that the order is really *there*, that life obeys an inescapable "geometry", so that whatever one might wish or imagine, injustice makes one miserable, and the only question is whether one accepts this fact gladly or fights, fruitlessly, against it.[75]

It should be noted, however, that the character of this misery cannot be understood in worldly terms; it can be seen or felt only from the perspective of the just order itself, which means that the sense in which acting unjustly is bad for you, as Socrates claims it is, cannot be explained in morally neutral terms – in terms of merely psychological disagreeableness or disorder, for instance. Rather, Socrates claims that the unjust are miserable because injustice corrupts the soul, making it incapable of grasping the truth – which consists precisely in seeing and acknowledging how the cosmos is governed by the "geometry" of justice. Socrates knows very well that this "argument" for a life of justice is circular, that what he says will not convince someone bent on injustice, someone who thinks in terms of gaining power and advantage for themselves, for the misery and corruption injustice brings to the soul makes it incapable of recognising its own misery and corruption.[76] Socrates is not really out to *convince* anyone; he is simply explaining how he sees the internal, logico-ethical connexions between things. He believes, however, that in doing so he is not just setting out *his* personal view of things, but the view that all of us in fact hold, and would also admit to be true if we just considered the question honestly – which is precisely what we are unwilling to do, however.[77]

Socrates connects the just order of the cosmos with friendship. As he says to Callicles, "friendship ... and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a *world order*, my friend, and not an undisciplined world-disorder".[78] Good men, Socrates thinks, are those

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[75] These connections are laid out very clearly in the *Gorgias* at 507a ff. "Geometry" is introduced at 508a.
[76] This is explained very clearly for instance in *Theaetetus*, 176a–177b.
[77] *Gorgias*, 474a–b.
[78] *Gorgias*, 508a. I quote this passage in Donald Zeyl's translation, from Plato, *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), because the Hamilton translation which

who consent to being bound by this order, bound in this cosmic friendship, and therefore – since they are willing parts of the same order – they are all also friends with each other. Bad men fight it, which means that they will have to fight themselves and each other, too, for when the order is transgressed, it makes itself felt precisely as the need to fight interminably, as spiritual chaos. That is why "only good men can be friends", as Socrates says, and as Aristotle and ancient philosophers generally agree, although the reasons they give for agreeing vary somewhat.

Epictetus' discourse on friendship is one of the clearest statements of the view that only good men can be friends. Epictetus takes it as obvious that

> every living creature is attached to nothing so strongly as to its own interest. So whatever appears to it to be acting as a hindrance to that interest – be it a brother, or father, or child, or beloved, or lover – is hated, abhorred, and execrated by it; for by nature it loves nothing so much as its own interest. This is father to it, and brother, and family, and god. /.../ For wherever 'I' and 'mine' are placed, thither must the creature necessarily incline.[79]
> Do you not often see little dogs fawning on one another and playing with one another, so that you exclaim: 'Nothing could be more friendly'? But, to see what this friendship is, throw a bit of meat between them, and you will know. And if you likewise throw a bit of land between you and your son, you will see that he will quickly wish you dead and buried, and you him: and then you will come to cry, 'What a son I have raised! He has been longing to see me buried!'[80]

Life will be anarchy *unless*, Epictetus explains, I make it "my interest to preserve my faithful, modest, patient, abstinent, and co-operative character, and to keep my relations with others inviolate"; wherever two people do this one can "confidently declare that they are friends, and likewise, faithful and just", even though they may not even know each other.[81] Why should we think, however, that if we "place the good in right choice", which is Epictetus' name for wisdom, "then the preservation of ... relationships", such as that to a father, a brother, a friend, "does in itself become a good"?[82] How do we know that *that* is the *right* choice?

Epictetus says that "each of these names [father, brother, friend and so on], if rightly considered, always points to the acts appropriate to it", thus, "if

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I otherwise use translates Plato's *philia* as "society and love" rather than "friendship".

[79] Epictetus, *The Discourses.* Edited by Christopher Gill. Translation [of Elizabeth Carter] revised by Robin Hard (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), Book II, 22:15 f.; 22:19 (p. 134 f.).

[80] Ibid., II, 22:9 f. (p. 133 f.).

[81] Ibid., II, 22:20; 22:29 (p. 136 f.).

[82] Ibid., III, 3:5 ff. (p. 157).

you go and revile your brother, I tell you, 'You have forgotten who you are, and what your name is, [just as] if you were a smith and made bad use of your hammer, you would have forgotten what you were as a smith".[83] There is, then, an order of things, cosmic and social, mirroring each other; "For what is a man? A part of a city, first, of that made up by gods and men; and next, of that to which you immediately belong, which is a miniature of the universal city".[84] This order in one sense *cannot* be broken, in another it *must not* be broken, and those accepting its inviolability live in a kind of universal friendship.

It seems to me that this talk of order leaves us hanging in mid air, morally speaking. To see why, consider the following example. It is about a police-dog named Fritz, but its significance is obviously not restricted to dogs;

> One night, [Fritz' master] Officer Beem stopped a young black woman for jaywalking and started clubbing her with his nightstick, for the sheer fun of it as near as anyone could make out ... Fritz attacked – not the woman, but his policeman partner, and took his club away from him empathically.
> Now Fritz was not only by nature a good dog, he was well trained and had a keenly developed sense of what his job entailed, what did and did not belong in this particular little dog-human culture. Sitting by while people got beat up for no good reason was no part of his job, it simply did not belong. While it would not be exactly wrong to interpret this story by saying that Fritz was moved by compassion or a sense of rescue or protectiveness, it wouldn't be quite right, either. He simply knew his job, had his own command of the law in a wide sense of "law", and was putting his world back in order.[85]

Cora Diamond believes that the example illustrates something important about morality, or at least about some conceptions of morality. She says that "coherent training gives a dog a new 'cosmology'", and describes the implicit thought of Fritz as something like: "The order of things is broken: 'Phil Beem is beating up this woman, and I, Fritz, am sitting by. *No one* is giving me a command to set things back into order. But *I am commanded*': here it is as if the cosmos itself were demanding to be set right".[86] Diamond also says that we can see the dog's actions "as embodying an understanding of what he *needed* to do", and that "the good to which Fritz's act relates is ... the good of a life for

[83] Ibid., II, 10:11 ff. (p. 96).
[84] Ibid., II, 5:26 (p. 85).
[85] The example, originally from Vicki Hearne, is quoted in Cora Diamond, "The Dog that Gave Himself the Moral Law" in French, Uehling & Wettstein (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII. Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 176 f.
[86] Ibid, p. 177.

man and dog ... a good which has internal to it the authoritative enforcement by 'teeth' of good order".[87]

Maybe so, but should we not, if the discussion is to help us make sense of ethics, ask what it is that makes us want to say, if we do want to say, that there is anything resembling *goodness* in the dog's behaviour at all – or in the behaviour with the same intent of a human colleague of officer Beem, for that matter? Suppose we changed the example a little, suppose part of Fritz' training had been that "one must keep blacks in their place", and that Officer Beem, normally a brutal racist, had one night done an unaccountable act of kindness to a black woman, whereupon his dog had attacked him and perhaps the woman, too. That would be as good a case of Fritz' "putting his world back in order" as the original story, but there is certainly no goodness in the modified story. There is goodness in the original story exactly to the extent, I would say, that we do indeed see Fritz as "moved by compassion or a sense of rescue or protectiveness" rather than just enforcing some order or other.

I would also say that making the order "cosmic" rather than simply mundane, as Socrates and Epictetus explicitly do, does not as such take us any closer to goodness. In fact, the social order with its morality always presents itself as more than "just mundane"; it does not enter in the form of purely conventional or practical considerations, but imposes itself in the *guise* of conscience, of an absolute demand concerning what one "must" do. Remember Huck Finn's fearful thoughts about God as "the One that's always on the lookout" for people not doing what they "should".

Plato was certainly aware that simply saying that the world is *ordered* does not get us anywhere, morally speaking, for the question is: What *kind* of order? After all, even the Athenians explaining to the Melians why they would show them no mercy, claimed to believe in a "justly" ordered world, which they explained was a world in which the strong take all they can and the weak have it taken from them.[88] The Greek natural philosophers all agree that the world obeys laws or principles or forces of some kind, and in this sense they think, as Socrates says, that there is a kind of "justice" in what happens, for whatever is "governor and penetrator (*diaion*) of everything else ... is rightly called 'just' ('*dikaion*')".[89] Disagreements arise only when, but also as soon as, it is asked what exactly this principle of justice is. When Socrates persists in "gently

[87] Ibid., p. 178.
[88] As related in Tuchydides' *History*.
[89] Plato, *Cratylus,* 412d. Translated by. C. D. C. Reeve, in Plato, *Complete Works*.

asking" the philosophers who have gone on about justice ruling the world, what the just actually *is*, they grow irritated and think he is "asking too many questions".[90]

So Plato saw the problem, the moral emptiness of the idea of a moral order as such. But as far as I can see he has no way of solving it, for he persists in thinking about goodness in terms of *order*. I would say that goodness is not about order at all, but about being open to others. What is lacking, or not just lacking but actually denied, in the idea of the "love" of a "moral order", is that very openness; what is denied is the love between individual human beings, or indeed between living beings – humans and dogs, for instance. Friendship, on the other hand, is precisely about openness, and that is why speaking of friendship in terms of order, or harmony and self-control, is in every sense "all Greek to me". In the Greek picture of things there is no sense of longing for, desiring to be with *one's friend*, just as there is no sense that the terribleness of injustice lies in what one does to individual human beings, to the victims of one's injustice.

If "reason" is taken to be the central concept in ethics, however, as it mostly has been in philosophy, then the idea of an *order* must be central, too, because the work of reason is precisely to establish the order among things, moral or otherwise – and for the purposes of my discussion it does not matter how this work of ordering is understood in the details; whether in a realist spirit as discovering an order that is already there, or in constructivist terms, as our "making law" as we go along in our practice of "being reasonable". The reasonable man's reasonability consists precisely in the fact that his attention – although not necessarily his conscious thought – remains at all times fixed on "the whole", by which I mean, and he means, his whole life as it is situated within a whole moral world or landscape or culture. If his attention was not there, he would not be reasonable, for being reasonable *means* relating things to each other, putting them in their *proper* places – that is, it depends on a conception of an *ordered whole*, an ethical world in which things *have* their proper places.

Suppose you are the friend of such a man and you come to him asking for a little loan, for instance. To the reasonable man, you appear as someone occupying a certain place in this ordered whole, a place that is as yet not fully determined, and the full determination of which is precisely his moral task. The question is, certainly, how much he should give to you, to *this* very person right *here* who is his friend, and in that sense his attention is on *you*, but he poses the

[90] Ibid., 413a–b.

question in terms of his general grasp or sense of *the kind of situation* that he is here confronted with, and in that sense he does not have his undivided attention on you. On the contrary, you are reduced to a placeholder or "role" in a certain moral drama; that is how it must be if reason is to have any work to do; if comparisons and weighings are to be made, the mean to be determined, judgment to be exercised.

The reasonable man's response to your request "fits" the situation; if he thinks, upon consideration, that he should grant you a loan he gives you what it would be fitting and proper to give in the situation. He gives enough, and if he is liberal as well as reasonable – and a touch of liberality is perhaps even part of the very concept of a reasonable man – he might even give you more than you would be entitled to expect, so that you certainly have nothing to complain about. Nonetheless, you would not feel *warmed in your heart* by the generosity he has shown you, because you would not feel that you had met real *kindness*, that you had really made *contact* with someone, rather than just being "dealt with", however graciously, under the description "someone asking for something". In short, you would not feel, as you might in another case, when meeting someone who is open with you, that the giving and receiving was no mere *transaction* but a real *communion*.

Lest someone think that I am quite dogmatically denigrating the reasonable man – "What's your basis for saying that he could not show kindness, just as well as anybody?" – I should perhaps say that I do not claim that there are certain people one could pick out beforehand as being incapable of this or that act. I am discussing how a given act is to be described, and my point is that to the degree that talk of being warmed in one's heart, talk which I take it we all see the point of, is the right description, then to the same degree it is misplaced to describe it as reasonable. Reasonability may be a good thing in all sorts of ways: it might be *encouraging*, for instance, to find a reasonable man – even just one – in a situation where everybody seems to have got into a panic, but it simply does not warm your heart to meet it.

Love is fundamentally alien to the whole mind-set of the reasonable man, and so it has always seemed excessive and "mad" in the eyes of the reasonable men of this world, while in the eyes of lovers the reasonable men have always seemed sad and small-minded; fearful of opening up to the infinite desire of the heart The "reasonable" spirit is aptly characterized by the expression "nothing to excess". For the Greeks excess seemed more or less synonymous with evil, and insofar as one operates within the mind-set or language-game where

questions of quantity, timing, appropriateness, suitability, *measure* in one way or another, are raised, excess *is* by definition bad, being simply *too much* of something.

Not everybody operates, not everyone *is*, in that mind-set, however: lovers are not. If they are challenged to give up or somehow limit their love, they refuse to do it. No matter how persuasive a case is made against them, they refuse to be *reasonable* about it. They deny the meaningfulness of introducing any considerations of moderation, and treat the wish to do so as a *temptation*. It is not that lovers would be somehow generally unreasonable, it is just that love refuses to be reasonable when it comes to *its own being*: it is no part of love to accept in a "reasonable" spirit that one's love is either not answered or that it is hampered by others, or by something in oneself, for instance one's concern with respectability. As Socrates notes, "when it comes to proper and decorous behaviour" a lover "despises the whole business"; as long as he can be close to his beloved, he is even – how shocking and unreasonable! – "willing to sleep like a slave, anywhere".[91]

In its *infinity* and *groundlessness* – love knows no end and one does not love *because* of anything in particular – love is, to speak with Kierkegaard, a movement of *faith*, a movement which appears *absurd* or *paradoxical* from the point of view of reason, for a reasonable man always puts limits to things and asks for their grounds. His doing so is precisely an expression, I should say, of his putting his faith in *himself*, in his own resources of judgment, explanation and foresight; that is, of his *lacking* the faith to receive the gift of life and the

[91] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 252a. Translation by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff in Plato, *Complete Works*. – Plato's Socrates is of course himself a great lover of sorts, and his view of the relationship between reason and love appears ambiguous or perhaps rather enigmatic. He always speaks of, and for, harmony and order and self-control, and yet he says that there is "no truth" to the story that a young man should give his favours to a man who does *not* love him, but only wants to have sex with him or seeks the prestige of having a handsome youngster by his side, because such a man "is in control of himself while the lover has lost his head"; on the contrary, Socrates says, "the best things we have come from madness [*mania*], when it is given as a gift of the god" (*Phaedrus*, 244a). A non-lover's companionship is, Socrates says, "diluted by human self-control; all it pays are cheap, human dividends, and though the slavish attitude it engenders in a friend's soul is widely praised as virtue" it is in fact a kind of living death of the soul (ibid., 256e). Far, then, from trying to prove that love is reasonable after all, and therefore alright, Socrates claims that its very madness is its strength. Watch out for reasonable people and seek the company of those insane from love; that is the advise given us by this supposed arch-rationalist! – I will not try to solve the riddle of Socrates', or Plato's, thought about love here, but let me point out that the mad love Socrates speaks of is not, at least not in any straightforward sense, the love of human beings for each other, but rather the love of humans for the "divine" which they see reflected in, shining fort from, each other's faces. All the talk of madness notwithstanding, we are moving in the world of shared ideals and aspirations.

approach of others openly, without distrustfully asking everyone to "prove" themselves, to show their "credentials" for him to accept or reject. And as Kierkegaard himself is well aware, at least at times, it is not that love or faith are absurd or paradoxical as such; they only appear that way to the reasonable.[92] To the lovers themselves there is nothing absurd in sacrificing, if need be, everything else to love; every comfort, every penny, every last shred of respectability. The point is not that love would *contradict* or reject or even silence the judgments of reason. Rather, lovers simply do not make any *judgments* in regard to how much or in what way they should open up to each other.

– Impossible to contain: love and injustice –

The central claim of this chapter is that friendship and love cannot be kept only for a select few. When there is openness between two friends, what is revealed to them does not just concern what is possible between *them*, but what is possible *between human beings as such*, because openness *means* precisely that the friends feel that their relationship – even though, or rather precisely *because* it is strictly personal – does not depend on any particular traits of theirs, on any special "compatibility" based on their particular characteristics, and so they will not feel that the openness between them is something that is *only* for them in their particularity. Openness cannot be isolated in one place, it cannot be *contained*.

This is not a theoretical claim, but a fact of life. Is it, for instance, really the case that people who fall in love normally become very nice to those they fall in love with but otherwise one can see no change in their way of relating to others? Will a brutal or stingy man who suddenly falls in love be just as brutal or stingy, although he has now fallen in love? If one says that he might be, is it certain that one has really imagined him falling in love, and not just his taking a liking to, or

[92] Cf. N. H. Søe, "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox", in Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup (eds.), *A Kierkegaard Critique* (New York: Harper, 1962). Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, the book where the "absurdity" and "paradox" of faith is most insistently declared, is himself avowedly a person who is *incapable* of faith, a person, that is, who looks on faith from outside; cf. *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition.* Kierkegaard's Writings, VI. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 32–38.

developing some sort of "amorous passion" for, someone? Is not love something that somehow changes one's life as a whole, not just some small aspect of it? And is not the same true, even if in less dramatic fashion, in relation to one's friends? One meets a friend in the street, exchanges a few words with him and goes on one's way with a smile lingering on one's face. Is it just an insignificant psychological curiosity that it takes some time for one's face to return to that indifferent, perhaps slightly irritable, expression that it had before?

Orwell describes an incident which shows the same thing – the fact that the openness of one encounter tends to *spread* to the next – from a slightly different angle. Reporting from the front during World War II, Orwell and a Belgian journalist come across a dead German soldier, just a young boy, face yellow like wax, on whose chest someone has put some lilac blossoms; it turns out that this is the first dead person the Belgian has actually seen with his own eyes in his four years as a war-propagandist at the BBC. Orwell relates how the Belgian's attitude was completely changed by that encounter: he looked with disgust at the bombed cities and the humiliations the Germans were made to suffer. Upon leaving he even gave the rest of his coffee to the Germans at whose house they had been quartered, although a week earlier the mere thought of giving anything to a *boche* would have been repellent to him. As he confessed to Orwell, the sight of "ce pauvre mort" down by the bridge had suddenly awoken him to the terrible meaning of war.[93]

The encounter with that one dead boy had changed the Belgian's way of relating to *all* Germans. As one might put it: where he had expected to see dead Germans, he saw a dead boy, and so he started seeing the humanity in the other Germans, too. One might also say that he realised they were "just like him", but if we ask what this realisation amounted to, we can answer only in terms of *his response to them*, of the compassion he felt for the dead boy, and the compassionate anger and disgust he felt at the way the others were treated. It was not that he suddenly noticed something about the Germans that he could point to as the *reason* why he had adjusted his attitude to them, as would be the case for instance if someone shooting at Germans held his fire when he suddenly realised that he had made a mistake and that the people he was shooting at were in fact allied troops. "Humanity" is not primarily the name of a class of beings we all belong to; rather, it names *the fact of our belonging together*, of our openness to each other.

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[93] Orwell, "Revenge is sour" in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and letters. Vol 4: In front of your nose, 1945-1950* (London : Secker & Warburg, 1968), p. 22.

What the Belgian awoke to was, I would say, the love of neighbour. What happened was clearly not that he took up some general attitude or policy towards people. There was a universality to his reaction to the dead boy, but it was not the universality of a general policy or a universally valid principle, but the universality of love itself. The "move" from what he "saw" in that dead boy's face to how he came to look upon others cannot be captured in (epistemo)logical categories like generalisation, induction, conclusion, evidence, justification or proof. By contrast, his earlier hatred for Germans had taken over his thinking precisely through illegitimate "generalisations" in which bad things done or rumoured to have been done by Germans were amassed as "proof" of German deviousness. I know that this is what happened although Orwell does not say anything about it, because that *is* the way hatred proceeds, finding its own spurious "justifications" as it grows – and note that the justifications are spurious not primarily because they are factually false, but because *what* they try to prove, that one *should* hate, is morally false from the start.[94]

By contrast, the Belgian's insight down by the bridge was not one that *justified* anything. His insight did not tell him anything about *Germans*, about what they (as opposed to other people) are like. On the contrary, he realised how he had become blinded precisely by his hateful ideas about them. His insight was an existential insight, that is, it was not primarily an insight about others – about Germans, for instance – but about how callous *he* had allowed himself to become in regard to them. We might well say that he forgave the Germans, but then we must bear in mind that he found that the person who most needed forgiveness was he himself. In effect, he said to the Germans, "I'm sorry, please forgive me!" In the same way, the awakening of friendship is, as I have been saying, not about seeing this or that particularly endearing quality in others, but rather about freeing oneself from the fear and the prejudices, fed one by the other, which we have allowed to grow between us, putting us on our guard against and isolating us from each other. In positive terms, this means that one wants to know the other and give oneself to her in every possible way, without holding anything back.

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[94] For discussions of the self-deceived and self-perpetuating dynamics of hatred, see Hans Lipps, *Die Menschliche Natur* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1941), pp. 126–130; K. E. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*. Translated by Theodor I. Jensen, Gary Puckering and Eric Watkins, and revised by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 32–35; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Translated by George J. Becker (New York: Shocken Books, 1965 [1946]); and Christopher Cordner, *Ethical Encounter. The Depth of Moral Meaning* (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 147–149.

The universality of love consists in the fact that this longing for openness, this *opening oneself* to another, letting one's guard down, *means* that one gives up the desire to control who one lets into one's life and how *altogether*. Will, the protagonist in Nick Hornby's novel *About a Boy*, puts it quite exactly when, having fallen in love for the first time in his life, and having found himself shortly thereafter becoming friends with an adolescent boy he has coincidentally met and whom he would not have dreamed of befriending in his previous, loveless life, he notes: "If you open your door to one person, anybody can come in".[95]

If one says "I will open myself to you, but not to those others", one is in effect saying that one will not be open at all, but rather chooses to be frank or intimate about this or that with the other person, while all the time retaining the right to determine the forms and limits of this frankness or intimacy. To return to the example I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and slightly modifying it: if a white or black man in a racially segregated society falls in love with a woman of his own colour, and it transpires that she is friends with someone of the "wrong" colour, this will put the man's love for her to the test. If he cannot accept her friendship with the other person – that is, if he refuses for his part to become a friend of her friend's – he will *eo ipso* reject *her*, while if he dares to open himself to the love he feels for her, this means that he will open himself to friendship with this person of the "wrong" colour, too, and of course not just to *this* person, for in accepting the friendship of *a* black (or white) person, he has broken out of the confinement of his group altogether – as the other members of his group will be quick to let him know. This is so in principle; in practice he may on some level choose love yet have to struggle with temptations to shut himself up in himself, to shut her and others out again. And he may also try to deceive himself about what is happening to him, what he is in fact in the process of opening up to, by telling himself that his relationship to these particular people is an *exception*; "I'm no nigger-lover, of course, but I love my wife, and so... "

What I have said about friendship or love "spreading" and of "opening the door to anyone" may seem to be contradicted by how love, by focusing attention on the beloved or the friend in her singularity, makes us forgetful of the world; think again of lovers kissing in some public place. The "world" the lovers "forget" is not other people as such, however, but others insofar as they

[95] Hornby, *About a Boy* (Penguin, 2004).

reject the openness of love – a rejection revealed, for instance, in the disapproving looks directed at the kissing couple. The lovers do not lose interest in other people. It is on the contrary the "world" with its categorising of us and the contacts between us into right and wrong "kinds" which is defined by a fearful *lack* of interest in others – and thereby in oneself.

Love and friendship do not define themselves against the world; on the contrary, the world defines itself against them. The lovers do not, in their love, feel any need to shut anyone out, but others may feel a need to reject their openness. One feels frightened, embarrassed by it; perhaps one tries to belittle it by smiling at the lovers' "silliness", or one disapproves of their "shamelessness" or "indiscretion", or one distances oneself from it by viewing it sentimentally, as "beautiful" and "innocent". Love does not shut anyone out. *Intimacy*, by contrast, is the name of a sphere that some may be let into, but which by definition shuts most people out from what one would feel ashamed or embarrassed to show them – as they would feel ashamed or embarrassed to see it. And precisely in its need to shut the world out, intimacy reveals itself as a *worldly* determination, defining a "we" who are allowed to see or hear this or that against those who are not.

But, someone may ask, am I seriously suggesting that if one did not look away but imposed oneself on a pair of kissing lovers, perhaps even jumping in and taking part in their kisses and caressing, they would not mind, since they "feel no need to shut anyone out of their love"? No, of course not: insofar as one feels that one is *imposing* on them, intruding, and so on, one moves not in the dimension of love, but in that of shame and intimacy, bound by their boundaries *as* one oversteps them. It is not love, but our lack of love, our difficulties with being open, that announce themselves in our feeling that we *would be* intruding in even looking at a couple kissing. I do not deny that we have these difficulties – they are obvious everywhere – I am saying that this is what our difficulties are about. Note, also, that the very embarrassment one may feel in the presence of lovers kissing, the feeling that what they do is not for one's eyes to see, shows that one is *moved* by what one sees, that one precisely cannot regard it as the lovers' private business, as something that is of no concern to one. The very need to keep love from view, to isolate it, shows that it is not really anything isolated; even if there are just two people kissing, it somehow affects us all.

If the openness of love cannot be isolated in one place, limited to only some people, neither can the refusal of love, the rejection of openness. The limiting of affection, the shutting out of some people from one's sphere of

concern, is a move that cannot itself be contained, but will leave its mark on all of one's relationships, as the example of the racist whose beloved became friends with someone of the "wrong colour" was meant to show. Thus, the callousness of a friend towards others will, as I noted above, show itself in everything that goes on between the friends too, limiting the openness between them. This is revealed in the simple fact that they will have to *avoid* certain subjects, or that the callous friend will not "understand" certain questions or objections, will not "see" certain connections – namely those that would bring him face to face with his own callousness – and so on. Hannes Nykänen gives an illuminating description of how the limiting of openness might come out in such a case:

> Suppose that someone close to you has been unjust to a stranger, that is: does not regret it but rather thinks the unjust treatment justified. This lack of love towards the stranger is not merely a lack *between* your friend and the stranger; it is a lack *in* your friend. It is not just that your friend has turned down love in relation to the stranger. Your friend has turned down love. Does this mean that he could not love for instance his children quite as before either? [...Well,] what if your friend's child in a tender moment asked him: 'Why did you become so angry with the stranger daddy? Should you not apologise?' What would happen? Your friend would probably try to get around this topic. But if that failed, *the tenderness of the moment would be over*. Your friend might be angry and hostile and declare that the stranger only got his fair share, etc. The important thing to note is that your friend can stick to his loving attitude only if the incident with the stranger is kept out of his consciousness, i.e. out of his conscience. This is an impediment when it comes to speaking of your friend in terms of 'truth in love.' The child's mother might for instance find it wise to say to the child: 'Do not make Daddy angry by asking that question all the time. Try to forget it.' We see how dishonesty towards one person enters, if unresolved, into all other relations too. The 'truth in love' is hampered.[96]

Someone might say that it is *of course* a problem between friends, as between parents and children, if one does something the other feels is unjust; then that thing must indeed be kept out of the relationship, and the falsity this implies will naturally be a problem. If the friends are *of one mind* in their callousness that problem does not arise, however, and claiming that the way they act towards others must still be a problem in their friendship is just a piece of dogmatic moralising.

I do not think this is true. If the child had not asked his father why he was so angry with the stranger but had instead admired him for being so tough on

[96] Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 208 f.

that annoying stranger, then that reaction would have put an end to the tender moment between father and child just as effectively as the child's anxiety about the father's violent reaction did. Admiration is not tenderness, and the tenderness that is compatible with admiring someone's brutality – and *ex hypothesi* that is what we assume the father's "toughness" to have been – is very different from the tenderness of the original example: there is in it an element of fear inspired by the brutality that will give the tenderness an air of flattery, or perhaps of fascination with the dangerous.

My point is not that the slightest injustice would make all love or friendship impossible; if that was the case there would be no love or friendship at all between people. As Nykänen points out, love is not "like a state which either obtains or not" and therefore there is often "not much point in asking simply whether or not one person loves another"; the point is rather that injustice, callousness towards "others" always introduces a "source of *complications*" between the lovers or friends.[97] What these complications are like can be seen in the examples and the discussion I have given, if one is prepared to see it there.

The point is not that if there is at one time an openness between two friends, it follows that they will also be open towards the next person who comes along, for nothing at all *follows* in this way from anything else in our life, and the two friends may close themselves to a third person who comes along, just as they may close themselves to each other, even if no one else enters the scene. Openness may give way to closure, and the other way around, as quickly as the expressions on a face can change. But the question is what these expressions themselves express, what the various "states" – to use a misleading word for lack of a better one – that a person may go through are *in themselves*. And the point is that a smile, for instance, cannot at the same time be open to someone and shut someone else out, while an ingratiating smile, one that is *not* open, wants precisely to accomplish a double-movement in which the smiler is let "in" to the one she smiles to, while others are left "out".

It is not difficult to imagine a scene in a gangster movie in which the hero, after having just murdered someone in cold blood, is seen crying like a baby at the side of his friend who was also killed in the shoot-out. What he did just a minute ago does not make the childish openness in his sorrow unbelievable or corrupt, but it can be portrayed only as long as his murdering self is not allowed into the picture. It may come in without destroying the

[97] Ibid., p. 209. Emphasis added.

openness only in the form of remorse; then the gangster would cry both for his dead friend, for the man he killed, and for himself as the one who killed him. But if he grabs his gun and swears to avenge his dying friend, the openness is gone immediately, because being open with a friend, even a dead friend, means being *there with him*, not letting one's thoughts wander to something else, for instance to "those who did this". For being open with a friend does not, of course, mean thinking about everybody else, too, even while one is with him. On the contrary, it means thinking only of him, and *therefore* not shutting anybody else out either. If one's thoughts turn to revenge, as *loyalty* would typically demand, one has as it were let the "enemy" come between oneself and the friend *in* one's very thoughts of revenge.

Someone may now object that precisely *revenge* marks the point of a necessary, or at least possible, connexion between friendship or love and evil, because one takes, or *may* at least take, revenge out of love; if one did not love the victim of the injustice one could have let it go unavenged, but precisely *because* one loved him one cannot do that. It seems to me, however, that the objection confuses love with strength of attachment or intensity of feeling as such. It is true that one does not feel a need to avenge people who are indifferent to one, people one does not in some sense feel strongly for. But from this it does not follow that the feelings explaining one's vengefulness have anything to do with love.

Think of a standard film-scene: a child has been killed by a drunk driver and the father rushes out of the hospital room swearing to kill the one who did this; the mother, on the other hand, stays by their dead child's side, asking the father whether killing someone will bring her back. Both parents are struck with grief, and I do not see how anyone could feel that the father's reaction must show a deeper or clearer or stronger love for their child – and the fact that someone may instinctively feel that they would react as he did obviously proves something about *love* only on the dubious assumption that they are *themselves* full of love, and *only* love, for their child.

I am not saying that it is *obvious* that the mother's reaction shows her love to be stronger, either, but it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that the father's quite physically running away from his dead child's side to get his revenge, is actually a desperate man's attempt to run away from the grief, from all the feelings for his child brought up by her death which he feels unable to confront. At any rate it is clear that revenge, even if he gets it, can never really help the father find his way back out from the black hole of his grief. It should

go without saying that I am not judging the avenging father. I simply want to point out that the strength of love does not in any necessary or obvious way correlate with the impulse to take revenge if one's loved ones are hurt by others.

The point should be even more obvious considering that the person who hurt one's near and dear may herself be someone near and dear. It may be that one of my children was hurt by the other. What am I to do with my vengeance then? If I respond mercilessly to the one child's mercilessness towards the other, will that show "how much I love my children"? Here the seemingly self-evident logic of revenge breaks down. This happens, I would say, because revenge is from the start animated by the spirit of exclusion, which in its turn is built on the self-deceiving presupposition that "we" – "the friends", "the family" or whatever the exclusive group calls itself – are *good*, while evil always comes from outside, from "the others".

– Aristotle's mutual admiration society, and ours –

Aristotle's conception of what he calls "perfect" friendship is the most famous articulation of friendship as an ideal in our tradition, but it seems to me a show-case of the falseness, the corruption introduced into friendships by the spirit of exclusion.[98] This claim may sound perverse in this connexion, for the defining mark of Aristotelian friendship is supposed to be that it is a friendship of the *good*; Aristotle says explicitly that "only the friendship of those who are good, and similar in their goodness, is perfect".[99] The "perfect" friends are not, as friends in inferior friendships, kept together by a hope for private gain or pleasure, or by habit or affection. They are united in their pursuit of goodness, and this pursuit is what makes them and their friendship good.

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[98] I will confine my comments to Aristotle's "perfect" friendship. For discussions of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship as a whole, see, for instance, A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1995), and Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[99] Aristotle, *Ethics (The Nicomachean Ethics)*. Translation by J. A. K. Thomson, revised by Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1976 [1953]), 1156b5–10. References to (estimated) Bekker-pages given directly in the text without further indication of source are to *The Nicomachean Ethics* in this translation.

Aristotle's commentators are much impressed with this talk of goodness, apparently because they think that it refers to more or less the same thing we refer to in talking about goodness – the goodness of human beings, not of cars or meals or jazz-musicians. But that is not the case at all, it seems to me. I do not deny the obvious connections between Aristotle's and our conception of goodness, that he, too, thinks that goodness has to do with how we act and what we feel, and that it includes courage and justice, for instance. My point is that the many differences which, as every commentator knows, are also there, flow from a radical difference of perspective. No matter how plausible it may sound in the details, the whole picture is somehow skewed, and anyone trying to read Aristotle on friendship or any other subject in ethics in the light of *our* conception of moral goodness has to be, as Elisabeth Anscombe said, "very imperceptive if he does not constantly feel like someone whose jaws have somehow got out of alignment: the teeth don't come together in a proper bite".[100]

Why is this? Generally speaking, and quite obviously, it seems to me, the answer is that the Greeks had not witnessed the Copernican revolution in morality wrought when Jesus – and before him the Jewish tradition – proclaimed the love of neighbour as the heart of goodness. Seen from the perspective of love Aristotle's perspective on goodness does not look so much outmoded or crude or incomplete as *evil*. And we moderns, who live in a secularised *Christian* culture, in fact instinctively think of Jesus as the paradigm when we think of goodness. As Nietzsche saw very clearly, all of modern morality is, even when it is explicitly atheist, a set of variations on Christian themes; even when we rebel against Christian goodness, as Nietzsche did most forcefully, *that is* what we rebel against. This is not to say, however, that *Jesus* would have agreed with our variations on his theme; as we shall see, they are *at the same time* evasions, falsifications of the original Gospel.

That Aristotle's conception of goodness is very different from our more or less Christian one, is perhaps shown most strikingly in the fact that whereas we instinctively tend to take it for granted that showing goodness is incompatible with thinking of oneself *as* good – if I help someone and think of what a good and generous person I am in doing it, this would show precisely my *lack* of goodness – Aristotle sees no problem at all with being thus conscious of one's own goodness. For him the virtue of virtues, "a sort of crown of the virtues" he says (1124a1–5), is *megalopsuchia,* the pride of the great man

[100] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy* 33 (1958), p. 2.

who rightly "thinks that he is worthy of great things" (1123b1–5), who "makes, and deservedly makes, great claims" (1123b15–20).[101] After all, Aristotle thinks, this man "estimates himself at his true worth" (1123b10–15), and that cannot be wrong, can it? And since "honour is the prize of virtue, and is rendered to the good" (1123b35–1124a5), there cannot be anything wrong with demanding the honour due to one from others either, can there?

When the great man is honoured he will not be enthusiastic, "because he will feel that he is getting no more than his due, or rather less, since no honour can be enough for perfect excellence", but he will accept praise from others since "there is nothing greater they can give him"; "honour conferred by ordinary people for trivial reasons he will utterly despise", however, "because that sort of thing is beneath his dignity" (1124a5–15). As Aristotle points out, "people of high birth or great power or wealth" mostly think themselves above ordinary people simply because they have money or power or a name; "In real truth", however, "only the good man ought to be honoured" (1124a20–30). Not understanding this, and not having the courage, wisdom and other virtues of the great man, the rich and famous "imitate" him in the one thing where, for them, "imitation is possible", and "despise other people" (1124b1–5). The point to note here, however, is that Aristotle takes it for granted that the great man in his superiority *despises* others; the rich and famous *imitate* him in this. The point, for Aristotle, is simply that the great man's "disdain is *justifiable*, because his estimate is true; but most people's disdain is capricious" (1124b5–10, emphasis added).

It is not surprising that the great man's pride, which Aristotle himself regards as the very highest moral virtue, hardly ever gets a central place, and mostly is not even discussed by his modern commentators: it is simply too shocking to our sensibilities. The shock was registered, with a nice understatement, in Bertrand Russell's comment that if *this* is supposed to be the *properly* proud man, whose estimate of himself is not unduly inflated by vanity, then "one shudders to think what a vain man would be like".[102] As we shall see,

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[101] As Hugh Tredennick notes in the translation of the *Ethics* I mainly use, "there is no real English equivalent for this very upper-class Greek virtue", but he suggests "magnanimity, proper pride, self-respect" as possible translations (*Ethics*, p. 153, note 1), and *greatness of soul* is used along with *magnanimity* in the text of the translation. W. D. Ross translated *megalopsuchia* as *pride* – see his translation of *The Nicomachean Ethics* in *The Works of Aristotle*. Edited by W. D. Ross. *Volume IX* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915) – and that seems to me alright, because to be a proud man, as opposed to being proud of this or that achievement, *is* to think oneself great, *beneath no one*. Referring to megalopsuchia simply as *greatness* would perhaps be even better, and that is what I will generally do.

[102] Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1961 [1946]), p. 188.

the shock is not about one thing, but has many, and in fact conflicting, roots. The immediate point, however, is that the discussion of the great man's pride is *not* one of those "lamentable, parochial details of Aristotle's moral philosophy" which, according to Rosalind Hursthouse,[103] modern commentators can safely leave aside as irrelevant for understanding the whole. The self-glorification illustrated in its purest form in the great man's pride is "built into the very structure of [Aristotle's] thought", as Hursthouse, perhaps rightly, claims that his particular views on women and slaves are not.[104]

This becomes especially clear in Aristotle's discussion of friendship. Even though commentators who find the discussion of the great man embarrassing usually experience no comparable difficulties with the discussion of friendship it is, as Cornelia de Vogel points out, precisely there that we find the most poignant statement of "the Aristotelian concentration on the self; actually a glorification of it in 'true self-love'".[105] For Aristotle, a person's relation to his friends is an image of his relation to himself. A good man, he says, "likes his own company" because "the memories of his past acts are delightful and his hopes for the future are good, and therefore pleasant ... he has, so to speak, nothing to repent of" (1166a20–30).[106] And the good man "extends to his friend the same relation that he has towards himself (for a friend *is* another self)" (1166a25–30). Naturally he will like the company of friends who are like himself – and the basic axiom for Aristotle is of course that good friends are alike, that the friend is like a "mirror" in which I see my own aspirations reflected.[107] In beholding his friends' virtuous conduct the good man will be happy both because, being good, he simply "enjoys actions that are in accordance with virtue, but is disgusted by those that proceed from wickedness, just as a musician likes beautiful music but is irritated by what is bad", *and* because he feels their conduct is "his own" in the sense of mirroring it; his friends show him, as it were, a picture of himself in action, and he likes what he sees (1170a1–15).

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[103] Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 2.
[104] Ibid., p. 9. Unsurprisingly, Hursthouse does not say anything about *megalopsuchia* in this connexion.
[105] de Vogel, "Selbstliebe bei Platon und Aristoteles und der Charakter der aristotelischen Ethik" in *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung. Erster Band:Aristoteles und seine Schule* (hrsg.) J. Wiesner (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), p. 400. – The original reads: "Doch gerade hier [de Vogel refers specifically to *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9:4 and 9:8] haben wir das wolle Maß der aristotelischen Konzentration auf das Selbst und gergadezu dessen Verherrlichung in der 'wahren Selbstliebe' vor uns".
[106] Here I use the translation of Ross, referred to above, which seems to me more striking than Thomson's, who does not speak of "repenting" but rather colourlessly of "changing one's mind".
[107] Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, 1213a20 ff.

Having friends is also important for Aristotle's good man because he needs an *audience*, people to *appear* before, for being a good or great man in Aristotle's sense is, to borrow an expression from Christopher Cordner, about "the carving out of an impressive *presence* before others".[108] As Cordner notes, this is not to say that the great man would show "a concern with the mere appearance – by contrast with the reality – of virtue; it is rather that a certain kind of appearing before others is for Aristotle partly constitutive of the *reality* of virtue".[109] As Lorraine Smith Pangle says, virtue for Aristotle *means* "being able to admire oneself", and this implies seeing "this admiration reflected in the eyes and honor of others".[110] This is a central part of the metaphor of the friend being like a "mirror" in which one sees oneself; one mirrors oneself in the friend's reactions to one, looks to him to confirm one's conception of oneself and of what one does. In the friend's admiring look one sees one's own sense of being admirable confirmed.

Of course, if my friend can confirm my conception of myself he can also *question* it; if he looks at me with dismay when I tell him about something I am proud of, this will raise a question about how I am to understand this discrepancy between his view and my own. It may be that his reaction makes me realise that what I did was not so great after all, or I may on the contrary be disappointed by what *he* revealed about himself in reacting in such way to what I told him. Whichever way it goes, the point is that Aristotle takes it for granted that friendship is *aimed at* having one's conception of oneself as admirable confirmed by one's friend. If there is disagreement, so that one friend is dismayed at what the other sees as admirable, there is a problem, and if the disagreement is great enough the friendship will dissolve. The friendship of the "good", however, is one where there is no, or at least very little, such disagreement, the friends agreeing that they *are* both admirable. Aristotelian friendship is, then, quite literally supposed to be a mutual admiration society.

It will no doubt be indignantly objected to this characterisation that Aristotle's point in calling it a friendship of the *good* is precisely to stress that we are *not* dealing with a conceited tapping each other on the back and telling ourselves how good we are, but with the friends' hard and earnest striving to *make* themselves good, worthy of the ideal they share. My friend is not simply someone I

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[108] Cordner, *Ethical Encounter. The Depth of Moral Meaning* (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 28.
[109] Ibid., p. 34.
[110] Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, p. 188.

like because he is just like me. In the mirror of his reactions to me I see, as it were, a double picture: the one showing me "my better self", the kind of person we both strive to be, the other showing me myself as I actually am, as the one my actions in fact show me to be right now. Sometimes the pictures merge into one, and then I will read admiration in my friend's face when he looks at me, and I will be right to feel proud of myself. But at other times, and perhaps this is mostly the case, what is striking is the *contrast* between the pictures. In my friend's pained, dismayed, embarrassed, disappointed, pitying, look I feel painfully the *distance* that separates me from the ideal – at the same time as I feel, *in* the very pain of estrangement, the *authority* the ideal has for me, my being bound to it in allegiance. It is only the contrast with my better self that reveals the badness of my actual self. Analogously, my friend will show me my better self even when *he* does something bad, for in his shame and in the embarrassed pity I feel for him, I recognise the authority of the ideal we share just as clearly as in happier cases, when I can look at the actions of my friend with pride and satisfaction.

All this is true, and it seems to me that Aristotle's contemporary commentators do not make as much as they could of the *stern idealism* that is implied by the way he talks about friendship; they do little to counteract the impression of an overwhelming *smugness* which a reader of the *Ethics* may easily be left with. This impression was summarised by Russell:

> There is something unduly smug and comfortable about Aristotle's speculations on human affairs; everything that makes men feel a passionate interest in each other seems to be forgotten. Even his account of friendship is tepid. He shows no sign of having had any of those experiences which make it difficult to preserve sanity; all the more profound aspects of the moral life are apparently unknown to him. ... What he has to say is what will be useful to comfortable men of weak passions; but he has nothing to say to those who are possessed by a god or a devil...[111]

I tend to feel the same way about Aristotle, but whether or not this is a just assessment, what I want to stress is that even in cases where one can detect no *obvious* smugness in sharing an ideal of moral perfection – as one cannot, for instance, in Nietzsche's discussion of friendship, which is basically Aristotelian in form, if perhaps not in spirit – the severity of the ideal's demand does *not* make ideal-based friendship any less of a mutual admiration society. The point

[111] Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 195.

is not only that Aristotle takes friendship to be more perfect the more the friends admire themselves and each other, the less they have reason to feel that they are not the way they should be, to question their own "goodness". It is also, and more importantly, that *what* one admires in one's friends is precisely *that* they demand, and expect, so much of themselves. Whether one lives up to the expectations or not, it is a *privilege* to be someone of whom much is expected. The most contemptible man is the one no one, not even he himself, expects anything from, and even contempt for oneself can actually, as Nietzsche pointed out, be seen as "its own special brand of pride", as a person's "last and most serious claim to a sense of respect (for in disrespecting we show that we still maintain a *sense* of respect)".[112]

It should be noted, however, that the question of *severity*, of what kind of judgment we make when we say that something demands much or little of a person, is far from straightforward. In moral matters there is a question to be asked and always asked again about how far what we say is just a rationalisation of our own wishful thinking, a self-congratulatory pat on the back of one sort or other, and as Nietzsche remarks somewhere, we like to make it out that the thing which in fact comes easiest for us is very hard, so that no one will be able to accuse us of making it easy for ourselves, of having shirked a challenge; instead we can be proud when we "succeed" in "living up" to our very "demanding" ideal. Thus, a person who is by temperament moderate, inclined to avoid excess, will present moderation as something requiring self-discipline and "character", and excess as being a kind of wantonness or sloppiness, even though she does not in fact find it hard at all to live an ordered life, for instance leaving early form parties; on the contrary, she would be quite alarmed if someone suggested she might stay and she had for once no "legitimate" reason not to. And the same kind of thing will of course happen in the opposite direction, with the weak and sloppy presenting their weakness as "freedom" and *joie de vivre*, and denigrating self-discipline, which they are incapable of, as bourgeois small-mindedness they refuse to engage in. Things get complicated further by the fact that for some people, and in some sense perhaps for all of us, *difficulty* itself, in the sense of denying oneself things, living a constrained and unhappy life, might be *easier*, much less frightening than opening ourselves to others in love.[113]

Let us return to Aristotle, however. His *Ethics* as a whole articulates a basically aristocratic morality, and as Nietzsche says, such a morality "grows

[112] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 292.
[113] I will return to this crucial question in the final chapter.

out of triumphant self-affirmation"; its "positive, intense and passionate credo" is "We noble, good, beautiful, happy ones".[114] To my mind the essential thing to note here is not the *affirmation* that Nietzsche wanted to focus on, but the "we". The point is that the aristocrat's self-affirmation is, first of all, an affirmation of the *group's* "goodness". What an aristocratic morality does, what it is there *for,* is to bind "us" aristocrats together, while dividing us from "them", the ordinary people. As Bernard Williams notes, feelings such as pride and shame which are central to an aristocratic morality are "essentially interactive among people, and they serve to bond as much as to divide".[115] This is shown in the fact that such reactions depend not only on *what* one does but on *who* sees one doing it; as Williams notes, "people can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong audience in the wrong way", as again "they need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt".[116] The "basic experience of shame" is, as Williams in very Aristotelian fashion puts it, "that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition".[117]

Although Aristotle's good man is preoccupied with his own greatness, it would therefore be misleading to characterise him simply as self-centred, for he has, as Cordner notes, "in the current parlance ... a communitarian sense of his moral selfhood".[118] Although his virtue does involve "a worldly self-concern" because he seeks honour and takes "pride in the honour owing to *him* as one who is virtuous", this very honour-seeking is, as Cordner says, "*at the same time and in itself* also a confirming, even a celebrating, of the worth of his ethical community".[119] I think the *kind* of role Aristotle gives to the community is precisely what is *wrong* with his view, but many contemporary commentators find his communitarianism attractive. Thus Paul Wadell, who describes Aristotelian friendship as "the activity of acquiring and growing in the virtues, a community whose purpose is ... to be the relationship in which those who love the good can actually become good",[120] likes Aristotle's analysis because he

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[114] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 170 f.
[115] Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 81. Williams speaks specifically about *aidos* (shame) and *nemesis*, a reaction to someone's shameful deed "ranging from shock, contempt, and malice to righteous rage and indignation" (p. 80), but the point has general application.
[116] Ibid., p. 82.
[117] Ibid., p. 78.
[118] Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, p. 33.
[119] Ibid., p. 183; note 30.
[120] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 63.

believes it shows that "we cannot have moral life without [our friendships]",[121] and so places morality in its proper communitarian perspective. Since, Wadell says, "the virtuous life is the activity of doing good, of practising good, of developing good habits", it "cannot be attained in solitude" but "demands others on whom the good can be bestowed"; goodness is, to coin a phrase, "essentially a group project", and Aristotelian friendship is a commitment to that "project".[122]

As an interpretation of Aristotle this seems fine, but if one tries reading "good" and "goodness" not as abstract terms, but as really referring to *goodness*, that is, to love of neighbour, the result is simply nonsense. It is not just that one obviously cannot enumerate goodness among one's other projects – "I try to play tennis at least once a week, and also find time for some goodness" just will not do – but that goodness, although it certainly takes place between people and not in "solitude", has nothing to do with "groups" or "projects" at all. The encounter with the neighbour lifts one out of every group and interrupts every project in the way I have explained that friendship does; actually, the love of friend and of neighbour are essentially the same.

On Aristotle's view, friends are people who share the same pattern of reactions, feelings and thoughts: they tend to be concerned about *and* disregard the same kind of thing and, most importantly, the same kind of *people*. For Aristotle, the basic category in friendship, and in ethics generally, is being and liking a certain "kind" of person. As Kathleen Wilkes says, for Aristotle "the ethical demand" is "to cultivate to the utmost the excellences required by the life chosen by each man as being the best for himself", and being a good man just *means* being "good at being the kind of man that he has deliberately chosen to be", so that Aristotle would have been "in full agreement" with the professor who claimed, "For me to be moral is to behave like a professor".[123] Aristotle's great man, too, would have said "For me to be moral is to behave like a great man", because for him, too, being good means taking one's place in a social context which gives the horizon of meaning against which one's behaviour is judged as good or bad – and the possibility that one makes something individual and perhaps unforgettable out of one's life does not mean that one in any way transcends this social context; on the contrary, it is an essential possibility within it.

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[121] Ibid., p. 55.
[122] Ibid., p. 64 f.
[123] Wilkes, "The Good Man and the Good for Man", in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 355.

For Aristotle's great man there is of course, as there might not for a modern-day egalitarian professor be – at least not in the same conspicuous way – a *ranking* among "lives". The great man would not feel that a professor's life was "different, but just as good as" his. He holds that for a *slave* to be "moral" is to behave like a slave, like a *good* slave, but he does not on that account hold even a good slave's life to be any less miserable. For the slave with his slavish instincts, with his slavish "nature", being a good slave may be the best *he* can do with his life – "incidentally" it will also be best for his masters – but a "well-born" man, a man of "noble" instincts, could not bear it.[124] In an analogous way, the great man would find the academic life ludicrous, and would rather kill himself than become a professor.[125]

The "goodness" of Aristotle's "perfect friends" is an ideal that they, thinking themselves good or at least aspiring to become good, gather round in a community excluding those they think bad; as Aristotle innocently remarks, "it is clearly better to spend one's time in the company of friends and good men than in that of strangers and people of uncertain character" (1169b20–25). Those were exactly the "kind" of people *Jesus* spent his time with, however, whereas the kind of people who think of goodness as Aristotle does, the *respectable* kind, who were of course as dominant in Judea as they were in Athens and as they are today, frowned on this "friend of tax-collectors and sinners".[126] As Jürgen Moltmann points out, these respectable people were so used to "define people always by their failings", that they did not realise that this "denunciatory, contemptuous name, 'friend of sinners and tax-collectors,' unintentionally expresses the deep truth of Jesus".[127]

Jesus did not become the friend of tax-collectors and sinners because he preferred their particular kind of people, but because he approached others in openness, not in terms of ideals or preferences. Respectable people, whose view

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[124] The fact that the slaves were *alive* was indeed sometimes held to be sufficient "argument" for keeping them in slavery, since a man who was "born" for freedom would rather kill himself than become a slave.

[125] For his own part, Aristotle may in fact have thought that the "great" man's life, all its heroism and all the praise it gets in the *Ethics* notwithstanding, was in the final analysis ludicrous, too, and that a "professor's" life, in the sense of a philosopher's life of the mind, was the only one truly worth living, as Plato has Socrates say in the *Apology* (38a). However, the question of the relation in the *Ethics* between the "political" and the "philosophical" life, as they are called, between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, is complicated, and I will not enter into it here.

[126] *Luke*, 7:34.

[127] Moltmann, "Open Friendship: Aristotelian and Christian Concepts of Friendship" in Leroy S. Rouner (ed.), *The Changing Face of Friendship* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 35.

of themselves is determined by a particular set of ideals and preferences, will not have anything to do with anyone who by his openness unmasks the callous presumption of their exclusive "goodness". Jesus did not seek the company of the social outcasts in the conceited spirit of those respectable "Christians" who think it their "duty" to help their "less fortunate brethren", descending with their benevolence to their low level. On the contrary, Jesus was himself *cast out of society*, as anyone will be who dares to love without regard for respectability, for the strictures of social morality.

The "goodness" Aristotelian friends are devoted to, by contrast, just *is* a particular social morality, the morality of their group. As Moltmann stresses, the Gospels give "the opposite picture of friendship" to "the exclusive friendship of people who are the same" which we find in Aristotle.[128] The "closed circle of friendship among peers is broken in principle by Christ" who, as Moltmann dryly notes, "would of necessity have had to stay in heaven" had he "abided by the peer principle".[129] In Moltmann's apt terms, the friendship of Jesus is "open", while that of Aristotle is "closed".[130]

We are not that far from Aristotle, of course; most of our friendships are just as closed as the ones he idealises. For this reason I would disagree with the objection which might be made against my discussion of Aristotle, that while it is perhaps justified in view of the central place Aristotle's account of friendship continues to occupy in our philosophical tradition, it can really be of interest only to scholars, since *we* do not go around glorifying ourselves the way Aristotle's great man does, nor do we actually think of friendship in terms of a shared pursuit of "the good" – just as we do not think of moral questions and difficulties in terms of "virtue" or "flourishing", even though Aristotelian scholars talk as if we did, and consider such talk a great step in the direction of bringing ethics *closer* to real life and real problems.

The point about "virtue" and "flourishing" seems to me true, but is it so certain that we do not glorify ourselves in our friendships? I think we do. I also

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[128] Ibid., p. 32.
[129] Ibid., p. 39.
[130] Ibid., p. 38. – Given the Aristotelianism of Aquinas, and more importantly, the respect enjoyed by respectability in Christian circles as everywhere else, it should come as no surprise, however, that many of Moltmann's theological colleagues on the Catholic side believe that Aristotle's discussion of friendship can help Christians understand their life better. Paul Wadell whom I quoted earlier is one example. Cf. also Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship. A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), and Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues. Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

think that the self-glorification inherent in Aristotle's aristocratic morality is actually inherent in most of what we commonly think of as morality; it is just that normally it does not have quite the aristocratic *naivety* or "good conscience" – or to speak more plainly, the cock-sure conceit – that can only be achieved by people who have always been told by everyone that they are better than the rest. Because we lack this naivety our self-glorification takes on more modest, more ambiguous – and in that sense more devious – forms; it becomes, in a word, *Pharisaism*. Nietzsche was right when he said that Pharisaism is not a "degeneration" in a "good" man, but rather a "condition" of what is commonly called moral goodness.[131]

I will discuss Pharisaism, or moralism, more fully in the next chapter. For the moment, I want to focus on the relation between the egalitarian conception of friendship dominant in our day and Aristotle's aristocratic conception. One could perhaps say that egalitarianism is the dominant form that *our* moralism takes. This comes out in the fact that we feel *offended* if someone claims, as Aristotle's aristocrats naturally do, that they are better than we are; we think that no one has a right to criticise the way others live, and that those who do are "elitists". The bad faith of our position can be seen in the fact that we actually feel *morally superior* to those "elitists", precisely *because* we, for our part, do *not* claim to be better than anybody. What we do claim, however, is the right to live as we please and to associate with whomever and in whatever way we please, and we will not accept anyone suggesting that there could in general be something amiss in our friendships as they are. By all means, they may not be "perfect", but then we are "only human".

What I am tempted to call the official egalitarian account of friendship can be found in John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, a book which could be described as an attempt to systematise and "rationalise" our egalitarian "intuitions" – or, less diplomatically stated, to flatter us by presenting our prejudices in an apparently unassailable form.[132] Rawls takes it for granted that in order to be able to maintain

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[131] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), §135.

[132] The conservative critic of the age Allan Bloom is one of the few to have said this clearly; see his excellent critique of Rawls in "Justice: John Rawls versus the Tradition of Political Theory" in Bloom, *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960-1990* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990). The bulk of the vast litterature on Rawls, by contrast, is as uncritical on fundamentals, as reverent, as Bloom and his mentor Leo Strauss are when discussing Plato, Aristotle and the other representatives of "The Classical Tradition of Political Theory" they admire. In both camps details are naturally discussed with great seriousness and subtlety, while it seems simply to be taken for granted that the fundamental questions have already been, if not answered, then at least posed in definitive form.

"self-respect" we need the appreciation of others, for "unless our endeavours are appreciated by our associates" it is, he says, "impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile".[133] Since everyone does not appreciate the same things, however – "men have varying capacities and abilities, and what seems interesting to some will not seem so to others" – we must see to it that "there are a variety of communities and associations, and the members of each have their own ideals appropriately matched to their aspirations and talents".[134] To be sure, others may find what a certain group of people does stupid or repellent, "But no matter. What counts is that the internal life of these associations is adjusted to the abilities and wants of those belonging to them, and provides a secure basis for the sense of worth of their members".[135]

That this basis may not be quite so secure after all is implicitly admitted by Rawls in his admonition that in order not to threaten each others' self-respect, we should "avoid any assessment of the relative value of one another's way of life"; this "democracy in judging each other's aims", as Rawls for some reason calls not judging them at all, is "the foundation of self-respect in a well-ordered society".[136] What Rawls is saying, then, is that we all need friends who like what we like, who are like us and therefore like us. If they were not there, assuring us that there is nothing wrong with us, we would find our life meaningless, and given that our view of ourselves is in this way completely at the mercy of what others think of us, it can be easily destroyed by a disrespectful remark from anyone, even if our friends assure us that we are fine, and therefore such remarks should be avoided.

What Rawls says is directed against aristocratic views such as Aristotle's, which stress that friendship in the true sense is only for the few, since few men are "good" and only good men can be good friends; Rawls explicitly assures us that we

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[133] *A Theory of Justice*, p. 441. – Rawls speaks of "associates", not friends, but what he says could equally be said of egalitarian friendships, and in Rawls' terminology friendships are apparently a species of "association" (cf. *A Theory of Justice,* §71). Rawls is of course talking about how we should think and act in public, in our capacity of *citizens* of a democratic state, not about what we should think or do in private. But aside from the fact that the distinction between public and private, and the closely related distinction between politics and culture, is a very tricky one – the difficult task of making and maintaining it, while at the same time connecting the two poles of it, is the very heart of the Rawlsian enterprise, as of liberalism in general – the general attitude expressed in the quotes I have given is constantly found in private life, and Rawls explicitly wants what he says to be relevant to how we "acquire a sense that what we do in everyday life is worthwhile" (p. 441).
[134] *A Theory of Justice*, p. 441.
[135] Ibid., p. 441 f.
[136] Ibid., p. 442.

need not be "highly gifted individuals united in the pursuit of common artistic, scientific or social ends" to have satisfying friendships and self-respect: all that is needed is that there be for each of us "some association ... to which he belongs" and within which what he thinks and does is "publicly affirmed by others".[137]

The same need to make friendship into something ordinary, something for everyman, is also evident in the contemporary interpretations of Aristotle's view of friendship, which try to free it of the charge of elitism.[138] I think this kind of democratising interpretation of Aristotle tendentious, but that is not the main point. What I want to stress instead is that there really *is* a basic similarity

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[137] Ibid., p. 441.

[138] John Cooper, whose work was instrumental in turning contemporary Anglo-American philosophers' attention to Aristotle's views on friendship, thus argues that we should speak of "friendships of character" instead of using the designations preferred by Aristotle himself, "friendship of the good" or "perfect friendship", since one may obviously "be attached to someone [for instance] because of his generous or open spirit, while recognizing that he is in some ways obtuse or not very industrious or somewhat selfindulgent", and so far from "perfect" ("Aristotle on Friendship" in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty [ed.], *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980], p. 306). Cooper assures us that there can be "no doubt" that on Aristotle's theory, too, "what makes a friendship a virtue-friendship is the binding force within it of *some* – perhaps, for all that, partial and incomplete – excellence of the character" while "the perfect friendship of the perfectly virtuous is only an especially significant special case of this" (p. 308). The fact that we find Aristotle himself "concentrating almost exclusively on the friendship of perfectly good men" is merely, Cooper thinks, "an aspect of the pervasive teleological bias of his thinking, which causes him always to search out the best and most fully realized instance when attempting to define a kind of thing" (ibid.). For *us* it "seems preferable", Cooper says, to speak of "character-friendship", because that "brings out accurately that the basis for the relationship is the recognition of good qualities of character, without in any way implying that the parties are moral heroes" (ibid.). Cooper's basic intention here is obviously to make Aristotle safe for democracy by assuring ordinary decent people like ourselves that "on his theory ordinary decent people are capable ... of character-friendship" (p. 315). Rawls, too, evokes Aristotle's name in calling one of his basic principles, having to do with the general requirements for human happiness, "The Aristotelian Principle" (see *A Theory of Justice*, §65), and as we shall see presently his whole view of friendship is in fact, appearances to the contrary, very close to Aristotle's. – In contrast to many of Aristotle's contemporary egalitarian champions, Alasdair MacIntyre does acknowledge that Aristotle speaks from the (explicitly masculine) "standpoint of those who have taken themselves to be self-sufficiently superior" and is therefore "unable to give due recognition to affliction and to dependence", but he thinks that this fault, as he takes it to be, can best be remedied by using Aristotelian arguments, "turning Aristotle against Aristotle" (MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* [Chicago & La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1999], p. 7f.; cf. p. 126 f., 164). I should say, if I may be blunt, that MacIntyre shows that what you can get out of Aristotle is always something less than human beings: either inhuman aristocrats or "dependent, rational *animals*". In Nietzschean terms: either "blond beasts" or tame "heard-animals". – There are contemporary interpretations of Aristotle which give the aristocratic character of his perspective due weight. Christopher Cordner's *Ethical Encounter* and Lorraine Smith Pangle's *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, which I have quoted from, are two examples; another is John Casey, *Pagan Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). The great master of these aristocratic interpretations is of course Leo Strauss; see, e.g., the chapter on "Aristotle's Politics" in his *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964).

between the views on friendship of Aristotle and the egalitarians, although his contemporary egalitarian defenders misdescribe it, while his egalitarian denigrators do not want to see it at all. His defenders fail to see that Aristotle really and essentially was an aristocrat for whom ethics was ultimately a matter of "greatness" – a view which is of course incompatible with an egalitarian society for the simple reason that, as Russell remarked, whatever we may think of Aristotle's "great" man, "one thing is clear: there cannot be very many of him in a community".[139] This is so not just because virtue is difficult, but because the great man's specific virtue is the very sense he has of being exceptional, of being far above the ordinary run, whose lot it is to stand in awe of his greatness.

On the other hand, the character of the egalitarian denigrators' rejection of Aristotle's great man reveals a kinship between them and him. As Russell says, the great man is "repugnant to ... modern sentiment"; our "ethical tastes" rebel against him.[140] This amounts to "rejecting" Aristotle on quite Aristotelian grounds, however, for his kind of friendship – just as his kind of enmity – is precisely a matter of one's *tastes* or *sensibility*, as can be seen from the essentially aesthetic language he uses to flesh out what he means by "goodness" in and out of friendship; the talk of finding people and their actions beautiful or ugly, noble or base, fine or coarse, and so on. The Greeks thought, as Plato puts it, that "measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue", so that the "good" can actually be said to have "taken refuge" in the "beautiful".[141]

Our democratic taste may not be as refined as that of the Greek aristocrats, but it is a *taste* nonetheless, and the person who considers himself an "ordinary" man who likes "ordinary" things, has an aesthetics every bit as strict as the most sophisticated snob, as is shown by the fact that he is just as quick to recognise and reject sophisticated things, things that are "above" him, as the snob is in rejecting unsophisticated things, things that he is "above". Thus Nietzsche admits that the only thing equal to the discernment of his fine, aristocratic "nose" for greatness and baseness, is the keenness with which base people can smell *him* out.[142] It is not the case that the "ordinary" man simply

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[139] Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 188.
[140] Ibid., p. 194.
[141] Plato, *Philebus*, 64e, translation by Dorothea Frede, in Plato, *Complete Works*.
[142] Nietzsche writes: "I possess a perfectly uncanny sensitivity of the instinct for cleanliness, so that I perceive physiologically – *smell* – the proximity or – what am I saying? – the innermost parts, the 'entrails' of every soul ... I touch and take hold of every secret: all the *concealed* dirt at the bottom of many a nature, perhaps conditioned by bad blood but whitewashed by education, is known to me almost on first contact. If I have observed correctly, such natures ... for their part also sense the caution of my disgust: they do not thereby become any sweeter-smelling..." (*Ecce*

"does not understand" sophisticated things, it is rather that he does not *like* them, fears the challenge he feels that they pose to him, and so does not even want to try to understand them; that is why the most superficial acquaintance with a thing – the first bars of a piece of music, a single high brow word in a text and so on – is enough for him to declare that he does not understand it.

Also, and connected with this, the view of friendship of an egalitarian like Rawls is just as much a matter of appearing before others, of having one's worth "publicly affirmed by others" (Rawls), as is the aristocratic view he wants to replace. The difference is only that egalitarians think that such affirmation must not be reserved for the chosen few, but should be given to everyone. And since not everyone can appear on the great stage of history, smaller stages – Rawls calls them "associations" – have to be instituted all over the place, on which we may all have our hours in the sun. Everyone is to have their respective ghettos or circles or subcultures where they are sure to get only approval – for on this picture, the very point of friendship is that your friends all think you are great; that is, they think that *they* are great, that "we", the friends, are great. And on the unavoidable occasions when we have to venture outside our circle, we must beware not to say anything that will offend anyone by interfering with their supposed "right" not to be criticised for the way they live; that is supposed to be their private affair.

Egalitarianism gives everyone the "privilege" the aristocracy has always enjoyed, of having to fear criticism from no one. "Political correctness", the more or less oppressive rules about what is becoming or proper to say depending on who you are and who you are talking to, did not appear with the liberals. It was much more oppressive as long as class-distinctions were more marked than they are now, a point quite lost on those who formerly had the "right" to say what they pleased to and about the "rabble", or about women or "niggers", and are now upset because that right has been taken from them, and the rabble suddenly starts talking back. Nonetheless, we should not forget or suppress the fact that political correctness in its current form, although perhaps not as crippling as the old form, *is* still crippling, because the demand for "correctness" in *any* form – including its most general form, politeness – means

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Homo. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1979], p. 18). And also: "He whom I despise *divines* that I despise him: through my mere existence I enrage everything that has bad blood in its veins" (ibid., p. 37).

that some people are not allowed to say what they want to say, and so, this should be noted, that others are not allowed to hear and answer them.[143]

The problem with the "privilege" of having to fear criticism from no one is not that formerly too few enjoyed it, but rather that it is not a privilege at all, but a curse, for it means shutting oneself out from truthful relations with others and oneself. However, that is what we often, more or less secretly, aim at in our friendships: we want simply to be "confirmed in our understanding of ourselves", to borrow a phrase from Gadamer.[144] Such confirmation is built into friendship from the start if we stick to the Aristotelian axiom that "all friendship ... is based on some similarity between the parties" (1156b20), that birds of a feather flock together. And Rawls and other egalitarians do stick to it, even if they do not happen to like *Aristotle's* kind of bird.

It should also be noted that the spirit of exclusion need not be any weaker in friendships where the friends do not look in the same *conspicuously* admiring way on each other or with as *conspicuous* contempt on others, as Aristotle's great men do. In the end it does not make any great difference if one group of friends say, in an aristocratic spirit, "We're the good people, others are ridiculous and despicable, and we would not dream of mixing with them" while another says, in a more egalitarian spirit, "We're not better than anybody else, we're just different, we happen to like the same things, and that's why we spend our time together". For both groups keep to themselves and do not like mixing with others, and is not the *fact* that one keeps a distance to others more important than the way it is *justified?*

The egalitarians will protest that they do not think others are worse people than they are: "It's just that we don't like them and they don't like us, that's all: there's no value judgment involved". But what *is* rejecting someone's

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[143] I am not saying that it may not in a particular situation be better in some respect or other to outlaw the use of certain derogatory expressions, and so on. But whether it is so or not depends on judgments about power relations between different groups and on how people are likely to react to different things, and in this sense "political correctness" is indeed a *political* concept: we should not think that it is somehow *really* wrong *or* right to use or not to use particular expressions. The only thing that is wrong or right is our actual attitude to others, how we really feel about them.

[144] Gadamer, "Freundschaft und Selsbsterkenntnis. Zur Rolle der Freundschaft in der griechischen Ethik" in his *Gesammelte Werke. Band 7* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1991), p. 404. – Gadamer thinks that friendship does and should confirm our self-understanding. He emphasises the normativity of Aristotelian friendship, the fact that I see my "better self" in the mirror of my friend, but says that "ein solche Begegnung im Spiegel des Freundes ist nicht als eine Forderung erfahren, sondern als Erfüllung"; "Freundschaft führt zur Steigerung des eigenen Lebensgefühls und zur Bestätigung des eigenen Selbstverständnisses, wie es im Begriff der *arete* liegt" (ibid.).

company if not a value judgment of the strongest kind: a judging the other not worth one's while to get to know? "I don't like you" is actually a very harsh thing to say; it is not at all like saying "I don't like football". What people like and are interested in is partly a matter of chance and psychology, of what they happen to have been exposed to and caught a liking for, and so a matter of indifference, morally speaking. But as soon as our relations to each other are involved, things change. Whether or not I am interested in you, or in people in general, is not a matter of indifference at all, and there is no such thing as being "the kind of person who just is not interested in people", as one might be the kind of person who just is not interested in football. If we say of someone that he is not interested in people that is a very significant and tragic statement, implying that he is self-centred, "full of himself", or perhaps that he has become cynical about people, not expecting anything genuine from anybody, not caring even to search for it.

Not being interested in others, preferring to stay within the circle of people who are like oneself or in some other way "suit" one's preferences and needs – as the flamboyant person who wants to have attention suits the needs of the shy person who would rather give others attention, and vice versa – is just as bad and just as sad whether one applauds oneself loudly for it or not. And if one does not, but simply settles down to a quiet life with the people one likes, there is actually great presumption in this very modesty: although one does not presume to tell others what is good for them, one presumes to know what is good for *oneself*, to have *settled* the matter ("When you get to my age, you know what suits you and what does not"), or at least one has accepted the way the matter has come to be settled, the place in life where one has ended up – as though it was for one to say when the "end" has come. This is indeed modest, but it is very far from humble, for humility means precisely that one is open to life, to others, to oneself, and does not presume to determine what is and is not possible or acceptable for one. And as I have pointed out, one's modest admission that one has no right to tell others how they should live their life carries the implication, meant to calm oneself and to warn others, "And no one has any business telling me how I should live mine!"

Let me stop now and connect what I have said now with the argument of this chapter as a whole. One of the two main contentions of the chapter has been that friendship lifts us out of our group, out of our social identities, inviting us to say "I" and "you" to the each other, rather than speaking as "one" does; inviting us, that is, to *be ourselves*. This is simply another way of saying that

friendship is a *personal* relationship, a relationship in which it is not for public opinion or anyone else to determine what you and I mean to each other or how we are to live together. That surely sounds self-evident and harmless enough, but what I have tried to bring out and want to stress now, is that the fact that in friendship no one can tell us what we can and cannot do, does not mean that friendship is some sort of safe haven where, temporarily freed from the pressures of social morality, we are free to relax and to be ourselves in the company of the like-minded. If that is what one thinks, one's conception of friendship is very limited and also, I would add, both naive and corrupt – the corruption and naivety being two sides of the same problem.

The naivety lies in one's not having realised how pervasively we are, all of us, in fact entangled in social ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, and how *radical* a thing it therefore is to try to *be oneself*, how this is not something that happens automatically as soon as one gets off work and goes for a drink with one's friends. It is true that as long as one is trying to *achieve*, trying to "be something", then although one may behave in a very characteristic way, one is not oneself in any existentially meaningful sense of that phrase. But it does not follow that one *is* oneself as soon as one stops trying to achieve and just relaxes, as one does in the company of one's friends at the bar. For there is a relaxed sociality as well as a tense, stressful one, and one's social persona is not a monolith, but has many faces: the stressed-out achiever at work, the relaxed drinker at the bar, and so on.

To think that being relaxed equals being oneself is quite naive. And the naivety is in fact a symptom of the corruption, because the reason one has not given thought to the fact that being oneself might not be the comfortable thing one imagines, is precisely that one is so very *comfortable* being the social person one is – or let us rather say, since the attitude I have in mind is compatible with one's being stressed out at work, unhappy in one's marriage, bored with one's friends, and so on, that thinking of any possibilities for oneself *out of the ordinary* makes one so very *uncomfortable*. One does not want to see the difficulties in being oneself because one does not want to countenance the very possibility that one *is not* now but *could be* oneself, that there is *someone to be discovered in oneself*, whose face would look quite different from the face one takes to be one's own – just as there is someone to be discovered in one's friend. And this means that one does not want to hear the question friendship opens up: "Who am I?" – a question which is *at the same time*, because it is in

my relationship to you, my friend, that it arises, the question: “Who are you? Who are we to each other?”

Insofar as one does not want to hear that question, to explore what it really means to say that friendship is a *personal* relationship, one will not understand the *other* main contention of this chapter, which is that opening oneself to the question of friendship *means*, at the same time, that one moves to a perspective in which the evil desire – that strong wording is deliberate – to exclude others from “our” company, with all the particular temptations to evil that this desire generates, *simply does not arise*, so that the more strictly personal our friendship becomes, the less exclusive, the more universal it becomes, too.

IV
– Moral dynamics –

In this final chapter I will try to show how the dialectics of our desire for, and fear of, openness, which I have up to now primarily discussed in terms of friendship, relates to broader issues in ethics concerning the nature of moral difficulties and the very meaning of good and evil, right and wrong. The point is not that I would now leave friendship aside to talk about something quite different, namely morality, but rather that the question of openness which is at stake in friendship is also at stake, in one way or another, wherever issues in our life come to be morally charged. Our desire for and fear of openness lies at the very roots of our moral life, for goodness *is* openness, while evil is the rejection, in all its multifarious forms, of openness.

The focus in Chapter Two was on showing that certain attitudes, values, and judgments often taken to define moral goodness – those involving respect, reciprocity or altruism, for instance – come into play only when the openness and unity of friendship is in some measure *rejected*. By contrast, the focus here is on showing that a sense of this openness and unity is nonetheless always there, in the call of *conscience*, even *in* our very rejection and suppression of it, and that this call is what makes us *moral* beings at all. Ethics as normally done disregards this call, however. Philosophers make all kinds of assertions, more or less formal or concrete, about what is right and wrong, or note facts about what people in fact think of as right and wrong, but they fail to inquire into the *meaning* of the strange fact that we react morally and make moral assertions at all. In short, moral philosophy usually gives no account of the very *morality* of morality, which it nonetheless presupposes – and this is also true of the various attempt to reduce morality to a mere symptom or function of something else; the need for social cohesion, for instance.

– *The power of argument* vs. *the call of conscience* –

It is a curious feature of discussions of so-called "theories" in normative ethics – including both formulations of the purportedly "highest" or most "basic" principle of morality, such as Kant's categorical imperative or the principle of utility, and derivations of lower-order principles of action from these first principles – that the various theoretical proposals produced conspicuously lack *moral authority*. The formulations are ostensibly put forward as giving us criteria or procedures enabling us to tell which courses of action are right and which are wrong (in a particular case or in some more general sense), but if it turns out that the proposal would make "right" a thing such as murder, which we know to be morally wrong, then no one will for a moment think that the proposal might actually be true, and that we might all along have been wrong to think murder wrong. Instead, one will return to the theory, trying to tinker with it in some way, so as to get it to yield the right result, condemning murder – and the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for a result where what we know is right appears to come out as wrong. Theories cannot change our sense of what is morally right and wrong, rather we change them as soon as they appear to contravene our *indefeasible* sense of right and wrong.

But, it might be objected, do not consequentialists actually claim, apparently in all seriousness, that murder is in many cases alright, and even morally demanded? They do. Note, however, that they do not typically claim that murder for no good reason, just for the "fun" of it, would be alright. Rather, they claim that it is alright where murder appears to be the only way to avert great suffering, or to prevent a massacre, or some such thing. Consequentialists, that is, claim that murder is alright in situations in which few of us would probably be completely immune to the temptation to think that murder might indeed be permissible or even necessary. Whether our being thus tempted bears witness to a "tragic sense of responsibility" or is really a *temptation* in the moral sense, revealing the pull of a terrible callousness in us, is a question of its own. The crucial thing to note, however, is that no one doubts that murder is evil, the disagreements appear only regarding whether murder may not sometimes, evil though it is, be justified in view of special considerations.

Consequentialists do not, then, challenge our moral reactions, but rather exploit a tension that is already there in them. By contrast, insofar as consequentialists or other moral theorists actually talk in a thoroughly *theoretical, abstract* way about moral issues, as they sometimes do, their thinking crosses the line between corruption and nonsense – in the moral if not

the logical sense. Thus when consequentialists argue, as many of them should indeed do on the grounds of their *purely theoretical* commitments, that *if* the sadist *really* gets more pleasure out of torturing people than his victims are pained by it, we should really, morally speaking, see to it that he is supplied with victims, they are talking nonsense of a terrifying kind, and no one takes what they say seriously – not even they themselves, however serious they may in a superficial sense appear to be. A consequentialist who *seriously* started thinking thoughts many consequentialists now *claim* to think, would be going insane in a way reminiscent of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment.*[1]

The simple point is that *arguments* have essentially no authority for us in moral matters. I have illustrated this with an example from philosophical discussions, but the point holds for any kind of argument. Thus, a mafia boss may use all kinds of arguments to get an underling to accept that murdering someone is justified or necessary. If he succeeds in convincing the underling to commit the murder, this may certainly be said to show the power of argument, for it shows that arguments are indeed one way of using power. If the boss runs out of arguments, he may take out his gun instead, but that would not change the logic of the situation, which is that he is trying to get a person to do evil, and uses the means he sees most fit for the purpose.

It might be objected that the boss is arguing fraudulently, in bad faith: he is not interested in finding out what is really right, he simply wants to talk the underling into committing the murder. That is certainly true, but the point is that we cannot in this case contrast the fraudulent argument with a sincere argument, for there is no such thing as arguing about the rightness or wrongness of murder in *good* faith, with a genuine interest in "finding out what is really right". In the same way, if the underling convinced himself by *arguments* that he should not commit the murder, his conviction would clearly have nothing to do with moral insight, for the need for argument implies that he in some sense takes there to be a *question* about whether he should murder someone – a question which he answers negatively because the *argument* seems to him to speak against murder, but a question nonetheless. The very fact that he comes to think that there is a

[1] It might be said that this observation holds for other philosophical positions as well, such as the Berkeleyian idealist's "belief" that the external world does not exist: what he says merits consideration in theory, but if someone appears to *live* as though it was true, they will end up in a mental asylum. There is an asymmetry between the cases, however, because the idealist's position, rightly understood, is not supposed to change anything *in* real life; rather, it is an interpretation of real life as a whole, attributing a certain irreality to all of it. The consequentialist's proposals, by contrast, are in principle – even if in bad faith – put forward as proposals for how we should in practice change our valuations and our way of life.

question here is in itself far from being a morally neutral fact; it shows him to be *tempted* by evil. We should also note that a question that can be argued about can by definition be reopened again, if suddenly new arguments appear. Even if the underling felt quite convinced that he should not commit the murder, his boss might come up with an argument he had not thought about before, and which seemed to him to tip the balance in *favour* of the murder after all.

To conceive of such an argument about murder is absurd, of course, and that is exactly my point. We conduct arguments about all kinds of questions: practical, theoretical, aesthetic and so on, but in moral matters arguments achieve nothing, morally speaking, although they may of course help someone, a mafia boss for instance, to achieve their evil ends, arguing someone into something in the everyday, morally reprehensible sense of that phrase. Even if an argument convinces someone to do what we know to be the right thing, he will still be doing it for the wrong reason. In moral matters, winning the argument means losing the case.

It will no doubt be said that I am scoring cheap points and running different issues together by speaking about "moral matters" in general while actually basing my case on the example of murder, which we indeed all know is wrong. Things are different, it might be said, and argument and even "moral theories" can actually contribute something, in case where we do not automatically agree on the moral issue discussed; if we are talking about abortion as opposed to plain murder say. As one might also put it, it is only where there is a moral *issue* – as is the case, at least according to many people, regarding abortion, but not regarding plain murder – that argument, more or less "theoretical", has a role to play. We need to argue insofar as we do not immediately know what is right.

I agree that there are differences between the cases, and they need to be described. I will discuss cases of apparent moral uncertainty and moral dilemmas later on in this chapter. I suggest, however, that we stay with the plain cases for now, for we will hardly be able to make sense of the (apparently) complicated cases unless we are first clear about the character of the (apparently) simple ones. If one wants to get clear about the nature of good and evil and the role of argument – or more generally thought and reasoning – in morality, it does not seem very advisable to react to the realisation that there are moral matters in which arguments can in principle have no authority whatsoever, by pointing to some other type of case where arguments supposedly do have a role to play. Should we not rather ask how it can be that

our capacity for reasoning should ever be reduced to silence in this manner? Should we not look into the experience of this silencing more carefully?

In everyday life, we say that *conscience* makes itself felt in these experiences, where the clamour of argument and counterargument is silenced. Thus, in political contexts we speak of "questions of conscience" at the points where political speech – that is, argument and persuasion – break down because someone sees something as simply wrong, and for no particular reason, on no particular grounds (if there were reasons or grounds these could, by definition, be argued about). The feeling that one must or must not do something is one of the manifestations of conscience, feeling remorse for what one has done is another. The authority of morality – if that is a good word; I mean the kind of importance or urgency that belongs to moral matters – is inextricably connected to conscience. In fact, doing wrong in a morally pregnant sense *means* doing something that one might later come to have a bad conscience about, if one does not have it already.[2] The suggestion that someone could sincerely think that something he did was morally speaking seriously wrong, yet suffered no bad conscience about having done it, makes no sense; what, in that case, would his "sincerity" amount to?[3]

As Kant points out, conscience is not, and *could not be*, something we should aim to acquire or have a duty to acquire. For "conscience" *names the fact that we are alive to moral demands in the first place*, and so being under obligation to have a conscience would, as Kant says, "be tantamount to having a duty to recognize duties", which makes no sense.[4] "Conscience" is a name we give to our experience of good and evil, and a being who lacked it would be, as Kant says, "morally dead".[5] The fact of our being morally "alive", cannot be

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[2] Further on, I will suggest that one indeed necessarily has a bad conscience about doing evil, and if one does not feel it consciously, this is because one represses it. My point at this stage does not depend on accepting that claim, however.

[3] I add the strictly speaking nonsensical qualification "seriously" wrong – the central point here being precisely that it is confused to suppose that an action could be morally wrong yet not be *seriously* wrong – to exclude cases where we say we "know" that something is "wrong" only to indicate that we know it is generally thought that one should not to do it, whereas we ourselves in fact consider it unwarranted moralism to make a moral issue out of it.

[4] Kant, *Practical Philosophy* [The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant]. Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 529/6:400. For a note on the page references, see footnote 2, p. 139 above.

[5] Ibid. – Kant actually says this about an imaginary individual lacking what Kant calls "moral feeling" rather than conscience, but this is inessential, since moral feeling, conscience and the other "conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty [i.e. to morality]" Kant names, are all internally related to each other, and it would be impossible to lack one but have the others (cf. ibid, pp. 528–531/6:399–403). As I noted in Chapter Two, the relation of *love*, which Kant names as one of these conditions, to the others remains very unclear, however, given the legalistic structure of Kant's ethics as a whole.

explained or proven or grounded in anything, however, anymore than the fact of our being alive at all. All we can do is to take note of, and try to understand the meaning of, the strange fact that, as Kant says,

> 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.[6]

Kant is not speculating here; he is giving a straightforward description of a fact of ordinary moral experience – even if it may be said that the fact that there should *be* such experience is quite extraordinary. In our everyday lives it is natural, and indeed indispensable, to speak of moral matters in terms of conscience; unlike "flourishing" for instance, or even, to an extent, "virtue", it is not an term of art used only by philosophers. For that very reason, the fact that philosophers hardly ever reflect on the experience and concept of conscience is all the more striking.[7]

What is the experience of conscience like? Describing various aspects of it, bringing out their meaning, will be a central task of this chapter. Let me start

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[6] Ibid., p. 560/6:438.

[7] As the quotes I have given show, Kant is an exception to this rule, but the concept of conscience does not really play any very central role in his exposition of ethics, even if our *experience* of conscience is what he implicitly – and sometimes explicitly; see, e.g., *Practical Philosophy*, p. 218 f./5:98 f. – appeals to as the point at which his seemingly abstract philosophical account of the categorical character of ethics can be concretely anchored in our life. In general, moral philosophers have neglected conscience. An exception to the rule, and by far the best book on conscience I know of, is Hannes Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul. An Ethics of Conscience* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002). This is a genuinely path-breaking book, and one which has crucially influenced my own thinking about conscience and, as I have said, my thinking in general. Another book on conscience well worth consulting, although much more traditional in its orientation than Nykänen's, is Helmut Kuhn, *Begegnung mit dem Sein. Meditationen zur Metaphysik des Gewissens* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr - Paul Siebeck, 1954). J. Donelly and L. Lyons (eds.), *Conscience* (New York: Alba House, 1973) is a rather depressing selection of articles written by analytic philosophers on the topic. Douglas C. Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) is to my knowledge the only monograph, besides Nykänen's, on the topic in English-speaking philosophy. The author reviews, not always very rigorously, various accounts of conscience, before presenting his own view, which as far as I can determine betrays no real sense of the fundamental character and moral centrality of conscience, which indeed becomes merely one "virtue" among others. Furthermore, Langston does not even mention the modern philosophers who have had perhaps the most interesting things to say about conscience, and whom I discuss briefly below: Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Arendt. I will also make some remarks on the medieval discussions of conscience.

with the aspect of it we have already touched upon: the relation between conscience and argument. The instant I am tempted by evil, conscience places me in front of an "either-or" which demands a *decision* from me with an urgency which allows for no compromises, no tinkering to make it appear that the "either-or" could perhaps be dissolved into a "neither-nor" or "a bit of both". Thus: *either* I help this man who is harassed by the powers that be (and get in trouble) *or* I let him down (and avoid trouble); it is no good for me pretending that I can escape the decision by discreetly helping a little and expressing my sympathy with the man in private, while avoiding exposure and so saving myself from trouble. Or perhaps I am able to deal with the situation in this way, but the point is that the inescapable character of conscience makes itself felt at the precise point when this kind of manoeuvre is no longer possible, and a decision is demanded from me; a decision *either* to do what I can to save this man who is in trouble *or* to save myself from trouble.

This decision is completely unlike "normal" decisions in that there are no *considerations* to weigh *pro-et-contra*, there is nothing for me to *deliberate* about, for there is no doubt about what I *should* do: I should help the man. The urgency of conscience is not a matter of one's having to come to a decision in very little time. Sometimes, as when a person with whom I have been involved in a long and bitter quarrel is dying, and there has to be forgiveness and reconciliation *now* if there is ever to be any, the situation may of course involve such an urgency. Often it does not, however. During all those years before, when he was well, there was thus plenty of time for me to forgive and to invite him to reconciliation, and the moral difficulty for me was exactly the same: my unforgivingness.

Sometimes, one tries to escape conscience by telling oneself that there is no hurry, that one has time – "I will come out with the truth in due time, but nothing hangs on doing it just *now*, and now is not a good time". Other times one tries to escape by referring to the lack of time, claiming, for instance, that there was no time to ask the persons affected by one's action what they thought of it, because the decision had to be taken immediately. But the urgency of conscience is not an urgency in terms of *time* at all: it comes rather from the realisation that there *is* really nothing for one to make up one's mind about. It is *clear* that I should help the man even before I in fact decide to do so, and it *remains* as clear, as urgently clear as ever, even if I in fact let him down: that is what my bad conscience will not allow me to forget.

It would be misleading to say that when I am tempted to let someone down nothing speaks in favour of doing so and everything speaks against it. The

point is rather that the voice (or voices) that speak for the one side and the voice that speaks for the other speak in different languages, as it were, in different dimensions, and so what they say does not speak to the same question. Conscience tells me that I must not let the man down, that he depends on me, that I am responsible for him. But of course my concern for my own well-being, for my career, my standing in the eyes of others, my physical safety, and so on, does not simply tell me to do the opposite of this, it does not say "Let him down!" It rather presents the fact that I will not help him but let him down as an unfortunate consequence of doing what I "must" do to save myself.

But must I save myself? Well, would not anyone do it in the same circumstances? And can it really be demanded of me that I should sacrifice everything just to save someone else – especially in view of the fact that I was in no way responsible for getting the man in trouble, that the whole business is really none of my business? *And so on*: that is how our dear old self goes on arguing in such cases, trying to extricate itself from the "either-or" that conscience announces. To counter it, we make up an "either-or" of our own: "You have to understand, it was either me or him, so naturally I had to... I had no choice...".

Conscience does not argue with this, it simply throws what I have said back at me as an echo in which I hear *what* it is I was saying, or, to change the metaphor, as a mirror image in which everything is the same with the invisible but decisive difference that the whole picture has been reversed, so that what seemed right now seems wrong: "It was indeed either me or him – and God help me, how could I do it, how could I let him down!"

Precisely this silent gesture, announcing an end to argument, provokes the dear old self into feverish argument, however. All the arguments in this strange controversy are in fact produced by the same side, the dear old self, while the other side, conscience, remains a silent witness to the *monologue directed at it.* The arguments keep coming because they are produced precisely in order to silence this silence, as it were, to furnish an escape from its inescapable "either-or". If the other side does not argue, you cannot win the argument, however, you can at most satisfy yourself that you "should" have won. And when I argue with – that is: *against* – conscience, I am not arguing against someone else, but against myself, so I can never really satisfy myself that my arguments, the arguments of my dear old self, will do. On the contrary, they all spring from my unacknowledged knowledge that they will *not* do. I start arguing because I do not *want* to do what I see I *should* do, and so I try to

deceive myself into believing what I know to be untrue. But it is no use: the silent testimony of conscience remains in place despite or behind the arguments, as the very ground that provokes them.

The point is that when we do wrong or are tempted by it, there is a *dialectic* at work in which we try to deceive ourselves about the character of what we are up to, but never really manage to do so, because our bad conscience will not be talked away. Our self-deception and our bad conscience are, as it were, the mirror images of each other, and as long as one is there, so is the other. As K. E. Løgstrup says, "Self-deception presupposes the conscience from which it flees, and conscience presupposes the self-deception which it exposes".[8] We feel irritation, envy, greed, bitterness, disgust, hatred or some other impulse or urge to somehow or other reject another person; or we are tempted to let her down by fear for our own safety, or by vanity or tiredness or depression or self-absorption of some other description. But whatever guise the temptation to reject our neighbour comes in, what conscience *does* is precisely to reveal that underneath all the psychological and circumstantial variety, regardless of the details of the situation and the nuances of how we feel, what we are dealing with is in plain fact a temptation to reject someone, to leave her in the ditch while we go on *our* way. As Løgstrup points out, conscience is not at all some sort of "bloodhound" tracking the intricate psychological windings of one's self-deception by means of a refined introspection; it does not care what "technique" one used to try to escape from one's responsibility but "goes straight to the heart of the matter – to one's guilt."[9]

Having a bad conscience *means* being caught in this dialectic in which one knows one has done wrong but dares not acknowledge it, at least not fully. There is an end to this wavering only through an unconditional acknowledgment of the wrong one did, which can only come about in forgiveness. I will return to the dialectic of self-deception inherent in evil-doing later in this chapter. Here, however, I want to say something more about the *silence* of conscience, the way it gives one nothing to *argue* with.

We speak about a "voice" of conscience, but that is quite misleading insofar as conscience does not literally *tell* me anything at all, even *in foro interno*. It would be more exact to say that when conscience awakes in me *I*

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[8] Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*. Translated by Theodor I. Jensen, Gary Puckering and Eric Watkins, and revised by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 154.
[9] Ibid.

may react to it by telling myself, for instance, "I shouldn't do this". It is not conscience itself that says this, but rather my awareness of the testimony of conscience makes *me* say it. That testimony itself is "silent" in the sense that there seems to be no answer to the question *what* conscience tells me in a particular case. If one tries giving a specific content to the testimony of conscience, one produces only nonsense of a quite comical kind; the more so the more specific one tries to make it. If I say conscience told me I must help this injured man by the roadside, that might sound alright, but if I try to make conscience's dictates more specific – "You must check his pulse, then cover him with your coat, and then run to the closest phone booth to call an ambulance, striking the number..." – the thing turns into a farce. But it would be quite arbitrary to claim that conscience can tell one only general things, but not specific things: where exactly is the line beneath which it cannot go?[10]

Conscience does not, then, tell us anything specifiable at all, neither general nor specific. When we say that conscience told us this or that we are really reporting what *we* said in response to it. But if conscience does not tell us anything, then how can it guide action, as it surely does in some sense? Yes, in some sense it surely does so. But in what sense? It does not do it by giving us directions to do or avoid this or that; what we do in connexion with the awakening of conscience is, all of it, *our* response to it. It may be asked how what we say and do can even be a *response* to conscience if it does not tell us anything specifiable? For in that case there seems to be nothing to respond *to*?

What conscience "does" is, I would say, to present others in a certain light, namely in the light of love; having a conscience *means* seeing them in that light, as one's *neighbours* in the Biblical sense. Insofar as I see a person in the light of love, his predicament will matter to me because *he* matters to me, and so it will give me reasons to do all sorts of things, for instance help him get to a hospital. Conscience itself does not, however, tell me to do this, or any other thing in particular, it simply *opens me* to my neighbour. To be open is, as I have insisted all through this thesis, not as such to act or to be in this or that particular way. Nonetheless, there is nothing vague about the call to openness that issues from conscience (or that conscience *is*). Conscience simply shows me the person who needs help as someone to love, but this makes me feel immediately the *evil* of the particular thoughts, emotions and actions which express my closing myself to him; "Oh, how he smells! Why do people get

[10] My remarks here simply repeat Nykänen's, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 326 f.

themselves so drunk? And my clothes will get all dirty! Why is it always I who have to help? Why should I not pass him by, like all these others?" and so on.

The point is that it is *I* who think these thoughts to myself, *I* who feel that I would *not* like to take the man to the hospital. What appears as the specific *content* of the reproach of my bad conscience, as conscience forbidding me this or that, is in fact the insight which it's silent testimony makes inescapable for me, that the particular things I am tempted by are excluded. In the same way, when I heed my conscience and it seems to be telling me to do this or that, for instance to take the man to the hospital, what happens is that I, guided by whatever practical knowledge, intelligence and skills I have, try as best I can to *respond* to the call of conscience, which in itself has no particular content, but simply calls me to love my neighbour.

At this point, someone will surely ask, however, in regard to what I have said about the character of the testimony of conscience, how it is that morality is so often understood in terms that have, on the face of it at least, nothing to do with openness or love, but rather deal in rights and duties, norms, respect, decency, utility, nobility or what-not? Does this not indicate that what I have said about conscience "calling" us to love our neighbour is a speculative thesis that has no basis in the actual facts of ordinary moral experience?

I do not think so. Certainly the facts of ordinary moral experience adduced do not by themselves tend to disprove what I have said, anymore than the fact that we often do not think of our friendships in terms of openness tends to disprove what I said about the question of friendship in Chapter One. For note that I have not said that the testimony of conscience is something we are eager to take on. That would simply not be true. On the contrary, I have stressed, and will continue to do so, the inner conflict, the denials and self-deceptions produced by our fear of the openness conscience calls us to. We fear openness, even if we also in some sense long for it, and so we will come up with all kinds of strategies for avoiding it, and, importantly, for *justifying* this avoidance. This is where *morality*, in the sense this term indeed carries in much ordinary moral experience, comes in. Social and private moralities are in large measure instruments for justifying our avoidance of openness.

Here I should perhaps also answer a seemingly obvious objection to making the concept of conscience, even as more traditionally understood, central in ethics. It is that, as Elisabeth Anscombe says, "a man's conscience may tell him to do the vilest things", and so it will be of no use to do ethics as though conscience could be understood to furnish the criterion of good and evil,

right and wrong.[11] Note, however, that Anscombe is not sceptical of the distinction between good and evil as such; on the contrary her objection appeals to our knowledge that certain things, which some claim their consciences demand of them, are "vile". This entitles us to ask what the source of this knowledge is, if it is not conscience? Have not the vilest things been thought by people to be demanded of them by love or friendship, but also by God or reason or duty or virtue or a concern for the best outcome, or whatever? Can we not be led astray by almost anything at all? Or rather, cannot any name be taken in vain? Can we not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are motivated by one thing when we are in fact motivated by something quite different, and even opposed?

Could it not be the case, then, that when someone claims, with the sincere falsity of the self-deceiver, that his conscience told him he had to do something vile, what in fact happens is that he has talked himself into believing that his conscience demands what he is actually tempted to do by his servility or pride, for instance? Certainly, the logic or dynamics of such moral confusion needs to be described, and I will engage in such description below – among other things I will return to Huck Finn's grappling with his *false*, social "conscience".[12] There is no need to assume, however, that the possibilities of self-deception about what one's conscience says makes the existence of conscience or the character of its testimony itself doubtful. Against all speculations about an "erring conscience", I would say with Karl Barth that conscience does not err, but "we err in our hearing of it", and so "our self-dialogue is undoubtedly a constant self-misunderstanding"[13] – and I would add that our errors and our misunderstandings themselves cannot be thought of as innocent, but must rather be seen as self-deceptions, as wilfully incurred.

It might be objected to this that I am simply making it true by definition that what conscience tells us is morally speaking true; whenever people are told to do something vile by what they take to be their conscience, I will simply and dogmatically refuse to accept this "voice" as issuing from *conscience*. Essentially the same objection could also be raised against my central claims about friendship, desire, and openness. In all these cases, it might be said that I conjure problems away by refusing to allow anything morally bad to count as

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[11] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy* 33 (1958), p. 2.
[12] Cf. p. 240 ff., above.
[13] Barth, *Ethics.* Edited by Dietrich Braun and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 485.

an instance of the things I claim to be essentially good: friendship, desire, openness, and now conscience.

I gave a first response to this objection in Chapter One.[14] Let me add a few comments. First of all, I must repeat that *any* philosophical interpretation of our moral experience is open to the same charge of making things true by definition. Thus ethical rationalists have never claimed that *reason* taken in an *empirical* sense, denoting something like the processes of ratiocination that a person as a matter of psychological fact actually engages in, has any moral authority. "Reason" is a *normative* concept for them; they do not say that the right and the good is determined by what someone *happens to think* reasonable, but by what really *is* reasonable, and so it is no objection to their view to point out that people can and do in fact think very unreasonable things reasonable.

Philosophical propositions about what something, for instance conscience or reason, *is*, are not empirical hypotheses which someone might disprove by producing an empirical counter-example, for instance a case in which conscience allegedly *in fact* told someone to do some vile thing. For in philosophy we ask how we are to understand the significance of facts known to all; the task is not to discover new facts, but to get clear about what to make of the facts we have. This task may certainly include pointing to phenomena and experiences which have not been given sufficient attention in the discussion – indeed, I claim that the experiences associated with conscience have suffered neglect in philosophy. Pointing to the experiences themselves does not settle anything, however; what we need is a description or conceptual articulation which brings out the significance of these experiences for understanding our moral life as a whole. There is obviously no point in simply refusing to *call* an apparent deliverance of conscience which urges someone to do something bad an instance of the true thing; one must also give a re-description of the situation in different terms which shows how one proposes to make sense of this and other apparent cases of an "erring conscience", and to distinguish them from genuine cases. This I will try to do.

[14] Cf. p. 119.

It will no doubt be suggested that the sense of right and wrong given us in conscience need not, and should not be understood in the way I seem to imply, as some mystical, apparently innate, faculty that each of us is supposed to have. At issue is rather our shared, and also perhaps more or less changing, sense of good and bad, which is as it were deposited in our common language, in the ways we speak about moral matters, the ways we use moral concepts.

To this I would reply that the fact that we have a conscience informs not just everything we say about moral matters, but in one way or another everything we do. Conscience – which is a manifestation of our very openness for each other, of the fact that we matter to each other at all – is thus too fundamental to be seen as a *product* of anything else, as *arising out of* something else in our life, for instance language or culture. Conscience is there from the start, as a crucial determinant in making our life what it is. To imagine a person literally lacking conscience would be to imagine someone who was *completely cold* to others (and therefore also to himself), a kind of living dead, a biological machine. If we did not have a conscience we would not be human, and so would not have a language or a culture either.

I would say that there is something like conscience in animals, too: this comes out in the fact that that animals respond to us; that they are not lacking in feeling for us and for other living beings generally (a creature that was completely unfeeling would not really be a living being at all, but precisely some kind of biological machine).[15] And infants certainly respond to us from the start, before they have been inculcated in our culture and learned our language. It is only because they do, because they are open to us and care about us, as we care about them, that they can become members of our culture and be taught anything at all. This openness – which is, at root, what conscience and

[15] The ludicrous question *whether we can communicate with animals* can appear to make sense only if one equates communication with being able to teach the animal to respond appropriately to orders or other signs given it in some hopelessly primitive sign-system, as though anything decisive regarding how close or far from each other we and the animal are would hang on whether it can or cannot be taught this. In considering experiments with teaching animals such "languages", one apparently does not even notice the obvious, and vastly more important, fact that the animals and their trainers have *feelings* for each other, like and care for each other – unless they did, or if there was only hostility between them, the teaching of the sign-game could not even begin. It is as if a dog-owner would see the decisive thing in whether she can teach her dog some simple trick or not, and regard the fact that she and the dog feel affection for each other, that she feels bad about treating the dog badly, may even quite naturally feel that she has treated it *unfairly*, and that the dog can feel shame, and so on, as mere trivialities.

morality are about *even for us* in all our cultural sophistication – is a presupposition of culture rather than a product of it.

Someone might agree with this, but insist that the fact that we have language and culture transforms our life and also our conscience, or perhaps they would rather say that it is only our acculturation with its moral education that turns the proto-conscience or receptivity to morality that even an infant has, into conscience and morality proper, just as the infant's cries and grunts are turned into language proper through linguistic training. To me it seems that this picture of things, self-evident, indeed trivially true as it seems, obscures things rather than illuminating them. I do not deny, by any means, that acculturation changes our life drastically in all kinds of ways, but faced with talk about "processes" of moral "education" and "growth" by which we are said to grow into moral "maturity", I want to say: "Alright, but what exactly does all this *mean*, in moral terms? If you want to talk about growth, please do, but then tell me what it consists in. What grows into what, and how does it happen?"

As I will try to show later in the chapter, the idea that we could teach a child anything essential about good and evil in the sense in which we do teach children to speak a particular language, is untenable. We can and do, of course, inculcate a particular social morality to the child, the *mores* of the particular social group we belong to, but that is different. One could say that the sense of good and evil given in conscience relates to particular social moralities somewhat as the fact that we feel *addressed* by others and feel a need to address them – which is the pre-linguistic, non-conventional root of language, and is also a central manifestation of our openness to each other – relates to particular natural languages. The analogy is misleading, however, insofar as there is also, as my remarks about social morality in the previous chapter intimated, a continuous conflict and tension, often a direct contradiction, between conscience and social morality, whereas there is no such tension between English and the pre-linguistic roots of language.

I will turn to this conflict between conscience and social morality presently, but before I do, I must add that what I have said about conscience not being a cultural artefact or social construction in nowise implies that it is "natural", either, insofar as nature is precisely what we, through various social practices of cultivation, use and transformation, *make into culture*. Culture is made of, and therefore dependent on, nature, and nature can limit the possibilities of culture, of human forms of life (for instance, being the kind of living being we by nature are, we cannot live without water or certain types of

nutrition). Nature does not *judge* culture, however. By contrast, our cultural practices no less than our individual actions are, or may be, judged in the light of the testimony of conscience. This testimony, therefore, has to come from somewhere else altogether, from beyond culture *and* nature.[16]

It might be helpful at this point to contrast conscience with *reason*, which has traditionally been held to be the ability defining human, as opposed to animal, "nature" (the contrast between reason and conscience was in fact discussed already, when I contrasted the power of argument with the silent testimony of conscience). "Reason" names at least, and centrally, the ability to step back from one's immediate situation, from one's spontaneous response to one's surroundings – one's patterns of perception, one's felt needs, wishes, stirrings, promptings – through the ability to conceptualise and compare *different* possibilities of action. To reason is in some measure to look at one's involvement in the world from outside the world, from outside oneself. Even if there is no view "from nowhere", reason is essentially an exercise in *detachment*, be it with the aim of finding one's way to a somehow truer or more desirable involvement in life.

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[16] The validity of this statement is not, I think, affected by the fact that on the classical, as opposed to the modern conception of nature, "nature" is itself seen as inherently *normative*. The difference between these conceptions – which I claim is inessential to my point – comes out in the fact that classical thinkers can admonish us to "live according to nature", whereas on the modern naturalistic conception everything that *can* happen must happen in accordance with natural laws which can (and can only) be stated in morally neutral terms, and so even the most horrendous life is by definition as "natural" as any other.That many moderns, natural scientists and philosophers no less than laymen, constantly revert to normative, teleological ways of thinking about nature, treating some things as "unnatural", or ascribing a goal or meaning to natural processes such as evolution, is not to be denied, but it does not make the basic distinction between the classical and modern conceptions of nature doubtful. I should add, perhaps, that the modern conception may be seen as a simplification resulting from discarding half of the essentially ambiguous classical conception, in which nature is *both* normative – supplying a measure by which to distinguish some things as "natural" and so good, others as "unnatural" and so bad – *and* as all-encompassing and inescapable as the "nature" of the moderns, in the sense that even a perpetrator of the most evil, "unnatural" acts will (acording to the classical conception) have to face the "natural" consequences of what they have done, just as their *motivation* must, according to the classical thinkers, be thought of as essentially "natural" in the sense that they strive for what they *mistakenly* see as good, rather than for evil as such. Evil is thus reduced to a consequence of a basic and inexplicable flaw in the design of the cosmos, a streak of disorder at the heart of the world-order, which allows for humans to make mistakes, and in general will not allow nature to attain the perfection it aims for. However, from the point of view of my discussion, the essential thing is that the classical conception of nature is just as incapable as the modern one of making sense of *conscience*, because conscience does not have anything to do with any *order*, "natural" or otherwise. It does not *call us back to order*, but rather calls us to open up to others in love; it *calls* us, in the strongest possible way, but supplies us with no norms. (Cf. also my discussion of Socratic justice and the idea of a "cosmic order" in Chapter Three.)

In this sense it seems that, however natural it may be for human beings to reason, reason takes us "out of nature," out of the self-evident immediacy of life. But perhaps this impression is misleading? What we need to note is that thinking as such, I mean thinking in so far as it is *not* prompted by and expressive of the call of conscience, *does not put me in question*. It may well be that in thinking about something I am forced to admit something I would rather not have to admit – for instance that I really must have forgotten my wallet at the bar table; when I think back that is where I must have left it. At the basic level, however, one is not challenged by having to admit that things did not work out the way one would have hoped, because here the problem is precisely seen to lie in the way *things* work, not in *oneself* – and realising that some of one's desires must be given up because they are unrealistic or incompatible does not take one out of this perspective.

The experience of conscience is quite unlike the experience(s) of thinking. While the soul's "silent conversation with itself" that we call thinking[17] can be a great pleasure, the "conversation" that starts when conscience – that is: the pang of bad conscience – makes itself felt, is certainly no pleasure; one does not look forward to an interesting conversation with conscience! Conscience speaks to me of what I would *not* like to discuss; it reminds me of what I would not like to be reminded of. While reason allows me to step out of my immediate situation to question *it*, conscience rather *questions me*, puts me in question. In other words, he crucial difference between reason and conscience is that while reasoning is an ability or power, "natural" for humans, conscience is clearly *not* an ability or power. While my reason allows me to do various things, to compare, make judgments and so on, conscience is precisely that which will *not* allow me to do things I would very much like to do, for instance ignore someone needing the help I feel disinclined to give.

As we shall see, this is *not* to say that the testimony of conscience is to be understood as essentially negative or forbidding; it takes on that aspect only in the face of our ill will. It is actually misleading to say that conscience will *not* allow me to ignore someone needing help I feel disinclined to give; the point is rather that my having a conscience is revealed in the fact that I must indeed *try to ignore* the person I do not want to help; I cannot *simply* pass him by. Even if I appear to be doing just that, my reactions if someone reproaches me for what I did, the very fact that I *understand* the reproach, reveals that I did not simply

[17] The phrase is Plato's, from *The Sophist*, 263e. Cf. *Theatetus*, 189e.

pass the other by, but rather pushed the call to help him out of my mind – and the fact that I might indignantly protest that the reproach is quite unjustified shows precisely that I *do* understand it (I will return to the question of indignation below).

With regard to the relation between conscience and reason I should also note, however, that this relation is not merely the negative one I have so far emphasised, that conscience is not to be reasoned away, that it announces an end to argument – for in so doing it actually, paradoxical as this may seem, make reasoning *possible*. What I have in mind here is the fact, noted already by Fichte, that since argumentation as such, considered formally, as a mere operation with symbols and meanings, "possesses no immanent limit within itself", the only thing that "sets a limit to the otherwise unbridled flight of argumentation [is] that which binds the mind because it binds the heart", namely the testimony of conscience.[18] Our belief in a "reality" which our reasoning *has* to conform to has, then, the character of "a moral compulsion – the only kind of compulsion that is possible for a free being".[19]

For after all, why is it that we *cannot* think and argue as we please? Why does it *matter* that we get facts and arguments right, that what we say is true? *How* does it matter? Is the reason we condemn untruthfulness merely that we fear it might have undesirable consequences? Might it not just as well have beneficial consequences? Certainly, our reaction of horror if someone proposes that we might live a life in which we would be very happy and content, but would be living a lie, cannot be explained by utilitarian considerations. Rather, we have a need and desire for truth which is itself of a moral-existential nature, which we cannot in conscience deny – a desire which must, I argued, be understood as a desire to be with those we love *in truth*.[20] To imagine an individual without a conscience is, among other things, to imagine an individual who feels no inner constraints on his speech and thought, who can without compunction argue for whatever he pleases. It is only insofar as we have a conscience – insofar as, that is, who we are to each other matters to us morally – that we feel there are certain things we cannot assert or deny.[21]

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[18] J. G. Fichte, "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World", in Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*. Translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), p. 147.
[19] Ibid., p. 150.
[20] Cf. the discussion in the section entitled "Truth" in Chapter One.
[21] This means that Hannah Arendt gets things exactly the wrong way around when she proposes to view conscience as a mere "moral side effect" of thinking (*The Life of the Mind. One-Volume Edition* [Harcourt Brace: New York, 1978], Vol. I, p. 192). Incidentally, Arendt connects

Conscience, then, is neither cultural nor natural, and so it must, positively speaking, be *supernatural*. It is experienced by us, *in* the world, but it is not an experience *of* the world, it rather gives the light in which we understand our whole life in this world. This is not to say that "conscience proves that God exists", or that it is an inherently religious concept. Conscience is what it is, it *proves* nothing. It does, however, open up the ultimate existential question of its own origin and of *who we are that we should be addressed by it.* As far as I can see, one can give a *mundane* interpretation to conscience only by means of reductive misdescriptions of our experience of it.[22]

Let me now turn to the conflict between conscience and social morality. The stress on a shared language with its horizon of intelligibility is a way – a quite sophisticated way, no doubt – of formulating the very common idea that morality is essentially a matter of shared norms and values. On this view, a person's conscience would be formed in a process where they come to make certain social values their own. One can imagine different accounts of how exactly this happens, of the part played by various motives in this process of

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conscience with friendship; her thought is that as a self, I must ask "whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to think about my deeds and words" (p. 191). And who would want, Arendt asks rhetorically, "to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer" (p. 188), for instance? "What kind of dialogue can you conduct with yourself when your soul is ... at war with itself" (p. 189), as the murderer's is? Arendt, like Aristotle and, in his way, Kant before her, in effect explains the badness of being bad and the goodness of being good by saying that the bad are in conflict with themselves, they contradict themselves, as the good do not. The problem with this whole approach is that it presupposes what it purports to explain. It is certainly true that evil deeds, if unrepented, tear the soul apart. This struggle may take place on the level of conscious thought, in which case it is felt as pangs of bad conscience, or it may be repressed and therefore come out in various, at first sight seemingly inexplicable, perversions of one's thought and feelings, but it will always be there. But the question is *why* this happens; and the rather obvious answer is that it happens precisely *because* we have a conscience. It is not that murder is evil because in murdering someone I contradict myself. Rather, in murdering someone I contradict myself, come into conflict with myself, *because murder is evil*, and I know it is because I have a conscience – or, as one might also say, my having a conscience shows itself *in* my feeling the evil of murder and lesser forms of evildoing *as* a conflict in myself. Arendt says that a murderer cannot will that "Thou shalt kill" be a general law because he "naturally fears for his own life" (p. 188). But someone who had no conscience would kill without compunction whenever he felt threatened, precisely *because* he naturally fears for his own life! He kills because he does not want to be killed, just as someone coming into a crowded restaurant will hurry to take a seat at his favourite table before someone else takes it. It is as simple as that, and quite free of any contradictions – *as long as conscience does not make itself felt*, making one feel that in doing what one did, one treated someone callously. Conscience cannot, then, be somehow derived from a fear of contradicting oneself; on the contrary, it is only because we have a conscience that we can feel that in acting in evil ways – for instance in arguing fraudulently, in bad faith – we are going against something is ourselves.

[22] Cf. Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 344 ff. I return to the question of the relation between what I say and explicitly religious speech in the Conclusion.

internalisation of social values – for instance, one might stress fear of the power of others, of their withdrawing their love from one, or the need and respect for authorities, or the desire to emulate those one admires. Whatever the case, on this view conscience would be that in us which most deeply brands us as property of our social group; indeed so deeply that we ourselves feel that our inmost voice *is* the voice of our community. This view of the matter seems to be confirmed by everything in our moral beliefs that is culturally variable. However, we also speak of, and more importantly we experience, conscience in a sense which is not just different from this social one, but radically opposed to it, and the central aim of this chapter is to bring out what that sense is.

There are a number of features of the experience of conscience which mark it as irreducibly personal, as an experience in which we are, in a certain sense, lifted out of our group and called to take personal responsibility for our deeds and our life. Nonetheless, these features are formal enough that they can quite well be accomodated within the essentially social view of conscience sketched above, which nonetheless I want to reject. The point is that within such a view, the *meaning* of "personal" will be different from what it is if one sees conscience, in the manner I propose, as manifesting love's openness.

It is undeniable that conscience addresses only *me* or *you*, in a strictly personal manner: there is no such thing as "our conscience". It is equally clear that conscience allows no authority to what is normally done and thought and said as such; instead it confronts me with the very concrete question how *I* feel about some action, it asks me whether *I* can really stand for it, quite independently of whether others accept it or not. Thus, there is an obvious sense in which conscience lifts us out of our group, asks each one of us to say "I" rather than "one", and reveals the futility of hiding behind common opinion, behind "One just cannot..." or "One must..." or "Everybody knows that..."

A matter of conscience is personal, but not in the merely *private* or *subjective* sense in which matters of taste are "personal", for instance. A person for whom something is a matter of conscience does not feel that it is something she has a right to decide as *she* sees fit, without others interfering with what she does; rather, her conscience tells her that the matter is *decided* for her in a sense I tried to bring out in my description of the "either-or" above, and neither anyone else *nor* she herself can do anything about it. There is indeed, as we shall see more clearly in a minute, a sense in which

conscience does not *decide* anything but rather opens a *question*. Nonetheless, it remains true that this question is not experienced as anything the person addressed by conscience can *do* anything about, however much she might like to be rid of it or to mould what it lets her know into a shape more palatable to her. The experience of conscience is, then, impossible to make sense of in terms of the dichotomy subjective-objective. Conscience addresses me, not I it, so it is not subjective. But conscience always addresses only *me* – that is, each one of us singly – so it is not objective, either, it cannot be "verified" in any objective way. This means that making conscience a central concept in ethics puts an end to the interminable debate between subjectivists and objectivists in moral philosophy.

This much I think that sophisticated versions of a social view of conscience can accomodate. For they need not defend the view that conscience is a simple reflex or mechanical reproduction in the individual of the current social values, vulnerable to every change in moods and fashions, in the "spirit of the times", or a violent imposition dating from childhood, rigidly unchangeable, having the character of a taboo, or some other such obviously heteronomous thing. On the contrary, they can claim that conscience manifests the genuinely personal "dimension" or "face" of social morality, the way in which an individual has appropriated and made his own the values of the community.

Different individuals will appropriate common values in their different, idiosyncratic ways, depending on inclination, personality and biographical details; they will each make something personal out of the values, the way of life, they have in common, and it is thus that the way of life remains alive. On this view, having a conscience means, at bottom, assuming a personal responsibility for keeping the way of life of one's community with its moral values alive; acknowledging that no one else can assume that responsibility in one's place. Such a personal commitment to the community is to be distinguished from mere conformism, and may indeed bring one into conflict with the people around one, for the commitment is *not* to them as such, but rather to a certain moral ideal of the way of life which one regards as "ours", but which the people around one might seem to have forgotten, or lack the commitment to uphold, or perhaps no longer share – think here of the way conservative patriots may complain of how "our once great nation is going to the dogs". Of course, one may also see oneself as part of a vanguard which

wants to build a new community based on new values, which it is one's task to invite others to share.[23]

This view may seem both *stern*, in its insistence on personal responsibility, and *appealing* in its stress on the desire for community. In short, there is something both noble and deeply human about it. This very combination should make us suspicious, I think. Further reflection on the case of Huck Finn will reveal, it seems to me, what is missing from this picture, and missing in such a way that it cannot simply be added to the picture, but if allowed into it will explode it.

Before I return to Huck, however, let me add a few comments on a feature concerning the idea of "moral dilemmas" which is, if not a necessary part of the "social" view of conscience I outlined, at least often stressed in connexion with it. On that view, conscience is often understood precisely as the "site" where the individual "deals" with the conflicts which sometimes arise between moral demands flowing from different allegiances – to friends, to the State, and so on (recall our earlier discussion of the case of Crito, who found himself caught between the conflicting demands of loyalty to his friend Socrates and to the State, which had condemned Socrates to death).[24] "Conscience" comes into play, it is thought, in situations in which one has to take personal responsibility and make one's own decisions, because one is faced with a "hard" case where the socially mediated moral values one endorses cannot give one the guidance they normally provide, since these values themselves conflict.

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[23] This is, I believe, more or less Hegel's view of the place of conscience, and so of the personal dimension, in moral life. Hegel thought that the claim for authority of the individual's conscience (*Moralität* or "morality") had been confusedly and disastrously inflated in the modern world, precisely because the dependency of the individual's private moral judgments on socially acknowledged moral values (*Sittlichkeit* or "ethical life") had been denied. Nonetheless, Hegel did not want to deny the authority of personal conscience altogether, but rather wanted to place it in what he took to be its proper context, which is approximately the one I sketched. Hegel does not, then, oppose the personal dimension of "morality", but rather sees it as an "essential aspect of the ethical life characteristic of the modern state", as Allen Wood says ("Hegel's ethics", in Frederick C. Beiser [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], p. 222). But note: on Hegel's view conscience is merely an *aspect*, however essential, of the social life of the group, and in fact only of some groups, namely the "modern" ones – that is, conscience is itself seen as a historico-social creation. Hegel presents his views on conscience in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§632–671, pp. 383–409. Conscience, and the contrast and connection between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* is also treated in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right.* Translated by T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), §§ 129 ff. – A good discussion is Joachim Ritter, "Moralität und Sittlichkeit. Zur Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit der Kantischen Ethik", in Iring Fetscher (hrsg.), *Hegel in der Sicht der Neueren Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973).

[24] Cf. p. 237 f., above.

What should be noted here is that on this picture, it is the tensions inherent in social morality itself that decide when a case becomes a "hard" one calling for "personal responsibility", so that the dimension of the "personal" becomes itself merely an aspect of the social, of the individual's social belonging. That does not seem very personal at all, however. In fact, it reduces the personal to the subjective and arbitrary, to the aspects of life which the social norms and values in their *generality* cannot determine, and which therefore may and must be left to individual discretion. For the person facing the "painful" situation of having to make his personal decision this has a comfortable, twofold implication: on the one hand, as I noted in the earlier discussion of Crito, the need to decide does not put the individual's social belonging as such into question, because the allegiances and demands which conflict are in themselves considered socially legitimate; we *all of us* have friends, just as we belong to the political community, and so we are all of us potentially prey to the same kind of dilemma Crito (thought he) faced. On the other hand, no-one can criticise an individual for deciding a case of conflict the way he does, because "in hard cases like these, there is no right or wrong answer, each man has to decide for himself".

In other words, in the midst of all his anguish over what to do, an anguish which may certainly be, in its way, sincerely felt, the person facing the "dilemma" he can only resolve "in conscience", can rest assured both that he is immune from criticism from others and that his belonging together with them as "one of us" is not in doubt. As I noted earlier, this view, which seems so very "responsibly" to refuse any "easy solutions" to "hard dilemmas", conveniently relieves one of raising any fundamental existential questions about *who* one is in relation to the larger community.[25]

Huck Finn understands his situation quite differently, however: there is no easy comfort for him. Huck calls the voice of his society in him his "conscience", and takes it to be the terrifying voice of God Almighty himself;

[25] This essentially very comfortable view of conscience and "moral dilemmas" is common to Wittgensteinians and Heideggerians, who both insist on the inescapably *personal* character of moral decision, but do so against the background of social values in the way I have explained. Here, it is instructive to compare Peter Winch's Wittgensteinian discussion of the alleged moral dilemma of Captain Vere in Melville's *Billy Budd* ("The Universalizability of Moral Judgments" in Winch, *Ethics and Action* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972]), with Henry G. Wolz' Heideggerian account of the dilemma Crito faced, or rather would allegedly have faced if he had taken on his "personal" responsibility in the situation (Wolz, *Plato and Heidegger. In Search of Selfhood* [London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981], pp. 29–46). I will discuss "moral dilemmas" more thoroughly below.

just as they teach in Sunday School. So Huck identifies the voice of others with conscience and the voice of God, and the social stigmatisation consequent upon breaking the rules of social morality with eternal damnation.[26] Everything seems clear-cut, and there seems to be no question about what he should do. But then he thinks of Jim – and chooses eternal damnation.

This is astonishing. There is nothing to indicate that Huck doubts that "everlasting fire" will be his lot for acting as he does, and yet he acts as he does: "I was trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll *go* to hell'".[27] Huck *decides* his fate, he does not think of himself as a wretched, weak sinner who simply *cannot help* doing what he knows will lead to his damnation. Nor is he, to mention the other classic candidate for the deepest motive of sin (the first being weakness), too *proud* to submit to the will of God. There is no defiance in his decision; his later avowal that if he could "think up anything worse" after stealing Jim out of slavery, he would do that, too, "because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog",[28] rather expresses the cheerful fatalism of someone who has nothing to lose. But in his decision to stick with Jim there is no fatalism, and no defiance. He is completely clear about what he is doing, although everything he has been taught, everything he knows about how the world works and believes about the heavens, makes it seem like madness.

How is this to be explained? I think it cannot be explained. But it is a fact that human beings can act in this mysterious way; there is nothing unconvincing or fantastic in the story as Twain tells it, there is only the mystery of the action depicted in it. We must take care not to take the mystery out of this mystery, however. One way to try to do so, an obviously insupportable way, I think, but one which might nonetheless appear tempting, is to write Huck's actions down to precisely the thing I have claimed is not to be found in this or any other instance of openness between people, namely a *preferential attachment* on Huck's part to his friend Jim, or alternatively a feeling that as a friend he had some *special obligations* to Jim. After all, in thinking about Jim and their trip down the river, just before deciding to save Jim and go to Hell, Huck says:

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[26] Cf. the passages quoted on p. 240 f., above.
[27] Mark Twain, *The Advetures of Huckleberry Finn.* Edited by Peter Coveney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 283.
[28] Ibid.

> But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog ... and such-like times; and [how he] would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now ...[29]

Is this not the voice of ordinary preferential attachment and an equally ordinary sense of obligation to someone who has been good to one; things which may be sweet and even admirable, but have nothing mysterious about them at all? I do not think so. First of all, we must bear in mind what Huck's thoughts issue in, namely the decision to accept eternal damnation rather than let Jim down. This is certainly something out of the ordinary, and so how could the thoughts leading up to it be ordinary ones?

Furthermore, if we look closer at the things Huck says, and the spirit of his words, it is evident that it has nothing to do with the thought that he would have come to *owe* Jim something because Jim had done him a good turn. The goodness he is thinking of is quite different; it does not make him feel indebted and bound to do as he had been done by, as his thought of someone's having been *fair* or *decent* to him might. By contrast, the thought urged on Huck by his *false* conscience, that in not denouncing Jim to his owner Miss Watson he was "stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm",[30] clearly burdens him with guilt for failing to do as he had been done by, for failing his role in the social game of services and returns – a game which in this case was also characterised by the fact that the "poor old woman" whose slave had tried to free himself would be "mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her".[31] Huck's thought of Jim's goodness does not burden him with any guilt or debts of gratitude, however, it only makes his *heart melt*: "But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind".

Huck does, to be sure, also think of what Jim has done for him, but that is important not because it would demand a return, but only because it reminds him of *how much Jim loves him*, just as do the memories of "how glad he was when I come back out of the fog" or how he "would always call me honey, and pet me".

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[29] Ibid., p. 283.
[30] Ibid., p. 281.
[31] Ibid.

Someone's loving you does not *oblige* you to anything: you did not "ask" to be loved, and it is not your "fault" that you are loved – just as it is not the other's "fault" that he loves you. But acknowledging that you are loved, that someone has taken you into their heart, may do something incomparably better than oblige you to him; it may awaken the love for him in you; you may respond to his open heart by opening your heart to him, as the thought of Jim's open heart opened Huck's heart when his false conscience tried to "harden" him against Jim.

I will return to the idea that what we are dealing with here is merely a *sentimental* attachment; this conception of love, which I have argued against all through this thesis, seems to me to be a way of trying to take the mystery and the challenge out of love, and to do so precisely by *disconnecting* love from conscience.

Another, quite devious, way of trying to make Huck's action appear ordinary and safe, is tacitly to think of all of us who condemn slavery as standing on Huck's side, as it were tapping him encouragingly on the back. But the point is that Huck had no one to tap him on the back, he stood all alone in the world with Jim, and Jim could not offer him any protection or reassurance. Huck is also *not* someone who stands "alone with his conscience against the world", only in such a way that he is not quite alone after all, but actually presumes to believe that he has *God* on his side – which is no small comfort when it is time to take a stand. Nor can Huck draw sustenance from the "good conscience" of someone who is conscious of having done "the right thing", the thing, that is, that he thinks others should really be respecting or even thanking him for doing, although they *in fact* do the very opposite, ingrates or perhaps just misled that they are.

By contrast, such a "good conscience" *is* available to those who understand themselves to be speaking to "the conscience of the nation", as we say – revealingly, because here the notion of a *collective* conscience suddenly appears. The person who takes a stand in conscience on some issue, but with a consciousness of invoking social values, is sustained by a feeling that he is expressing this *collective* conscience or consciousness – which is, to be sure, ideal rather than real, appealed to rather than ready to hand – and no matter how unpopular his speaking out may be, he still feels that he is the one who speaks for the community's "better self", and that he is *justified* by this.

The thought that he would somehow have been justified in doing what he did, that he would somehow have chosen the "right side" does not, however, occur to Huck in any form. This shows that he has moved out of the whole

social game of moralised power in which, whether "God" is drawn into it or not, questions about who is in the *right* against whom, and what one is justified in demanding, reign supreme – and in which the voices of others always ring in one's head, whether what they say confirms one in one's "good conscience", or discourages or infuriates one by failing to do so. Huck, however, is unconcerned with the voices of others; at the moment of decision he is alone in the world with Jim. It seems to me that this is what happens when conscience, in the non-social sense of that word, makes itself felt. The question conscience opens up is in fact the *same* strictly personal question opened up in friendship: "Who am I? Who are you? Who are we to each other?"

– *Conscience as love* –

Let us return to Huck Finn once more. Huck himself did not say that in staying with Jim he heeded his conscience; in his thoughts the name "conscience" was reserved for the voice of his society in him. Huck did not say what it was that made him stay with Jim – and in one sense this is as it should be, for it was nothing *in particular* that made him stay; it was simply his *love* of Jim. I do not think that there was anything Huck did not see or misunderstood in moral terms, in terms of conscience; there was nothing amiss in his actions. One could say, however, that he had no words to express what he felt and knew in his heart. This was not a problem for him; he felt what he felt and knew what he knew, and he stayed true to that in his actions. In a philosophical account of what those actions revealed we need words, however.

Huck's creator Mark Twain said that the book told the story of how "a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat".[32] I would rather say that there is no meaningful distinction to be drawn between Huck's sound heart and his conscience, while what suffers defeat in him is not really a "deformed" but a *false* "conscience" which tried to usurp the place of his conscience.[33] One could call that in Huck which opens him to Jim his conscience, or his heart, or the friendship or love he feels for

[32] Quoted in Peter Coveney's "Introduction" to Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 31.
[33] In this I follow Hannes Nykänen, who discusses the example of Huck and Jim in *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, pp. 371–9.

Jim, or perhaps one should rather simply say that his openness to Jim can be spoken of in terms of any of these words. These words, *heart, conscience, love, openness, friendship*, are not exactly synonymous, but in this context, and used in the way I now use them, they all point to the same reality. The purpose of this thesis is, one might say, to indicate the nature of the reality which these words, used in the way I use them, refer to – and this can of course only be indicated by actually *using* them in this way.[34]

The point is that the meaning of any one of these words will be changed by its connexion with the others. Thus, bringing love and conscience together in the intimate way I propose will exclude as senseless a number of conceptions of both love *and* conscience which might otherwise appear attractive. Kierkegaard said, rightly I think, that Christianity "has transformed everything, changed the whole of love ... by making all love a matter of conscience".[35] If one brings conscience into love itself it is, as Kierkegaard notes, no longer possible to think of love in worldly or naturalistic terms (and these two characterisations are not at all opposed, but rather complementary or even synonymous), as a matter of "impulse" or "inclination", perhaps "with one or another discriminating alloy of duty, natural relationship, right, *etc*".[36] Showing the insufficiency of naturalistic views of love is a central concern of this thesis.

If love is a matter of conscience, conscience is equally a matter of love. Kierkegaard seems not quite to have appreciated the force of this point, however. For him, conscience is "the relationship between the individual and God, the God-relationship", and each person "belongs first and foremost to God" even in their love for another human being.[37] This means, Kierkegaard says, that conscience does *not*, for instance, ask a married man "whether he really loves his wife"; it may indeed be "hoped" that he does, but *conscience* asks him only whether he is "conscious of himself in his inmost relationship to himself", which is his "responsibility" not before other human beings, but "as a single one before God [*som Enkelt for Gud*]".[38]

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[34] To forestall a certain kind of instinctive quasi-Wittgensteinian criticism of almost any talk of *reality* in philosophy as "metaphysical" in a bad sense, I should perhaps say that I do not picture this reality as anything like the reality of tables and chairs, only in "some other dimension". "Reality" will mean different things depending on the reality of *what* one is talking about, and the sense it has can only be indicated by talking of the reality in question.

[35] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*. Translated by Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 147.

[36] Ibid., p. 144.

[37] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 143.

[38] Kierkegaard, "Tale ved Anledning af et Skriftemaal" (1847), in *Samlede værker. Bind 11.* 5. udgave (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), p. 119.

Kierkegaard is of course right to point to the self-deception involved in living "for" or "before" others in such a way that one flees from one's personal responsibility. However, he apparently does not consider the possibility that loving others – and not in the sense of performing "deeds of love", but in the sense of opening oneself to others in love – could be the very "site" of the existential task which conscience calls us to, of discovering who we are. The aim of this entire thesis is to show that this is indeed the case, and that if one removes love between human beings from the picture, talk of an existential task, or indeed of a God-relationship, becomes an empty abstraction, no matter how solemnly or feverishly it may be insisted on.[39]

This is also the very heart of the teaching of Jesus, as I understand it. This interpretation is shared by at least some theologians. Thus Friedrich Gogarten says that the radical import of Jesus' teaching that love, rather than any ritual observances, is the essence of religion, is that "men's relation to one another" becomes "the one and only point" at which our relation to God is "decided".[40] This insight is reduced to an absurdity if one thinks of what takes place between us and our neighbour as merely some kind of testing ground for our relationship to God, lacking in intrinsic importance, as though God *could* have let our eternal fate be decided by our relation to art or to housekeeping, for instance, but just happened, quite arbitrarily, to decree that the decisive thing should be whether we love our neighbour. It seems clear that the Biblical thought must rather be, as Løgstrup says, that what happens in the relationship between me

[39] It seems to me that, all his passionate rhetoric notwithstanding, Kierkegaard cannot in the final analysis avoid such empty abstraction, for his avoidance of love, which is underlined rather than mitigated by his discourses on the "*deeds* of love", creates a kind of void in the midddle of his account of conscience, selfhood and the God-relationship. Heidegger's interpretation of conscience – contained in *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993 [1927]), §§ 54–60 – is, like much else in Heidegger, formally rather Kierkegaardian, although it omits any mention of God. It also suffers from the same abstraction, it seems to me. Heidegger, like Kierkegaard – and, as we saw above, Kant – explicitly, and to my mind rightly, assigns to the experience of conscience the role of being a concrete indication in everyday life of the most fundamental existential possibilities of human being (ibid., p. 268), but he says explicitly that the "authenticity" conscience calls us to is to be understood *amorally*. According to Heidegger, conscience calls the individual to an authentic relationship with "Being" and/or "Nothingness"; he thinks that conscience has to do with acknowledging one's fundamental "guilt", but he understands this in a sense which is, he says, deliberately so far "formalised" that the "vulgar guilt-phenomena" having to do with one's "being-with-others" simply "drop out" of the picture (ibid., p. 283).

[40] Gogarten, *Die Verkündigung Jesu Christi.* 2. Auflage (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1965 [1948]), p. 115.

and my neighbour really is of "decisive importance" in itself – that is, both for me, my neighbour *and* God.[41]

If it has been far from a matter of course even in Christian theology to actually place love and the neighbour at the centre of accounts of conscience, this has been even rarer in philosophy. Although it may be appreciated that conscience is a radically personal matter in the sense that it is always "I", an individual human being, who am addressed by *my* conscience, conscience is normally not thought to have anything in particular to do with my relationship to an individual "you". On the contrary, whereas philosophers speak of a conscientious person being true to their ideals or principles, or making sacrifices for truth or justice, one gets the impression that they consider a mere individual human being of flesh and blood to be somehow too trivial an "object" of the conscientious person's concern.

Raimond Gaita is one of the few philosophers to have noticed the strangeness of this state of affairs. He is also one of the few philosophers to have written on remorse, which, he aptly says, is "an awakened sense of the reality of another",[42] it is "the recognition of the reality of another through the shock of wronging them just as grief is the recognition of the reality of another through the shock of losing them".[43] Thus a remorseful murderer is, Gaita says, "*haunted* by their victim",[44] and "any account of the seriousness of murder which does not give prominence to [this fact] will be inadequate to the way in which remorse is an awakening to the *terribleness* of what was done".[45] Most theorising in ethics *is* inadequate in precisely this way, however. The theorisers may talk of principles or ideals or human dignity; in fact they will, as Gaita notes,

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[41] Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, p. 5. – In religious pharisaism, however, we witness precisely the absurd move of a person doing "good" deeds "for her neighbour" because she imagines that this will make her "deserving" of God's grace or, in a less *obviously* corrupt mode, simply because God, whom she loves, bids her to do so. That even this latter way of viewing the love commandment *is* corrupt, even though it may not be mercenary, is evident, as Gogarten notes, from the "simple fact" that what is commanded is *love* of neighbour, rather than mere benevolence, for instance, and if I help you merely because I was told to do so by someone else I love, even if this other be God himself, I am evidently not loving *you* (*Die Verkündigung Jesu Christi*, p. 110).

[42] Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (Houndmills & London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 50.

[43] Gaita, "Ethical Individuality", in Gaita (ed.), *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 127.

[44] *Good and Evil*, p. 51, emphasis added.

[45] "Ethical Individuality", p. 126, emphasis added.

> say almost anything so long as [the victim] drops out and becomes merely an instance of something else that carries the moral weight. They will say that it cannot be him, John Smith, because would it not be exactly the same if it were someone else in the same circumstances?[46]

Gaita of course agrees that it would be, that the haunting presence of the victim in his individuality has nothing to do with any *preferential* attachment to him on the part of the murderer. The victim might be someone the murderer loathed, and generally speaking murderers do not, of course, tend to pick their victims among those they are very fond of. The point is, as Gaita notes, that even if the victim "might have been anyone", in his remorse the murderer is "not haunted by everyman ... he is haunted by the particular human being he murdered".[47] The idea that what the remorseful murderer feels could be explained by his sense of having violated his principles or ideals is, when one thinks of it, simply ludicrous. Or how does this sound: "Jones woke up in a cold sweat, trembling at the memory of his having violated the principle that one shall not kill. *Who* it was he had killed he had long since forgotten, but the memory of his violation of principle was as painfully fresh in his mind as ever"?

It is obviously not a curious special feature of murder, as opposed to other kinds of evil or wrong-doing, that the remorseful awakening to the moral significance of what one has done is in this way tied to an awakening to one's *victim* or victims. Thus, the remorseful liar thinks of the person he lied to. What would it mean to be very troubled about having told a lie, although one did not care at all about the person one lied to? Is the idea that it would even be possible not to care at all about others not perhaps confused; is it not rather that one might be tempted to try to *ignore* them in different ways?

Someone might be *ashamed* of a lie because of the unfavourable light it presented them in: perhaps they now appear as untrustworthy, or they lied out of cowardice. This attitude is morally speaking corrupt, but it is very important for understanding the actual character of our moral life. In this attitude we do not have goodness but rather the spurious "goodness" of Pharisaism, which is well characterised by Rodger Beehler as "a concern always to do what it is right to do, because one wishes to be someone who does right", but where "the importance one attaches to one's right actions is, so to speak, that one has done them", so that even if one does "attach importance to doing what it is right to

[46] Ibid., p. 127.
[47] Ibid.

do", one is nonetheless "indifferent to human suffering or happiness and so to ... what *is* done."[48]

Imagine a man who on his way to work hurries past a crying girl evidently in need of some help and consolation. He might react Pharisaically and come to feel ashamed of not helping the girl. That would mean, as Beehler notes, that his thoughts do not reach out to the *girl* in her unhappiness, but to "that *incident*" – "and then only, as it were, to return to himself".[49] He might well wish he could go back now and help the girl, but he would not do so "on the child's account, to restore her to untroubledness, but to perfect his record of uprightness".[50] One can also imagine that he came to *resent* the child because she was the occasion of his moral failure, cursing her for being in *his* way that morning: why could she not have stood on some other street, so that he would not have been the one to act so squalidly? What troubles him is not that the child got no help, but that *he* did not give it to her. He might even hope that *no one* helped the child, because if someone else did help it would put his not helping her in an even worse light.

The Pharisee might well say that he has an uneasy conscience about leaving the girl unhelped – as he might also have stopped to help her because his conscience would not allow him to just pass her by. This "conscience" is quite devoid of love, however, and for that reason I would call it a *false* conscience. The man in our example might also have reacted quite differently, of course. He might have felt sorry for leaving the girl all alone, and remorseful in thinking about how callously he treated her. That is a reaction of conscience in love, and there is therefore goodness in it, whereas there was only callousness in the Pharisee's shame.

It seems to me that love is necessarily circumscribed, and an element of callousness is introduced, wherever moral principles or ideals, or a concern with the *form* of one's actions, come to play a role in one's reactions. Although their criticism as such is correct, it is disingenuous for moralists of principle to complain that consequentialism demands that individuals be sacrificed for the greater happiness of the greater number, for having moral principles, *regardless of their content*, means precisely that one is prepared to sacrifice people for them, if need be – "oneself not excluded", as Nietzsche would add.[51] A

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[48] Rodger Beehler, *Moral Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 30.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 102.

Christian theologian puts it quite frankly; "we must be willing, if we are to live morally in this life, to let others suffer for our principles".[52] And a Kantian explains, apparently not noticing the simultaneously inhuman and bizarre implications of what he is saying, that what we mean when we say that a man is "a conscientious and good man" is that he lives by the maxim: "I will do my duty, whatever my duty may be".[53] The inhumanity is that one declares oneself prepared to do one's duty *whatever* the costs in human terms; the bizarre thing is that one apparently has no idea *what* one's duty may turn out to be, even as one declares that one will nevertheless do "it". This is a military conception of duty – "I will fight for my country as a loyal soldier, wherever it sends me to fight" – and morality is here seen as some sort of commander ordering one about wherever *it* pleases. That, it seems to me, is a false semblance of the way conscience calls us to love our neighbour regardless of whether we feel particularly eager to do so or not.

There is a callousness built into moralities which insist on a certain *form* of action, too – ranging from the pettiest bureaucrat's insistence that the rules and regulations of his code must be followed, to Kant's sublime-sounding insistence that the categorical imperative's formal demand must be fulfilled. The formalist insists that things should be done *his* way, regardless of whether a crying child will be left alone because of it. The formalist will object that it is not *his* way, but the "right" or "proper" way he insists on, but the fact is that *he* is the one insisting on it, *he* is the one who has decided that what is important here are formalities, rather than the crying child.

No doubt Kantians and others will indignantly protest that the *right* moral principles will forbid callousness to children, not call for it. That may be so, but my complaint is that they make their formal principles the criterion of rightness, and that that is *in itself* an expression of callousness. It is because, or insofar as, the principles forbid it, that one must not leave a crying child unhelped, not because of any love one would feel for the child. Thus, Kant says, "I ought to try to further the happiness of others, *not as if its existence were of any consequence to me* ... but simply because a maxim that excludes this [is not fit to become] universal law".[54]

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[52] Stanley Hauerwas, "Love's not all you need", in Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue. Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1974), p. 121.
[53] H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative. A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1963 [1947]), p. 62.
[54] Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 90/4:441, emphasis added. – According to Kant, to react with immediate, felt *love* to another human being, without one's reaction being mediated by a sense of

My claim is that it is impossible to make sense of the experience of conscience – to make anything more than a severely limited and morally speaking perverted sense of it – without connecting conscience and love. It will no doubt be objected to this claim that although love and conscience may indeed be closely linked in our dealings with people we actually *love*, our friends and others close to us – as they were linked in Huck's thoughts of Jim – talk of love gets no purchase on a great many cases where conscience makes itself felt.

Suppose, for instance, that you are sitting on a train; a slightly drunk woman gets on the train, and it transpires that she has no money to pay for the fare, so the guard asks her to get off the train. You see what is happening, but you do not intervene; later, you feel a bad conscience about it, thinking you should really have offered to pay for her ticket. Now why should we suppose, someone might ask, that in such a case there was anything more "going on" between you and the woman than the fact that you saw she could have used a helping hand, and you declined to help her, which is what you now feel bad about? Would it not be positively misleading to start talking about love here?[55]

Undoubtedly it would, if one had in mind something like "falling in love" or feeling sexually attracted to the woman, for instance. And in general, if one thinks of love as what I have been saying that love and friendship are *not* – a preferential attachment, an inclination or attraction, a very particular attitude towards another person – then it is quite true that love is not at stake in the encounter with the woman on the train, or in any other encounter seen in the light of conscience. But love need not mean that.

It should also be clear that the question is not whether there is or needs to be a *prior* relationship – one called "love" – to the person one's conscience speaks to one about, for it is obvious that conscience can speak to one about a person one does not know, who is a stranger to one. One need not even have met a person to be moved by their fate and feel in conscience bound to intervene in some way with regard to them. Simply being told that *someone* has been badly hurt down the road may turn helping that unseen person into one's business – whether one *does* in fact help is another matter, of course. In short:

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the requirements of the moral law, is to act immorally or, at best, amorally, because only an *autonomous* will – a will, that is, which "is a law to itself", making its own *formal consistency*, rather than "any property of the [concrete] objects of volition" the criterion of its volitions – is moral (ibid., p. 89/4:440).

[55] This example was proposed to me by Lars Hertzberg, as a challenge to my views. I try to meet the challenge in the text.

there need be no *prior* relationship of any particular kind to the person one's conscience speaks to one about, the question is only what one feels towards and how one relates to the other *in* thus feeling addressed by conscience on her behalf.

If it is so certain that we should not speak of love here, then how should we characterise the way the woman appeared to you in your bad conscience? At any rate it is obvious that conscience does not show her to you in the light in which you perhaps initially saw her: as an irritating drunk creating an embarrassing scene, someone you were, to tell the truth, rather relieved to see thrown off the train. In fact, your bad conscience is precisely about your having looked at her in that, or some similarly callous way. It does *not* attach directly to your act or rather omission of not paying for the ticket. Rather, what is at stake is your whole way of relating to the woman, which your failure to pay for the ticket only crystallises. This comes out in the fact that even if you had paid for the woman's ticket you might still have had a bad conscience for the spirit in which you paid for it – it might have been just a way for you to get an irritating drunk out of the way and off your mind, for instance.

Suppose you had paid for the woman's ticket. She might just have thanked you and that would have been the end of it. But suppose she wanted to sit down and talk to you. What then? If you feel irritated or embarrassed by this, if you feel that you did what could be required of you, and now you want to be left in peace, this is obviously something you could later come to feel a bad conscience about, too, just as you did for failing to pay for the ticket in the original example. The point is that one cannot put any limits in principle on what the encounter with someone may come to involve, how it may come to implicate one in their life. In the terms of the previous chapter: "friend" and "stranger" do not name two categories of people, but the poles between which our encounters and dealings with each other move. Openness and rejection, love and callousness are there, in play, all the time, in various ways: they cannot be isolated only to particular actions or situations or relationships.

Your bad conscience does not, then, tell you that you should have paid for the woman's ticket, it tells you that *you should have been there for her and with her in a way in which you were not*. As Karl Barth says, in helping someone

> everything depends, not on how much time or attention I give ... but on whether, even if only for a moment, even if only in an unassuming and incidental turning to him ... I am really there for this person /.../ He needs *me*,

> not my deeds, though he needs these too, but before and in all my deeds he needs *me*.[56]

Therefore it quite obviously will not do in moral terms to say, with C. S. Lewis, that "the rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbour; act as if you did".[57] The untenability of this view comes out in Lewis' very way of putting the point: he tells us to act *as if* we loved our neighbour, thus making a person who actually *loves*, who *feels* love, the moral measure. And what else could he do? For Lewis of course knows, although he pretends to have forgotten it here, that the mere loveless doing of "good works" has nothing to do with goodness, and can be a truly *evil* thing, as anyone will know who has experienced for instance the poisoned atmosphere in a home governed by a resentful mother who has, as she lets everyone know, sacrificed everything for her family. Her family would certainly be happier if she had not. There is no use telling *her* not to bother whether she loves her family but to act "as if she did", for that *is* what she has been doing all these years, and a joyless hell is where they all ended up.

To put the point more formally: the proposed severing of good action from good feeling, and in particular from *love* as something *felt*, is impossible because the very identity and significance, moral and otherwise, of our actions is a function – not only, but essentially – of the feelings that motivated and were expressed in them, or by the apparent lack of feeling manifested in them.

It is of course clear that whether something is right or wrong, good or evil, does not depend on what someone *happens* to feel about it. "I just didn't feel like it" is morally speaking no answer at all to the question why one neglected to help someone who needed help, for instance – and if someone gives as her reason for helping that she *did* feel like helping, this is just as bad, for it implies that she might not have helped if she had not felt like it. Kant is therefore quite right that helpfulness, kindness, pity and other reactions and dispositions which seem in some sense good or at least positive, have morally speaking nothing to do with goodness *insofar as* they are understood to be some kind of natural inclinations which people may at various times have to a greater or smaller degree, or lack altogether.

This means that if love is, as I claim, central to moral responses, if the morally good response simply *is* the loving response, then love cannot be

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[56] Barth, *Ethics*, p. 426 f.
[57] Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 108.

thought of as an inclination that may or may not be there, nor as some feeling that we would have to try to "produce" in ourselves, but must rather be thought of in the way I have indicated all through this thesis, as in some sense *always there*, the task we are called upon in conscience being *not to reject this love but to open ourselves to it in opening ourselves to others*.[58]

So what *do* you feel for the woman on the train? Initially, you might have felt irritation, but what do you feel now that you have a bad conscience about your earlier irritated, loveless way of looking at her? It will not do to say that you feel nothing in particular, you only feel sorry for not having paid for her ticket. For remember, the issue is not the *ticket*, but your way of relating to *her*. If conscience lets you feel the callousness of your earlier way of looking at her, must it not do so by showing her to you in another, contrasting light? I do not mean that it would show her as "actually a very nice lady, when you get to know her" or some such thing. That would just mean that you had made a mistake in judging her character, and so would not put your judgmental attitude as such into question, but rather confirm it, the implication of the revision of your judgment being that *if* she had been the irritating drunk you mistakenly took her to be, you would have been right to feel glad she was off the train. Your bad conscience does not tell you that your *particular* judgment regarding her was wrong, however, but rather that your judgmental attitude was self-centred and callous.

Conscience does not show one's neighbour from any *particular* point of view, in the way all attitudes by definition do. But as I tried to show in discussing openness in Chapter One, that in itself is a very definite "mode" of relating to others, insofar as it contrasts with all the various attitudes one might have taken to them. What one is reminded of in one's bad conscience is precisely the possibility of openness, and it shows up all one's attitudes as forms of closing oneself to the other.

[58] On this point, cf. Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, pp. 146, 165, 157 (footnote) and passim.

– *Principles and sentimentalism* –

Connecting conscience with love as I do, will probably be looked upon as *sentimental* by those who think that conscientiousness is about being principled and steadfast. Mark Twain, for his part, said of Huck that he was "ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a heart as ever any boy had ... He was the only really independent person – boy or man – in the community".[59] If it sounds strange to have good-heartedness and independence thus connected, that is precisely because we tend to have a sentimental picture of good-heartedness as a soft and teary kind of kindness which finds it impossible to be hard on anyone including, and starting with, oneself, while we think of independence as a combination of clear thinking and a tough will keeping the heart on a tight leash. This contrast certainly captures a real psychological difference between characters or personality-types, but it seems to me that if one imagines a truly good-hearted person one has indeed imagined someone who is not sentimental at all and who is also truly independent.

In the context of a slave-owning society, the *sentimental* kind of good-heartedness might lead the good-hearted to *pity* slaves, especially slaves living under particularly hard conditions, suffering under particularly harsh masters. The sentimentally good-hearted may be kind to slaves, and even to become friends of sorts with them – but only in a very limited sense, for their sentimentalism *consists* precisely in the fact that they will not allow their heart's goodness to bring them into real conflict with their society, will not allow it to jeopardise their own standing within it – in this case they will not allow themselves to think of slavery as an injustice, to really feel the terribleness of it. Their warm feelings for the slaves are *lukewarm* because they will not allow it to become *burning*, as it would if there was a real sense of the injustice perpetrated by their society. But burning feelings will set fire to the whole house, and that is precisely what the sentimentalists fear.

The sentimentalists try to protect themselves from what their heart tells them precisely by *denying that the heart has anything to do with conscience*, by presenting compassion and the other faces of love as a matter of the private,

[59] Quoted in Peter Coveney, "Introduction", p. 31. – Twain is actually describing a real person, a certain Tom Blankenship, son of the village drunk, who served as his model for Huck's character; "In *Huckleberry Finn* I have drawn Tom Blankenship exactly as he was" (ibid.).

psychological inclinations of their particular kind of people, "emotional" and "soft". One can very well decide to suppress merely psychological reactions if one thinks it advisable, for unlike the testimony of conscience or the heart they carry no authority. Thus one finds sentimentalists doing terrible things – punishing misbehaved slaves cruelly, perhaps – while claiming to suffer terribly from "having" to do them. Although the *obviously* disingenuous cases are *legio*, the sentimentalists may quite sincerely suffer from their own actions. This does not speak in their favour, however, for the self-deception at the root of their attitude is precisely that they have twisted the suffering of a bad conscience which treating others callously calls forth in them, as in any human being, into their private suffering. They then proceed stoically to "bear" *their* suffering, even asking to be pitied for it, instead of stopping what they do, ending the suffering of *the other*. That would end *their own* suffering of conscience, too, but it would do so only at the price of facing the *question* conscience awakens, including, centrally, the question of their relationship to their society – and that is what they want to deny at all costs.

It is not, then, as though there was nothing wrong with the sentimentalists' good-heartedness, it is just that their sense of justice is not as sharp as it should be. On the contrary, the fact that they are not outraged by how unjustly the slaves they know are treated *means* that their hearts are *not* good, or rather, that they are too fainthearted to allow the goodness that is somehow in their hearts, as it is somehow in everybody's, to express itself. Instead they try, like we mostly do to some extent and in some way, to suppress the goodness and hide from it behind their pity and their kindness. By contrast, someone who is truly good-hearted, as Huck showed himself to be in his way of relating to Jim, will feel in his heart that all his pity and kindness and "friendship" will be a fraud if he accepts that his friend's freedom be taken from him. As it happens, such false pity was what originally tempted Huck to start writing the letter denouncing Jim to his owner; Jim had been captured by a plantation-owner, and Huck initially said to himself that "it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was, as long as he'd *got* to be a slave".[60] Huck quickly realised, however, that this was just a lie he came up with in order to find a justification for doing the socially demanded thing at last.

In light of the above, there is nothing paradoxical in the saying of Jesus that in bringing the gospel of love he came not with peace but with a sundering

[60] Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 281.

sword. As Chesterton remarks, this "rings entirely true even considered as what it obviously is; the statement that any man who preaches real love is bound to beget hate ... sham love ends in compromise and common philosophy; but real love has always ended in bloodshed".[61] When love is thought of, as it often is, in naturalistic terms, as a blind passion binding people together with an elemental force that can lead to evil as easily as to good, and therefore needs to be regulated by morality or reason, it will seem that love itself *is* a kind of violence, a kind of grasping possessiveness, with all that this entails of jealousy, for instance. Jesus obviously did not understand love in that way, however; rather, he connected it, as I also do, with conscience and goodness of heart.

If we think of love in this sense, there is nothing violent at all in love itself; the dark and violent phenomena surrounding love do not appear as aspects of *it*, but rather as the kind of destruction wrought by other forces in our life – inner and outer, social and individual – *provoked* and *frightened* by love. Love itself is a kind of creative light, life-giving as the sunlight is, but this light makes the darkness and destruction, in one word: the lovelessness in us show itself as what it is – both in the sense that only love makes us feel how terrible lovelessness is, and in the sense that love provokes the destructive forces in us into showing themselves in all their destructiveness.

If to imagine a truly good-hearted person – a person, that is, who loves wholeheartedly – *is* to imagine a truly independent one, conversely, to imagine an independence, or for that matter a sense of justice, lacking all good-heartedness, amounts to imagining not independence but *indifference* to others, inhumanity. Someone might of course have a strong sense of the injustice of the slaves' situation, and perhaps do much to help them out of it, although they were not particularly good-hearted at all, did not, that is, care personally about any slave, did not love any slave, as Huck loved Jim – and love always means love of particular human beings; there is no such thing as loving people in general, although there *is* such a thing as loving *each and every one in particular*. But to the degree that the sense of justice was thus severed from love, it would I think raise a question about *what* that sense of justice really involved, what it sprung from and what it aimed at. Was the whole thing, perhaps, not so much about helping slaves, but more about rebelling against one's society, or presenting oneself as a selfless, righteous person, or getting political power, or some other private motive?

[61] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: John Lane, 1909), p. 244.

It might be objected that while some such ulterior motivation *might* be present, surely the motive might simply be a thirst for justice? What would it mean, however, to care very much about justice, while not caring about the people to whom one thinks justice should be done? But surely, it might be said, there *are* situations in which one is faced with a moral demand to do or refuse something *purely on principle*; where what is at stake is not, or at least not directly, what one's action means for individual people, or the consequences it has for them.

Thus, a teacher may feel she is morally obliged to disqualify a student in an important exam, even though she has every reason to wish that the student could be passed; to add drama to the example, we might imagine that she knows that the student, who has a young family to support, will not get the job he badly needs if he is not passed. Now it might be said that cases like these, which are surely common enough, show that authoritative moral considerations, far from issuing from what I call "the concrete encounter with the other person", may *prevent* one from doing what one would do if one had only the concrete other and her personal well-being in mind.[62]

However, we should note here is that the moral urgency of the situation, the concern the teacher in the example may feel, comes precisely from her perception of the likely consequences to the student of not passing the exam. It is only insofar as she cares about *him* that the situation raises a moral question at all. If she did not care about him she would simply disqualify him as a matter of course. In this sense, the example tends to prove my point rather than disproving it. The point is that following the rules or acting on principle becomes a moral issue only when *individuals* seem to be in one way or another hurt, treated callously or unjustly, by one's going by the book. If we have a case in which rules or principles conflict, but without this conflict in any way involving any suffering of, or injustice towards, individual persons, then the situation presents no moral problems at all; it is rather like the case where the rules or a parlour game make no provisions for a situation which arises in the course of playing, and we will simply have to decide on an *ad hoc* rule if we are to carry on with the game.

It might be objected that it is surely a moral issue what kind of rules or principle an institution – a university, for instance – should adopt in the first place. Moral questions of justice and fairness are there from the beginning, on a

[62] A similar example, and objection, was raised by Lars Hertzberg in response to my views.

quite general level. Naturally, I do not deny this, but it seems to me that discussions about what kind of rules to adopt, or whether the rules in place are acceptable, are tacitly informed by – and insofar as they are moral in character, indeed provoked by – a sense of the significance to the *individuals* concerned of the application of the rules, generally or in particular circumstances.

Thus the exam requirements raise a moral issue insofar as they seem unfairly to favour students with a particular socio-cultural or educational background, and lecture-schedules will have to be rearranged if they unfairly prevent some students from attending courses they need to take. Even if the scheme seems well-planned on the whole, the fact that some students get into trouble because of it raises a moral demand that it be reworked. Insofar as we are dealing with mere inconveniences, the demand to change the situation is defeasible; it may be that some students will simply have to accept the inconvenience because trying to do something about it seems unworkable in practice. The demand that their being inconvenienced be *taken into account* by those planning the schedules, rather than treated as irrelevant or primarily as an inconvenience for the *planners*, is not defeasible, however.[63]

What the indefeasible demand both rests on and expresses is, I would say, a concern for and openness to *each person* affected by the decisions and arrangements one makes. Morally speaking it is not enough to aim, in the manner envisioned by utilitarians and consequentialists, for "the best result over-all", however defined, for *each* individual person affected by the arrangements made is to be taken into account on their own terms, as far as that is possible, and sometimes this may mean that an otherwise highly desirable arrangement will simply have to be abandoned because it would, given the circumstances, have required acting in a morally unthinkable way towards a minority or even towards a single person.

It might be objected that even if all I have said is true, I am dodging the real issue. Since I have claimed that moral demands issue from the concrete encounter with the other person, the burden is on me to explain where the moral demand that one nonetheless act on principle comes from in cases such as the first example, where doing so – in this case failing the student – is not for the good of the other. Admittedly, if the good of the other person was not in some way threatened there would be no moral urgency in the situation at all, but

[63] This important distinction has sometimes been formulated by saying that what is morally demanded in making up institutional rules is *equality of consideration*, but not necessarily *equality of treatment*.

surely I must for my part admit that there would be no urgency if the good of the other was the *sole* concern, either. Then the teacher in our example would simply let the student pass, even though his exam did not really measure up to standard. Therefore, it might be said, moral principles must be taken into account as contributing to the moral urgency of at least some situations; the concrete encounter with the other person cannot carry all the moral weight.

Is this so obvious? First of all, I am not claiming that openness to the other is an exclusive affair of two people, in which concern with the other's wishes or needs would somehow override consideration of others with their needs; as I showed in Chapter Three, openness is the very antithesis of favouritism and callousness to "outsiders". If the teacher cares for the student in a way free of favouritism, it means that she cares for her other students also, and for the others who might apply for the same job as her student, and so she cannot ignore the injustice of letting her student pass when others who did no worse are disqualified, while those who actually did better get no credit for it. Again, my point is that this concern with justice need not be, and in the good case is not, a concern with "moral principles" as opposed to a concern for the people affected, but is rather an essential aspect of one's very concern for, or openness to, these people, some of whom one knows personally, others not.

The same, I would say, applies to a concern with *institutions* more generally, for instance the concern a teacher should feel to uphold academic standards. Such concern is not to be construed as a concern somehow competing with openness to the students as individual human beings. It is rather a concern with the meaningfulness of the institutional activity they all share in, in this case the academic life. If that activity loses its point; if, that is, the people engaged in it lose their grasp of its point, it is obviously not only bad for the institution, but bad for the individuals in it, insofar as they are involved in an activity which becomes – which by their actions they make – increasingly pointless. And in academic life upholding the standard at exams is, although not an end in itself, an important part of upholding the meaningfulness of the activity.

I am not trying surreptitiously to equate being a good, dedicated teacher with being a good human being. It is certainly quite possible to be in many ways a very good teacher and yet be, for instance, cruel and mean and unfair to some students, perhaps those who do not show enough talent, or who have some characteristic which one happens personally to dislike very much – and I added the qualification "in many ways" because obviously one will not be a

good teacher to those particular categories of students. What I am saying is only that there is no necessary tension between being a good teacher concerned with upholding academic standards, and being open to one's students, *all* of them, as human beings. This will not lessen the importance in one's eyes of one's calling as a teacher; if anything, it will make it more important, insofar as being open to others means that how they fare and how one acts in regard to them becomes as important as it can ever be. But it will mean, among other things, that one could never think of using that calling, for instance the duty to uphold standards, as a justification for treating someone callously, as teachers are in fact very often tempted to do.

I do not deny that even a teacher who is as open as she can be, may face situations in which she wonders what to do, where she feels that the rules force her to make unfortunate decisions, where formalities and broadly speaking "political" considerations – considerations about how certain decisions are likely to be interpreted and reacted to by others, or likely to affect long-term institutional trends and so on – affect the possibilities of action in regrettable ways. I will discuss cases of apparent moral dilemma below; here I only note that *where, and in what terms,* one sees the difficulties, and so how one may deal with them, depends on how open or closed one is to the various people involved in the situation one faces.

– Goodness, guilt, and bad conscience –

Conscience seems essentially to mean *bad* conscience; it makes itself felt most dramatically in the uneasiness, suffering or outright torment which will not let us forget the bad things we have on our conscience. Here, conscience appears as the dreadful "accuser within". Certainly, there is such a thing as having a "clear" conscience with regard to some matter or other, as when someone accuses one of having done something one did not do. But even here, it is only because an *accusation* has already been aired that we speak of conscience at all. That the accusation turned out to be false merely means that conscience does *not* pronounce one guilty of any wrong-doing in this particular case, it does not mean that it makes one feel positively good. There is no such thing as a *good* conscience other than in the sense of the evil of smugness, of Pharisaical

conceit.[64] We do also speak of conscience not "accusing" or "reproaching" us for things already done but rather "warning" us not to do, or "telling" us to do, certain things. Conscience does not lose its terrifying aspect even here, however. It does not appear as a friendly guide suggesting the most advisable thing to do, but rather as a stern commander telling us what we *must* do.

If all this is true, the idea of connecting conscience with love in the way I propose to do might appear the height of absurdity. For if it is true, as I argued in Chapter Two, that the openness of love and friendship reveals that goodness does not lie in *limiting* anything, in heeding any "moral must", but rather in the free movement, driven by a *desire* for the other, of opening oneself ever more to her; if it is true that one cannot be forced to love, nor experience love as a joyless thing, no matter how much pain and suffering it may involve; if it is true, in short, that in love there is, as Martin Luther says, "keyn gesetz, keyn recht, keyn zwang, keyn nodt, ssondern eyttel freyheyt und gunst" – no law, no right, no force, no necessity, but only freedom and grace[65] – then how could conscience, which seems to do nothing *but* limit and force us and deny us joy, have anything to do with love, or with friendship?

How indeed, *if* conscience has the character it appears to have in the hasty sketch above. Perhaps we should look more carefully into the experience of conscience, however; perhaps the picture of conscience as accuser or stern commander is not quite true. Not that I would want to *soften* the picture and claim that conscience somehow shows us a more *agreeable* countenance, that it is not as nasty as it has made out to be. That is not the point. The question is rather: from what perspective, from *whose* perspective, does conscience appear in this terrible aspect? Furthermore: whence comes the idea that *love* could not appear terrible indeed – *if* one wants to flee and deny it?

I think we need to see the bad, "accusing" conscience not as opposed to, but rather as continuous with, other manifestations of love's desire for openness such as joy and grief, which have nothing particularly "moral" about them at all, and forgiveness, which means giving up all accusations. I would say that conscience is an aspect – a central one, obviously – of the openness between people which as such is something positive and good, which indeed is *goodness itself*. I agree with Hannes Nykänen that the "specificity of conscience, the fact

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[64] On this point, see Kuhn, *Begegnung mit dem Sein*, p. 13, and Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 562/6:440.

[65] Martin Luther, *Adventspostille* (1522) in *Luthers Werke, Weimar Ausgabe,* Band 10:I, 2, p. 178, quoted in Gustaf Wingren, *Luthers lära om kallelsen*. Andra upplagan (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups förlag, 1948), p. 56, footnote.

that we call something in us 'conscience,' is not to be understood as indicating that there is a particular faculty with a specific 'moral ability'"; rather, speaking of conscience "specifies ... how our soul involves us with our neighbour in a particular, and perhaps striking, connection".[66]

This may sound strange, but I think a moment's reflection will show that bad conscience would be unintelligible on its own, isolated from the other ways in which we are open to each other in joy and suffering. Our talk of the way a bad conscience torments us could not be understood apart from the way we speak about, say, our heart melting in front of someone or our being filled with joy by the sight of someone or crushed by the thought of their misery. I quoted Gaita as saying that remorse is "the recognition of the reality of another through the shock of wronging them just as grief is the recognition of the reality of another through the shock of losing them", and the connection between them is that it makes no sense to imagine someone who could recognise the reality of others in just one of these ways, but not in the other. It is impossible to picture someone who was quite unmoved by the spectacle of human joy and suffering around him, for whom it *was* just a "spectacle", yet felt remorse when he wronged someone. How could one feel very bad about having wronged someone if *otherwise* he meant nothing to one?

Conscience seen in its "accusing" or "reproaching" aspect, is connected with *guilt* and *shame*. I would say, however, that guilt and shame are reactions which do *not* issue from conscience. Rather, they are reactions that either have nothing to do with conscience or else reveal a refusal to open oneself fully to the testimony of conscience.

Suppose I am jealous of two friends of mine for their apparently being closer friends with each other than with me. I might be ashamed of my jealousy. This *means* that I think of the light in which my jealousy, and the deeds it may lead me to, show *me*, of *what I become* or the kind of person I reveal myself as being in feeling what I feel and doing what I do. My shame will prompt me to *hide* my jealousy; to try to conceal the smile that appears on my face when I see signs of discord between my friends, for instance. It may also, since shame is not only about what others see of one but about how one sees oneself, make me wish that I was not so jealous, that I could put myself above the whole business, perhaps even put the friends I am jealous of behind me and just walk away from it all.

[66] Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 330.

By contrast love, and so conscience, prompts me to *stop* hiding, to go to my friends rather than walking away from them; it does not make me ashamed of my involvement in a certain kind of embarrassing *business*, it makes me want to be open with those friends I have closed myself to – as they may have closed themselves to me. While one is ashamed because one has shown something one should not have shown, the only worry in love is that there are things one has *not* shown, that one has not dared to be quite open with others. If one is ashamed one cannot bear looking others in the eye, but love makes one want to look into their eyes and tell them one does not want to hide from them anymore.

If one has closed oneself to those one loves, and then opens oneself to them and to love again, this opening will take the form of bad conscience for having closed oneself to them. *This* bad conscience does not really feel *bad*, however, but is rather felt as the urgent and – because it marks one's coming out of the confinement of one's closedness – liberating desire to re-enter the openness of love with the other in asking and receiving forgiveness. Certainly this desire for forgiveness is painful, but the pain in it has the character of a *longing* for the other: it is painful in the same sort of way as it is painful to long for a loved one whom one has not seen for a long time, when one's heart aches to see her again. This does not mean that one has somehow managed, conveniently, to "forget" that in this case the separation was not due to a long trip abroad or some such thing, but to one's having closed oneself to the other, perhaps in some obviously unjust and callous way. How could one forget that, when all one wants is to ask the other for forgiveness? But the point is that the horror one feels at what one did does not overpower the loving desire one feels to be with the other. This is, however, precisely what happens when feelings of *guilt* become central in one's experience: they take on the aspect of invincible forces making forgiveness impossible.

According to a familiar way of contrasting shame and guilt, guilt is focused on what I have done to others, shame on what my doing it says about me; as Bernard Williams puts it, any morally charged action of mine "points in one direction to what has happened to others" (this would be what guilt does), "in another direction to what I am" (this would be shame).[67] As I see it, however, guilt is in fact closely related to shame. I should say that one feels *guilty*, or that one comes *no further than* feeling guilty, insofar as the desire to reunite in forgiveness with the person one wronged is drowned out by one's

[67] Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 92.

focusing in a self-centred way on what a bad person one showed oneself to be in wronging her. Thus, guilt would really be another name for being ashamed of oneself; and in fact we find that guilt just as much as shame makes one want to run away and hide. Although feeling guilty means that one feels one *has* something to ask forgiveness for, one's guilt actually *keeps one from* asking for forgiveness. The guilt one carries feels too heavy for one even to drop it, as it were. Conscience, by contrast, does not weigh me down with a guilt too heavy to bear; it calls me to let go of the weight of guilt in returning to the person I wronged, asking for her forgiveness. Conscience certainly lets me feel my badness, but only by showing me a goodness, an openness, that is there for me to enter, if I dare to follow the call of conscience to do so.

Nietzsche thought that bad conscience resulted from "an animal soul turning in upon itself", from human beings having been forced, under threat of violent social sanctions, to restrain the outward expression of their cruel animal instincts, and these instincts turning back on their owners: "Hostility, cruelty, the delight in persecution, raids, excitement, destruction all turned against their begetter";[68] "In its earliest phase, bad conscience is nothing other than the instinct of freedom forced to become latent, driven underground, and forced to vent its energy upon itself".[69] I claim instead that bad conscience in the sense of oppressive feelings of guilt and shame results when the desire for goodness, for openness, is not expressed but repressed, when one does not dare go unto the other but instead turns back in on oneself. What then happens cannot be understood according to the Nietzschean schema that "instincts that are not allowed free play turn inward",[70] however, for the desire for the other *cannot* turn inward. What happens is rather that we suffer in ourselves from anxiety over having rejected goodness.

My main point in this section could be expressed by saying that what is *bad* in a bad conscience attaches to one's recognition that what one did to the other, how one related to her, was bad; it does not attach to the other, *nor* essentially to oneself, as self and other are revealed in conscience. The point is, to express it in yet another way, that the *badness* of the bad conscience cannot be understood as the essential feature of conscience itself. It is rather the case that *we* feel bad, we suffer, when we reject the life in openness with others

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[68] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* in *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals.* Translated by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 218.
[69] Ibid., p. 220.
[70] Ibid., p. 217.

which is what conscience calls us to. Conscience is not some kind of imaginary hangman in my head: *it* does not punish me or *make* me suffer; rather, I make myself suffer in turning against it, against my neighbour. Plato likened the good to the sun, and the light of conscience could indeed be likened to the light of the sun: if I turn *against* the sun, stare into it, its light will blind me, will make me suffer terribly, but it is not that the sun "punishes" me: it just goes on shining with the same life-giving light that, if I did not insist on opposing it, would warm me and make me see.

"Bad conscience" is actually the name we give to the experience of going against something *in ourselves* – and not just anything in ourselves but something of a wholly different order than mere moods, wishes, expectations and so on. When we go against these, when we find ourselves in a situation where we have to force ourselves to do something we find irksome or disgusting or boring or off-putting in some other way, we experience the problem as lying *not* in ourselves, but in the world "outside", in *others*. In forcing myself to listen politely to "this bore who is going on for ever about his stupid views on some stupid issue which does not interest me in the least", I experience *him* as my problem; it would be solved if only he would go away. This means that although I have perhaps to force myself not to say anything rude to the man, in my thoughts and feelings I do not force *myself* at all; on the contrary I *indulge* myself; behind the facade of my politeness I give free reign to my dislike for the man in front of me.

Conscience makes itself felt in this situation in my starting to feel bad about the whole situation in quite another way than before. Whereas before, I as it were localised the badness in the man in front of me, I now come to feel the badness *in myself*, in my way of relating to him. When conscience makes itself felt, I become painfully aware that I have let my private projects and agendas fill my mind, blinding me to others. Conscience calls me, like friendship does, to be open to others; it calls me out of my closedness. In the light of this call my self-centredness in its various manifestations appears precisely *as* self-centredness, rather than as the apparently self-evident claim of my moods, wishes and needs to be taken as the measure of all things.

In this sense it might seem that conscience creates a distance or split between me and myself, tearing me out of my "natural" self. Putting it like that confuses things, however. It is true that conscience makes itself felt as a pain, a tearing asunder of my self, but conscience merely reminds me of what I have done, in my meanness or other ill will. *It* does not alienate me from myself, it

makes itself felt because *I* have alienated me from myself. Rather than tearing me out of my being, conscience calls me back to it, to my true being, which is – this is what conscience makes me feel – being with those I closed myself to, whether in obvious wrong-doing or in some apparently more innocent form of lovelessness, such as irritation or self-pity. That the innocence of these ways of closing oneself is indeed only apparent, is again something only conscience can make me feel.

In the pang of bad conscience, one realises that while one thought that in disregarding others one was in some sense "choosing oneself" – one took care of one's private interest rather than taking care of the person needing help, for instance – doing what one did actually meant that one closed oneself to oneself too. Conscience lets one feel that in hurting others one also hurt oneself – for one *suffers* from bad conscience, it is not that one has some kind of intellectual notion that there is something one in some sense "should not" have done. Again, this does not mean that conscience keeps one on the straight and narrow road through the threat of *punishment* if one goes against it ("In hurting your neighbour, you are only hurting yourself"). The point is rather that conscience bears testimony to the primordial belonging together of human beings.

Conscience puts our life under judgment, not in the sense of telling us that we are bad, but simply through holding out love as a *real possibility* for us. That reveals our *de facto* way of life as a *refusal* of love's goodness, and makes it impossible for us to go on living thus lovelessly without feeling guilty about it. But again, it is we who make ourselves guilty. Conscience does not tell me "Be guilty!", rather it invites me to love, and when I refuse this invitation, as I constantly do, I feel terrible. If, per impossible, conscience had not been there, I could neither have refused its invitation nor suffered from doing so, but as it is both the refusal and the suffering are my responses to conscience, my flight in the face of love.

My remarks here constitute a critique of the wide-spread idea according to which morality is essentially a matter of acknowledging *limits* to one's will, staying the hand raised to strike or extended to take what belongs to another – conscience being the authority which issues the command to stop. Levinas expresses this perspective strikingly when he says that the "first word" spoken to me by "the face of the other" – a word heard in conscience – is "Thou shalt not kill".[71] And it is certainly true that if I harbour ill will towards someone, if I

[71] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 89.

am tempted to be callous, selfish, mean, spiteful to her, her face will indeed announce itself in this prohibitive way, and the testimony of conscience will appear to me as a violent imposition, a dictatorial limit to my will, a "You must!" or "You must not!" What we should note, however, is that this is how conscience appears *only from the perspective of my ill will* – from the perspective, that is, of someone who will *not* open himself to what his conscience nonetheless shows him, however much he wants to deny it and push it out of his mind. In itself, conscience simply shows me my neighbour as someone to love, nothing more, nothing less.[72] That is precisely the light in which in my ill will I do not *want* to see the other, hence the violence of my resistance to conscience. Conscience does not limit or resist me, however, it is I who resist it.

The primordial "event" of the encounter with the other is not the temptation to kill and the command not to, but the invitation to love, to a life together. This invitation has *always already* been extended from one to the other; it gives the light in which all our particular actions and reactions in regard to each other get their meaning for good or ill, and therefore it cannot be thought of as originated by any particular action, at any particular time. "Live with me!" rather than "Thou shalt not kill!" is the first word spoken by the face. The "Thou shalt not kill!" makes itself heard only if and when the temptation to "kill" this openness of life with others has arisen, and in response to it. Even then, it is *not* the voice of conscience as such. Conscience does not tell me what I must or must not do, it simply shows me my neighbour as someone to love, calls me back to the openness that I have rejected.

One cannot really make sense of either good or evil from a perspective where goodness is defined negatively, as a matter of *abstaining* from doing evil, of *limiting* one's evil will. For what is the *evil* in killing unless one sees those killed as *good* – I do not mean "good" in any moralistic or preferential or sentimental sense, but in the sense of love, where one feels that it is good, good not in this or that particular respect or "over-all", but *simply* good, that the other is there for one to *love*. Furthermore, what it means to *love* one's neighbour, as conscience calls one to do, cannot be explained by giving a list of things one must *not do* – or by giving a *list of things* one must *do*, for that matter. Love is not about doing this or that in particular, just as the corresponding *temptation* is not to leave this or that thing undone, but to reject the other and to shut oneself

[72] Cf. Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 326 ff.

up in oneself; this was what my discussion of the example with the woman on the train was meant to bring out.

The badness of the bad conscience is, then, simply what it feels like to reject the goodness of life with the other as revealed in love. This is not to deny that a kind of "bad conscience" is part of love itself as we know it insofar as, Hannes Nykänen notes, "a concern for one's love is part of what it means to love" and this "anxious concern ... is itself a form of bad conscience".[73] The point here is obviously not, Nykänen adds, that "whenever one thinks about someone one loves, bad conscience must follow", but rather that *if* and *when* worry and bad conscience announce themselves in this connexion, "they do not enter the picture from 'without'", but are "aspects of love as much as is joy".[74]

A feeling that one's love is not what it should be, is indeed an essential aspect of love for us. This is clear from the fact, noted by Karl Rahner, that someone who refused "any willingness and any attempt to love ... more than he does now", could not be said to love at all, for as Rahner says, "love itself is of its very nature measureless", and it is "true love even for today only to the extent in which it reaches out to become more than it is today, only if it is really on the way and forgets what it is now, reaching out for what lies ahead of it".[75] That this insight is a form of *bad conscience* is clear from the fact that what keeps our love from being what it should be, keeps it from being fully *love*, is not external circumstances, but our own closedness; our fear and shame and small-mindedness. Furthermore, all of this is *known* to us not through conceptual or psychological investigations, or in any other way which could in principle be objectively, neutrally assessed, but through our bad conscience itself. We know that we do not love enough because we feel it in conscience to be true. "For who can honestly say that he loves ... his neighbour with all his heart?"[76]

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[73] Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 331.
[74] Ibid., p. 332.
[75] Rahner, "The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments" in Rahner, *Theological Investigations. Volume V: Later Writings*. Translated by Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 451 f.
[76] Ibid., p. 451. – Levinas, too, realises that however much I do for the other, at no point will I be able to say "Now I have done enough". However, because he sees goodness in terms of sacrifices made *for* the other, rather than in terms of *love's joy in the other*, he can only understand goodness as an *infinitisation* of sacrifice. Thus, he says that the more I sacrifice for the other, the more I see that I have really given nothing; "the giving ... shows itself to be a parsimony, the exposure a reserve, and holiness guilt" (*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981], p. 142), and so, by a strange inversion, my "debt increases in the measures that it is paid" (ibid., p. 12). I think that Levinas is here giving

This is a question of conscience, which means both that it is very real, for it concerns us personally in the most radical sense, *and* that the answer to it is given as soon at is it posed. For it is not as though someone *might* after careful scrutiny of himself honestly say that he *does* love others with all his heart. And yet this does not make the question of conscience superfluous, because the "point" of it is not to ascertain general facts, once again confirming that our love is weak indeed. The question is rather a *call* to us to love more, to love wholeheartedly. And although this call cannot, since we are speaking now of love, be reduced to a list of things to do, of duties to fill or practical measures to be taken, it is not *vague* at all, because it makes itself felt in regard to one's loveless way of relating to individual human beings of flesh and blood. Conscience does not tell me that in a *general* way, I do not love people enough, it rather makes me feel bad when I treat my wife or daughter or the stranger on the bus badly in some quite concrete way, whether by a mean word, by looking away when I should try to help, or whatever. But, again, what I feel bad about is the *good* possibility, the love, which I rejected, but which was, *and still is*, there for me to take, if only I dare to do so.

– Evil as self-deception –

As I have said, conscience speaks to us of what we would *not* like to discuss; it reminds us precisely of what we would not like to be reminded of. Note the verb: conscience *reminds* us of something. It is not as though its arrival came as a surprise to us, as though we had no idea *why* it had come or *what* it wanted to tell us. What conscience tells us is not anything we decided that we should tell ourselves, but it is nonetheless always something we already knew. We express this by saying that we are *pricked* by conscience. It pricks us because it reminds us of something we would *like to forget*, the memory of which we actively try to suppress. By contrast, being informed of something one genuinely did not

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confused expression to what is an insight in terms of love, namely that when I open myself to another in love, what I previously thought generous and open turns out to have been a reserved holding back in timidity and pettiness, a hiding myself from the other and from myself, and this movement of opening up and exposing the earlier professed openness as pretense, as self-deception, has no back-limit. What Levinas does not see, is that the thinking of the relationship in terms of a *sacrifice* is a form of the very pettiness and self-centredness that love exposes.

know or had simply forgotten does not prick one, although the thing one is informed of may move one in all sorts of ways.

I am not engaging in psychological speculations about how certain experiences actually affect people, but rather remarking on what it *means* to have a particular experience. It is not that having what one had genuinely forgotten revealed does not normally tend to prick, but rather that *if* the revelation pricks one, this means that one had not genuinely forgotten, but rather suppressed it, if only in the "mild" form of preferring not to think about it – in more violent forms of repression it would be more correct to say that one *cannot allow oneself* to think about it.

My claim is that conscience by definition reveals to us something about ourselves that we *know* but do not want to *acknowledge*. It reveals, that is, a self-deception, an attempt on our part to *evade* having to face ourselves. This claim may sound unbelievable, but my point is that it is actually implied by the experiential-conceptual fact, innocuous as it may seem, that conscience *reminds* us of something, and does so in the form of a *pricking* us.

It might seem that while my claim might conceivably be true of the "accusing" conscience after the deed, it certainly cannot be true of the "warning" conscience before it, but in fact this distinction is of no particular significance in this context. Think again of the case of Huck tearing up the letter he had written denouncing Jim: it might seem that if his conscience came into it – and I speak now of his true conscience, not the voice of social morality he confusedly called by that name – it was only to warn him against sending the letter, not to reproach him for having done anything, for he did not actually *do* anything wrong; he never sent the letter. However, just as conscience reproaches me only for things I have actually done, it warns me only of things I am already, in my desires and thoughts, on the way to doing – or, as one may also put it, have already started doing. It was obviously was not Huck's *conscience* that came up with the possibility that he might send the letter, then only to warn him against doing it; it warned him against doing what *he* was *tempted* to do.

We tend to deceive ourselves about the distinction between being tempted and succumbing to temptation. It is not, as we like to think, a distinction between a state of innocence and a state of guilt, for innocence cannot even be tempted – innocence *means*: not being tempted – but rather between two stages or degrees of guilt. To be tempted at all, be it only by a fleeting thought, is already to have fallen into guilt. The question now is how

far one lets oneself fall into it, and the warning conscience is always both a warning not to go further down the road of evil *and* a reproach for the distance one has already travelled.[77]

The implication of the above is that conscience cannot, even in its "warning", and in this sense "guiding", function, be thought of on analogy with an advisor advising us to do or avoid certain actions – something like a legal counsel or financial advisor, "only with regard to moral matters", for conscience does not inform me, as the advisor does, of anything I did not know. Rather, it reminds me, even in its "warning function", of *the evil in me*, it shows me the evil of all the ways in which I am *in fact* moved to abandon my neighbour – none of which I would like to acknowledge.

It follows from the phenomenological fact that bad conscience is experienced as a reminder of something, rather than as the disclosure of a piece of hitherto unknown information, that wrong-doing cannot be conceived of as our first doing wrong and only *subsequently*, when bad conscience appears, coming to know that it was wrong. One cannot have a bad conscience about doing something one had, at the time of acting, no way of knowing was wrong. The impossibility here is not one of mere psychology. Rather, the conceptual and the experiential are two sides of the same coin, and the point I just made in terms of the character of the experience of bad conscience can also be made in terms of the concept of *moral wrong*: if I really had no way of knowing that what I did was wrong, then what I did cannot meaningfully be described as morally wrong.

I may of course accidentally *bring about* something very bad, for instance by giving some information about you to someone I thought was your friend, but who proceeds to use the information against you. In such a case I will be very sorry that I made this mistake, and I will try to repair the damage I inadvertently caused, if I can, for my role in bringing about the damage will certainly make me feel *responsible* for how the situation evolves. My feeling thus responsible does nothing to show that I really have a bad conscience about what I did, however: one can feel responsible for all kinds of things one had no part in bringing about at all, things one simply happens to witness, for instance.

[77] The warning conscience is, then, "about" our guilty past and present as much as about our future. Conversely, the remorse one feels for what one has done also contains a call to return in forgiveness to the person one has wronged, and this "future-orientation" of the longing to reunite with the other in openness distinguishes remorse – and also the "warning" conscience – from the essentially impotent, and so destructive, backward-looking wish in *mere regret* or *guilt* that one had never done what one did.

The fact is that insofar as what I did was a genuine mistake, I did nothing wrong, and my conscience will not prick me over it.

Certainly, in awakening in remorse to the reality of what one did, one might exclaim "How could I act as I did? How could I not see how terrible it was?", and it might seem that this implies that one really did *not know* that what one did was wrong. One sees it now and is terrified, but one did not see it then. Closer examination reveals that things are not so simple, however. The first thing to note is that these expressions, despite having the form of questions, are exclamations expressing incomprehension in face of what one did. One is obviously not asking for an *explanation*; it is not as though one could even imagine coming across something that would make one say "Oh, so *that* was the reason why I acted in such an evil way!". The non-seeing of evil is not, then, of the kind which could be explained by reference to psychological or circumstantial factors. It is not, for instance, like "How come I did not see you at the meeting? Are you sure you were there?" – "Yes, I was sitting in the very back of the room, that is probably why you didn't see me".

It might be suggested that the situation of the person who awakens in remorse to what he has done is analogous to the case of someone who racks their brain trying to figure out how the pieces of some simple machine fit together, and suddenly exclaims "Of course! That is how it works! How simple! How strange that I did not see it before!" In such cases, all the information needed for solving the problem lay right in front of us, there is nothing we do not see or know, and yet we do not "get it" – until suddenly we do.

The case of remorse is indeed formally similar to such cases in that there is no external explanation in terms of new, previously unavailable information being revealed, of why someone suddenly awakens to the realisation of *what*, in moral terms, they have done. However, there is the obvious difference – and this difference makes the whole difference between *moral* insights and intellectual or practical ones – that in the moral case one feels *remorse*, and in the other cases one does not. The person who could not figure out how the pieces of the machine fit together may feel stupid, and ashamed for being so stupid, but he does not and cannot have a bad conscience about it. Bad conscience follows upon ill will or indifference towards others – or upon self-destructiveness.

The general point is that we cannot conclude from the fact that someone might do evil and apparently not know that what he does is evil, that he *really* does not know. It is not that there is a general phenomenon called "not realising" which may simply take different "objects", as though one could say

"Sometimes what one does not realise is how to put a machine together, sometimes that what one does is evil, but in both cases we are dealing with the same thing, someone's not realising something". Rather, the fact that *what* someone does not see is the *evil* of what he does, will determine how we understand the character of his non-seeing, and the crucial point is that *our* perspective on it is not a perspective quite foreign to him which we arbitrarily impose on him and his action. On the contrary, it will also be his *own* perspective on it, if he awakens to what he has done in remorse. In his remorse he will come to acknowledge the evil in his action which he refused to acknowledge before, and this acknowledgment includes the acknowledgment that his earlier blindness to the evil he did was not a condition imposed on him from without, but the result or expression of his own earlier *refusal* to acknowledge that what he did was evil.

Suppose a nurse administers a drug to a patient in the belief that it will save him, whereas it in fact kills him. She will certainly feel terrible about what she did, or about *what happened*, as one may *in this case* very well also put it. Precisely to the extent that one can equally put it like that, one cannot say that what she feels is bad conscience or that what she did was wrong. This is obviously not to say that therefore, since she did no wrong, the nurse "has nothing to worry about", for bringing about the death of someone is always a matter of terrible existential gravity. But it remains true that she did no wrong, and that whatever may be making her feel bad, it cannot be her conscience.

As soon as we change the example, however, so that an element of indifference or ill will towards the patient enters the picture, there is room for bad conscience on the nurse's part. Even if her administering the lethal drug was a genuine accident, the very fact that she looked disdainfully or contemptuously or in some other unfriendly way on the patient who is now dead, and died *at her hand*, may well make her feel remorseful. Not because it would have been her *fault* that the patient died, but because in her unfriendly thoughts about him she in a way *wished him away*, and now he is gone, in the most terrible way, thus revealing the terrible significance or *direction* of her earlier wish.

There is also the possibility that her dislike for, or indifference to, the patient actually contributed to his death, and then the nurse's bad conscience will of course get a grip on the act of administering the lethal drug itself. Her making a mistake might for instance have been partly caused by her being irritated with the patient – or perhaps by her being distracted by some

completely unrelated private thoughts – so that she did not pay proper attention to what she was doing. Her mistake now becomes a case of negligence, in a moral if not a criminal sense, and so she may have a bad conscience about what she did. Morally speaking, the point is not that she did not attend properly to the administering of the drug as such, but rather that she did not attend to, was not open to, the human being entrusted to her care. She let her private preoccupations fill her head so that she became indifferent towards him, an indifference that then expressed itself in her not paying proper attention to administering the drug.

Note that although the nurse's not paying proper attention to what she was doing in administering the drug is partly explained by her not attending properly to her patient, her absentminded lack of attention to him, or the perverted attention she paid him in her irritation, has not been explained. And it *cannot* be explained: her closing herself to him in irritation or absentmindedness, suppressing her conscience, is morally speaking inexplicable. What I mean is that her bad conscience about her attitude towards the patient implies, whether she acknowledges it or not, a *rejection* of every possible explanation of why it was that she was irritated or absentminded. The explanations – perhaps the obnoxious behaviour of the patient or the nurse's troubles at home – may be correct as far as they go, but in her bad conscience the nurse feels that they are *not to the point* in the sense that *they excuse nothing*. Her conscience as it were lets her keep all her explanations, it is not interested in them. *She* is not interested in them, insofar as she opens herself to the testimony of her conscience. The simple fact of the matter is that she allowed something, whatever it was – obnoxious behaviour or troubles at home – to come between herself and her patient, with terrible consequences.[78]

The situation of the negligent nurse is, then, that she did the terrible thing she did (administer the lethal drug) unintentionally, not knowing what she did, but she was in that state of ignorance about what she was doing because of something (irritation or absentmindedness) which *cannot* be put down to ignorance – cannot, because her bad conscience will not allow her to put it down to anything at all. *In* her irritation she instinctively justified her behaviour by how irritating the patient was, and if pressed she would have tried to explain and excuse her behaviour by reference to her being in the state of being irritated, as though she was an unwitting victim of her own irritation. But in her

[78] Here some will no doubt say that she may be overreacting. Perhaps she is. But what or who is to decide whether she is or not? Is it not obvious that this is itself a question of conscience?

remorse she is struck by the simple fact that *she* was irritated, that is, that she looked at the patient in this unloving way.

The point of this example is to bring out that evil is not *explained* by ignorance. Rather, evil *expresses itself in*, among other things, one's *ignoring*, and *therefore* being ignorant of many things. Let me take another, slightly different example.

Suppose a child comes home from school, finds a jar full of sweets and, without thinking about it, empties the jar so that there is none left for her brother who comes home an hour later. Certainly, in one way this case contrasts with the case where the child deliberately gobbles up the sweets as fast as she can because she knows her brother will be home soon and she does not want to share with him. Nonetheless, the fact that in the original example she did not explicitly think of her brother while eating all the sweets is not as such an extenuating circumstance but rather *the very problem*, for her selfishness showed itself precisely in her *not* thinking of her brother *as she should have* – supposing of course that she knew, even if she did not think about it, that he would be home soon, that there was someone she *should* share the sweets with. In the other case, where her selfishness expressed itself instead in her deliberately making sure that she would not have to share the sweets, she did not think of her brother *as she should have*, either, although she did think about his getting home soon.

If one kind of evil consists in consciously *thinking about others in a callous way* – as when one tries to figure out ways to hurt them, or thinks of them only as an instrument one may use to further one's own ends – another kind of evil consists in *not even thinking* about them, but *ignoring them to such an extent that they do not even enter one's conscious thoughts*. I can see no way of determining, nor indeed any point in asking, which of these two forms of evil is worse in some general way. One can imagine gruesome cases and petty ones of both descriptions – and we should remember that the petty cases have a horror of their own, for it is heart-rending that human beings can be as petty, as pathetically small-minded as we often are.

In more general terms, the point I am making is that the moral question is *what one is doing*, what are the feelings and ways of relating to others *expressed* in one's actions and reactions, and the question of how much of this goes on *consciously* in one's head is of quite secondary importance. The fact that a reaction is not premeditated but instinctive or spontaneous does not as such make it morally innocent, just as, on the other hand, the fact that one has

thought it over very carefully in one's head, and in quite moral terms, in terms of rights, duties, fairness and so on – *as one conceives all these things in one's thoughts*, of course – does not at all guarantee that the conclusion one has arrived at is not horrendous, morally speaking. One's selfishness will express itself in the bent of one's thinking just as much as in one's spontaneous reactions. In one sense it might indeed be said that all things in life, bad and good, are at root spontaneous; even conscious calculating comes spontaneously to the consciously calculating kind of egoist.

Whatever the details of the case, if one awakens in remorse to what one has done, one will see that one had allowed oneself to become *blinded* by something – by one's fear or vanity or hate, for instance – so that one did not see what one was doing. Seeing this means acknowledging that there was *nothing that kept one* from seeing then the evil one sees so clearly now. It was not that one suffered from some unaccountable lack of moral knowledge about the wrongness of what one was doing, but rather that, regardless of that knowledge, one allowed something else to fill one's mind and determine one's behaviour.

Suppose one says something mean to someone. It is clear that *meanness* can be present in one's words only if one put it there oneself, if one actually wanted to hurt the other, for meanness *is* a desire to hurt the other. If someone who feels threatened or slighted by what one has in fact said in a truthful, open spirit, without ill will, accuses one in a hurt tone of voice of being mean, what she falsely claims is precisely that one's words were *meant* to hurt. And when someone is hurt by words that *are* really mean, what hurts her is precisely the intention to hurt which she *hears in* the words: that is what *smites* her in them. This desire and intention to hurt must of course be embodied in or "carried by" a more specific intention to hurt in a specific way, by saying this-rather-than-that, but the words do not hurt merely on account of their "propositional content"; rather their content hurts because or insofar as they are said in a *mean spirit*, with intention to hurt. This can be seen from the fact that while someone's making a mean joke about my big nose may hurt me, if a small child remarks, in innocent astonishment, "What a big nose you have!" I will not feel hurt, even though the remark may, if I am very small-minded, wound my vanity.

So if someone is really hurt by the meanness in my words, this can only be because my words *were* mean, because I *was* out to hurt her in saying them. And if I have a bad conscience about what I said, then this is because I myself come to acknowledge the mean intention in my words. On the other hand,

meanness is also characterised by a refusal to *acknowledge* that one is mean, which comes out in the fact that if someone reproaches me for being mean, I will not admit to being mean without qualifications – unless, of course, I come to repent of my meanness, thus rejecting the perspective of meanness. As long as I does not do that, I will try to *justify* my mean actions in one way or another, perhaps by claiming that what I said was not mean at all ("It may seem cruel to outsiders, but we are used to rough jokes around here"); or that it was *necessary* to be mean in order to achieve some purpose, so that I was not mean out of a desire to be mean ("I had to get him to shut up, he was undermining the discussion with his irrelevant comments"); or that the meanness was a *legitimate* response to what the other had done, and so was motivated by a sense of justice, rather than by a desire to be mean ("He deserved to be told off for being so inconsiderate to John"); or that I *could not help* being mean, that my meanness was in some sense a natural and unavoidable response ("I became so angry when he said that; I could not control myself, the mean words just poured out of me").

In this last case it might be said that I do not try to justify my action, but rather I assert that there is nothing to justify because I was in effect acted upon by my anger rather than being the agent of the meanness. However, even in this case I am out to *justify myself* by claiming that I cannot really be blamed for being mean, because I reacted as "anyone" would in a comparable situation: "You know how annoying it is when someone tells one things like that, it really makes one angry". The focus is thus taken off the fact that *I* was angry and mean to *someone*, and instead I claim that the *situation* was such as to make "one" angry. This "one" may be qualified so that it does not mean "everyone" but "people like me" – those who are impatient by temperament, or who have been brought up to disapprove of a certain kind of language very strongly, for instance. But regardless of the details, the thing to note is the objectifying and *depersonalising* character of the move: the "objective" account of the situation now merely includes a new element, namely "the *kind* of person" one "happens" to be.

Sometimes, to be sure, one does not claim that anybody could identify with one's reaction – the violence of one's anger, for instance – or even that anybody can understand that a person like oneself would react as one did; instead, one claims to be as astonished and uncomprehending as everyone else in the face of what one did: "I don't know what came over me!" The point of this move is evidently the same as before, however, namely to present oneself

as reacting "just like everyone else", only in this case the reaction one shares is that of incomprehension at one's earlier deed, which one thereby disowns.

The point is that in *no* case does one simply admit, without evasive qualifications, that one was mean because one *wanted to be mean*. This view of what one did is available to one only if one comes to repent of one's meanness. The evil of one's actions and thoughts and feelings will appear to one in their nakedness, as simply evil, only in retrospect, when one has in remorse freed oneself from the evil. A "pure" evil in the sense of a malice which is lucidly aware of, and affirms, itself, does not exist. To claim the opposite amounts to claiming that we can conceive of a person steeped in evil who *could not* wake up in remorse to the horror of this evil, since he had already somehow listened to what conscience had to say, considered it fully and rejected it as "not for him". As far as I can see, that suggestion is senseless. By contrast, we all know what it means for someone to be *fleeing* their conscience, trying to avoid having to confront it's testimony. And one strategy of avoidance is to *make it appear* that one fully acknowledges the evil of what one does, while in fact avoiding to have to own up to it and to seek forgiveness. Thus, one might wallow in *self-pity* over what a worthless person one is, or one might *defiantly* insist that one is an evil person and wants to remain one, thus using attack as a defence, "admitting" to all the charges others may bring only in order to have them silenced.

The main point is that when one does evil and treats others callously, one cannot allow oneself to be fully conscious of it, but has to present one's actions in a distorted light, one that will make the callousness either disappear or appear in some sense justified. Note, however, that while this failure of self-understanding is indeed a necessary aspect of the perspective of evil, one is *not* necessarily wedded to that perspective. *If* I do evil, I am necessarily blind to the true character of what I do, because only such blindness will allow me to do it, but there is no necessity that I *do* evil, that I blind myself. The point is that the perverted understanding of oneself and one's actions inherent in evil cannot be characterised as, or seen as a result of, mere *ignorance*, but has the character of *wilful* ignorance, of *self-deception*.

That we have a conscience means that if we do evil, we know it, and so know that we *must not do it*. Nonetheless, we do evil, but in order to be able to do it, we must push the knowledge of its evil, which conscience silently reminds us of, out of our mind, we must suppress conscience. Conscience will not go away, and therefore we must try to escape from it. But since we carry it

with us in the depths of our own being, there is no place where we are be safe from it, and our escape from conscience is possible only as an endless movement of *anxious avoidance of what it tells me about myself*.

Evil is always, then, *unconscious* in the Freudian sense of being *repressed*. The notion of unconscious intentions and desires may sound like mystification, but while all kinds of mystifying speculations about the psyche as "containing" unconscious "entities" may indeed be grafted onto it, it is a quite indispensable concept if we are to understand ourselves at all. Freud did not discover these phenomena, they are all around and well known to us all.[79] We very often do things which we earnestly *claim* are motivated by certain desires, aims, emotions or attitudes – or by nothing in particular at all – even though other people can clearly see that the real motivation behind our actions is quite different. It is very common to hear someone protesting in an angry voice that he is not angry at all, or to claim with obvious disappointment that he is quite satisfied with how things turned out, or to explain bitterly that he is not bitter at all, and so on. In such situations it is *neither* the case that we are simply unaware of the true character of our actions and attitudes, *nor* that we are ourselves quite clear about what moves us, only we do not want others to know it. Rather, we are keeping ourselves as much as others in the dark about what we are doing.

The difference between us self-deceivers and the "clear-sighted" deceiver, whose deception is aimed only at others and who is not himself in any way taken in by it, is revealed by the very fact that others can so clearly see what we are actually up to; if we were ourselves quite clear about what we are doing, certainly we would be able to stage a better deception. It is precisely because we are keeping ourselves in the dark about what we are doing that we lack the clear-sightedness to deceive others.

The difference also comes out in our reaction if the deception is exposed and becomes impossible to uphold. If someone feigns friendship for a person she hates only in order to get into a position to hurt him, and is quite aware of the motives and aims of her actions, she might certainly become very emotional if her designs are finally exposed: she might unabashedly express her hatred of

[79] Freud has the great merit, however, of bringing the unconscious to consciousness in scientific psychology, if I may so put it. His influence on reflections on the human condition outside of psychoanalysis proper has of course been massive, but even before Freud all great dramatists and novelists had, as Freud himself empasises, been keenly aware of the unconscious. The writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and in his own way Marx, could also very well be described as investigations into the unconscious; into those hidden desires and fears and dreams and evils that shape our life most, but which we want least of all to know anything about, as I put it in the Introduction.

the other person. If, by contrast, she deceived herself about the character of her involvement in the situation, but came inadvertently to reveal her real motivation, perhaps in an uncontrollable outburst after having been driven into a corner by others, she would not only express her hateful emotions; she would also, as Herbert Fingarette notes, become emotional "over the *fact* that she is expressing these feelings as hers, i.e., it would be shock that *this* should be the proper characterization of her feelings and her aims."[80]

The exposed self-deceiver's reaction is thus: "I can't believe this is true! And yet, I cannot deny it..." This is actually only a public expression of the back-and-forth of acknowledgment and denial that has gone on in her soul all along, as can be seen from the fact that the public expression need not mark the end of her self-deception. On the contrary, exposure of the deception is typically followed by an instinctive retraction: "I didn't mean what I said! I don't know what came over me!" Self-deception is essentially *denial* and *flight*. One realises how things are – that one has behaved in a terrible way, or that the situation demands something of one that one is terrified of attempting, for instance – but one dares not face this reality because doing so would bring on an existential crisis making it impossible for one to hold on to the image one has made of oneself, the life one wants to think of as one's own. And so one turns and runs away.

The typical philosophical puzzles about self-deception, "How can one get oneself to believe what one knows not to be true?", "How can the same person be deceiver and deceived?", are in one sense quite beside the point; they result from an intellectualistic view of matters which assumes that the self-deceiver is a coolly rational thinker, who still somehow manages to get himself into a mess of self-contradiction. But the self-deceiver is not cool at all, he is in a *panic*. There is something he feels he *cannot* admit, something he *must* deny, and so it is no wonder that he gets into the most absurd contradictions in trying to avoid having to admit how things are. On the other hand, it is also no wonder that a person struggling for his *life* – his life *as he wants and needs to imagine it* – should be capable of great ingenuity and persistence in this struggle.

The self-deceiver's whole way of acting may show quite clearly that he is engaged in a covert, and to himself unavowed, but nonetheless quite *deliberate and systematic* operation of some sort, perhaps an attempt to hurt the person they claim to want to help. The fact that "helpful friendliness" quite regularly

[80] Fingarette, *Self-Deception* (London: Rouledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 58.

"becomes 'accidentally' inopportune and hurtful", that "'respect' becomes so irreproachably complete as to annoy and embarrass", that the "'best of intentions' leads to the most damaging results" and so on, can, as Fingarette says, only be understood as flowing from "adherence to a policy (tacitly) adopted".[81] Naturally, the "self-covering" policy of self-deception, as Fingarette calls it, includes the determination to hide both one's immediate aim (hurting the person one claims to help) and the motive that explains this aim (envy, for instance), and also the fact *that* these things *are* hidden.[82]

In self-deception we are actively denying things, keeping certain feelings, motives and aims out of our own view, rather than merely failing to see them, and this comes out in our disavowals of our own inadvertent revelations of what actually moves us. It also comes out, as Fingarette notes, in the "breaks" or "gaps", and in the otherwise quite "unaccountable" anxiety and emotional outbursts, which appear in our thought and talk whenever something touches on the area of our life we want to keep hidden, and also in the "continuing effort and ingenuity" which we reveal in "filling in plausibly the gaps" created by our deception, in all the "masks, disguises, rationalizations and superficialities" that our attempt to keep the deception going results in.[83]

It also comes out, of course, in our typical reactions when others point out our real, but suppressed, motives. If you tell me such a repressed truth about myself my first reaction will not be gratitude to you for pointing out these faults I had overlooked in myself. On the contrary, I will indignantly deny your allegations. And again, this denial is not merely a show I put on for you. When my argument with you is over, I will not think to myself how well I fooled you, rather I will *in my own thoughts* go on waxing indignant about how you could be so unfair or conceited as to allege that *I*... and so on.

This might seem to indicate that I *genuinely* do not know that what you say is in fact true, but actually the very *indignation* of my reaction – and not only my possible remorseful insight later on – shows that I indeed know what I am doing, for *indignation at an accusation is itself a tacit admission of one's guilt.* I am not saying that each time one is indignant it shows that the specific allegations one is indignant about are true, but I would claim that one's indignation reveals that one knows that the allegation *could* have been true, because such allegations *are* often true of one. The closer to home the

[81] Ibid., pp. 90, 48.
[82] Ibid., p. 49.
[83] Ibid., p. 49 f.

accusation has struck, the greater will be the indignation: the most violent indignation can thus be shown by someone who is always doing bad things, and is once again accused of doing something, when *for once* he has *not* misbehaved – or again by someone who was tempted to do the very deed he is now accused of doing, but in fact resisted the temptation. By contrast, someone who would never even think to do the thing she is accused of doing will not be indignant about the accusation, but bewildered, sad, angry; perhaps furious and desperate if others persist in accusing her, but not indignant. Thus the very *way* in which one *denies* having done wrong may reveal that one in fact knows quite well that one is guilty, even if one does not want to admit it, not even – or rather especially not – to oneself.[84]

Why do we deceive ourselves? It is certainly true that we do so in order, as Freudians might say, to "reduce anxiety" by avoiding having to face "a painful part of reality". But *what* is it that is so painful, *what* causes the anxiety? It might be said that many things may be painful to face: anything that hurts one's pride or vanity, for instance. That is true, and when I spoke of existential threats to one's self-image, pride and vanity certainly come into it. Merely speaking in neutral language about the "integrative capacities of the Ego" being too weak to integrate some aspect of oneself into one's self-image[85] tells us nothing, however, but rather raises a question about why such integration should be so important, about why one is so concerned with one's "image" in the first place.

I will return to the anxiety involved in the perspective of *shame*, within which pride is one possible position. Here, I will keep to the primary "cause" of self-deception, namely conscience. It is not that conscience *makes us* deceive ourselves, of course, hence the inverted commas. Rather, the point is that the testimony of conscience is painful, induces anxiety in us, and so we try to suppress it, deceive ourselves that it is not there. And as should be clear from what I have said about how conscience always reminds us of what we already know, it is not possible to conceive of self-deception as merely a result of one's first having done something wrong, the memory of which one then suppresses in

[84] I suppose it will be objected that my claims about the nature of indignation are arbitrary. I reply that it seems to me that when we speak of, and experience, indignation, it has the character of a tacit admission of one's guilt, and that a careful tracing of the associations and presuppositions of various ways of speaking where this character may not be apparent at first, will nonetheless reveal its presence. But by all means, if someone wants to claim that we can legitimately speak of indignation in another signification, I will not insist on the point, and it is of course clear that we can decide to use the *word* "indignation" in many different ways. What I ask the objector to grant is only that indignation can often have the character I ascribe to it.

[85] Fingarette, ibid., p. 130.

order to escape the bad conscience which thinking of it inevitably brings. Rather, just as the perspective of love, which one's bad conscience reminds one of is always there, so too bad conscience *and* self-deception are always there when we do evil, from the very first temptation all the way through to the last unrepentant breath of the person who is steeped in evil and so has come to live a lie.[86]

An important aspect of the problematic of self-deception is that self-deceptions are often *collective* – indeed I would say that allowing oneself to be caught up in collective identities is in itself a form of self-deception, insofar as it allows one to escape into the anonymity of the "we", which serves to insulate one from the question of conscience. Taking self-deception seriously as a basic category in ethics will open a rather different view on the question of moral relativism, for it alerts us to the possibility, which should after all be quite obvious, that the fact that a whole group professes to see nothing wrong with practices that we see are horribly wrong, might be due to the group collectively deceiving themselves about the moral character of their way of life. If individuals may deceive themselves, many individuals may certainly also do it together. And in fact we all know how rife the life of groups is with collective self-deceptions in the form of self-serving myths and well-understood avoidances of touchy matters.

The purpose of these remarks is not to avail us of an easy way to assure ourselves that what we think is right and what others think is wrong – we simply accuse "them" of self-deception! One may of course use imputations of self-deception to that end, but that merely means using them to defend one's own self-deceptions. By contrast, to take the ubiquity of self-deception seriously means, first of all, to place a question-mark in front of one's *own* moral convictions and ideals – and note that *conscience* does not propagate

[86] Fingarette's excellent little book *Self-deception*, which I have quoted from, makes as good sense of the phenomenon of self-deception as it is possible to make *without* bringing in the concept of conscience, it seems to me. Fingarette is right to reject verbal puzzles about how it is possible that someone at the same time knows and does not know something and to talk instead about self-deception "in the language of avowal and disavowal, and in closely related language such as 'identify oneself as', and 'acknowledge" (p. 68 f.), and both his statement that "self-deception turns upon the personal identity one accepts rather than the beliefs one has" (p. 67), and his characterization of the self-deceiver as "one who is in some way engaged in the world but who disavows the engagement, who will not acknowledge it even to himself as his" (p. 66 f.), are correct as far as they go. But they remain merely formal. Fingarette gives a good description of the "how" of self-deception, but the "why" of it escapes his grasp. He recognizes that the question of the basic motive for self-deception is crucial (p. 114 f.), but to my mind what he says about it (cf. p. 130 and the last chapter, p. 136 ff.) is very meager, and at essential points, all having to do with his neglect of conscience, confused.

convictions or ideals, it simply shows us our neighbour in the light of love.

It may be asked how one is supposed to be able to "place a question-mark in front of one's own moral views"? This is really the question how one is to know whether one is deceiving oneself or not. And what kind of a question is that? Is it perhaps not a self-deceived question? "How am *I* to know whether *I*...?" Are you not the person who *must* know? I will return to this question in the Conclusion. Here, I want merely to underline that questioning one's own moral views is certainly *not* to be done by adopting a "rational" attitude, telling oneself that one should "try to make one's moral principles probable ... and seek also the reasons against them, and listen to and weigh the principles and reasons of others".[87] This seemingly self-evident approach is excluded by the simple fact that moral matters are essentially matters of conscience, and conscience is not to be argued with; when we start arguing in moral matters we only betray, as I have said, our desire to argue ourselves *out* of something.

Furthermore, by arguing reasonably, one is in no position to get out of the limitations of one's cultural milieu, because what *counts* as "reasonable argument" is itself culturally determined. Even if some general "moral principles" might perhaps win more or less universal approval across cultures and times, what is considered reasonable as regards their concrete *application* varies, and it varies precisely at the points where one might wish to call upon reason to decide issues, namely where there is culturally determined disagreement about what is right and wrong.

By contrast, *conscience* may tear a person out of their culture in the most radical manner, as the case of Huck Finn illustrates. Certainly, someone moved by the testimony of conscience may also speak about what he sees as demanded in a situation, and engage in argument of a kind, as many abolitionists did in regard to slavery, for instance. But such argument is moral in character, rather than political or practical or rational, precisely to the extent that it is engaged in out of a sense that the issue is essentially not to be *argued* about, but rather people need to be shaken, appealed to, woken up, alerted to the true character of what they are collectively engaged in.

As I have said before, I am well aware that appeals to conscience can be used for the most horrible ends, but that is true of appeals to anything – and of course it is true of appeals to openness and love, too. The philosophical task, however, is to see how far one can make morally speaking *good* sense of

[87] Richard Robinson, "Aristotle on Akrasia", in Barnes, Schofield and Sorabji (eds.), *Articles on Aristotle. 2. Ethics and Politics* (London: Duckworth, 1977), p. 91

different ways of speaking about moral matters, and what I have been trying to do is to reveal the kind of sense things make in the light of the perspective I articulate, and to indicate how other perspectives on morality appear in this light to make either less sense, or a morally problematic sense.

– *The absurdity of intellectualism in ethics* –

The fact that conscience *pricks*, that it brings me face to face with my *guilt* even as it calls me back to the openness I am guilty of having rejected, is undeniable if one attends to the actual experience of conscience. This fact is lost, or kept from view in most philosophical accounts of conscience, however. In these accounts, conscience is presented as some sort of general intellectual capacity for testing or judging whether particular actions, done or contemplated, are in accord with some universal moral law or, to put it more neutrally, with one's standards of behaviour. If one finds that an action meets these standards, one has a clear conscience, if not, a bad conscience. Paul Lehmann aptly characterises such views as attempts at a "domestication of conscience",[88] for the fact that conscience makes itself felt precisely as a painful reminder of one's guilt disappears from view, and conscience instead appears as an ability which, just like our senses or our memory, helps us along in the world by making it possible for us to do the things we need and want to do – in this case to find out whether what we have done or plan to do is right or wrong – and which apparently, if we are decent people, will for the most part confirm that we are morally speaking "clean".

The most explicitly worked out and unabashedly rationalistic versions of such views are perhaps to be found in the medieval philosophers who discussed conscience.[89] The same general *intellectualism* which comes out so

[88] Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 330 ff.

[89] A good overview of the medieval discussion can be gained from Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), which includes an interpretive essay by Potts and key medieval texts on the topic by Peter Lombard, Philip the Chancellor, Bonaventure and Aquinas, among others. The details of the views of the medieval authors differ, but they all divide conscience into two parts, *synderesis* and *conscientia*, where the former supplies us with "first principles" of action, i.e. "the natural law" of morality, while the latter is concerned with the application of these principles to concrete

clearly in their discussions is present, however, in most philosophical discussions of morality, whether conscience is mentioned or not, and also in much that is said about morality outside of philosophy. It is assumed that what makes an action or response moral in character is that moral *reasoning* and/or *judgment* in one form or another, comprising argumentation, weighings of different considerations, assessments, attendings, and so on, is brought to bear on the situation – or could be brought to bear, if a need for justification were to arise.[90] It is thought to be constitutive of moral behaviour that one feels a desire, or an obligation, to *justify* one's actions in moral terms, in terms of "moral reasons" – first in terms of specific judgments and considerations concerning the duties and rights of various persons in the situation at hand, or the fairness and consequences of acting in different ways, and later, if the moral argument goes on, perhaps in terms of more general "moral principles".[91]

I think this picture of moral life, obvious as it may seem at least in a text on moral philosophy, is so far removed from the facts of life as to be almost surreal. It is also, and more importantly, morally speaking false. It is a lie. What it leaves out is the very thing that gives *moral* difficulties, as opposed to practical or intellectual or other kinds of difficulty, their specific character, their strange kind of urgency. What I have in mind is the fact that what we are faced with here is not primarily a difficulty about grasping, or in some other way

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cases. Both parts of conscience are assumed to belong to "reason", even if there must admittedly be, in some way or other, a connection with a *desire* for the good and aversion from evil. It is also assumed that *synderesis* is infallible and inexstinguishable, that is, that people always know what is right in principle, but that "mistakes" can occur in the application of these principles to concrete cases. In all these discussions it remains unclear whether, and if so, how, these "mistakes" are something a person can be held, and first of all hold himself, *morally responsible* for, something he can have a *bad conscience* about – for obviously genuine *mistakes* can be regretted but cannot cause bad conscience. In fact it seems, if I may say so, that in the medieval discussions the *morality* of morality is simply not touched upon; all we are left with are intellectual operations, the application of general rules to particular cases, which may sometimes "go wrong". As we shall see, this is in fact what happens in most moral philosophy.

[90] This is to reject the idea that an *act of reasoning*, conscious or somehow "unconscious", must always have preceeded or accompanied an action or decision if it is to be a moral one. Against this idea the objection, quite correct as such, is that being reasonable is less a matter of what one must have said to oneself *in foro interno* before one acted, than about what one *could* say about it if the need to say something, to justify one's action announces itself.

[91] This conception appears to be taken for granted by most people, at least most philosophers, and the claim that this is so hardly needs to be substantiated by referring to examples of the conception. Indeed, explicit statements of it are not necessarily very easy to find, precisely because it is taken too much for granted to need stating. It *informs* discussions about morality rather than being an *object* of discussion.

relating to, an "object" before us (judging an action, operating a machine, understanding an argument and so on). What we are grappling with is rather *ourselves*, and more specifically our own dark sides, our ill will, indifference, fear, vanity and so on; all those motive forces which not only tempt us to do evil but are in *themselves* forms of evil.

The typical case of a moral problem is not of the kind standardly given in ethics books, where someone is faced with a perplexing choice such as whether or not one should lie to the police in order to protect a friend. I will return to such cases later. What we should note before even starting to discuss them, however, is that our problems are not typically like that at all, but rather issue from the distrust, irritation and animosity, the small-mindedness, the unforgivingness, and so on, which make our relations into the mess they often are. These are quite clearly *moral* problems, for they are problems in the way we relate to each other and to ourselves, and things which we may come to have a bad conscience about, to repent of and feel a need to ask forgiveness for. But they have nothing to do with any difficulties of knowing what is right, they do not demand that we exercise judgement or engage in reasoning about anything. Rather, they demand that *we change*, that we give up our distrust and small-mindedness. It is not because we do not *know* they are wrong that we do the pathetic and terrible things we do, but because *we are crooked and weak*, because our hearts are hardened – and remember that such a hardening of one's heart can very well take the form of a "soft" sentimentalism.

Ethical intellectualists – and on my reading that includes most moral philosophers – simply ignore the inner dynamics of our moral difficulties, our temptations and struggles. Indeed they ignore the inner life of the moral subject as a whole; at most they give it a very cursory attention. That is precisely what their intellectualism consists in. What they give us instead of an attempt to understand our actual moral difficulties are descriptions, more or less general, of situations in which someone has to deliberate about what to do, and discussions about the principles which should guide such deliberation. The problems all appear to lie in the *situation*, that is, *outside* of the person facing it, spread out in front of him, in plain view, and the question is what he is, morally, to make of it. The crucial point is, again, that the *relation* of the "moral agent" to his "moral problem" is tacitly assumed to be no different from that of a person who is trying to solve a practical or intellectual problem. The *will* to solve the problem is assumed to exist; the problem is only to find the *way* or *means* to actually solve it; to get the moral reasoning right, *or* to develop the

"virtues" or "capacities for perception" needed in order to register the morally salient features of the situation properly.[92]

Superficially viewed, ideas of this latter kind might seem to be rather anti-intellectualist because they emphasise the need to cultivate character-traits and dispositions of perception, and in this sense the need for changing ourselves, getting rid of our vices and cultivating our virtues, rather than presenting moral problems as a matter of reasoning and justifying particular actions. But in fact, the task of "cultivating virtues" tends to be understood in an essentially intellectualist spirit, in a spirit which accepts the basic falseness, the self-deception, involved in the intellectualist picture, namely the tacit presupposition that we are *not* crooked, that *our wills are good*. One assumes that we *want* to "do the right thing" or "become better persons", and then makes the difficulty of moral life out to be either knowing what is the right thing to do in various situations, or how to effect the change for the better in our characters which we are taken to desire. When one thinks of it, this is a truly astonishing assumption to make. Is it really the case that we are such exemplars of good will? That we want wholeheartedly to do the right thing and become better persons, only often we do not quite know *how*? Can any of us truthfully say that this is so? I certainly cannot.

Could it be that our moral difficulties are about actually *being* good, rather than about finding out what *is* good, as intellectualists pretend? Is not this, in fact, what conscience painfully reminds us of, that we know quite well that what we do is *not* good, and yet we do it. I think that this is the central teaching of the parable of the Good Samaritan, too.[93] The parable is not meant to teach us what goodness is, but to remind us that we do not need to be taught that, what we need is to *be* good.

The first question posed by the lawyer to whom Jesus tells the parable is "Master, *what shall I do* to inherit eternal life?" The lawyer poses, that is, precisely what is normally taken to be the basic question of ethics: What should one do? How should one live?[94] Jesus answers the lawyer in a way which does not answer his question, but rather silences it, revealing to the lawyer, and to us

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[92] The connection between virtue and perception has been developed for instance by John McDowell. On his view, possessing a "virtue" centrally involves having a "reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behaviour" ("Virtue and Reason", *Monsit* 62 [1979], p. 331 f.).

[93] Luke 10:25–37.

[94] For the point I wish to make the often noted contrast between the narrower modern focus on *right action* ("What would be the right thing to do?") and the wider Greek focus on *good living* ("How should one live?") is of no significance.

as readers, the bad faith involved in the very framing of it. First, Jesus simply reminds this man, who is so familiar with the (religious and moral) law, what this law says. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" – The lawyer answers: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself", and Jesus says: "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live". So the lawyer already knows the answer: all you need is love – which by the way does not, as is sometimes supposed, make difficult things all too easy, because it really means that *you* need to be *all love*.

This is not the end of it, however, because the lawyer demands to know, and in demanding this reveals *how* he reads the law, what it *means* to love, what the injunction to love amounts to in terms of concrete, action-guiding specifications, and so he asks: "And who is my neighbour?" A very reasonable question, no doubt, but deceptive precisely on that account. Jesus responds to the question by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which two men leave a man in need unhelped, while a third, the Samaritan, helps. Then he asks the lawyer: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" to which the lawyer answers: "He that shewed mercy on him" – and so Jesus tells him: "Go, and do thou likewise".

The point, as obvious as the lawyer's answer "He that shewed mercy on him", is that Jesus has not taught the lawyer anything he did not already know; he has not given him any guidelines for action; on the contrary, he has told him to *stop pretending that there is something he does not know*. He knows what to do, he knows what love is, he knows who his neighbour is – and to know these things is not to know different things, but rather these are three ways of pointing to one and the same knowledge, which is love itself. The lawyer's real problem, the real moral problem for all of us, is not to find out what to do, but *to do what one knows one should do, to love*.

The question is not "Who is my neighbour?" but rather, in the concrete situations of life the question is put to *me* whether *I* am a neighbour to others, or rather choose – in my arrogance or weakness, in my shame or in my pride – to pass them by, like the priest and the Levite passed by the wounded man.[95] The difficulty is not knowing *how* or *who* to love, but actually loving the people one meets. Or, in the words of Karl Barth, "what it means concretely to will and act in the presence of the neighbor, to love him as ourselves ... is not something that

[95] Cf. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love.* Translated by Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 38.

we can or should tell ourselves, but something that is told to us if we are ready to listen".[96] What should we listen to? To our conscience or our heart – which we can only do by opening our heart to others. But we do not like to *listen*, we would like to be able to tell ourselves who our neighbour is and how we should love him, and especially the ways in which need *not* love him. We like to exercise judgment, to have *limits* set to our proceedings with each other.

At this point, it will certainly be objected that even if it may be true of many cases that the moral difficulty is actually *doing* what we know to be right, rather than finding out what *is* right, there are surely many cases where it is *not* obvious what we should do, no matter how much we may examine our consciences, and in these cases we need all those powers of moral perception and reasoning that philosophers have traditionally discussed. In response to this objection I will say what I say in answer to a similar objection earlier in this chapter: There may indeed be more complicated cases, and I will return to the question whether or in what sense they are more complicated, but we should surely try to get clear about the simpler case before we move on to the more complex ones. If intellectualism completely misrepresents the simple cases, as I think it does, then why should we believe that it gives a true picture of the more complex ones? Let us look, then, at how the simple cases of moral acting and reacting are represented within the intellectualist framework.

The defining assumption of intellectualism is that there is, for the person who is considering the moral quality of an action of his, *a genuine question* as to how the judgment will go. He does not yet know, that is, whether what he did or is contemplating is morally alright or not; it is only when he has concluded his "moral deliberation" that he will know this. Thus, Barbara Herman writes that moral deliberation "characteristically begins" with one's wanting something, the getting of which "prompts consideration of an appropriate course of action";

[96] Barth, *Ethics*, p. 191. – One may put the same point by saying that the "neighbour" in the Christian sense can only be discovered, and *is* also always discovered, in love, in conscience. My neighbour is not hard to find – nor easy to find, for he or she has always *been found already*, he or she is each person my conscience shows me as there for me to love *hic et nunc*. As Rudolf Bultmann says, "the neighbour is someone who is always already there; he is not someone I need first to go looking for" ("Das christliche Gebot der Nächstenliebe" in Bultmann, *Glaube und Verstehen. gesammelte Aufsätze. Band 1*, 2. A (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1954), p. 231 – the original reads: "Der Nächste ist einer der immer schon da ist, den ich ... nicht erst zu suchen brauche").

> My need for money [for example] may send me to the bank, to work, or to a deceitful promise, depending on the situation in which I must act to meet my need. Whether I will be tempted to act in a morally impermissible way will likewise depend on contingent and variable circumstances. [...It] is what happens next that is the crucial moment for the moral agent. Once I am aware of what I want to do, I must consider whether it is morally permissible. If I have an effective motive of duty, I will act only when I determine that it is. ... This is the normal state of affairs for someone with a sincere interest in doing what is right.[97]

This passage seems to me expressive of the standard view of the matter in, and probably out of, philosophy. It also seems utterly confused. First of all, the idea that it "depends on contingent and variable circumstances" whether I am tempted to act in rotten ways or not, falsely implies that temptation is produced by the circumstances themselves, whereas it is obvious that a temptation to make deceitful promises arises only for someone who is prepared to contemplate such a possibility, and if I am so prepared it shows how callous *I* can be, not how excellent opportunities for deceit the world can sometimes offer. If it is replied that in certain situations it is "humanly speaking" very understandable that someone is tempted, I agree, but this still does not show anything about the objective circumstances, but only reveals how callous most of us often are

This preliminary point about temptation should be easy to see, and in a way the view of the character of moral deliberation I want to criticise does not depend on missing it. In another sense it does, however, for whereas the point about describing an urge to do something as a *temptation* is that the urge itself is already felt to be evil, is already morally condemned, the heart of the view I am criticising is the idea that our desires (for instance to get money), the particular intentions they issue in (such as making a deceitful promise in order to obtain a loan), and the general attitudes they issue from (such as a general desire to "make it big in the world") are in themselves somehow pre-moral; their moral character for good or ill is not to be seen and felt *in them*, but can be determined only by a subsequent "moral deliberation" concerning them.

This must be so if being moral consists in the disposition to ask oneself whether what one wants to do is morally alright, for this presupposes that one

[97] Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 15. – Herman is here giving her interpretation of Kant's views. Although she does not speak about conscience here, I take it that she could well say that what she has described is a conscientious person, one who considers in conscience what he is to do.

does not already know it. "Once I am aware of what I want to do, I must consider whether it is morally permissible", Herman says. So I am aware of what it is I want to do, but as yet I have no idea whether my wish is good or bad, or indifferent, morally speaking. Apparently – there is nothing in Herman's view which disallows this possibility – the wish may even be horrendously evil, and yet I have no idea that it is, until I have "considered" the matter! This idea seems absurd.

Let us look again at Herman's example. It comes from Kant, whom Herman is interpreting. Kant imagines someone who needs money but knows that he will get a loan only if he promises to pay it back, which he knows he will not be able to do. The man "would like to make such a promise", Kant says, "but he still has enough conscience to ask himself: is it not forbidden and contrary to duty to help oneself out of need in such a way?"[98] Is it not clear already from Kant's very description – "...but he still has enough conscience to ask himself..." – that there is really no moral question to be asked here at all? Contrary to what Herman thinks, the tempted man's conscientiousness is not revealed in his "sincerely" asking himself, even in the midst of his dire need for money, whether what he is tempted to do to get the money is right – and then finding out, upon reflection, that it is not. The point is rather that his having a conscience is shown in the fact that he feels unable to just go ahead and make the deceitful promise which tempts him. He already knows, in conscience, that what he is tempted to do is not right; that is why he feels it as a *temptation* rather than a mere possibility to be considered dispassionately on its merits. The fact that he nonetheless starts to *ask questions*, to *argue* the case, does not at all show how conscientious he is, how "sincere" is his "interest in doing what is right" (Herman). On the contrary, it reveals that he is indeed still tempted to *do* what he *knows* to be wrong, and so wants to plead with his conscience, trying to find a way of making the deceitful promise appear alright after all.

The absurdity of supposing that we do not know, but need to deliberate in order to find out, that the bad things we are tempted to do are bad, should be obvious. Think about it: *what* is it, morally speaking, I am supposed *not* to know when, to take a typical everyday example of a moral difficulty, I am tempted to say something mean to someone, perhaps because I envy their success? What would it mean to say that I myself am not immediately aware that what I am about to do is wrong? The only thing it might mean is that I

[98] Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 74/4:422.

deceive myself about what I do; that is, I do not allow myself to become consciously aware of, what I am in fact up to, and what I in fact feel. Perhaps I pretend that I do not envy the other person at all, and that what I am about to say is "a fair remark to make, although it might sound harsh". In this sense, we may indeed be said to fail to "know" that what we do is wrong, but here "not knowing" actually means not wanting to admit what we in fact know. And since the problem here is with acknowledging what we know and not with finding out what we do not know, "reasoning" – inquiries, arguments and so on – is not what is needed to arrive at "knowing" that what we do is wrong. On the contrary, arguments will just be used as the instruments of self-deception, to make it appear that the meanness was no such thing, or was at least "justified" in the circumstances.

Suppose, however, that I am not deceiving myself in this way: in my envy, I am about to say something mean, and I know it. According to the intellectualist picture, I still need "moral judgment" to tell me that what I am about to do is wrong. What could that mean? According to Kant what decides whether an act is right or wrong is whether its "maxim", describing in morally relevant terms what is sought in the act, can be "universalised". When I am about to be mean, I should ask myself, to use one of Kant's formulas for the categorical imperative, whether I can will that *being mean* "should become a law of nature". What is it I am supposed to be asking here? What is it, in moral terms, that I do not already know about my intention in knowing that I intend to be mean? What is the knowledge that is to be provided by the answer to the question whether my intention can be "universalised"? And how do I decide, as surely I am supposed to do, that I cannot will meanness to become a law of nature?

Asking whether I can will it seems roughly equivalent to asking "What if everybody did that?" So what if everybody was mean; why would that not be alright? Because it would not "work"? But first of all, why should it not work, in the kind of poisonous way that meanness does work? And secondly, *Kant* certainly does not intend universalisation to be about finding out what works. Ethics, he insists, is about what *should* happen rather than about what in fact happens, or what in fact "works". Well, it would be terrible if everyone was mean. Certainly, but how do I *know* that it would be terrible? I know it because I know what meanness *is*, and I know *that* from having *felt* how other people's meanness hurts me and how my own hurts them – and as we shall see, this pain is actually what I suffer, by a strange detour, in my bad conscience for having

been mean to them. That is how I know that meanness is *mean*, that it is terrible, and that terribleness is the reason why it is wrong. Or perhaps one should rather say that it is what its being wrong *amounts* to.

However, I know all this about meanness *already*: I know it, although I do not acknowledge it, *in* my very intention to be mean, for to want to say something mean *is* to want to hurt someone. I do not need the "test" of universalisation to tell me anything, I know all I need to know already. And if I did *not* know already that this meanness I am about to commit is bad, why should more of the same thing, the same thing done by everybody, seem bad? Indeed, if I did not have an immediate feel for the *meanness* in meanness, how would I even recognise more of the *same* thing? What would I look for?

It might be objected that I am confusing the issues by describing the situation in morally charged language. Of course, if we say that someone is about to do something *mean*, we have *eo ipso* said that she should not do it, that it would be a bad thing to do. That is what calling an act "mean" *amounts to*; the "negative moral charge" is part of the meaning of the word *mean* in our language. But, the objection would continue, the whole point is that if we are to think clearly about moral issues, we must reject this kind of loaded language, these "thick" descriptions as they are called, because using them will determine in advance what we think about the cases described with the help of them. Then we will have agreement in our reactions, but agreement of a spurious kind, since it depends on picking particular words to describe the case with. Thus, if we called the act of meanness a "harsh but fair remark" instead, the same act would suddenly appear alright.

It seems to me that this objection misses the point entirely, at the same time as it unintentionally focuses attention on what is in fact the heart of the matter. The first confusion in the objection is the idea that we *could* discuss moral issues while describing the situations we discuss in morally neutral language. This is simply nonsense, for if the description of the situation is neutral there *is* no moral issue to discuss: that is what "morally neutral" *means*. The second confusion is that if what we are faced with really is, for example, a harsh but fair remark and not an act of meanness, then it would not just *appear*, but *be* alright, morally speaking. As I noted above, I might indeed try to make my meanness appear alright by *calling* it "a harsh but fair remark", but the moral question is not what an act could be made to appear as, how it could with some plausibly be described – *that* is a question for self-deceivers and scheming lawyers – but rather *what is in fact intended and done*.

The question is: how do we know what is in fact done? This question will, from the *intellectualists'* perspective, create the so-called "problem of relevant descriptions", which is in fact insoluble.[99] The problem arises from the fact that in order for me to be able to ask whether some action or intention of mine is morally alright, I need to know, to describe to myself, *what* it is I did or am about to do. Or, to express it in Kantian terms, I need to formulate my maxim before I can ask whether it can be universalised. This, however, raises the question how I am to arrive at the morally speaking relevant description of the action. As long as we keep to the level of *descriptions*, rather than seeing the question as one of *conscience*, the answer is certainly not self-evident, for the same action – performed or merely intended or considered – can in principle be described in countless different ways. The same remark may, to keep to our example, be described as either "mean" or "harsh but fair", or again as "a good way of getting the class to pay attention", and so on. Depending on how it is described, it will appear as either morally demanded, unproblematic or reprehensible. So the question is how I know which description is actually the right one? Obviously, I cannot apply the Kantian universalisability-test to find this out, for the test can only be applied to a maxim *already described*, and the question now is precisely how I am to know that the way I describe my maxim is the right one. Or rather, we need to ask what it *means* to "know" such a thing, what it means for a description of one's intention to be "the right one", *morally speaking*?[100]

This question is not merely a theoretical or speculative one, which can be dismissed as practically irrelevant, because when we are tempted to do bad or evil things, we will, as I have noted, pretend to ourselves and others that they are really not the bad or evil things they are, but quite legitimate. Thus, a mean remark the slighted teacher is tempted to make becomes in her self-deceiving re-description "a good way of getting the class to pay attention". So the problem

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[99] Cf. Onora O'Neill, "Modern Moral Philosophy and the Problem of Relevant Descriptions" in Anthony O'Hear (ed.), *Modern Moral Philosophy*. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). – The name of the problem appears to derive from an observation in Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 2

[100] Onora O'Neill argues that the problem of relevant descriptions, which she admits seems hard to solve, indeed, does in fact not need to be solved, because "ethical judgment does not encounter the problem of relevant descriptions" at all, its aim being "*to guide action* rather than to pass judgment on *acts already done*" ("Modern Moral Philosophy and the Problem of Relevant Descriptions", p. 313). This way of removing the problem is quite obviously untenable, however,for planned acts are as much in need of being described in morally relevant terms if one is to assess whether one should or should not do them, as are acts already done, if one is to assess their moral character.

is: how do I know that the description of my action which I come up with is not a self-serving one?

How do I know? Or should we not rather ask how it could be possible that I would *not* know? How could I not be aware that I am engaged in self-serving re-description? If I was not aware of what I was doing – although I might deceive myself into being "unaware" of it in the paradoxical sense discussed above – then by definition it was *not* self-serving. The important point here is that what from the intellectualist perspective appears as the problem of relevant descriptions turns out not to be about *descriptions* (the right pairing of descriptions with acts) at all, but rather a problem of *self-knowledge*.

My act of meanness is not bad because the *description* "mean" can rightfully be applied to it, but because *I am mean*; that, and not "descriptions", is what I feel bad about if in remorse I awaken to what I have done. But *that I am in fact mean* is not anything that "deliberation" informs me of; "Did I want to be mean to him or not? Well, there are some things that speak for that conclusion, but on the other hand..." is the kind of nonsense that we are tempted to engage in when we do not want to admit to the character of our own feelings and actions. As we have seen, one cannot be mean without *wanting* to be mean, and if I wanted to be mean, I know it. The only question is whether I am prepared to *admit* it to myself.

What I need to do in order to "get the description right" is not, then, to deliberate, but to *face myself*. If I do, I will discover my own meanness, and thereby the wrongness of it, and of the actions it tempts me to do. If I do not face myself, this *means* that everything I think and say about my motives and actions, all the descriptions I give, will be tainted by self-deception; they will be false.

Kant said that the "first command of all duties to oneself" is "Know yourself!", that is, "know your heart – whether it is good or evil, whether the source of your actions is pure or impure", for "only the descent into the hell of self-cognition can pave the way to goodness".[101] Kant appears to think, however, that this is merely some kind of first step, necessary but only preliminary, that needs to be taken if the work of moral reasoning is to be properly done. But if you *know* your heart, whether it is good or evil, then what else do you need to know, morally speaking? And if you do not know your heart, then whose fault could that be but your own? That is, must your lack of

[101] Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 562/6:441.

knowledge whether your heart is good or evil not be due to your not *wanting* to know it? And must that not be due to your somehow knowing that your heart is *not* good – otherwise why would you not want to know it more intimately?

I can imagine someone objecting to what I have said, that while it is obviously true as I say that being *mean* to someone is bad, or perhaps even evil, and that we all know that this is so without need for deliberation or judgment, the situations in which we feel such bad feelings towards others are a special case; it is in all those cases in which we feel nothing in particular towards the people involved in the situation in which we have to act, that we need deliberation and judgment to tell us what to do. In such situations our knowledge of the evil of our own motives will not take us anywhere, since *ex hypothesi* we do not have any such motives.

It seems to me, as I have indicated in many ways all through this thesis, that this whole idea of a feeling-neutral perspective on human relations is confused; *there is no such thing as feeling nothing at all towards others*. Let us however, for the sake of argument, change the example into one which *appears* to be of a situation that is morally urgent even though no particular feelings of one person for the other are involved. Imagine, then, a garbage-collector about to pour the contents of a waste container into the waste disposer when suddenly he meets the eyes of someone looking up at him from amid the garbage, perhaps a tramp who has spent the night in the container. The garbage-collector stops the disposal process at once. This is obviously not because he first had the evil intention of letting it run, crushing the man, but then decided not to act on it; he rather acts simply because he *saw* the man in danger.

On the intellectualist picture, the garbage-collector has in some sense to *reflect* on what he has seen in order to come to the *conclusion* or *judgment* that he "should", or "morally ought", not treat the contents of this particular container as something he can dispose of. The fact that a man is about to be crushed apparently somehow awakens in the garbage-collector's mind a "moral question" about whether he perhaps has a duty to try to save the man – or perhaps on the contrary a duty to see to it that he is crushed. Or perhaps the real moral issue is not what happens to the man about to go into the disposer, but rather whether his going in will damage the *disposer* in some way? If we really need to *ask* what the moral character of the situation is, then surely these possible questions and answers should be considered, too!

The suggestion that there could be a question here is absurd, and not just because, as anyone would admit, we do not *in practice* raise such a questions,

but because it makes no moral sense to raise them at all, anywhere. The absurdity of the intellectualist suggestion is not lessened by saying that the reflection, the raising of the question "What should I do?", must of course, given the urgency of the situation, occur "very fast" or "instinctively". *That* would be the correct description of what the garbage-collector does once he *has met* those eyes in the garbage; now he has to think fast about what to *do in practical terms* to save the man in danger of being crushed – and insofar as certain work-routines have become second nature to him he has no need to reflect at all, but is in a position instinctively to take the appropriate action. But the absurd suggestion we are now considering is that he has to reflect and make decisions not *given* the moral urgency of the situation, but in order to *see* that there is any urgency at all, that the other person's being in mortal danger is of any concern to him.

Naturally, I am not denying that the garbage-collector's seeing that the tramp is *in danger* is a result of his *practical* grasp or sense of the situation; he knows what the disposer does, and that the man is heading straight into it. It is not his *conscience* which tells him that this is in fact what is happening, nor does it tell him what to do in order to stop it from happening. This is clear from the fact that someone who did not know anything about waste disposers might genuinely not realise that being in the position of the tramp is dangerous, and if they did, they might still not know what to do in order to stop the disposer and save him. Their not realising or knowing this, although unfortunate, would be quite *innocent*, that is, it would not be anything they could feel *remorse* about later, no matter how terrible they would feel about having seen a man being crushed in front of their eyes.

The idea that we could immediately know or sense what is morally at stake in a situation, is apparently felt by intellectualists to be somehow incomprehensible; they think there must be some sort of deliberation through which one comes to a judgment about this. Even if this were the case, however, there would obviously at *some* point need to be an immediate perception that there is morally speaking something at stake in the situation, otherwise one would feel no need to start deliberating about it in the first place. If the intellectualist allows, as he must, that there is an original perception of the situation *as* "morally demanding deliberation", the question arises *how* the situation is perceived in this original perception. In terms of our example: what is the garbage-collector's perception supposed to be, given intellectualism's requirement that it leave room for a question about how the situation should be judged, morally speaking? I have

no idea what such a perception would look like. Once the facts of the situation are grasped – that there is a man about to be crushed unless the disposer is stopped – there is no room for moral questions: it is clear that the disposer must be stopped. On the other hand, if the facts are not grasped, if the garbage-collector simply (physically) did not see the man, for instance, there is no moral question either, for then it will all seem like just another day at work.

It might be suggested that the reason that no question about the moral urgency of the situation arises for the garbage-collector is that the question has been settled in advance by the habits of thought that our upbringing has ingrained in him, as in us. This suggestion is untenable, however, for if it were all a matter of acculturation, there would have had to be some point in the early life of the garbage-collector and the rest of us when we did *not* know whether one should, in general, do what one can to prevent people being killed, for instance, whereupon the "rule" (or whatever we should call it) that one should indeed try to prevent it was ingrained in us by our upbringing. Obviously, it makes no more sense to imagine such genuine moral unknowing in childhood, than to imagine it in adults.

The point is that *there is no moral question,* there never was one and never can be one. When you see that *there is someone there*, even if he be covered in garbage, you are, for lack of a better word, "committed" to him, you do not just dump him as you dump garbage. You cannot do it even if you wanted to. The Kantian formula "Treat no one simply as a means to your end, but always also as an end in himself" does not express a moral principle that we may or may not choose to adopt or that we are unconditionally duty-bound to adopt; it is not that we *should* not, but that we *cannot* treat another living being simply as a means to our end. This impossibility is given *in* the very encounter with the other, in the experience of meeting someone's eyes, for instance.[102]

The point is that the authority of morality, which we come face to face with for instance when we see someone needing help or when we are pricked by bad conscience, cannot be made sense of by speaking of norms, principles, values, ideals or such like. The authority, the urgency, is not somehow imposed on the

[102] In our dealings with dead matter morality does not enter at all. We do not have a *relationship* with dead matter because *it* is not capable of entering into a relationship with us. As soon as we are involved with a living being, however, morality enters. Regardless of how callously we may treat animals, no one actually thinks, whatever they may *claim* they think, that it is a matter of *complete indifference* how we treat them. The crucial distinction is given already in the word "treat", we do not *treat* a brick at all, well or badly. As I noted earlier, this is the reverse side of the fact that we feel that animals do or could respond to us, too.

encounter with the other person from without, but lies in the encounter itself. This crucial point may also be expressed by saying that morality does not begin with thoughts about how things ideally *should* be, as opposed to how they actually are. Such thoughts do come to us, but they are superficial symptoms of something much more fundamental, of the *lived experience* of our encounter with others. *In and through* the feelings – especially, it should be noted, in and through the *contradictions* of feeling – that the encounter with others arouses and manifests itself in, we are *always already claimed*, in a moral sense: we are called upon, in conscience, to be "our brother's keepers". This obviously does not guarantee that we will not treat each other in evil ways, it simply means that if we do it, we *know* it. We *feel* it to be evil even as we do it, although, as I have explained, we do not and cannot fully *acknowledge* its evil as long as we keep doing it.

In this context, the concepts *experience* and *feeling* do not refer to anything merely inner and subjective; on the contrary, the point is precisely that in encountering others we are claimed in such a way that the insignificance, the lack of authority, of everything merely subjective, but *also* of everything merely *reasonable* or merely *willed* is revealed to us – which is to say that moral authority cannot be understood in terms of either "emotion", "sentiment", "will" or "reason", which are the terms in which philosophers have traditionally tended to understand morality.

– *Moral psychology* –

In positive terms, what I am saying is that in moral matters, "knowledge" and "feeling" are two names of the same thing: we *know* what is good and evil because we immediately *feel* it. This knowledge of good and evil is not a mystical, intuitive knowledge of "first principles". It is what we know when we feel like being mean, or on the contrary want to embrace someone or ask their forgiveness; it is what we know when we feel the warmth of someone's embrace, hear the derision in their laugh, see the gladness in their eyes, and so on. Intellectualism in ethics must either deny that we know these things or else deny that knowledge of good and evil is about such things.

Either way we land in absurdity, it seems to me. The urgency that moral matters in fact have cannot be understood apart from our immediate perception

of the *suffering* in suffering, the *meanness* in meanness, the *kindness* in kindness, and things of a similar nature. It is because we can perceive nothing in such terms in a piece of wax, for instance, that *it* is not an "object of moral concern" to us – as philosophers misleadingly put it, the point being precisely that mere *objects* are of no moral concern. What we immediately sense and make sense of when we feel suffering, meanness and so on, cannot be given a description in morally neutral terms; indeed the description of the perception becomes circular, we are reduced to speaking, as I just did, of the meanness in meanness, and so on.

The urgency of moral matters is felt, for instance, *in* the very pain one feels when someone is mean to one (it is a pain different from physical pain), and in an indirect and as it were perverted way when one is mean oneself, when one desires to hurt another and takes *pleasure* in their pain – and again in a different way if one comes to feel remorse for having been mean. That pain is akin to the pain of compassion: in both cases one suffers with the other in their suffering, but in remorse the knowledge of being the one who willingly made the other suffer transforms one's suffering. All these kinds of pain are manifestations of our openness to each other, of the way the things we do and suffer touch others, just as we are touched by them, have our days darkened or lightened by their presence.

A longstanding habit makes moral philosophers immediately dismiss this kind of thing as "mere psychology", but my point is that the allegedly "pure" morality which supposedly contrasts with this mere psychology becomes an empty abstraction precisely insofar as one tries to isolate the morality from the psychology. The whole abstract language-game of moral philosophy can seem to make sense only because one in fact surreptitiously smuggles one's quite concrete understanding of the human significance for good or ill of the matters one is talking about into a game supposedly quite independent of it. Conversely, I would say that the notion of the merely psychological makes apparent sense only because an understanding of the moral import of its concepts is in fact presupposed.

The standard idea I criticise is that it is one thing how things *should* be, morally speaking, another how they actually are and how they work, and while ethics is concerned with the former question, psychology investigates the latter. It is indeed obvious that things are very often not as they should be with us, but the question is whether *how they are* in such a case can be understood independently of an understanding that they are not as they should be. I think it cannot. Whether we treat each other well or badly, we know in conscience what

we are doing, morally speaking, and this knowledge determines our relationship to what we are doing, the sense it makes for us. When we treat each other badly, when things are not as they should be with us, this will, as I have explained, come out in a need to suppress our knowledge of what we are doing, of how things are with us, but this suppression in itself becomes a crucial aspect of how things are with us.

Consider what it means to be *tempted*. The crucial thing about temptation is the tension or contradiction between what one is tempted *by*, and what one is tempted away *from*. The thing one is tempted by is from the start seen in a kind of double exposure: it is seen as desirable – if one is tempted to steal someone's money one thinks of what one could do with all that money – but not *simply* as desirable, because one cannot help but also see it in the light of the goodness it tempts one away from; thus one thinks of the person whose money one is tempted to steal. To be tempted is to stand in this double exposure, trying to escape from the light of goodness, given in conscience, without quite being able to.

One's temptation may come to expression in self-serving re-descriptions of the situation, perhaps focusing on the thought that no real harm will come to anyone from one's action ("He has more money than he could ever need"), or in attempts to focus solely on the desirable state of affairs one might bring about. One tries, then, to give a morally speaking neutral re-description of the situation, and so of one's own desire; in effect, one tries to isolate the desire for money, as though it could be understood independently of one's morally charged relation to others. One says to oneself "I want the money, doesn't everyone want money?" – and tries to forget that the fact is that one is tempted to *steal* from someone. That is the important thing, not the money.

The point is that the things we are tempted by – the actions, thoughts, attitudes, urges and so on – have no *neutral description*, morally speaking, and for that reason there can be no morally neutral economic science describing the "logic or monetary transactions", and no morally neutral psychology describing the functioning of our psyche with its desires and needs, for instance our desire for money. To be exact: such apparently neutral descriptions may have their uses, but they have no final *authority*, for if a certain "monetary transaction" in fact expresses callousness – it might be theft, but equally some quite legal form of exploitation – then *that* is the important characterisation of it, and a "neutrally" economic or psychological characterisation in fact *loses* its neutrality, if one still insists on it in these circumstances.

This means that there is no neutral, merely "natural" or "given" psychological reality for a morally neutral psychology to investigate. Instead our experience, the inner life of our souls, is *morally determined through and through*. There are of course many thoughts, feelings, actions and so on that can be described in morally neutral terms – "I felt tired, so I went to bed" would be an example – but the fact that they can be thus described is itself *morally* determined; it is thus only *given* that I did not, for instance, irresponsibly leave something I had promised to do undone, that my going to bed is morally speaking neutral.

"Morality" is not, then, superimposed on some neutral psychological structure or dynamics, but rather the dynamics of our psychic life is itself a moral dynamics. Again, this is obviously not to say that we are *good* through and through, but rather that our *difficulties* with goodness, with being open, are visible everywhere in our life. A central aim of this thesis to articulate the meaning of this last claim, to see what can be made of such a *dynamic* conception of moral life – or simply, of life – which does not in the final analysis reduce morality, in the manner of Nietzsche's or Freud's dynamic accounts, to a mere epiphenomenon of a conflict of *drives*, amorally conceived.[103]

One implication of what I have said is that the structure of moral perceptions and reactions cannot be understood in a Humean way, as a two-tiered process in which the facts are first ascertained and arranged into a whole

[103] Levinas is one of the few thinkers to defend such an essentially moral-dynamic conception of the psyche (cf. especially *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*). His analysis is very abstract, however, and as my earlier criticisms should have made clear, problematic in basic respects. Kierkegaard's analyses, especially in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII. Edited and translated by Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), and *The Sickness unto Death*. Kierkegaard's Writings, XIX. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), are more concrete – which is not to say less philosophical, if anything the concretion gives them greater power of illumination. In the third and final part of *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul* especially, Hannes Nykänen gives an excellent analysis of psychic conflict in moral terms, one no less profound or exact than Kierkegaard's, and one which in certain respects keeps closer to the moral-existential facts. It might be said that Plato, too, analyses psychic conflict with a great deal of insight, but insofar as he lacks a conception of morality in our sense of love of neighbour, what he says does not really address our concerns, I think. Kant also tries, in a certain sense, to show how our inner life is essentially determined by moral struggle. However, he understands this in terms of a fundamental duality or opposition in us between our "intellectual" sense of morality and our "sensuous" nature with its inclinations, which he takes to be "naturally given", and thus morally neutral, propensities, and in this sense he simply perpetuates the traditional conception of an opposition between *passion/nature* and *reason/morality*, rather than understanding our inner life itself (all of it, all the way down) in terms of a dynamic struggle between good and evil which is *as spiritual as it is concretely incarnate*.

by "cool and disengaged" reason, after which morality comes in and "makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation", thus "gilding or staining all natural objects [discovered by reason] with the colors borrowed from internal sentiment".[104] I agree with Hume that a moral reaction is not "the work of the judgment but of the heart", that it is not "a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment",[105] but the point is that the facts we react to morally are *themselves* from the start seen in a moral light, rather than "coolly registered".

A morally neutral or undetermined fact such as John's having started to read the magazine before Jill took it, becomes morally relevant only if there ensues, for instance, a fight about who is entitled to read the magazine, and then only insofar as it becomes intertwined with facts of another order, concerning what the people involved feel for each other; facts such as the callousness with which Jill just takes the magazine she wants to read, not caring that John was in the middle of reading it, or John's small-minded envy which prompts him to claim the magazine back just because he had it, or because he sees that Jill is really eager to read it, and so on. Facts of this order cannot, however, be registered by morally neutral observation. Rather, our morality, our openness to each other, manifests itself already, and first of all, *in our registering them at all.* We do not pass moral judgment on what we perceive after having perceived it, but immediately *in* perceiving it; in morally charged situations, perception and reaction are one. This is not necessarily mean that everything is clear to one in a flash; it may take time for what one has witnessed to sink in, to unfold in its moral significance ("It is only now that I realise the full horror of his words"), but what then unfolds in one's slow reaction *is* the original perception.[106]

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[104] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), p. 112.

[105] Ibid., p. 108.

[106] Hume's account of morality has other problems besides the confused separation of a supposedly "cool" perception of the facts from the "affective" reaction to them. An even worse confusion, or at least one which is, as it seems to me, in substance *morally corrupt*, whereas the confusion about fact and affect *might* perhaps be seen as a merely intellectual muddle without any particularly moral ramifications, is (firstly) that Hume makes morality a matter of a quite unspecified approval and disapproval, defining virtue as "*whatever mental action or quality gives a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation",*and vice as "the contrary" of this, and (secondly) that he, quite logically given this definition, regards it as "a plain matter of fact" – and by this Hume means an ordinary *empirical* fact – "*what* actions have this influence" (ibid., p. 107). Thus he reduces ethics to simply a part of empirical (social)psychology, and morality itself to what people happen to like and dislike, making it indistinguishable in principle from etiquette, aesthetics, social propriety and so on; it all belongs to the province of what Hume calls "*taste*", which he defines as the faculty which "gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, of

As I have explained, the idea of a feeling-neutral perspective on human relations is confused; contrary to what is routinely assumed in most philosophical discussions of emotions and morality, emotions and feelings are not some kind of exceptional states that sometimes erupt in us, disturbing the feeling-free calm supposed to be the norm. To repeat: there is no such thing as feeling nothing at all towards others. It is a contradiction in terms to say that someone relates to someone else in a completely neutral way. Of course there is such a thing as *neutrality*, but that is itself a very specific attitude; it is a refusal to take sides in a conflict, a reserve. The openness of friendship or love, on the other hand, is not an *attitude* at all, but it *is* a way of relating to others, and certainly not neutral or unfeeling. There is also, obviously, such a thing as not feeling anything in particular towards others because one has not actually had any contact with them, been involved with them in any way. But as soon as one becomes involved with them one will feel something about this involvement, about them; "involvement" *means*, among other things, to have such feelings.

This involvement starts before one has even laid eyes on the other, as soon as the fact or even possibility that one *will* meet them or in some other way get involved in their affairs, announces itself. Someone rings at your door; you do not know who it is, but when you go to open the door, you will already be anticipating the encounter in some way or other. Perhaps you are irritated at the visitor because whoever it may be, they have interrupted your work; or you hope, or fear, that it will be so-and-so; or you feel embarrassed because you did not expect anyone and your home looks a mess; and so on. It is also possible that you go to the door *simply* with the thought "I wonder who that might be?" This is not a neutral thing at all, however; it means that you are *not* fearful or irritated or embarrassed and do not have any other bad feelings about the encounter announced by the door-bell. In other words, you go to the door in an open, welcoming spirit.

We experience and understand the demeanour and actions of others and ourselves in terms of the feelings they express, and if we say that someone

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vice nd virtue" (p. 112). Hume explicitly says that the question of what is and is not *moral* (dis)approval is "merely verbal" and so "cannot possibly be of any importance" (p. 130). – Kant corrects Hume's muddle on this point, and insists forcefully on the strangeness, the unwordliness of our sense of good and evil, but *he* is muddled in not seeing Hume's point that morality is not basically about using one's *reason* in any sense of the term. Hume is, then, quite right to insist that morality is born of feeling, but he does not understand that the feeling(s) in which our sense of the good is revealed are radically different from approval or pleasingness of any kind. We will return in a moment to the way in which Kant's ethics, too, is in fact very much an ethics of *feeling*.

showed no feeling in doing something, that in itself is a characterisation of his affective response, which has its own significance. Thus, if someone shows a *blank* face, a face which in a certain sense shows no feelings at all, this is itself an expression of his rejecting, or being numb to, others. I am not saying that we feel something *whatever* we do. That may be true in the minimal sense that being alive means having some sensations, being in some degree receptive to one's surroundings, but my point here is about feeling in the sense relevant to and fundamental for morality. In that sense of "feeling" it is nonsense to say, without further explanation, that someone showed no feeling as he mowed the lawn, for instance, because there is nothing for him to feel anything about here – whereas it makes good, or rather terrible, sense to say that he showed no feeling as he gunned someone down, precisely because of the moral, or as we may also simply say, the human, significance of what he did.

The significance of actions and situations and the feelings these evoke in us are two sides of the same coin. That gunning someone down is radically different from mowing the lawn is revealed *in* the different way people are affected on the level of feeling by doing or witnessing these things. This in turn is not an empirical claim about human psychology in the usual sense: there is no way to test it or disprove it, since the difference structures our whole way of seeing, of understanding and feeling these things. We could make no sense of "results" which were presented as "disproving" the apparent difference.

I want to stress, in case it has not been made clear by what I have already said, that my main point regarding the role of feelings in morality is not *merely* one about the "object" of moral "assessment"; that what is good and evil is primarily what we feel for each other, how we relate to each other on the level of feeling, and more particularly the extent to which we are open or closed to each other. Nor am I merely making a point about the way we have "epistemic access" to this object of assessment, namely through an openness to others on the level of feeling, which manifests itself for instance in one's *hearing* the bitterness in someone's voice. I do make both these claims, but with the proviso that the whole picture of moral life which is expressed in quasi-epistemic talk about our "access" to "objects of assessment" is quite misleading.

The picture is one where "the moral agent" stands over against the situation, surveying it and the people in it, perhaps including himself, with his deepest personal commitments and problems – this aspect is emphasised in the conceptions which take the agent's personal "integrity" as a central concept – in order to determine the character of the situation and what he must

do, or what it is possible for him to do, in it. But we are not in such an outsider-position with regard to the situation, we cannot *survey* the situation in order *then* to decide what we should, morally, do. We are *in* the situation, we are there *with* the other people in it, feeling this or that in relation to them, and if we come to *survey* or observe the situation we have *always already* taken up some attitude or other to them. Furthermore, since it is possible to survey and observe others only from a *distance*, the observer's stance as such – even if it is characterised by benevolence and respect, rather than animosity, for instance – reveals an alienation from the unity of love which conscience calls us to.

What I have said about feelings and the *felt* character of moral responses depends crucially, of course, on the distinction I make between emotional reactions and all kinds of feelings and moods *on the one hand*, and love's desire for openness *on the other*. As long as this distinction is not kept in mind, what I say about conscience will no doubt appear to be just another defence of the claims of irrational spontaneity and emotion against the claims of discipline and reason of a familiar kind which regularly recurs in our basically rationalistic tradition. In fact, however, my view of our emotional life is in fact completely opposed to any such romanticism of spontaneity.

The desire for openness is not an emotion or *a* feeling, but it *is* something *felt*, and something that *concerns* the *other* things we feel, the emotions, moods, and so on. It *puts them under judgment*. The desire for openness can appear in different "modes" as it were: as joy, sadness, compassion, forgiveness and even anger – and we also feel it *in the form of being awakened to, or called back to it*, in the pang of bad conscience. The desire for openness is, then, what gives us our knowledge of good and evil – or rather our openness *is* that knowledge.

All the *emotional* goings-on in us are crucial to our moral life, too, but in quite another sense than love's desire for openness, namely as expressions and symptoms of our difficulties with openness. The provocation of love is what sets all our emotional and other psychological defence-mechanisms in motion, and the suffering of bad conscience comes from our struggle to turn down the love we in one sense always feel. The inner dynamics of our moral struggles are played out in the tension between our knowing in conscience that we are in various ways closing ourselves to others, and our *suppressing* this knowledge, pushing it our of our consciousness, to which it returns in the form of falsifications and perversions of thought and feeling. Evil is the destructive, but essentially futile, attempt to close oneself to others, to *the openness which one*

cannot help being. Goodness means not resisting, but welcoming, this openness from which and into which conscience calls us.[107]

– Moral education and the reflected self –

In claiming that our knowledge of good and evil is a matter of immediate feeling or perception given in the testimony of conscience, I am not speaking for *particularism* in the sense of claiming that, since moral understanding is always a concrete understanding of a particular situation, we cannot meaningfully say, quite generally and without exceptions, that it is wrong to be mean, for instance. We can and do say just that. We do not tell a child who has just been mean, "In this particular situation, you should not have been mean", as though in some situations it might be alright to be mean. What we tell her is that one must not be mean to others, *period*, and in this sense our moral understanding is quite universal and unconditional.

This does not mean that we are dealing with universally valid *principles* or *norms* or any other such intellectual thing, however. What is at stake is rather the universality, the non-exclusivity, of love's desire for openness itself; the fact that being open does not mean being open to just one person, or to a few people.

[107] I might note here that the great rationalist Kant would be quite sympathetic to the kind of morally speaking fundamental distinction I make between two radically different senses of feeling, since he makes such a distinction himself, and considers it to be as crucial to ethics as I consider mine to be. What I have in mind is his rather infamous distinction between "pathological" and "moral" feelings. The things he says about the former are perhaps not very enlightening: the interesting thing is what he says about moral feeling, in particular the feeling of "respect" or "reverence" (both translating Kant's *Achtung*) which he takes to be the basic moral feeling. As has often been noted, Kant insists that respect has an origin and a quality categorically distinct from normal, psychological feelings, which simply indicate what a person's "natural tendencies" and idiosyncracies happen to be. It is less common to note that kant also insists that respect really is a *feeling*. See especially *Practical Philosophy*, p. 56/4:401, the footnote, and pp. 528–531/6:399–403, which I discussed above, p 142. Appearances to the contrary, Kant is a great ethicist of moral feeling. My position is like Kant's in that I agree that feeling, in a special sense of that word, is at the root of morality, the difference, which obviously is no minor one, being that while Kant thinks this feeling is respect, and is in some strange sense "intellectual", directed to a pure "idea" or "ideal", I think it is love, which is directed towards human beings of flesh and blood. As I noted above, however, there are passages in which Kant, in a strangely erratic fashion, gives love equal rights with respect in this regard. – The centrality of moral feeling in Kant's ethics has been poorly appreciated by commentators. Ming-Huei Lee, *Das Problem des Moralischen Gefühls in der Entwicklung der Kantischen Ethik* (Bonn, 1987), claims to be the first monograph devoted to the subject (p. 11).

It would be misleading to say that one is open to "everybody", because that way of putting it still makes it appear as though openness was some sort of attitude directed to a definite group or number of people (one, a few, or everybody). Openness is rather a way of relating to those one meets, whether one person or many, which is characterised by a desire to be with them which cannot be exclusive because it does not focus on any particular aspect of their persons, their being *like* this or that, and so does not contrast them, favourably or unfavourably, with others who are *not* like that.

Certainly, we do not say to the child who has been mean, "One must not be mean to others", as though we were trying to teach her a *principle* she should live by. We say, for instance, "Lucy! It was mean of you to say that to John: look how sad it made him. Now go tell him you are sorry, so that you can be friends again". What we say is a reaction to the child's meanness on this particular occasion, but our reproach is not tied to this particular occasion in the sense that we would have her understand that we do not like her to be mean *right now*, or to *John* in particular, or for *this* particular reason. If that *is* what we are saying, then we are actually trying to corrupt the child, we are telling her that meanness is alright, only it should be used with caution.

In the good case, where we are not out to corrupt the child, we cannot really be said to *teach* her that it is *wrong* to be mean, however. Rather, we *reproach* her for *being* mean, all the while taking it for granted that she *knows* what she did was wrong. She was not mean because she did not know it was wrong to be mean, or because she did not know that *mean* was what she was – as we have seen, these suggestions are nonsense – but because she was, for instance, jealous of the other child, or felt slighted or frustrated in some other way, and decided to take revenge by being mean. She was, in short, mean out of exactly the kind of motive that we ourselves are mean out of; she knows, just as we know, that she should not be mean, but she could not, as we often cannot, resist the temptation to be mean anyway.

It is not that we as adults know what is, morally speaking, right and wrong, good and bad, whereas children do not yet know it, and must be taught it by us. There is a lot they do not know about the world, but they do know the moral difference between good and bad. As Rosalind Hursthouse notes: "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".[108]

[108] Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 106.

I would have thought this was a nice way to make the point that goodness is not about being knowledgeable in the ways of the word, that it is not about having medical knowledge, for instance, but about *wanting* to help. But Hursthouse in fact misses the point completely: she thinks that the reason we do not ascribe a mistaken conception of goodness to small children is that 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".[109] But surely what we are teaching the child here is something about what is in fact, in medical terms, good for wounded babies, and in this teaching we take it for granted that the child indeed *wants* to do the baby *good*, that is: that she loves – cares for, feels compassion or concern for – the baby. That is what goodness *is*; it is not "a certain species of rationality" enabling "competence or intelligence in living", as Hursthouse and many others apparently think.[110] The only way to "teach" goodness, and the "concept" of it, to a child is by *showing* the child goodness, by *loving* the child.

When we tell children not to take off bandages, or not to eat too much chocolate because it is bad for their teeth, we are teaching them something new about the world. Things (human teeth, for instance) might have been different, and children have to be told that this is how things are *in fact*. In the same way, the fact that one is not to belch at dinner-table is a contingent fact about the social world, about the manners that have come to characterise our culture – in other cultures, it is considered impolite not to belch – and children have to be told this by us who know the social world. The difference between these cases is that with the chocolate, a reason why one should not eat too much of it can be given in terms of consequences – "It will ruin your teeth" – whereas with the belching we can only say that it is something that *simply is not done*. One might of course say "You should not belch because if you do people will be offended or look at you funny", but the point is that these consequences are not the reason why the thing should not be done; rather, they ensue *because* the thing should not be done.

The case with meanness, and moral "understanding" in general, is different, however. It is not that meanness is one of those things that, like belching, just is not done. We cannot say, nor can the child, "I don't know why

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[109] Ibid.

[110] The phrases are from Sabina Lovibond, *Ethical Formation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 5 and 9.

I should not be mean, I don't think there is any reason for it, it is just not done around here", because that would, again, introduce the nonsensical supposition that one could be mean while not knowing *what* one was doing. But neither can we give a reason *why* it is bad to be mean. What would that be? Perhaps the reason is that being mean hurts other people's feelings? But that is not anything we need to be, or *can* be, informed about, as we do need to be informed about the fact that chocolate is bad for our teeth, for in being mean what we are out to do *is* to hurt someone's feelings: in our meanness, that is what *we* hope to be able to do. In our meanness, the thought that we will hurt someone does not deter us, but spurs us on: the problem is not a lack of knowledge about the bad things our actions will lead to, but rather the fact that *that* is precisely what we *want* them to lead to.

So the child already knows that she is being mean, and that meanness is wrong: in an important sense, we are not teaching her anything in reproaching her for her meanness; we are not informing her of anything, nor teaching her any principles or giving her "moral reasons" for doing anything. What are we doing, then? We are speaking to her conscience. And what does that mean? I would say: we are distressed by her meanness – we will be, if we care about her and also, of course, about whoever she was mean to – and the point of our reproach is simply to communicate this caring, this love, to the child. We let her feel, certainly, that we think what she did was bad, but also that her meanness makes us sad and angry only because we care for her and the victim of her meanness. We are sorry she was mean because we are glad she and the other child are here with us, and we want them to be glad about that too: "Now go tell him you are sorry, so that you can be friends again".

The emotivists were quite right to insist that "the language of morals" is not primarily about passing information or about "making judgments", but about communicating feelings. They were wrong, however, in taking this to mean that one tries to "produce" feelings in others, "influencing" them to feel a certain way, or that one is "recommending" or "prescribing" or trying to "convince" them that they should feel that way. If I reproach you, and I do it openheartedly, then I am not trying to *make* you do anything; any more than in asking you for forgiveness. I am not out to manipulate you, I am speaking to your heart, to your conscience. If my words *influence* your feelings or *convince* you that you should feel a certain way, then this would mean that you do not hear them as they were spoken, that they do not touch your heart, but only stir your sentiments. And if I speak to your conscience, trying to awaken you to the destructiveness of what you are up to, but

you refuse to listen, the question whether I have really done all I could is not about whether I have really used my imagination and resources of persuasion to the utmost, but simply whether *I* have really been *open*, whether my appeal has not been falsified by, for instance, a touch of condescension or irritation or simply by a lack of faith in you, so that in my "Please stop this destruction" you have heard the self-refuting thought I uttered with it: "...but of course you are not the one to stop, are you?"

When we use moral language in actual fact, when we reproach a child, for instance, we very often do what the emotivists said we do, however: we treat what *should* be a question of conscience, of openness between people, as though it was actually a matter of power, of socio-emotional politics – and in so doing we are in effect trying, more or less consciously, to corrupt the child. This happens when our reproach actually shows the child that what we worry about is not her meanness as such, but either the light in which it puts *us*, parents of such a misbehaved child, or simply the fact that she does not act as we *want* her to, our reproach being just a way for us to try to shame or scare her into submission. We are saying, in effect, "What a nasty child you are, not at all the kind we want! Now show us how sorry you are, and we might perhaps give you a second chance!". If our reproach was spoken in the light of conscience, however, it would, as I said, communicate to the child the opposite of this; that we do *not* find *her* nasty, pathetic, disgusting, a disgrace. We love her, and *that* is precisely why we are upset by the nasty way she *acted*.

The difference between these two ways of relating to others and to good and bad is the difference between the perspective of *shame* and that of *conscience*. The difference between these two perspectives is crucial for understanding the character of our moral life, but it is often missed or dismissed. Indeed, a basic assumption behind much of the contemporary discussion about social life and the human condition – an assumption that appears self-evident and therefore morally neutral, which in fact it is not – is the idea that we become conscious of ourselves and of the moral significance of our acts only through mirroring ourselves in the reactions of others to us. This *social constructivist* idea actually amounts to reducing conscience to the sense of shame, as can be seen clearly in Adam Smith's account of the origin of conscience. Smith writes:

> Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character ... of the beauty or deformity of his own

> mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. All these are objects ... which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty or deformity of his own mind. To a man who from his birth was a stranger to society, the objects of his passions ... would occupy his whole attention. The passions themselves ... could scarce ever be the objects of his thoughts. The consideration of his joy could in him excite no new joy, nor that of his sorrow any new sorrow ... Bring him into society, and all his passions will immediately become the causes of new passions. He will observe that mankind approve of some of them, and are disgusted by others. He will be elevated in the one case, and cast down in the other...[111]

Two hundred years after Smith, G. H. Mead gave an influential restatement of the point, when he wrote that the individual

> experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self ... not by becoming a subject to himself, but only insofar as he first becomes an object to himself ... and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment...[112]

The position of both Smith and Mead of course depends on distinguishing between *consciousness* and *self-consciousness*; as Mead explains, while you may be conscious of the pain in your leg, "the taking or feeling of the attitude of the other toward yourself is what constitutes self-consciousness".[113]

Let us return to Smith, who explicitly claims that this mirroring of oneself in the reactions of others is the origin of our *moral* self-consciousness,

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[111] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 110 f. – Smith may have got the mirror-metaphor from Hume who said, in a closely related context, that "the minds of men are mirrors to each other" (*A Treatise on Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. 2nd Revised Edition [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], p. 365), and Hume may of course have got it from Aristotle's Platonic metaphor of friends acting as mirrors to each other. It is natural to extend the metaphor, for one's friends are evidently not the only one's who act as one's mirrors; everyone does so, *insofar as one is on the lookout for one's reflection in their reactions.*

[112] Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 138.

[113] Ibid., p. 171 f. – Sartre argues essentially the same position as Smith and Mead in the long chapter on "The Look" in *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966 [1956]), pp. 340–400.

that is, of conscience. According to Smith, conscience is essentially a development of man's "original desire to please, and ... original aversion to offend his brethren".[114] Having a conscience means, he says, to have become used to mirroring oneself in the *imagined* approval and disapproval of others: "We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct".[115] Having a bad conscience thus means imagining how others would look at one if they knew what one had done;

> [The offender] could not think without terror and astonishment even on the manner in which mankind would look upon him, of what would be the expression of their countenance and of their eyes, if the dreadful truth should ever become known. These natural pangs of an affrighted conscience are... the avenging furies which ... haunt the guilty...[116]

By contrast, the person who has "the consciousness of merit, or of deserved reward", is "in friendship and harmony with all mankind, and looks upon his fellow-creatures with confidence and benevolent satisfaction, secure that he has rendered himself worthy of their most favourable regards".[117]

Smith is quite right to say that we learn about the *propriety and impropriety* of what we do and express in more or less the way he describes; it is only by noticing the disapproval of others when one belches at table that one comes to know that it is not *proper* behaviour. This goes for everything that can be characterised as manners and social codes in general: they are what they are only because a particular group has in fact come to endorse them, and that this is so I cannot find out by myself, but only, as I noted above, by being introduced into the ways the group. None of this has anything to do with *conscience*, however, which is quite independent of social norms, and may therefore go against them – witness the case of Huck.

Conscience certainly speaks to me about, and only about, my relation to others. But it is not about mirroring myself in their reactions to me, anticipating them and adjusting my actions in the light of them. Conscience is not *reflective* like that, it is an *immediate* perception, an immediate feeling-with-others, a felt

[114] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 116.
[115] Ibid., p. 112.
[116] Ibid., p. 118.
[117] Ibid., p. 85.

unity with them in their joy and sorrow, which has nothing to do with a desire to *please* – just as friendship has nothing to do with such a desire.

Smith in fact has a term for an unreflective feeling-with-others, independent of any desire to please: he calls it *sympathy*. He gives a striking illustration of it in how the "mob ... gazing at a dancer on the slack rope" will "naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies, as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation".[118] The spectators are immediately identified with the rope-dancer: they feel with him, understand him, but their thoughts do not return to themselves, worrying about what someone, for instance the rope-dancer, might think of them for thus identifying with him.

Now suppose a fine gentleman comes along and stops to look at the rope-dancer: he might feel the same anxious excitement as the crowd, instinctively moving his body like everyone else. But then he is suddenly reminded, perhaps by an amused look from someone else, of *who* he is and what he is doing: a gentleman acting just as vulgarly as any brick-layer! He is embarrassed, he feels ashamed, and the immediate togetherness with the rope-dancer and the crowd is over. He now stands *alone over against* the person who looked at him, viewing himself through the other's eyes. He feels an *object* of the other's look, instinctively taking up an objectifying perspective on himself, thus alienating himself at one stroke both from the other, who becomes "that person over there, looking at me", and from himself, for being embarrassed *is* feeling alienated from, not at one with, the person one nonetheless must admit that one has shown oneself to be. And the whole process is of course mediated by *social values*, by the consciousness of "a gentleman" and "a brick-layer" that the gentleman is acting vulgarly.

Smith thinks that this is the point at which morality is born: I should say that this is indeed the point at which social morality is born, but also the point at which goodness dies, insofar as a concern with one's appearance drives out the immediate togetherness with, desire and concern for others, thus also drowning out the voice of conscience. One may well say that *self-consciousness* is born here, but this does not signify *the* peculiarly human mode of being in the world, of relating to oneself and others, which first makes morality possible. Instead, "self-consciousness" is to be taken in the ordinary and precise sense of that word, signifying the state in which a person is, as Gabriel Marcel says, "at once

[118] Ibid., p. 10.

preoccupied by himself ... and hypnotized at the same time ... by others, by what he imagines other people may think of him".[119]

According to he social constructivist notion I criticise, our moral sense and sense of self are created only in our mirroring ourselves in the reactions of other to us, in our being, to use a contemporary catch-word, *recognised* by them, in our recognising *that* they recognise us.[120] The role of recognition is normally stressed in opposition to the atomistic tendency of much modern thought to regard the individual as some kind of "ready-made", a self-enclosed entity which is what it is regardless of the relations in which it stands to others. It should be clear that the perspective from which I criticise constructivism is not that of atomistic individualism. On the contrary, my critique of the constructivist stress on recognition is that it, too, concedes too much to atomism, in supposing that the individual is *first* enclosed in himself, *until* the look others direct at him alerts him simultaneously to others and to his own being-for-them.

On the constructivist picture, the relationship between human beings appears to be created by the recognition of a judgment one individual passes on the other in revealing her liking, respect, admiration or fear – or again contempt or dislike – for him, acknowledging his independent existence in the very judgment she passes on it. Against this, my point is that the relationship between human beings is not *created* at all; rather, the relationship, the openness, is always already there.

I do not deny that a child who receives apparently no response, but only indifference, from others, will not grow into a human being in the full sense, but will survive, if at all, only as a brutally maimed creature. However, my point is that this very fact shows that recognition does not create human beings, but rather we are by constitution open to each other, and particular forms of recognition are only modifications of, or rather responses to, that primordial openness (where *one* response, namely the wholehearted welcoming of openness, contrasts essentially with the others, the countless forms of hesitation or rejection in the face of openness). 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

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[119] Marcel, *The Mystery of Being. Vol. I: Reflection and Mystery.* Translated by G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Gateway, 1960 [1950]), p. 217.

[120] Among the many book on recognition, a standard work is Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts.* Translated by Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

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.

– *Moral dilemmas* –

I will now turn to a direct discussion of an apparently obvious objection to what I have been saying in this chapter. The objection, which I have so far mentioned only to leave it aside, is that even if it may be true of many cases that the moral difficulty is actually *doing* what we know to be right, rather than finding out what *is* right, there are surely many cases where it is *not* obvious what we should do, no matter how much we may examine our consciences. Of course we all know that one should not be mean to others or leave a person in need unhelped, but in other cases we *genuinely* do not know what would be the right thing to do; this happens when we find ourselves in situations where more than one moral considerations come into play, and these considerations conflict. Of course one should not be mean, but what if being mean is the only way to avert some great harm? One should help people, but what if helping one means not helping ten others? And so on. In all such cases there is a conflict, not between moral considerations and one's unwillingness to heed them, but between different moral considerations, and thus the uncertainty about what one should do is an *intra-moral uncertainty*, rather than a temptation, where morality is opposed by something else.

In some such situations, the objection goes on, the moral considerations on the side of one of the options for action are in fact, on reflection, found to outweigh those on the other, and so the uncertainty is revealed to have been merely provisional, the conflict merely apparent. Many philosophers will indeed claim that, if one only deliberated sincerely and acutely enough, one would in each situation realise, at least in principle, that there is one thing which is the right thing to do in that situation. Others will claim, however, that this is not necessarily the case, that there may be genuine moral dilemmas; situations, that is, in which whatever one does one will do evil. Perhaps one saw only terrible alternatives, and chose one of them because one had to do *something*,

although one did not and still does not know whether one chose rightly, or even what it would *mean* to consider a choice "the right one" in such an "impossible" situation. Or perhaps one saw that morally speaking one *had* to do what one did, but nonetheless feels that doing it was wrong; one chose the *lesser* evil, but one still chose *evil*. Whatever the case, the thought is that evildoing may in some situations be *inescapable*.

The debate between those who claim that evildoing may be inescapable, and that in this sense there are genuine, irresolvable moral dilemmas, and those who deny it, seems to me largely irrelevant, because both sides view moral problems in essentially the same way, which to my mind is confused. They see moral problems as a matter of *calculating* or *balancing* various claims of right and obligation in order to reach a *judgment* of the situation, the difference between them being that one side claims that the calculation must always, at least in principle, "add up", while the other denies this. Even those who deny the existence of irresolvable dilemmas admit, however, that there is *bona fide* moral *uncertainty*; they only claim that it can always be resolved, at least in principle, by moral deliberation.[121]

As I see it, the whole problematic of moral dilemmas *and* moral uncertainty is inextricably bound up with the question of openness, which conscience opens up. And openness is not about calculating or balancing or judging things at all; the perspective of calculation, balancing and judgment appears precisely to the extent that openness is *rejected.* Insofar as we are open with each other, there are no dilemmas and no uncertainty, as I will explain.

As soon as we are not open, moral uncertainties and dilemmas appear, however. Our closing ourselves to each other manifests itself precisely as a *distrustful uncertainty* about how they will act and react, or again a *distrustful certainty* that they will act and react in ways which will make the situation impossible, hence creating an irresolvable dilemma ("Whatever we do, you can be sure that she will make us pay for it"). The distrust – and remember that it may express itself in such relatively "positive" forms as a tactful reserve or an anxious desire not to offend – will also, and centrally, come out in a moral thinking characterised by a need to make *determinations* concerning what is

[121] For a good selection of texts showing the various ways in which moral dilemmas have been discussed by philosophers, contemporary and older, see Christopher Gowans (ed.), *Moral Dilemmas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Gowans, *Innocence Lost. An examination of Inescapable Wrongdoing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), is a book-length examination of contemporary debates in Anglo-American philosophy about moral dilemmas, and also presents the author's own view of the issue.

offensive or just or fair, for instance. One is on one's guard against being used, or again afraid that others might feel that they are being treated unfairly by one; one is afraid that what one says might be taken to be too frank, that what one asks for may be thought to be too much, that doing a favour for someone will be perceived as favouritism, and so on.

In general, one is anxious to determine what one may, morally speaking, demand from others, and what they may demand from one; one calculates and balances these demands against each other. In this balancing act, this game of moral calculation, the possibility that the various calculations will not "add up" is there from the start; it can only be excluded by stipulative fiat, by claiming that whatever option for action one finds oneself left with at the end of deliberation *will be* "the right thing" to do. The extent to which one *in fact* finds oneself faced with situations in which one feels that whatever one does one will wrong *someone*, betray *some* responsibility or "value", is left to chance or "fate" to decide, but the perspective from which one sees one's moral relations remains the same whether one is spared actual tragedy or not, and philosophically and existentially speaking the *perspective* is what we should examine.

A moral uncertainty or moral dilemma can only appear insofar as we are not open to each other. Furthermore, if one presents the situation to oneself without acknowledgment of this fact, one will be deceiving oneself about the true character of the situation. One will then leave *one's own difficulties with being open* out of the picture, instead presenting it as though the situation was somehow *objectively* uncertain or impossible in itself – where the "objective" facts of the situation will be presented as including one's being "the kind of person" one is, having the kind of relationship one has to the others involved in the situation. An analogy to the falsification involved in presenting moral uncertainties and dilemmas as though they had no connection to openness and the lack of it – which is the standard way of presenting them – would be a discussion about what should be done about the "motivation problem" of factory-workers, in which some suggest the carrot and others the stick, but all tacitly agree to omit mention of the essential fact, that the work and its aims are in fact quite meaningless. The concern with secondary problems masks the unwillingness to acknowledge the root problem – and the more sincere and serious the concern is, the better it will work to mask this fact.

It should be clear from what I have already said that I do not view "the question of moral dilemmas" as an isolated, specialised question which one can

look at in one way or another independently of how one sees the character of ethics generally; in fact, I do not think there are any isolated questions in philosophy *or* in morality. My discussion of moral dilemmas and uncertainties is, like all the various discussions in this thesis, meant to indicate how one's view of moral and existential questions generally is changed if one views these in the light of the openness of friendship.[122]

Those who claim that there are irresolvable moral dilemmas, that evildoing may be inescapable, tend to think of themselves as speaking for a "realistic" or "morally serious" view of our moral predicament against the naive "moral optimism" of those who claim that no one can be *forced* to do evil.[123] That is a pious pipe-dream, say the defenders of irresolvable dilemmas. *Their* basic claim is, in the words of one of them, Christopher Gowans, that

> We may find ourselves in moral conflicts in which, through no fault or our own, we will do something morally wrong no matter what we do. In these situations we may choose the lesser of two evils and hence act for the best. But in acting for the best we still choose an evil, and in this sense we do something wrong. Moral wrongdoing may thus be inescapable.[124]

In fact Gowans claims not only that this *may* happen but that "there are occasions in the lives of us all" when it does happen, and "we will do something morally wrong no matter what we do".[125] The most important thing to note about this claim is the assumption Gowans makes as a matter of course: that we *want* to "act for the best", and that it is only because of circumstances conspiring against us that we are forced, "through no fault or our own", nonetheless to do evil. This assumption is necessary, since the genuineness of a moral dilemma presupposes that the motives and "aim" of the person facing it are "proper", that she "want[s] to do what can truly be assessed as *right*."[126]

If this is not "moral optimism", I do not know what is! For surely it is very optimistic, or to be more exact self-congratulatory and self-deceived, to

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[122] What I say about moral dilemmas is, like so much else in this thesis, crucially indebted to Hannes Nykänen's *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*; in this instance, the discussion on pp. 148–247 is especially relevant.
[123] This way of framing the issue has been insisted on by, among others, D. Z. Phillips; see, for instance, the essays "Some Limits to Moral Endeavour" and "How Lucky can You Get?" in his *Interventions in Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1992). Cf. also the discussion of "the ideal of moral innocence" in Gowans, *Innocence Lost*, pp. 218–224.
[124] Gowans, *Innocence Lost*, p. 3.
[125] Ibid., p. 22.
[126] Thus Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 50.

assume that the most serious moral predicaments imaginable, the ones that somehow put our sense of good and evil to the test – which is how the proponents of moral dilemmas invariably present them – are situations in which we want to do the right thing, but are prevented from doing it by circumstances beyond our control. This amounts to assuming that our will is good, but the world is evil, insofar as it mercilessly forces us, all our goodness notwithstanding, to do evil. This seems to me a clear instance, once again, of what I called the temptation of Gnosticism; the attempt to make our quite personal sinfulness out to be an inescapable part of the human predicament as such. For the Gnostic, evil is forced on us "through no fault or our own".

In reply to this it may be asked if there are not, quite obviously, many situations where the circumstances *are* simply such as to force one, for instance, to choose between people, making it inevitable that one lets someone down? And that is precisely the form of a moral dilemma in the strong sense of the term – to be exact: the person who presents herself as facing a dilemma gives her moral difficulty the form – "If I do this, I will let someone down; if I do not do it, I will let someone else down, or let the same person down in some other way, so whatever I do I must let someone down; my position is hopeless".[127]

Let us to take a banal example: I throw a party and there is not enough room to invite all the friends I would like to invite. I anticipate an obvious objection regarding the character of this particular example: that one cannot even speak of letting someone down in connexion with trivialities such as invitations to parties, and that whatever can be said about such trivial examples will certainly not help us understand the cases of "moral tragedy" which are, or should be, the real question at issue in the discussion of moral dilemmas.

I agree that the question is precisely what we are, in moral terms, to understand by a *moral tragedy*. I disagree, however, about the alleged irrelevance of the proposed example. The moral-existential logic or dynamics of two situations, which on the face of it are very different, the one serious and dramatic, the other apparently trivial, may in fact be the same, and it may be easier to see the moral implications in the apparently trivial case – that is, it may

[127] This statement about the form that a moral dilemma takes will certainly be contested by many philosophers, for the standard way of putting the matter, whether one believes or wants to deny that there are genuine moral dilemmas, is not in terms of letting people down, but in terms of one's being unable to fulfil one or more of one's "duties" or to honour one or more of the "moral principles" or "values" one lives by. As I have argued, however, speaking of responsibilities, values, principles and duties does not capture the *authority* of moral matters, and so amounts to a misdescription of moral life.

not be as easy to deceive oneself into taking morally corrupt ways of thinking seriously when one is dealing with a "small" case where none of the drama and paraphernalia of the "great" tragic cases is available to mask the pettiness of the actual motives of the people involved.[128] This of course presupposes that the triviality of the "small" cases is in fact only apparent, that the moral difficulties we meet with in them are of a kind with those involved in more dramatic cases. In the case of the example I proposed, it is at least clear that not inviting someone to a party can, given the right context, amount to real meanness, and so be far from trivial.

Suppose, then, that I throw a party and there is not room for everyone I would have liked to invite. Such things obviously happen, but the crucial question with regard to the discussion of moral dilemmas is whether this has to mean that I have to let anyone down. The friends who are not invited will probably be disappointed, just as I will feel it was a pity that I could not invite them. But if our relationship is a good, open one, I can simply explain the situation to them: "It's a pity, but there wasn't enough room for everyone; we will have to meet some other time instead". If my explanation arouses a feeling in the uninvited that they were not treated right, this might be because they feel that it is insincere, that there would have been room for them too, if I had really *wanted* to invite them, or at least that I am not all that sorry that there was no room for them.

If they are right about this, if there is in my demeanour a disregard or dislike or disdain for them – in short a lack of friendship or love for them – then there is indeed a moral problem, but not one forced on me by the circumstances. The problem is not the fact, if it is one, that there was not enough room for everyone, but my attitude to the uninvited – and to the *invited*, too, as my discussion in the previous chapter of the corrupting spirit of exclusion should have made clear. By contrast, if there really was not enough room, and I really am sorry about it, no wrong is done to the friends I do not invite, and if they nonetheless think they were mistreated, this is either due to a misunderstanding or to their viewing the situation in a selfish way, feeling, in effect, that someone *else* should have been left out so that they could have been invited instead. In that case the problem is *their* attitude, not mine.

In no case are the circumstances *as such* the problem, however. The mere fact that there is not enough room for everybody cannot create a moral problem,

[128] Socrates used to drive his interlocutors mad with his insistence that controversies over apparently "great" subjects be taken down to a level closer to home where their moral pettiness could be clearly seen. The discussions in *Gorgias* are a case in point.

just as the fact that there is enough room will not of itself solve any moral problems. The latter point should be obvious if one considers that I may choose for selfish reasons not to invite everyone even if there would bee enough room to do so, and also that I may be acting in a bad, unfriendly way towards people even in *inviting* them, if my invitation is motivated for instance by my fear of their disapproval if I did not invite them, or by my desire to mix with such influential people, or by a condescending pity I feel towards them.

The idea that the *world* could somehow create *moral* dilemmas simply by circumstances happening to turn out in a particular way, is in fact completely ludicrous. That would mean that a *moral* problem could be solved by finding out, say, that one could after all squeeze in a few extra chairs at the very back of the room! *Practical* problems may indeed be solved by the world, just as they are created for us by it; it may be a grave problem to get enough water to irrigate the fields during a dry period, but then it suddenly starts raining, and the problem disappears. Moral problems cannot disappear like that, however, for they are not about getting what we want – rain or some extra chairs – but about our *wanting what we should not want*, about our harbouring *ill will* towards each other.

What I have said about inviting people to parties applies just as much to the issue, so much more morally serious to our moralistic eye, of helping others. One does not let anyone down just because it may be the case that one can, as a matter of contingent fact, help only one or a few of the many people needing help in a particular situation. In such a case, one will have to decide who to *help*, not who to let down. It will be said that I am playing on words, that I am just saying the same thing in two different ways. I disagree. If the situation is such that helping one person will in practice mean not helping others, then the more one cares about these others the more heart-rending the situation will be, but this is not because one had to decide to let anyone down – one can never be forced to decide any such thing – but because one simply *could not* help the others, in the same way as one may be unable to help a *single* person one tries to help. I run as fast as I can to get to the bank before closing time so as to transfer the money you desperately need, but I simply cannot make it on time; the consequences of my not making it may be tragic, but there is no moral problem here, I have not let you down; on the contrary, I did all I could, it just was not enough. And in many cases of tragedy there is, of course, nothing at all one can even try to do: one will, for instance, helplessly have to watch a friend dying from an incurable disease.

The morally decisive question, then, is not whether I have in fact managed to help everybody who needed help, but whether I have really *wanted*

to help everybody, or have rather let some people go without help because I did not care about them. Elisabeth Anscombe explains this quite well in her comments on the typical consequentialist example of a doctor who has just enough of a drug to save either one very ill person or five others who are not so ill. Anscombe refuses the to a consequentialist obvious sounding "solution" of the "dilemma", that one should save the five and let the seriously ill person die – and not because she has a different solution, but because she, rightly I think, refuses to see this as a *moral dilemma* at all:

> Suppose I am the doctor, and I don't use the drug at all. Whom do I wrong? None of them can say. 'you owed it to *me*.' For ... if *one* can say that, all can; but if I used it, I let one at least go without and he can't say I owed it to *him*. Yet all can reproach me if I gave it to none. It was there, ready to supply human need, and human need was not supplied. So any one of them can say: you ought to have used it to help us who needed it; and so all are wronged. But if it was used for someone, as much as he needed it to keep him alive, no one has any ground for accusing me of having wronged *himself*. – Why, just because he was one of five who could have been saved, is he wronged in not being saved, if someone is supplied with it who needed it? What is his claim, except the claim that what was needed go to him rather than be wasted? But it was not wasted. So he was not wronged. So who was wronged? And if no one was wronged, what injury did I do?[129]

In order to make it clear that she is not supplying any action-recommendations of her own, Anscombe adds:

> I do not mean that 'because they are more' isn't a good reason for helping these and not that one ... It is a perfectly intelligible reason. But it doesn't follow from that that a man acts badly if he doesn't make it his reason. He acts badly if human need for what is in his power to give doesn't work in him

[129] Anscombe, "Who is Wronged? Philippa Foot on Double Effect: One Point", *Oxford Review* 5 (1967), p. 16 f. – This text, a comment barely a page and a half in length, is to my mind one of the best pieces of criticism of consequentialism ever written. Raimond Gaita, "'Better One Than Ten'", *Philosophical Investigations* 5 (1982), 87–105, is a longer essay which develops the crucial point made against consequentialism by Anscombe in terms of the question "Who is wronged?" – the point, namely, that *morally speaking each* person who happens to belong to the group of people for whom the consequentialist takes it as obvious that the single person's life should be sacrificed, must ask himself what *he* thinks about having someone sacrificed for *his* sake. The group he belongs to is after all made up of single persons, and it is *for each of them* that the single person's life who is not part of the group is to be sacrificed. Here, as always, the perspective opened by friendship and conscience lifts us out of the group, makes us say "I" rather than hiding in the conscienceless anonymity of the "we". Gaita develops this insight excellently in section IV of his paper (pp. 99–101), but to my mind he blurs his own insight in what he then goes on to say about the way he thinks the person faced with the "choice" to save the group or the one person must see the situation.

> as a reason. He acts badly if he chooses to rescue rich people rather than poor ones, having ill regard for the poor ones because they are poor. But he doesn't act badly if he uses his resources to save X, or X, Y and Z, for no bad reason, and is not affected by the consideration that he could save a larger number of people.[130]

The point is not just that moral philosophy has no business deciding who one should save in such a situation; that is true enough, but not, as some would contend, because "philosophy" has to leave the moral decisions to the individuals actually confronted with these "hard choices". The point is rather that it is no business of *anyone* to decide that it is "morally" better to help this person rather than that. *Everyone* should be helped, and if this is not possible, as often it is not, whatever one does will be humanly speaking terrible to do, or at least, in the less serious cases, regrettable, and one will be sorry for not being able to help everyone. If one helps as best one can, however, one will have nothing to blame oneself for or feel guilty about, because the goodness or badness of one's actions does not lie in the consequences of these actions as such, but in the motives and intentions expressed in them – and more particularly in the attitudes to those affected by one's actions. These are the things conscience speaks to one about, the things guilt and blame attach to.[131]

In saying this I do not want to make morality "easy" by relieving us of the responsibility to think about the consequences of our actions since "it does not matter what our actions lead to as long as our intentions are good". That idea is simply nonsense, for if one does not care about what one's actions lead to, one's intentions in acting are by definition *not* good at all. Not caring about the consequences of one's actions is evil because it shows that one does not care about the people affected by one's actions – but such callousness can equally

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[130] Ibid., p. 17.

[131] This much is in fact conceded even by consequentialists, insofar as they distinguish the "goodness" of the *action* – which *they* define as the desirability of a certain outcome or result of the action – from moral judgments made about the goodness of the *agent*. They would agree, for instance, that a person who did what he could to ensure the best outcome but whose action in fact happened to lead to something bad showed himself a better person than the person who went for some petty private advantage, but whose action happened to have a beneficial effect on events. What makes them consequentialists is that they would say that what matters morally speaking is not that people should be good, but that we should have a world of desirable outcomes. The goodness of people matters only indirectly, insofar as this tends to have a good effect on outcomes. To paraphrase a classic picture: if one could bring about a world where everyone, oneself included, was a complete pig morally speaking, but everyone was in some sense "happy", i.e. content to behave and be treated in his swinish way, this would be preferable to the one we inhabit, where there is immense misery, but some human goodness too. I leave it to the reader to decide what kind of sense, if any, this kind of thought makes.

well come out in one's justifying bad treatment of people by reference to the good consequences one expects from it.[132]

The crucial thing in discussing moral dilemmas is, it seems to me, to clear away *a false sense of the character of our moral difficulties*. We should stop pretending that our moral difficulties have to do with the way the *world* is set up, when the real problem is that our *actual* intentions, our *actual* motives, our *actual* feelings for the people we meet, are not what they should be. In morally charged situations, the question is not the one supposed to arise in, and to constitute, a moral dilemma: "Should I help, or in some other way give precedence to, this person or that?" One has, as I said, no business at all deciding such things. If there are in fact more people who need help than one can, in practice, help, then one obviously needs to decide who to help, and considerations about where one's resources are likely to be most effective, who is most in need of help, and so on, may come into the decision – or perhaps one simply helps the person who happens to be closest at hand. But morally speaking, the only problem one faces is, as Anscombe pointed out, to make sure that one's decision is not influenced by a disregard for any one of the people involved. If someone thinks this still sounds like making things too easy, their self-understanding appears, if I may say so, very optimistic.

I am *not* claiming, naturally, that if one is open to everyone in the situation in which one acts, then it will always be obvious what one should, in *practical* terms, do. Being open, heeding one's conscience, does not by some magic make one suddenly see what would be the best thing – the most effective or smartest or smoothest or most elegant thing – to do in order to help the person needing help; to get them a job or fix their broken car, for instance, or to stop someone else bent on causing destruction. But then one's not knowing how to do such things does not show one's heart to be crooked, it is not anything anyone can have a bad conscience about.

Even a lack of practical capability *may* reveal facts of moral significance, of course, but only indirectly, insofar as it shows something about the heart of the person who lacks it. In a situation where one would need to find an effective way to stop an injustice, for instance, someone who really *wants* to find a way out will often do so where someone else, who was not as interested, declares that the situation is impossible. This latter person need not be dishonest in what

[132] Consequentialists confuse issues by their talk of "the" consequences of an action. There is no such thing, there are just consequences of this, that and the other sort to this, that and the other person.

she says, she really can find no way, but this is connected with her not wholeheartedly wanting to, perhaps because she is wrapped up in "the mild depression of intelligent people" that Dorothee Soelle speaks of, in which one's "dominant spiritlessness" reduces one's intelligence to registering acutely the difficulty of doing anything about the injustices one sees, but leaves one quite "incapable of action".[133]

The fact that someone sees a situation as difficult or impossible in practical terms may, then, be a symptom of her moral difficulties, of her lack of wholeheartedness. In itself, such lack of wholeheartedness marks a lack of openness towards the people affected by one's inaction. Being open to someone means, among other things, that if she needs help one is fully engaged in trying to help her, committing all available resources to the task. One does so not because one thinks it one's *duty* to help, or because one has for some other reason *decided* to do all one can, but simply because being open to the other person means being in touch with her, being touched – saddened and troubled – by the ill that befalls or threatens her, as one is also gladdened and warmed by the good that comes her way. To repeat the point I made in Chapter One, openness is not just about telling things openly to the other, but about really *being* open to her, which comes out in one's feelings and thoughts, in spontaneous reactions no less than in deliberate actions – for instance, when help is needed, in one's being moved to do what one can to help, and not just to think that "one should help, but...".

Having said this, however, I must repeat that I am *not* out to deny that there are genuine *practical* difficulties. On the contrary, my main point is precisely to insist on the categorical difference between practical *and* intellectual problems on the one hand, and *moral* difficulties on the other. That distinction obviously is not blurred in principle by the fact that we may in practice often dress the latter up as the former. Certainly there is no way of *proving* that what makes it impossible for one to find a way to help, for instance, is not, however intense one's search for a way out might be, one's lack of wholeheartedness – for intensity is not the same as wholeheartedness. This is not to say, however, that one can never *know* how it is in this regard; it is to say that the answer is not a matter of proof, whether by objective or introspective evidence, but of *conscience*, of searching one's heart, which is quite different from introspection in a psychological sense.[134]

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[133] Soelle, *Theology for Sceptics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 115.
[134] In a situation in which one would need, morally speaking, to help someone, but cannot see

Often we cannot, for quite practical reasons, do things we would like to do, and/or morally speaking know we should do; "I would like to lend you the money you need, but I am broke myself" may be a straightforward description of a state of affairs. At other times we are tempted not to do what we know we should and could do. My claim is, however, that we do always know what *would* be the right thing to do, *morally speaking*, and it can also be stated quite simply what this is, namely *to be open with others*. We know that this is so because we have a conscience, for conscience "does" nothing but call us to this openness. This call lets us know that there are *never* any *moral* "considerations" that could speak against it, for "Be open!" is the *only* moral injunction there is. It is what "Love thy neighbour as yourself" *means*. Conversely, "Be open!" *means* "Love thy neighbour as yourself", nothing less; it does not mean "Be frank!" for instance.[135] And the real form of the moral difficulty which we falsely present to ourselves as a "moral dilemma" is: "I dare not be open with this person – so what would be the best way to deal with her instead?" In terms of speech it would be "I dare not tell her the truth – so what should I tell her instead?"

It is of course crucially significant that our difficulties with openness present themselves as *moral* dilemmas, rather than just as tactical or strategic problems about how best to secure what one wants. As I see it, however, this does not prove that the dilemmas really are the way we present them to ourselves. The point is rather that one dares not be open with others; this gives one a bad conscience which one can neither simply rid oneself of, for conscience is not at our beck and call, nor simply "bear". There is no such thing as "bearing" one's bad conscience; one must either acknowledge it fully, which means repenting and opening up to the person one closed oneself to, or one must try to hide it from oneself in self-deception. This, I claim, is what one does in reinterpreting one's difficulties with being open as a "moral dilemma".

However, discussions of moral dilemmas are standardly carried on in the same spirit of intellectualism which permeates moral philosophy generally, and

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how to do it, one will at no point be able to say in any definite way that one has tried *all possible ways* to help them. For a situation is not like a chest of drawers, so that one could say one has checked all the possibilities and none of them worked, as one *can* say one checked all the drawers, and they were all empty. The practical possibilities of a situation are only limited by our imagination, and we obviously cannot put any external limits on that; to declare something unimaginable you would first have to imagine it. What we can say, however, is that imagination is not any sort of technical ability, but is connected with desire, courage and humility; with wholeheartedness or its lack.

[135] Cf. the discussion on p. 111 f., above.

this means precisely that they ignore our pervasive tendency to deceive ourselves by falsely presenting the bad and evil things we do as, for instance, morally demanded of us or forced on us by circumstances beyond our control – and remember that an irresolvable moral dilemma is defined precisely as a situation in which one is forced, or even morally obliged, to do evil. Thus, if I do not in fact *want* to help someone I for some reason dislike, I might convince myself that given all the practical complications of the case – which I will have an astonishingly keen eye for – it is quite impossible to do anything to help him. Alternatively, I might present the situation as a moral dilemma, finding all sorts of reasons why it is *morally* speaking impossible to help without being unfair or inconsiderate or mean to others, or again present the situation as a conflict between, on the one hand, my obligation and desire to help the person I dislike, and, on the other, my obligation and desire to teach him to stand on his own – a conflict in which I "in the end decide" to be stern rather than lenient, assuring myself and others that I did not take the decision lightly, perhaps that it "hurts me more than him" not to be "able" to help.

The function of these false justifications for not helping, which will crop up quite spontaneously in my mind – my dislike for the person who needs help will see to that – is obviously to disguise the fact that I do not *want* to help, and to make it appear, on the contrary, that I would very much want to help, but unfortunately I cannot. At most, I might admit that for some reason or other I do not particularly feel like helping, but I will then proceed to assure myself that, being a decent person, I *would* of course help anyway – *if* only it was possible or morally advisable. What we are dealing with in cases like these is, as W. G. Maclagan aptly puts it, our attempts to make "a refusal *of* morality" look like "a problem *in* morality".[136]

It can hardly be denied that we often try in this way to disguise our unwillingness to do the right thing, that is, our being bent on doing something rotten, as an "objective" moral difficulty in the situation. Philosophers, however, tend to think – and thinking this is what defines one as an intellectualist in my sense of the term – that situations involving self-deception do not, however common they may perhaps be, qualify as "real" or "interesting" cases for ethical reflection, and so they proceed in their investigations on the assumption that self-deception can be ruled out.[137] This

[136] Maclagan, "Respect for Persons as a Moral Principle [Part I]", *Philosophy* 35 (1960), p. 195.
[137] Some Wittgesteinian moral philosophers who have especially emphasised the importance to a lucid understanding of morality of acknowledging the existence of genuine moral dilemmas,

intellectualist prejudice comes out in the very fact that moral problems are routinely presented as something one "faces"; one finds oneself in a situation where one has to make a difficult decision about what to do. A "moral dilemma" is indeed something one faces, or rather something *one presents oneself as facing*. Due to the ubiquity of self-deception, having a moral *difficulty* does not, by contrast, standardly involve one's thinking of oneself as having such a difficulty. A moral difficulty is not normally something one faces; on the contrary, the difficulty is a moral one precisely to the extent that there is something in one's way of relating to others that one does *not* want to face. This very fact is not faced by moral philosophers, however.

In this regard, philosophers are no different from anyone else. As Løgstrup points out,

> We commonly have the notion that a person has to be a scoundrel to get involved in falsehood or fraud. ... We imagine that we are normally sincere and honest and that we get involved in dishonesty ... only through some conscious and deliberate act. However, this is true only in the case of civil or legal relationships ... When it comes to evaluating our own position and actions, judging our motives and efforts, and the various arguments we advance in this connection ... we can be honest and sincere only through ruthless self-criticism. Unless we struggle to reach clarity ... dishonesty and self-deceit inevitably assert themselves. Arguments are used to camouflage our motives. Whatever is disagreeable we push into the background or entirely forget. Unwillingness to ... admit error or failure on our part causes us to hide certain facts or to regroup them in such a way that everything comes to be seen in a false light. In short, we arrange things to our own advantage. And all of this is done largely unconsciously. In other words, dishonesty and self-deceit are the normal state, honesty and sincerity are an achievement.[138]

Løgstrup does not say so, but it is obvious that this failure to take the ubiquity of self-deception seriously when reflecting on moral life in general is *itself* an

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would vehemently deny being intellectualists, but the tacit intellectualism of their approach comes out precisely in their failure to take self-deception seriously. Central texts in this Wittgensteinian debate about moral dilemmas – and I should note that even if I disagree with the view of moral dilemmas expresssed in it, its philosophical quality is of quite another order than what one finds in most analytical moral philosophy – include Rush Rhees, "Some Developments in Wittgenstein's View of Ethics" in his *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), the essays "The Universalizability of Moral Judgments" and "Moral Integrity" in Peter Winch, *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), and the chapter on "Moral dilemmas" in D. Z. Phillips and Howard Mounce, *Moral Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1970]).

[138] Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, p. 152 f.

instance of self-deception, a manifestation of our unwillingness to know ourselves.

A striking illustration of the way in which self-deception is routinely kept from view in moral philosophy is Peter Winch's discussion of moral dilemmas, which he characterises as situations in which someone is "faced with a conflict between two genuinely moral 'oughts', a conflict, that is, *within* morality" rather than a conflict between moral demands and something else.[139] For the purposes of his discussion, Winch simply *rules out* the "suspicion" (his word) that the person facing the dilemma is engaged in "special pleading" in his own case, that he is out "to evade doing what he ought to do if he can persuade himself that he is justified in doing so".[140] What Winch is interested in is, he says, "the position of a man who, *ex hypothesi*, is completely morally serious, who fully intends to do what he ought to do but is perplexed about *what* he ought to do".[141]

After having said this, Winch launches into a discussion of an example which he apparently takes to satisfy these constraints, namely Captain Vere's decision to hang the innocent Billy Budd in Melville's well-known story, which to my mind is a school-book example of self-deception. How could it *not* be evil and self-deceived to decide to execute a man one *knows* to be innocent? I would say with Anscombe that anyone who is tempted, in discussions of examples like this, to think otherwise, shows a "corrupt mind" – which is *not* to say, as Anscombe herself notes, that refusing such thoughts *in principle* would guarantee that one might not in a real life situation be tempted by them.[142]

My problem with Winch's analysis is not just that I disagree with his interpretation of the particular example, however. The problem is that I cannot make any sense of the invitation to assume "*ex hypothesi*" that someone is "completely morally serious". For how could one know that someone is "serious" – that is, that their moral response is not corrupt – other than by actually looking at the character of their involvement in the situation, at the way they relate to the issues and, before and beyond that, to the people involved in the situation? That means, however, that "moral seriousness", that is, absence of self-deception,

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[139] Winch, *Ethics and Action*, p. 158 f.
[140] Ibid., p. 161.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", p. 17, ans footnote. – Evidently, both Vere and Winch were tempted to present things as too "complex" to allow for such a categorical judgment. I will not discuss this particular example, or Winch's discussion of it, further here, however. There is a penetrating discussion of it in Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, pp. 181–190 and p. 238.

cannot be *assumed*. Rather, the task of moral-philosophical clarification consists precisely in finding out whether the demeanour of the person in the situation under discussion *is* indeed free of self-deception. And this means finding out whether, or to what extent, one's *own* spontaneous reactions to the situation under discussion – fictive or real, it does not matter – are tainted by self-deception, by a willingness, for instance, to accept certain courses of action as justified or unavoidable and, more fundamentally, by a willingness to accept the characterisation of the situation as a *dilemma* in the first place.

It may seem that my claim that difficulties with openness are at the root of apparent moral dilemmas can, at best, be an illegitimate generalisation from a particular form of difficulty. For it would appear quite easy to adduce examples of moral dilemmas that have nothing to do with being open. Just think of Sartre's young man who wonders whether he can go to fight for the Free French Forces or must stay with his mother, probably the most famous example of a moral dilemma in the philosophical literature.[143] Sartre presents the example (apparently not fictive but real, although that does not matter) as an instance of the clash between "two kinds of morality"; a politically oriented one and a "morality of sympathy, of personal devotion", the actions implied in the latter being "concrete, immediate, but directed towards only one individual", while those implied in former would be aimed at "infinitely greater" ends, but would for that very reason be ambiguous, since their final effects would be impossible to survey, and might indeed "vanish like water into sand and serve no purpose".[144]

As Sartre presents it, the demands of both moralities are quite legitimate, and the dilemma unsolvable – that is, only to be solved by existential fiat.[145] Others think that his view amounts to irresponsible "irrationalism", and look for principles or decision procedures by which the dilemma could be (dis)solved "rationally". To me it seems that such debates are beside the point, because they overlook the morally speaking decisive aspect of the example as it is described by Sartre, namely the fact that the motives and attitudes of both mother and son, and their whole relationship, is devoid of love; there is no openness between them.

The young man wonders whether he should leave his mother, who has just lost her other child, the young man's elder brother, in the war, and whose husband is apparently in the process of leaving her. The young man knows, he

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[143] Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism.* Translated by Philip Mairet (London: Menthuen, 1965 [1948]), pp. 35 ff.
[144] Ibid., p. 35 f.
[145] Ibid., p. 38 f.

says, that leaving might well "plunge her [his mother] into despair".[146] His motives, for the satisfaction of which he seriously contemplates bringing this on his mother, are, he says, his "will to be avenged" for the killing of his brother, and "all my longings for action and adventure".[147] There is not a word to suggest, for instance, that the young man sees the inhumanity of what the Nazis are up to and feels he must do what he can to put a stop to it. So far, it seems that we have only the quite familiar and frustrating case of wanting all sorts of things that one knows one cannot have because going after them would mean callously disregarding others. There is no moral dilemma here, just a temptation on the part of the young man to let his mother down.

But the case is complicated, and corrupted even further – again in a very familiar way – by the mother's apparent attitude. If it is really the case, as the young man claims, that she "lived only for him [her one remaining son]"[148], then that is in itself corrupt; it means that she has taken him hostage by making the meaning of her own life depend on what he does; he is not allowed to live his own life because she does not have the courage to live hers. This hostage-taking may take the form either of her caring for him or of his having to care for her; in both cases she would react to any suggestion that he might live on his own with "But you are all I have!" – a plea whose corrupt character is shown, among other things, in how easily it changes into an accusation.

Given that this is how the young man views the situation, that he knows that both he and his mother are actually only out to get what they want, it comes as no surprise that he does not stop to consider the possibility that *she* could react to his decision to go fight for the resistance in quite a different way than by feeling betrayed and crushed, as he envisages; that she could understand that this was something he really needed to do and not object to his going, although she would of course miss him and fear for his life if he went. Also, he does not consider the possibility that even if she initially reacted the way he envisages, he could talk with her openly, explaining how he saw the situation in such a way that she, too, could come to see it differently. The reason why he does not consider these possibilities is not, of course, just that he knows his mother and does not have any faith in her changing her attitude; the primary reason is that the pettiness of his *own* motives, and his lack of love for his mother, apparent in the way he talks about the whole situation, excludes such openness between them.

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[146] Ibid., p. 35.
[147] Ibid., p. 36.
[148] Ibid., p. 35.

However, the young man's "dilemma" is what it is, and Sartre can use it to support the philosophical point he wants to make, only because they both take it for granted that there *will* be no openness between the young man and his mother, that their relationship will remain as hopelessly closed as it is now. If there was openness, that is, love, between them, there *might* be no decision to make for the young man, it might be clear that he will stay with his mother – *or* he might still have to decide whether to stay or join the resistance, but in that case the decision would *no longer be his alone to make*, but something which involved them both, son *and* mother. I do not mean that the young man could then evade his responsibility by transferring part or all of the responsibility for the decision onto his mother. Such manoeuvres have no place in openness; on the contrary they are a mainstay of *closed*, that is, more or less untruthful, relations, where one person will often let the other make decisions which both should really take responsibility for, either because he does not dare to challenge the other, and so lets her have her way – this would be the case with a young man cowed by an authoritarian mother – or because not assuming responsibility suits him in some other way; thus, a cowardly young man might very easily convince himself that his mother's opposition to his going to fight makes it impossible for him to go as he "would like to".

Against such possibilities of evasion, Sartre's existentialist insistence that "no one can make your decisions for you" may sound, and may even be, edifying, but we must not forget that in a different context, for instance the one of the original example as described by Sartre, this insistence itself becomes an instrument of evasion. For the problem with Sartre's young man is precisely that he already views things as though it was a matter of him standing all alone over against "the situation", facing the difficulty of deciding which of his various private inclinations and needs he should identify with as the decisive one – and he clearly counts his so-called love for his mother merely as one among these private inclinations; he has to decide, he says, whether he loves her "enough" to stay.[149] Such a thing can obviously be said only by someone who does not love, who is on the contrary very tempted to get rid of the person he claims to love, for instance by going off to the front, but who is worried that various sorts of inconvenience may be the consequence if he leaves; others might think very badly of him, for instance, and he might also be worried by a dim recognition, forced upon him by his conscience, that leaving would in fact be a terribly callous thing to do.

[149] Ibid., p. 36.

Sartre's young man has closed himself to his mother – just as, judging from his testimony, his mother seems to have closed herself to him – and therefore telling him that he must make his own decisions is merely helping him persist in his closed isolation, in his evasion of open communication and confrontation. And actually, the problem is exactly the same – closed isolation, evasion of open confrontation – even in situations where someone lets the other person make all the decisions. What the person evading responsibility in this way needs to do is not merely to start making his own decisions, what he needs to do is to stand up to the people he is now cowed by, that is, to start being *open* with them.

A defender of moral dilemmas might of course say that Sartre's example is a bad one more or less for the reasons I have laid out, but that showing one alleged example of a moral dilemma, or indeed any number of examples, to be spurious does nothing to cast doubt on the existence of genuine dilemmas. That is true, of course, although it seems a bit strange that one of the most famous examples of a moral dilemma, which is everywhere discussed as though it was a very good and striking one, should suddenly and without further ado be declared "bad". In general it appears, judging from the reactions my view has provoked in discussion, that those who believe that there *are* genuine moral dilemmas tend to feel that my view is simply a piece of dogmatism which I can hold on to only by denying or ignoring obvious facts, whereas they think that they respect the complications, detail and nuances of actual cases in all their variety. They do not deny, they say, that apparent dilemmas are indeed *often* due to self-deception, but they accept, whereas I dogmatically deny, that there are *also* cases, or at least there *might* be cases, where this is not so, and the dilemma is genuine.

Given this self-understanding it is striking to me, but apparently not to the defenders of dilemmas, how they get impatient with, and prove quite uninterested in, the *kind* of complication and detail that *I* point to in the examples they adduce to prove that there are indeed genuine moral dilemmas. Thus, the reaction to my interpretation of *where* the moral problem in Sartre's example lies, is typically not disagreement about how the example is to be interpreted. Instead, the example is simply dropped, and a new one is proposed instead. And when the new example proves, the differences in outward detail notwithstanding, to be an example of *exactly* the same kind as Sartre's, which we just agreed is spurious, my interlocutor remains unmoved in his conviction that there are genuine moral dilemmas. To me this indicates that he has a quite general conviction that there are moral dilemmas, that he *wants* to believe in the

existence of genuine dilemmas, and therefore is not really interested in trying to understand the perspective from, and the sense in which, I deny this.

Be that as it may, I am not trying, stupidly, to prove by example that there can be no examples of genuine moral dilemmas. I use Sartre's example merely as a concrete illustration to bring out the philosophical or conceptual differences between my way of approaching apparent dilemmas, and the way typically taken by those who accept the dilemmas at face value. And I am not impressed by the claim that Sartre's example is a bad one, for as I see it *any* example of a dilemma will have to involve a closure, a lack of love, between the people involved in the situation – otherwise there will be no dilemma at all. In that respect, which is the only one relevant to the point at issue, any example will turn out to be just as bad as Sartre's.

Note that my claims are philosophical in nature; they are not empirical hypotheses about what is likely to happen, or empirical claims about what in fact always happens, in various situations, but claims about what it *means* for a situation or demeanour to be open or closed. This means that I do not claim that openness somehow "protects" against dilemmas arising in the same kind of way that a vaccine may protect one from contracting a particular disease, so that one could come up with an example where the protection failed (vaccines never give 100% protection). Nor do I claim that being open will give one the resources to "solve" or "deal with" an apparent dilemma on its own terms. Rather, the point is that what appears as a dilemma from a closed perspective will appear in a different light altogether from the perspective of openness.

It is a defining feature of moral dilemmas, as they are discussed in philosophy and elsewhere, that they are presented from the perspective of the "agent" (i. e. the young man in Sartre's example) who is faced with "options" to act in one way or another. The consequences of these actions in terms of the reactions of the people affected are supposed to be known: "If I do *this*, A will feel ..., but if I do *that*, B will feel ..., so there is nothing I can do". There is not supposed to be any communication between the agent and the others involved in the situation; that would destroy the whole set-up, in which there is only *one* agent, faced with others who are reduced to mere "patients" of his possible actions, who are passively affected by them or, at most, react to them in predictable ways. Again, the predictability must be there, for the dilemma can only be set up if one is able to calculate with the foreseen consequences of one's projected actions.

What drops out of the picture is the fact that one is not *alone* in the morally charged situation, having problems with deciding how one should act "on" others: if one views the situation in that light, that *itself* is *the problem*, morally speaking, for it amounts to reducing the other people who are in the situation *with* one either to mere passive sufferers of the consequences of one's actions, or to "actors" in the dehumanised sense in which the only thing of interest to one is how their behaviour may impinge on what one does, helping or hindering the effectiveness of one's action. In neither case does one see the others as human beings to talk to, to communicate with.

To put it very simply: the perspective from which situations may present themselves as moral dilemmas, is a perspective of *power*. That is a perspective especially tempting in politics, and in one sense indeed inextricably bound up with it. I would define political decisions in the broadest sense as decisions where one is not in touch with, does not communicate openly with, all those affected by them. A politician can of course try to explain her decisions to the public, but public communication as such brings with it the problem that different people will react to it differently, and one cannot address everyone's worries, objections and misunderstandings.

Laws and regulations, the instruments of political power, have the same sort of inherent deficiency: they will affect different people differently, and it will be impossible to ensure that even a law that seems generally fair will not have unfair and even unjust effects in a particular case – part of the job of judges is to see to it that these effects are minimised. In making political decisions one is in a position of power whereby one can, and to some extent inevitably will, *impose* things on people whom one has no personal contact with, and whose reactions to the decision are therefore unknown to one. For this reason, political decisions can be fair at the most, but they can never be *simply, unqualifiedly just or good*, as actions in personal relations can.

To the extent that open communication is impossible in politics the perspective of power is indeed inextricably bound up with politics. It is also a *temptation* in politics, however, insofar as it tempts one to forget that although political decisions cannot be unqualifiedly good or just, they *can* of course be unqualifiedly unjust or evil. The decision to allow torture is an obvious example.[150] No one can be forced or morally required to take such an evil

[150] The decision to ban torture, in a context in which it is in use, could of course be said to be unqualifiedly good in the sense that it is a decision that morally speaking *must* be taken. But that is a very weak sense of "good", I think.

decision, but people in positions of power will often be tempted to justify injustice and callousness in the name of *the responsibility for others* that their power brings. To take a stark example: "If we don't torture this terrorist, thousands may die: can you live with that?" It is undeniable that politician, like anybody else, may find themselves in situations where, owing to the callousness of others or to unhappy circumstances, they find that there is something they would need to stop or bring about, but they cannot see any way to do it, since whatever they do will have terrible consequences. What one easily loses sight of in such a case, what in one's temptation one does not *want* to see, is the fact that there is still a decisive difference between accepting that one is *unable to avert some evil*, and accepting that one "has" to *do* evil oneself, for instance torture someone.

One falls for the temptation to do evil because one *refuses* to accept one's inability to avert some evil; driven frantic by the evil one sees others doing and is unable to stop by decent means, one decides to do evil oneself, as it were reclaiming control over the situation by becoming an evildoer oneself, rather than just a sufferer from it. This control is of course entirely fictive, for what one originally wanted to control or stop was the evil, but instead of doing that one has become an instrument of it. This may be part of what Kafka had in mind when he said that one of the most effective instruments of the devil is "the call to fight".[151] The devil will make it appear that what one has to fight is *him*, "the forces of evil", but what happens in fact is that people start cruelly fighting each other, and then *both* sides are in fact fighting on the *devil's* side. If this seems speculative or over-stated, just think of what a war, no matter how "just" it may be, is actually like in terms of the suffering and cruelty involved on both sides.

One clearly need not be a politician to have power over others, however. We wield power over the lives of people close to us every day. A mean word may be enough to ruin someone's day, just as an encouraging one may save it: that is the frightful power over others we all have more or less of, all the time. The crucial thing to note, however, that it is *not* a "simple fact" that we just "have" power over each other; rather, *power comes into being when openness is rejected* – which is also, one might say, the point at which the personal *becomes* "political". Power can corrupt in the obvious sense in which it often does only because power as such *is* a corruption; its very existence betokens a breakdown of relationships, morally and existentially speaking. A *responsible* use of

[151] Franz Kafka, "Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung and den Wahren Weg" in *Er: Prosa von Franz Kafka.* Auswahl von Martin Walser (Eschwege: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 196.

power, although obviously of capital moral importance, can never be more than a responsible management of this breakdown, an attempt to stop the corruption going too far, to stop it from eating its way into everything.

Why do I say that power comes into being when openness is rejected? Because as soon as one closes oneself to others, one will start to *manipulate* them in some way or other. Not because one is a particularly manipulative person, but simply because everything we do in regard to each other that is not done in openness *is* a kind of manipulation, that is, an exercise of power. Out of your private motives, you do something to me, your *play on* this or that, in order to elicit or to avoid eliciting some reaction from me – and I do the same in regard to you. If we know each other we know how to "humour" and "handle" each other, we "know what strings to pull" in order to get what we want: the very turns of speech we use leave no doubt as to the character of what is going on.

Very often this game, the human, all too human game of give and take – as in: to give and take money, although the currencies are not the ones kept in banks – is not experienced *as* manipulation, and not primarily because we would be such expert deceivers in regard to each other, but because we both *want* to play the game, that is, because neither of us wants openness. A typical example: I am angry with you for some selfish, small-minded reason which I do not want to acknowledge, while you are afraid to confront me about my selfishness because you are just as selfish yourself, and so you are happy to apologise to me although you know it will really be a lie. And since I do not want to persist *too* long in my petty anger – if I did, its pettiness would become too obvious – I am happy to accept your apology, although I too know it to be a lie.

Often, of course, we do not aim in this way to conceal any particular unwanted truth, but our manipulation is rather aimed at something else: putting others in a good mood, making them think well of us, making them laugh, teaching them to respect us in the sense of putting a "healthy" dose of fear into them, arousing their interest in or admiration for us, and so on, and so on. Whatever the details of the case, however, the perspective of power is defined by one's standing over against others, "on" whom one acts, trying to get some reaction or other from them. Morality would not exist at all if we knew *only* this perspective, for from within it, all we have are our private purposes, and the practical problems which we may encounter in realising those purposes. But of course we know another perspective too, namely the perspective of openness or love or friendship or conscience, and *that* is what makes us feel, more or less

and sooner or later, that there are *limits* to how far we may go in our manipulative pursuit of private ends.

Thus, you might not tell a friend about your plans to go to a concert because if you did he would probably also want to come, and frankly you would rather go alone; you may not have made any clear decision not to tell him, the thought may just have passed your mind that it would be nice to go alone to a concert for once. Then he calls, suggesting you go see a movie together; you answer vaguely that you do not really feel like going, although this deliberate withholding of information makes you feel uncomfortable. But then he asks you explicitly if you have any plans for the evening – and at that point you "break", you feel that you cannot go on concealing your plans from him any longer, and you tell him you plan to go to the concert.

The first thing to note here is that the moral problem in the situation was there from the start, it did not appear only when your friend asked you what your plans were. That was only the point at which your manoeuvres of concealment or, in plain terms, your lying, became unbearable to you, but *what* then became unbearable had been going on ever since the thought that you would rather go alone *and* would rather not tell that to your friend, announced itself. And of course, that thought may have revealed, in the sense in which a symptom reveals a disease, a larger problem or tension in your relationship, a history of friction and troubles, as indicated by your thought "it would be nice to go alone to a concert *for once*".

It is not as though you just decided for *no* reason not to tell him; we do not lie on a whim, although we may sometimes pretend to ourselves that we do; rather, we lie about such thoughts and feelings we do not want to confess to others or to ourselves. In your case, you did not want to tell your friend that you wanted to go to the concert alone because you did not want him to know that you were, in some measure, *tired of him*. You did not start to close yourself to him only when you started concealing your plans from him, but already when you started feeling that you would not want to be with him tonight. The lying and the concealment are not the closure itself; rather, they are there to *mask* the original closure, which took place on the level of your feelings for him.

Insofar as you do not *completely* reject the perspective of the pursuit of your private ends, insofar as you do not completely open yourself again to your friend, which would mean feeling sorry for having closed yourself to him, the problem in the situation will not present itself to you in the way I presented it just now. You will not acknowledge that your *attitude* was the problem; rather

you will feel that "there are, after all, limits" to how one can "allow oneself" to behave towards a friend. However, that is precisely how you thought about the situation *before* you felt you had to give your scheming up, too. It was clear to you from the start that there would be limits to what you would allow yourself to do to avoid having to go to the concert with your friend.

This consciousness of moral limits did not of course manifest itself in your contemplating various extreme measures, and then ruling them out; it is not as though you would have thought, "How about shooting him? No, I could not do that!" and so on. Rather, it manifested itself in your need to reassure yourself that in not telling your friend about your plans you "really had not done anything". You just had *not* told him, and that is very different from actually *lying* to someone, is it not? *Not* doing something is almost like doing *nothing*, is it not? Such distinctions and justifications are what you came up with, or would have come up with if someone had pressed you. But that was all self-deception, for the fact is that you were hoping that you could just avoid the whole issue, that you could *avoid having to face your friend*. And morally speaking, *that* was, from beginning to end, the whole problem.

This situation could very well, if we modify the description slightly, have presented itself to you as a moral dilemma. The modifications are needed, because thus far, we only have your unwillingness to go to the concert with your friend struggling with your sense that it is not right for you to scheme the way you do, a struggle manifesting itself on a conscious level as unease and attempts to play down the moral significance of your actions. In order to make a moral dilemma, however, one needs to emphasise rather than play down the moral charge of the situation; one needs to have something that appears to be a moral consideration on *both* horns of the dilemma, and your not feeling like going to the concert with your friend does not qualify for that role – whereas, and this should be well noted, no one doubts for an instant that being open with your friend, not lying to him, *is* a moral consideration.

One way to produce an apparently conflicting moral consideration is to introduce a third party into the situation, perhaps an acquaintance of yours with whom you are going to the concert and who has expressed his wish to go with you alone, perhaps because he is a very shy person who feels intimidated in the company of your brusque friend. Now, it may seem, we have the elements of a typical dilemma: would it perhaps not be alright for you to lie a little to your friend in order to ensure that the concert-evening is not ruined for your shy

acquaintance? But on the other hand, it is not quite right to lie to friends. So what is one to do? Lie to avoid disaster, or tell the truth, and invite it?

This would be a typical example, albeit on a rather small, undramatic scale, of the way a moral dilemma gets set up. The thing to note is, again, that the possibility that one might just be open with one's friend about the situation – telling him about one's shy acquaintance, perhaps asking him if he could try not to be quite so over-bearing as he usually is, or asking him if he could skip this concert, or whatever – is simply not considered. It is just silently left out of the picture, as it of course has to be, because if it was allowed in, there would *be* no dilemma. The dilemma presupposes that one "cannot" be open, that one "can" only stick one's thumb in one person's eye or in the other's, and then the question is which would be less bad. I am sorry, but I cannot see how considering such a question could teach me anything about morality.

It will no doubt be objected to everything I have said in this section that by presenting "Be open!" as the *only* moral injunction there is, I indeed manage to make it true by definition that if people are open no moral problems remain, but that this move depends on a patently false claim. For, the objection continues, openness *itself* must be limited by other *moral* considerations, those of charity and courtesy, for instance. Although total frankness or candour may, as Rosalind Hursthouse puts it, "have their charm in youth, they connote insensitivity, thoughtlessness, and plain folly in people old enough to know better", to know, that is, "when one should speak out and when one should remain discreetly silent, when one should tell the whole truth and when one should tell only part of it".[152] I claim that the real problem is that one dares not tell another the truth, and then wonders what one should tell her instead, but surely it is often the case that one for moral reasons *should* not tell another the truth?

I would respond to this by pointing out that insofar as there is a lack of openness between people, the truth will indeed become a thing to be handled with the greatest care, in fact it will become essentially unspeakable. For to be closed to someone *means* that one *will* not, and feels that one *cannot*, be quite open with them, that one keeps a reservation in one's heart about them, which in turn means that however frank one may be about particular matters, one is always ready to draw back and conceal oneself whenever one deems it necessary or opportune to do so, and if one speaks one's mind on a particular issue, it is only because one has judged, however instinctively, that it is *safe* to

[152] Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 59.

do so. One never tells "the whole truth and nothing but the truth", but instead presents only what is consistent with the image of oneself and one's relationship to others that one wants, however unconsciously, to project.

In such a closed setting, "moral dilemmas" can obviously appear at any moment, because all kinds of complications – misjudgements of the feelings and thoughts of the person one is talking to, slips of the tongue, and so on – make it hard to keep up appearances, and then one will have to decide how far one can allow oneself to go in order to save the appearances. One may be "forced to lie" in order not to spoil the *atmosphere*, for instance, for an atmosphere is a delicate thing, easily ruined. But the fact that a truth told, or even hinted at, *can* spoil the atmosphere should alert us to the character of the whole thing; the point is that the "atmosphere" is needed and nurtured precisely because there is a lack of openness between the people involved; because, that is, there are feelings between them that they do not dare to express. Were it not for the "atmosphere" they could not breathe in each other's company. Naturally, not spoiling the atmosphere will not be presented as something one avoids just out of a desire to avoid conflict and live comfortably for one's own part, but rather as something done out of *consideration* for the others involved; out of *moral reasons*, that is. And it is certainly true that the others will normally be as concerned as one is oneself about saving the appearances. This is not because everyone is so very unselfishly courteous, however, but rather because there is a common interest in keeping the show going, in *avoiding* openness.

Given that one is *not* open to others, uttering a particular truth, for instance confessing to a friend that one has betrayed her in some way, will in an important sense be morally speaking no better than lying, for in one's confession one is not open with one's friend, but merely discloses a piece of information to her out of some motive or other – and one's not being open *means* that one will have *some* motive, however ambiguous; perhaps one avers that one's friend will find out anyway, and so it is better to tell her oneself, or one wants to ease the burden of one's guilt, or one actually wants to hurt and humiliate the other. Whatever the motive, one refuses the one *good* possibility, which would be to open up to one's friend in asking her forgiveness, and so one faces the question whether it would be better to confess or to keep the betrayal secret, a question which will furnish one with a "moral dilemma" if one does not simply see the matter in terms of expediency. Neither option is a good one in an unqualified sense; it all becomes a matter of weighing up the probable consequences of doing one

thing or the other ("If I confess, she might be very hurt, and she might make a terrible scene; if I don't, I will also have to lie about a, b, and c...", and so on). Here we see – and this point was implicit in the remarks about power I made earlier – how looking at a situation as a "moral dilemma" means looking at it in an essentially *consequentialist spirit*, as a matter of choosing to use one's power to achieve desirable consequences, or again to inflict suffering, of one sort or another.[153]

If, by contrast, one opens up to one's friend and desires to ask forgiveness, there remains for one no question whether one "should" confess or not; the concern with the consequences of doing so simply drops away. This is, to repeat, what it means to be open; it means not making one's approach to the other conditional on calculations, no matter how unconscious, about what approaching her might *result* in, about whether it will "pay" or not.

This is not to say, however, that openness implies a refusal to conceal anything from anybody. Kant's infamous example with the "truthful" person who refuses to lie even to save their friend from a murderer who comes looking for her, is certainly not an example of openness.[154] Telling the murderer where one's friend is *because one was asked* is merely absurd; it is like agreeing to *shoot* someone because one was asked to do *that*. In neither case does the question of truthfulness come into it. "Truthfulness" in a morally meaningful sense is not about disclosing or not disclosing information as such, but about desiring an open encounter with the other, and if the other is clearly *not* open, but merely out to *get her way*, satisfying her own private agenda, then one's desire for openness will be frustrated by her attitude, and speaking "truthfully" is reduced to a meaningless formality. The example of the murderer is extreme, but the same point applies in more humdrum cases, for instance when someone

[153] The fact that many philosophers who discuss moral dilemmas would vehemently deny being consequentialists does not change this fact. I do not deny that those who insist that moral dilemmas have no "good" or "best" solution but are *tragic* situations in the sense that whatever one does it will be terrible, are in one sense very far removed from the spirit of the *avowed* consequentialists, who see a solution to every dilemma in the sense that they think whatever has the "best" consequences, no matter how horrible these may be, is "the right thing to do" in the situation, who are always out to "make the best of a bad job" and have "something to say even on the difference between massacring seven million, and massacring seven million and one", as Bernard Williams puts it ("A critique of utilitarianism" in Williams and J. J. C. Smart, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* [London: Camridge University Press, 1973], p. 93). Nevertheless, those who speak of the tragedy of moral dilemmas share with this absurd "optimism" – if that is the word – the focus on the probable consequences to others of the various actions they claim the person in the dilemma "has" to choose from.

[154] See "On a supposed right to lie from philantrophy" in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 611–615/8:425–430.

asks you a personal question out of malicious interest, or even out or mere curiosity, that is, not because she has any real interest in you.

I would not deny, then, that there is often good reason to be "economic" with the truth, to conceal and dissimulate, and in extreme cases even to tell plain lies, that speaking frankly may indeed "connote insensitivity, thoughtlessness, and plain folly" (Hursthouse). But the crucial question is the *sense* in which one affirms this; whether one believes, as Hursthouse seems to do, that openness itself may sometimes need, for "moral reasons", to be limited, *or* one claims, as I do, that reserve is morally speaking called for only if the other evidently refuses to be open, thereby making openness impossible and unguarded communication pointless, and perhaps also (as in the example with the murderer) irresponsible.

I spoke of the other "evidently" refusing to be open, to distinguish the cases I had in mind from others, where someone is torn, more or less violently and dramatically, between openness and closure, so that whether they open up or close themselves to you may be decided by whether you for your own part approach them openly or not. If in such a case you desire openness, you will take the risk that the other will reject your open approach – ridiculing you, perhaps, or using what you showed her against you in some other way – rather than playing it "safe", keeping your distance. In other cases, it may indeed be evident that there would be no point in trying to be open.

Here it might be objected that in real life the difference between the "hopeless" cases and the others is not clear-cut. I agree, and I would also say that the "hopeless" cases are hopeless only in a relative sense. There are indeed cases where, as we might say, it would take a miracle to change things, but such miracles do happen; I mean situations where someone who appears lost in evil or self-centredness of one description or other, deaf to all appeals, suddenly comes out of it in a kind of conversion. Furthermore, one's own demeanour in the face of such a person, for instance, the way one might *not* be afraid or disgusted at someone who expects to meet nothing but fear and disgust from everyone, is a factor of essentially *incalculable* importance.

There can certainly be no *neutral* assessment of what can and cannot be achieved in terms of open communication in various situations. The question can, once again, only be raised and answered in conscience. The question is whether I really *want* to be open with this person, and being a question of conscience it is not about my preferences, of course; rather it exposes my closedness. Perhaps I am, for instance, disgusted by the other, or afraid of him –

which is different from being on my guard because I know that he is likely to try to take advantage of me or hurt me, while *not* allowing this knowledge to confuse my sense of him *and* myself in the situation, as happens in fear (in the sense of that word in which *panic* is merely an intensification of fear).

Even if one were for one's own part completely open to others, however, *judgment* would be needed in one's dealings with *their* difficulties with openness, as a matter of having a sense for the ways in which one may and may not help them to be open. This is, in its own way, a consequentialist perspective, concerned with getting certain results, but it comes in only *in the service of openness*. Insofar as one is open one "deals" with people only in the hope of thus helping them to move into a dimension in which there is no room for any "dealings", for any use of power, at all.

Let me repeat, that I am not speaking for some kind of moral "optimism"; I am not claiming that there is always a good solution to every problem, and that if one just tries a little harder to be open with others every difficult situation can be resolved. I do not think that moral difficulties, in contrast to practical problems, are about finding "solutions" for anything. Thus, to overcome one's unforgivingness, which is a common and important kind of a moral difficulty, is not a solution to a problem, for although forgiveness does indeed free both oneself and, in a different way, the person one forgives from a bitter and resentful bondage to the past, in one's unforgivingness that bondage did not appear as a problem that needed solving, but as a quite *justified* reaction on one's part to what the other had done. And even if one comes to recognise that one should and needs to forgive the other, while finding it impossible to actually do it, forgiveness is not a solution to an independently identifiable problem, but rather the unforgivingness itself *is* the problem, and it can be seen and felt to be a problem only from the perspective of forgiveness, which one somehow is alive to without feeling able fully to enter. In forgiving a problem is not solved; rather a difficulty is overcome through a change in one, which I would describe precisely as an opening up to the person one forgives.[155]

As for the charge of "optimism", I would say that it can hardly be called *optimistic* to point out that insofar as the people involved in a situation are all open to each other, then however unsatisfactory, difficult or even tragic the situation may be in other respects, there will be no *moral* problems between them, since *moral* problems *are* precisely problems with openness, as I have

[155] Cf. the discussion of forgiveness at the end of Chapter Two.

tried to show. It would indeed be optimistic, or rather simply stupid, to claim that such openness is to be expected, or that it is easy to be open oneself. But I have claimed no such thing; on the contrary, I have insisted on our *difficulties* with being open. In general terms, the question is not whether life is hard or easy, but *where one locates* the difficulties.

My intention is also not to paint a heroic picture of "the open person" who manages to do the right thing and to hold on to goodness even in situations where others despair of finding a way out of their apparent moral dilemmas. I do claim that insofar as one is open to others, one will not see difficult situations as moral dilemmas, as situations which force one to act callously towards someone or other, but I emphatically do *not* claim that one will experience no difficulties, sufferings and terrors at all, nor that one will always be able to hold on to goodness. On the contrary, for the person who wholeheartedly desires openness, goodness simply *is* openness, and that means that goodness will be *impossible* as long as *everyone* in the situation is not open. If I close myself to you, you can indeed for *your part* "do the right thing" in the sense of remaining open to me at least – if my refusal of openness is so total as to make any actual approach or contact impossible – in your way of thinking of and seeing me. Nonetheless, if I refuse to be open there will *be* no openness between us, however much you desire openness and invite me to it. You cannot *force* me open.

You can "do the right thing" in appealing to me to be open; but you cannot do the *good* thing, because as you see it "the good thing" is not anything you or I can do on our own; it is rather our being together in openness, and I block that with my veto. To take a simple example: if we have planned a fishing trip but I decide to sulk at home, you can ask me to cheer up and come along, but if I refuse, you cannot do the good thing, which would be to go on the fishing trip *with me.*

If that example does not sound "moral" enough, since you are obviously not duty-bound in any sense to go with me on a fishing trip I do not want to go on, suppose that we have invited some children to come with us who are very much looking forward to going. It is my boat, however, and I refuse to lend it to you, so you will have to disappoint the children by telling them the trip is off. Certainly, you would have done nothing *wrong*, for you had no choice in the matter, but you have not been able to do the good thing either, which in this case would have been spending a good day with the children out on the lake. If, in this situation, you manage to lend a boat from someone else, it would make

that goodness (the goodness of the fishing-trip) possible, although with the sad qualification that *I* am not with you in that goodness. The *moral problem* in the situation is my selfishness, and as long as I refuse to come out of it, as my friend you will not say that things are good, even though you had a good day fishing with the children.

That someone determined to cause destruction and suffering can often be very successful in doing so is obvious, and neither "morality" nor openness can protect anyone from that. Thus, if I see some big bully assaulting someone else there may be nothing I, being a weakling, can do to stop him, much as I would want to. No one will say that this creates a moral problem, however. If the bully is devilish enough to put me in front of a choice, however, perhaps asking me to take part in the battery or else he will beat up the other person even worse, and give me a beating to boot, then many people apparently feel that the bully has succeeded in suddenly creating a *moral* dilemma for me: would it be *right* for me to accept the bully's "offer" or not, considering that... and so on.

It is as though a situation which was earlier seen, quite correctly, as a morally speaking clear-cut case of someone evilly using their superior power to inflict suffering on others, is suddenly changed in its moral character when the evildoer comes upon the wicked idea to try to make his victims feel partly responsible for the suffering he inflicts on them by spuriously "including" them in his decision-making. Instead of merely battering me and the other person, he "asks" me whether I would *want* to be beaten up, and *how* I would want the other beaten up. This is obviously not a real question, it is a cruel joke inflicted on me by someone who could also simply beat me up, but apparently feels that option to be too boring, and wants to see how desperately he can get me to act.

Philosophers, however, eagerly rush in, taking up the evildoer's "question" in all "seriousness", as though it showed how "tough" or "tragic" moral choices can be. The discussions that ensue amount to a thoughtless continuation of the evildoer's game, in which philosophers allow themselves to be fascinated by and tempted into going along with an evil that is devilish enough to try to force its victims to take part in its impossible game.[156]

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[156] In commenting on the film *Sophie's choice*, where a Nazi asks a Jewish mother to choose which of her two children he should send to its death, Hannes Nykänen points out that the most important thing to note in the example is that "the Nazi has a real choice, not Sophie ... remember: *she* never raised the question whether one of her children should be killed. It is the Nazi who tries to force Sophie to think that there is such a choice to be made – that precisely is the devilishness of his game" (*The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul,* p. 236). As Nykänen notes "This game, in its many forms, can be played in a philosophical seminar but it can also be played in a concentration camp" (p. 235).

Note that essentially the same impossible set-up, the same wicked urge to make the victims of one's evil designs take part in their execution, and feel responsible for it, appears whenever – and that is very often indeed – someone engages in the kind of *moralised blackmail* that is, as I explained in Chapter Three, epitomised in demands for *loyalty*. A typical example of this would be a divorced couple who in their bitterness demand that their friends choose sides and break off all contact with the other party: "It is either me or him/her!" This creates an impossible situation for me as their friend, insofar as at least one of them will accuse me of letting them down whatever I do – unless I manage to be diplomatic enough to have them both believe that they can count on my support against the other, or can at least consider me neutral.

Being thus diplomatic would, however, either be corrupt in itself, or at least indicate that I wanted to keep out of the conflict. If I become engaged in it, and try to be open and truthful in it, *both* of them will accuse me of siding with the other, since in their bitterness neither of them wants openness, wants the truth. I might of course manage to speak to the conscience of one or both of them, and then the conflict would cease, or at least change character from an embittered, destructive fight to a truthful – which does not mean: passionless or happy – encounter. But if they refuse to let go of their bitterness, then there is nothing to do. We are obviously not dealing with a genuine moral dilemma here, however, but with plain blackmail, no matter how "moral" the terms in which the blackmailing couple presents the situation, and however much they claim that I betray them by not siding with them against their ex-spouse.

In other kinds of situation, the appeal will not be to personal loyalty but to "the sacred duties of a citizen to his fatherland", perhaps, or again to how very "sensitive" or "vulnerable" someone is – which allegedly makes it cruelly insensitive to confront them with their self-centredness, and so on. In such cases of moral extortion, the victim may for her part describe the situation she faces as a moral dilemma in which whatever she does she will let someone down, but this will be so only to the extent – and also precisely to the extent – that she succumbs to the blackmail, allows herself to fall for the temptation to play along in the blackmailer's devilish game. That she does so is in itself a moral problem, but it does not have the form of a dilemma. Rather, the real problem is that she has allowed herself to see the situation in terms of a dilemma at all. That is precisely the evil way the blackmailer wants her to see it, and the way she should – and insofar as she was open *would* – refuse to see it.

But again, the fact that one can and should refuse to accept the evil, moralised terms in which the blackmailers presents the situation, does not offer protection from the destruction wrought by their evil actions. Whatever *I* think about the divorced couple, they will refuse to go to events where the other is present, their children will perhaps not be allowed to see my (a "traitor's") children, and so on. *If* one thinks of goodness in terms of, for instance, remaining true to one's principles or ideals, then one can indeed say that even so, *I* may still, all by myself, have managed to hold on to goodness. But if what one desires is life in openness with others, if *that* is what one feels goodness to be, then the life of the lonely moral hero is simply not an option.[157]

– Determinations, rules and regulations –

As I said early on in this chapter, social and private moralities are in large measure instruments for justifying our avoidance of openness. The use to which an insistence on one's "right to be respected" may be put is an obvious case in point. I say *may*, not *must*, because one may of course insist on one's right to be respected, not in order to defend oneself from an openness one fears, but in the face of someone bent on hurting or taking advantage of one in some way. Even in this case, however, the need to insist on respect arises only because the other has rejected openness. In general, the need for moral *determinations,* the need to determine what one has a right to demand from the other, to calculate and

[157] Cf. Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 245. – I do not, then, believe that we can be good if we just decide to, that we may, as Gowans has it, "through power of individual will alone ... attain moral innocence" (*Innocence Lost*, p. 221). I *do* hold that "though much harm may befall us, we can remain pure of heart in confronting it" (p. 220); to my mind that is not a pious hope but a piece of moral logic, and *therefore also* a real possibility for us. But I would not add, as Gowans does, "if only we choose" (ibid.), at least not without carefully explaining that "choice" here means something entirely different from what it means in most contexts. To be innocent in the sense of being pure of heart – which, it should be noted, has nothing whatever to do with being gullible – is not something one can choose to be, nor attain, in any ordinary sense of those words. Rather, one's choices and attainments reflect one's purity of heart, or one's lack of it. – Nor do I think, as Gowans supposes people who deny that wrongdoing may be inescapable might think, that it would be "*unfair* if our goodness depended on factors outside the will" (p. 223, emphasis added). The world is not a fair place, and to think, as many people appear to do, that the spiritual life contrasts with the world in being a realm where things always work fairly, where everyone gets rewarded in proportion to merit, is to my mind a very *worldly* way of thinking about spiritual things. As I see it, goodness has nothing whatever to do with fairness or rewards.

balance these demands and the corresponding obligations against each other, only arises when openness is rejected, as I explained in Chapter Two. And as I noted above, in this game the possibility that the various calculations will not add up, thus creating a "moral dilemma", is there from the start.

Let us now look more closely at the way moral determinations get introduced into our lives. Here is a simple, but typical, example of how this happens: some children are playing together, and everything is going well. But then trouble appears: a child starts monopolising a certain toy, or one of the children is frozen out by the others. The adults who are looking after the children interfere, telling them that they must let everyone in the game or that they must share the toys with each other. Hopefully, that is enough to remedy the problem, and the spontaneous joy of playing, excluding no one and allowing everyone to do what they feel like doing, alone or together, will resume. However, if this does not happen rules and regulations may have to be instituted: for instance, the children will have to take turns with the most popular toy. Thus, *rights*, those instruments of mutual limitation, of demand, reciprocity and compromise, are introduced; "It's Johnny's turn to have the pedal car now" means that he has a right to it.

It is crucial to note that it would be a misdescription of the initial situation to say that in it the children instinctively respected each other's rights, without these rights having to be formulated at all. In games there are rules, but when children are just playing there are no rules; *patterns* spontaneously emerge in what they do, but that is different, for there is nothing anyone *has* to do, as one has to move one's pieces in a certain way if one is to play chess, or one has to give the pedal car up to Johnny when it is his turn to have it. Before the conflict over the use of the pedal car ensued, there were no rules and no rights, there was – or at least there *might* have been; we can picture a case where there was – just a spontaneous, living, literally *anarchic* harmony.

The fact that there is harmony does not mean that all the children are induced by some mysterious invisible hand to want the same thing all the time: the decisive thing is rather the way they *react* to what the others want, to their suggestions. If one child wants to move on to playing something different, thus breaking or changing the pattern others expected it to follow, that is not a problem in itself: on the contrary, it is part of the fun of playing that things change, that one does not go on doing the same old thing all the time, and if someone comes up with ideas one had not thought of oneself it is a good thing, not a problem. Even if the other children initially want to keep to the old pattern

it need not mean that a conflict ensues, although it does raise a question about which way to go on. That question may be resolved by one group breaking up into two, or by someone making a third suggestion which all can agree on, or the children may reach some other sort of agreement. The problem, the *moral* problem that may need to be remedied by reproaches and regulations, comes only from someone's refusing stubbornly to listen to the suggestions of others, insisting on having it *his* way.

It would be misleading to describe the initial harmony as a "state of nature" in the sense of modern political theory, because in that case what is emphasised is the fact that there is *no protection* from others in the state of nature, that everyone is free to do to others whatever they wish and can get away with, whereas the salient point about the children playing happily together is not this abstract threat that someone *might* do something bad to someone else, but the fact that no one *is* doing anything bad, but on the contrary everyone is playing happily together. To be sure, children are not "good by nature", none of us are, and so there is nothing to guarantee that this harmony will persist: it may break down the next second, as I indeed imagined it doing. The harmony, the goodness of the initial situation consists in the children's openness towards each other, in their desire to play together, and rights have to be introduced only if this good desire is driven out by other, selfish desires, such as the desire to monopolise a toy or to freeze someone out.

In the new situation, when ill will has appeared between the children, rights and regulations – "moral" in a wide sense – may be the best thing the adults can come up with to try to remedy the problem. Note, however, that the spontaneous harmony created by the good desire to play remains the *model* the adults are looking to in making their rules and regulations. It should indeed be obvious that it is not the playing that should conform to the rules, but the rules that should help the playing along: a common way of ruining the joy of playing is for a meddlesome adult or a bossy child to start making up rules that the playing supposedly "must" conform to. The relation of the moral regulations to the playing they regulate is, then, at best like the relation of weed-control to gardening: it plays a perhaps necessary, but always subordinate role; it removes impediments to growth, but makes nothing grow by itself.

This means, to put the same point in terms of our knowledge of good and evil, that we do not have some mystical sense, given us by our "reason" or by some "intuition", of what moral rules or rights or principles there ideally should be; we do not judge the children's spontaneous play according to how it

measures up to such an ideal. Rather, we have a concrete and immediate feeling for the openness between the playing children, and when we sense that the openness is obstructed we come up with rules to try to remove the problem. We feel a need to remedy anything in the first place only because we feel, just as spontaneously as do the children, the goodness, the desirability, of their all playing together, and the evil, the undesirability, of the situation where someone monopolises a toy or someone is frozen out. And these unfortunate possibilities are in a sense variations of the same thing, for what is bad about a child monopolising a toy is that he thereby freezes the others out from his game; only at this point does the game become *his* in an exclusive sense. If a child comes to feel remorseful about having behaved thus selfishly, he is called back by his conscience to openness; he wants to go to those he was cold to or angry with and become friends with them again.

My point is not that rights are a bad thing, only that their presence reveals the presence of something bad. Rights may be described as instruments of good only in the qualified kind of way in which guns may be described as instruments of peace: if someone has guns and threatens us with them, the best thing we can do to avert war may be to get enough guns to make him back down, but it would obviously be nonsense to claim that peace came into the world with the gun, for guns exist only because people fear war from each other. Similarly, rights may, at best, be instituted and justified as a measure against the threat of some people ruining things and taking advantage of others, but as Løgstrup says, when "rights" or "moral rules" become an issue at all, this indicates that we have become "indifferent" to others in some way, and so we resort to the rules as a sort of "insurance" against this callousness.[158] The rules of morality thus provide us, as Løgstrup says, with "*ersatz* motives for *ersatz* actions."[159]

So if we take justice to mean what Hume took it to mean, respect for a system of rules, rights and duties – justice being in Hume's terms an "artificial" rather than a "natural" virtue – we may indeed say with him that "'tis only from the selfishness and confin'd generosity of men ... that justice derives its origin."[160] Insofar as rights are meant to protect the weak from the strong, their institution clearly cannot be explained *merely* by our "confined generosity",

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[158] Løgstrup, "Etiske begreber og problemer" in Gustaf Wingren et. al. (eds.), *Etik och kristen tro* (Lund: Gleerup & Gyldendal & Universitetsforlaget, 1971), p. 226.
[159] Løgstrup, *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1967), p. 123.
[160] Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. 2nd Revised Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 495.

however, but must be explained by the combination of, or conflict between, that confined generosity *and* our conscience, which tells us that we must try to protect the weak from the strong (the conflict may also be between the confined generosity of some and the conscience of others).

The moral priority of the *anarchic* openness which conscience calls us to, and the secondary character of rights, rules and regulations, can also be seen in the fact that we can always ask whether the rules are *just* or whether it is really *right* that someone has certain rights, which it obviously need not be at all. This basic fact proves that the cynic is wrong to see the "law" – moral and political – as *simply* an expression of a balance of power, the result of people realising that if they cannot have the best thing, the ring of Gyges allowing them to do what they please, they must settle for the second best: giving up some of their freedom in exchange for protection from the violence of others. We must rather say that the law is indeed a second best, but the best thing, the possibility in the light of which we understand all other possibilities as in various ways deficient, is not the freedom of total licence, but the freedom in openness with others that is love or friendship – and children playing happily together are, for the time being, friends.

Often, however, the selfish demand to have it one's own way, the will to power, is itself from the start expressed in the form of *a claim of right*, so that rights-talk introduces the moral problem rather than remedying it; this is what lends the cynic's case the credibility it has. Thus "good" – that is: justified – rights are most often used to combat bad ones, so that the problem the "good" rights are meant to redress is not a lawless tyranny, but a lawful one. Legislation banning the physical abuse of children by their parents and overseers did not, for instance, introduce rights into an area of life that used to be unregulated, rather it replaced an older regulation which gave parents the right, and in a sense even made it a duty for them, to use corporeal punishment on their children. Use of rights-talk to justify evil aims is not a marginal phenomenon, but rather a standard case, for as I have explained, when we do evil we need, precisely because we are not conscienceless brutes, to come up with a "justification" for doing it, and to that end we invoke rights and other moral considerations.

Philosophically and existentially, the question is not whether or to what extent rights and regulations are necessary, but rather the light in which one sees their necessity, which is undeniable *in fact* – although we should not forget that this necessity is indeterminate as to its actual extent in any particular

situation, because how far power holds sway depends on how *we*, the people involved in the situation, in fact relate to each other. Nonetheless, Levinas is right to say that in principle the question is whether social morality with its determinations and regulations is

> the result of a limitation of the principle that men are predators of one another, or if to the contrary it results from the limitation of the principle that men are *for* one another. Does the social, with its institutions, universal forms and laws, result from limiting the consequences of the war between men, or from limiting the infinity which opens in the ethical relationship of man to man?[161]

In one sense this way of putting may be misleading, however. We should perhaps rather say that rights indeed always limit "the infinity which opens in the ethical relationship of man to man", namely (although Levinas would not say this) openness. But on the other hand, rights *also* sometimes limit "the war between men" – just as at other times they merely serve as an instrument of and enticement to that war.

Regardless of the variations here, it remains the case – and this is the crucial point – that the institution of a regime of rights can by itself never really solve a moral problem: on the contrary, the very consciousness of rights shows that the problem still persists. The children waiting impatiently for their turn to ride the pedal car, jealously guarding their right to it, are obviously not playing happily together: to them the others are reduced to competitors to be envied or, when it is one's own turn to ride, triumphed over. If the picture is not that grim, this is so precisely to the extent to which the matter is *de-moralised*, so that the taking of turns is not seen as a question of insisting on one's rights, but as a matter of organising things practically in such a way that everyone can try the car. As I tried to bring out in my discussion in Chapter Two, where there is openness there is a lack of concern over moral *determinations*, over the moral *standing* of the people involved in a situation, for the unity felt in openness abolishes the distinction between *yours* and *mine*.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that moral discourse, with its judgments, admonitions, allocations of praise and blame, rights and duties, and so on, is possible at all only because of openness, because we have a conscience. If there were no openness human life would not be what it is. In

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[161] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 80.

fact, we cannot imagine what it would be like in such a case, for everything which could be described as our being affected by and caring for each other at all, not just morally in a restricted sense, is in one way or another related to openness. On the other hand – and here the paradoxical character of openness, or rather of our relation to openness, comes to light – one can also say that moral discourse is possible only insofar as openness is *lacking*, for the *determinations* which such discourse, and the reactions it articulates, consist in (when one determines that one person owes another *this*, because earlier he had done *that*, for instance), come into being at the precise point when people step or fall out of the openness in which there is only the wholehearted, and in this sense unlimited, desire to be with each other.

Let me try to bring out the sense of this claim with yet another example. Two people may talk together; they are glad to be there talking together, in openness. But then one of them says something which the other reacts to with indignation. What does this mean? It means that there appears the feeling, the thought, "You have no right to say *this*, to speak like *that*", "*You* have no right to speak like that to *me*". Determinations, specifications, appear, and they appear as the expressions, the vehicles, of one person closing himself to the other, coming to look at her as a stranger – which in his indignation he does not, however, experience as *his* changing his attitude, but rather as the other changing in such a way that he suddenly feels *estranged* from her. And of course this estrangement may take the form of an indignant recognition that the other has once again revealed herself to be the same old person one knew so well, but who for a moment seemed to have been transfigured; now one sees that this was only a deceptive appearance ("I should have known she is *always* like that...").

So there is, in the indignation, a specification of what the other said or what she is like, a fastening onto this or that specific thing about her or her words, which is felt, by the indignant person, to have come between him and the other, making an open communication between them impossible: "You are asking about things that are none of your business, I refuse to talk to you!" Naturally, I am not denying that in an open talk, too, people will be talking about *something*, saying this specific thing rather than that, and *in this sense* they will be making distinctions and determinations. But the *openness* of the talk is not anything specific in itself, nor does it rest on anything specific. It is simply the desire of the people talking to be with each other in talking, in knowing and being known. And insofar as this desire is there, it means that the

specific things which are said will not come between the talkers, estranging one from the other, making them draw back from the communion of their talk into a more or less manifestly distrustful and hostile talking *at* each other; on the contrary, the things said will be the medium in which their desire to know each other, to be with each other, is embodied, in the same way in which that desire may be embodied in an embrace. The point is that in the desirous openness the specifics, our doing *this*, your saying *that*, my responding *thus*, his behaving like *that*, her being like *this*, do not assume the decisive and *divisive* importance they get when we fall out of the openness.

With regard to openness, the distinctions we may make are accidental and unimportant; whether we speak of forgiveness, joy, hope, humility, trust or longing, we are pointing – if we take these words in the sense I am evoking – to manifestations of the same desire for, and unity with, the other, the same wholeheartedness or openness. One cannot, for instance, be humble or forgiving, but not open; nor can one be open, but not humble or forgiving. Once we realise that there is this possibility of an openness without distinctions, the moral distinctions and determinations we make in our everyday dealings with each other lose their apparently self-evident status. Thus, while it may be very important indeed whether there is respect or disrespect, on the other hand even the better of these possibilities depends on there being a lack of openness, and therefore no unqualified goodness, between people.

In moral contexts, the distinctions we make are not *innocent*. It is certainly not innocent that proponents of slavery make distinctions about "better" and "worse" forms of it, and in the same way, although not as obviously corruptly, it is not in any straightforward sense a mere "fact" or a positive "resource" that we have all the possibilities we have of distinguishing "better" from "worse" in moral terms, for in focusing on the relatively speaking better one may be losing sight of the good. Furthermore, we often make moral distinctions as a move in a game of power, in order to force others to give us what we want, or in order to *justify* ourselves. And what I have said will certainly be provocative – and will therefore be felt to be "ludicrous" or "absurd" or "exaggerated" – insofar as it threatens to deprive us of this illusory fig leaf of justification.

– *Moralism* –

This point about justification brings us back to the question of Pharisaism or moralism – as far as I can see, these terms are synonymous – which we have touched upon intermittently. What is the relation of moralism to *morality*, and to *goodness*? I will argue that, while moralism is obviously inimical to goodness, the relation between morality and moralism is too close for comfort. As I said I agree with Nietzsche that Pharisaism is not a "degeneration" in a "good" man, but rather a "condition" of what is commonly called goodness.[162] Karl Barth expressed it in even stronger terms when he said that we are Pharisees "to the core of our being".[163] As Jacques Ellul points out, we ask "nothing more than to be justified and to be right ... [we] cannot stand going on living ... in the situation of the accused".[164] For this reason, our moral life consists in ever new attempts by which we try to "[take] possession of morality, turning it into an instrument for [our] own advantage", and this is what gives birth to Pharisaism or moralism.[165] As Ellul explains,

> In the hands of the moralist, morality becomes essentially an instrument of justification. ... Either the person will construct morality in terms of his own behavior and will end by showing that the good is what he himself does. That is direct justification. Or he will modify his action, his attitude, his works, to conform to a moral commandment which he obeys *in order to be able to* declare himself just and to *affirm his own justice*, hence to affirm his superiority over the unjust. However harsh, or difficult, or pure it might be, this system of morality will never be other than a mechanism of justification, since it is never observed except for the sake of being able to say, "I am right". In both cases it is a veritable procedure for creating a good conscience.[166]

It should also be noted that "immoralism", far from being the repudiation of morality and moralism it claims to be, is just another form of moralism, as indicated by the fact that the immoralist typically *accuses* others of their moralism, accusation being the typical attitude precisely of moralism. As Ellul says, "immoralism is always illusory. Either it is a justifying hypocrisy, or it is a

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[162] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), §135.
[163] Barth, *Ethics*, p. 343.
[164] Ellul, *To Will & To Do*. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin (Philadelphia & Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1969), p. 183.
[165] Ibid., p. 174.
[166] Ibid.

hoax which serves to cover up a social conformism or a return to another morality".[167]

The name Pharisaism comes from an Aramaic word meaning *separated ones*; a Pharisee is a person who in his presumed goodness or "cleanness" separates himself from the bad, the unclean, thus aiming *to justify himself by finding himself better than others*. And as Barth says,

> What would human goodness be without the motivating power of the comparative? Human goodness always lives a little, and often totally, by the greater lack of human goodness ... among others, in contrast to which our own smaller lack of it can pretend to be good and feel calm and comfortable and secure. This is true even and perhaps most of all when we seem to be totally and perhaps very seriously and passionately devoted to others.[168]
> We *need* the sin of our fellows. We live by it. ... Sin interests us, not because we take joy in evil but very naively for our own sake. We need it as a foil. We are never more intensely concerned about ourselves than when we are concerned about the sin of our neighbors. In fact there is no stronger revelation of our own lack of goodness than this far-from-good attitude to the sin of others. *Moral* sin, the sin of our closed goodness which is no goodness, is the real sin, and again the *moral* devil is the *true* and *proper* devil.[169]

Sin would not, then, be something that comes from going against morality; rather, our first sin would be our very morality itself – or, to put it more cautiously, the *use* to which we put our morality in putting ourselves above others and pitting ourselves against them; in our moral *judging* of people as "good" or "bad", "worthy" or "unworthy", "deserving" or "undeserving". By contrast, the goodness of Jesus was, as Barth points out, completely free from any Pharisaism, for his goodness, that is, his love, was

> a purity of heart that does not consist in a differentiation from others, from the weak and impure, by a specially keen conscience or powerful will, but in a lack of reservation in his heart against even the weakest and the most impure. ... Christ's ... sinlessness is not that he lived an angelic life ... but that he was free from the moral sin ... in which precisely the best part of us has the greatest share.[170]
> He opens the closed door of righteousness from within instead of rejoicing at being within and hiding himself behind the door. He brings the unrighteous

[167] Ibid., p. 183; Ellul gives his grounds for claiming this on pp. 179–183.
[168] Barth, *Ethics*, p. 338.
[169] Ibid., p. 340.
[170] Ibid., p. 340 f.

> in instead of talking to them through the closed door and taking pleasure in their being outside.[171]

"Bringing the unrighteous in" is essentially a matter of one thing and one thing only: *forgiveness*, which is itself a manifestation of love or friendship, an opening of one's heart to the person one had closed it to. However, in our moralism we constantly try to turn even forgiveness itself into a sign of our moral distinction – thinking to ourselves that we are not only very good ourselves, we are also forgiving of the sins of others. This attitude obviously has nothing to do with forgiveness; it is simply one more way of trying to justify oneself by favourably contrasting oneself with the badness of the unforgiving others.

Here we come again upon the fact that being good – in our sense, not Aristotle's – is incompatible with thinking of oneself as good. This is obvious, and yet it may seem strange. Certainly, philosophers have been perplexed by the idea that a good person cannot "know" that she is good. It has seemed to them to imply that goodness is incompatible with self-knowledge, and since the goodness someone shows may be obvious to anyone who witnesses it, it seems that we must, as Anthony Skillen puts it, attribute to good people either "tremendous powers of self-deception or depths of stupidity".[172] This supposed "paradox" about the lack of self-knowledge of the good arises from confusing two different perspectives, however; that of goodness itself, and that of someone observing it, and furthermore, observing it with a Pharisaic interest in determining the relative moral standing of the people involved.

A person showing goodness can obviously be, as Skillen puts it, "quite 'realistic' about themselves",[173] but that does not mean what Skillen thinks it means, that they are conscious of their own merits and will say that they are very good people. It means, among other things, that they may be fully aware that because of what they do *others* might see them as a very good person, as someone who is better than others. However, they may also be aware, without corruption, of the fact that they *want* to do good and that what they do *is* indeed good. Thus, if you pick up a crying child and comfort it there is normally no uncertainty about whether you want to do it or whether what you do is good: it obviously is – but the point is that this is *not* to say that it is "meritorious", or that in doing it you show yourself to be a very good person. When we are good

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[171] Ibid., p. 339.
[172] Skillen, "Can a Good Man Know Himself?", *Philosophical Investigations* 18 (1995), p 152.
[173] Ibid, p. 154.

to others we do not feel that our actions reflect favourably on our persons; we do not feel proud or satisfied with ourselves for doing what we did. You do not normally feel that you are somehow admirable because you take pity on a crying child, and yet this is certainly a paradigmatic example of goodness. Why do you not feel admirable? Because your attention is on the *child*, not on *yourself* and your "moral standing".

In the same way, if you manage to help a friend in trouble, you will be glad for it, and if your help does not help, you will be sad for it, and if someone then tells you, for instance, that you did more than anyone else to help, you may very well agree – perhaps you helped precisely because you knew no one else would[174] – but you will be no happier for that. Because what worries you is how your *friend* is doing, not how *you* "did" on the moral test your interlocutor apparently takes the situation to be. Your attention does not stray from your involvement with your friend to the "moral" light it presents you in, and that *not-straying* is what goodness *is*, negatively speaking. Positively, it is the desire for, the openness to the other person; it is the orientation whose other name is friendship or love.

To be good, to be a friend, is not only to give of the good things in one's possession to others, instead of jealously guarding them as one's private possessions. It means, first of all, that one does not regard goodness *itself* as a personal possession, as one's personal "virtue" which would entitle one to moral recognition from others. Barth says, speaking of the goodness of Jesus, that goodness is something one cannot "for a moment possess without giving it away".[175] What this means is, in fact, that the whole language of possession *and* so of "giving" really misses the point, which is that goodness in the sense of love is not something anyone, any *one* person, "has" or even "shows". What goodness means is rather, as I pointed out in discussing moral dilemmas above, *that things are good between people*. Not of course good in any pedestrian sense – enjoyable, fairly uncomplicated, satisfying to both parties, and so on. Goodness is, rather, the openness of love itself in which there is no "yours" or "mine", and so no *merit* and no *virtue* either.

The crucial point about the Christian conception of morality is *not*, then, that "the distinction between moral and other merits has become much sharper than it was in Greek times", as Russell and many others think,[176] but rather that

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[174] Cf. D. Z. Phillips, "Can Which Good Man Know Himself?", *Philosophical Investigations* 18 (1995), p. 160.
[175] Barth, *Ethics*, p. 340.
[176] Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1961 [1946]), p. 189.

morality has ceased to be a matter of merit at all. Or perhaps we should rather say – since it seems very hard to conceive of morality, and certainly of *a* morality, that would be free of ideas of merit and demerit, praise and blame, and so on – that *goodness has ceased to be a matter of morality*. This essential point is at the same time seen *and* misunderstood by those who proclaim that the supposedly *sui generis* and *absolute* character of moral claims is a red herring, and that we do not really have any clear idea of the supposedly fundamental distinction between "moral" goodness and other kinds of merit and approval.[177] It is true that we do not, but this is so because the only goodness that is "absolute" – to stay with that perhaps misleading expression – is one which, unlike *moral* goodness as normally understood, is not about merit and approval at all.

Nietzsche thought that our (modern) instinctual moral reactions betray "a contradiction of values" between worldly (Greek, aristocratic) and Christian tendencies, a contradiction we do not want to acknowledge, preferring instead to "sit between two chairs, saying Yes and No in the same breath".[178] I think this is true, but as should be clear from what I have said the contradiction cannot be understood as one between elements from two different *moralities* enjoining different "values" or "ideals". The teaching of the gospels has already been betrayed when aspects of the openness of love are isolated and turned into "Christian values" which we are enjoined to further; when it is said, for instance, that we should act unselfishly or be forgiving or tolerant, as though this could be given a fixed description in terms of particular dispositions or behaviours, as though there could be a list of *Christian* virtues.[179]

The point is that we are torn between our wish for *a* morality – for a system of more or less determinate values enabling us to *measure* good and

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[177] As I noted above, Hume explicitly says that the question of what is and is not moral (dis)approval is "merely verbal" and so "cannot possibly be of any importance" (*An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, p. 130). More recently, Bernard Williams has made similar claims.

[178] Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner* in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* (München/Berlin: DTV/de Gruyter, 1988 [1967-77]), Band 6, p. 52. – The epilogue, from which I quote, gives a very concise statement of Nietzsche's thought on this point.

[179] As H. Richard Niebuhr says, "the idea of virtue itself has no real place in Christian ethics", in an ethics, that is, where love is the central concept; the talk of Christian virtues is rather an example of how when "the ethical reflections of Scripture are systematized with the aid of ideas developed by Greco-Roman-Western reason, considerable violence is done to them and the way is opened to many misconceptions"; we may speak of virtue in the context of love, Niebuhr says, only "with the qualification that we mean by it neither achievment nor habit, but gift and response", for the so-called virtues of love are "not given as states of character but as relations to other beings" ("Reflections on Faith, Hope and Love", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 1 [1974], p. 151 f.).

bad, to apportion praise and blame, and so on, thus justifying ourselves – and our knowledge, given us in conscience, that the good is love, and that adopting any morality, whatever values it may champion, will amount to a *rejection* of the openness of love.

Whence comes this need for moralism? We take refuge in morality because love frightens us. As Ellul notes, moralism, in which one makes use of morality as "a means of distinguishing the good from the bad, assuming, of course, that I am on the side of the good", is

> a way of avoiding being called into question. Since I am on the side of the good, I neither call into question what I myself am nor the society to which I belong. But conversely, [moralism] authorizes calling into question, and finally destroying, all those who are on the other side, those whom morality condemns.[180]

The first sentence in the quote is the crucial one, it seems to me. The point is that we use morality as *a way of avoiding being called into question*. The fact noted by Ellul, that moralism "turns morality into an organization of convenience",[181] is related to this. Convenience is achieved quite concretely by morality's "establishing a behavior type on which everyone can depend ... a norm of average social behavior which makes it generally possible to know how my neighbor will behave" – a norm, expressed in our instinctive judgments and our "legitimate expectations", the breaking of which causes "moral scandal".[182] This *normalising* function of moral norms, as one might call it – normalising is what norms *do* – in effect makes morality, as Ellul rightly notes, into "a screen by which to avoid personal human relations".[183]

Let me give a longer quote from Ellul in which he explains what he means by this; he puts the central point well, and his words reveal how intimately the discussion of moralism is related to what I have called the fear of openness, and so to the central problematic of the thesis as a whole. Ellul writes:

> Each person presents a moral facade to all, which allows him to remain hidden in social and personal relations. Only the moral facades confront each other, and in reality they make easy coexistence possible without collision or

[180] Ellul, *To Will & To Do*, p. 175.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., p. 176.

> conflict ... for it must never be forgotten that person to person contact is, in reality, dreadfully painful. In this contact, the person who reveals himself to me in his reality becomes my neighbor, and this neighbor then obliges me to reveal myself, to reveal what I am in the depths of my being. Deprived of the protective armor of morality, one is only what one is. It is always painful to let oneself be seen *only* for what one is ... Now ... this revelation, this confession, is forced upon me solely by the relation with my neighbor. It is in my relationship with the other person that I am stripped cruelly naked. As long as I am with an organization, a crowd ... I can take shelter behind a cluster of conventions and pretexts. The best mask is that provided by morality, which allows me to be seen at my best as the virtuous and just individual ... A little goodwill on both sides suffices to make the two parties [to an encounter] believe in the game and to be satisfied with each other. But that is only a meeting between two masks and two accomplices. It is not at all a meeting with one's neighbor.[184]

Moralism is obviously a destructive attitude considered from the point of view of the person who is judged and rejected as morally "unworthy" by the moralist, but as Ellul notes, moralism "also has its repercussions on the person who does the moralizing".[185] In rejecting the other he "rejects himself", for in shutting himself up in a system of justifications designed to protect him against being put in question, he in fact *robs himself* of "the ability to call himself into question and to be called into question", and "in reality ... denies himself by denying his own future", for in refusing to be called into question "he refuses all possibility for serious development".[186] The crucial point to see, Ellul concludes, is that

> we have no future except to the extent that we have a neighbor. The latter formulates for us the demands of life and truth, and to the extent which he makes us reveal ourselves it is he who opens for us (for us in our reality and not in our seeming) all the available potentials which are excluded by an attitude of moralism.[187]

I should perhaps make it explicit, in order to forestall a misunderstanding that may have been prompted by some passages in the quotes from Ellul, that I do not primarily have in mind moralism of the obviously external and hypocritical kind, where someone is anxiously hiding behind a screen of valuations they clearly do not themselves believe in, or have simply accepted unthinkingly from

[184] Ibid., p. 176 f.
[185] Ibid., p. 178.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., p. 178 f.

their social milieu. In the more important, and more devious case, the moralism is a sincere, deeply felt and thoughtful expression of a personal attitude, which furthermore need not have any of the surface characteristics we normally associate with moralism; it need not be particularly judgmental or hostile to spontaneity, for instance. However, regardless of its specific details, the attitude of moralism cannot be *wholehearted*, for moralism is precisely an attempt to close love's openness by claiming the right, or making it one's duty, to *draw limits* to what one can accept from others and from oneself, demanding that each stay within their limits.

By contrast, if goodness is *love*, then it is, as Karl Rahner, a theologian in many ways obviously very different from Ellul, says, "quite impossible to say exactly what is really demanded" of us.[188] Each of us is certainly to love "with his *whole* heart" but what this means for each of us can only be known *in* opening oneself in love; one knows it only to the extent that one has "really caught up with himself and hence begins to know what is in him and *who* he is in the concrete".[189] To love, whether as friend or lover or parent or child or neighbour, does not mean fulfilling "the demands of morality", it means daring to find out who one is, and who the other is. In loving, therefore, "man embarks on the adventure of his own reality, all of which is at first veiled from him".[190]

Love is openness, it is an existential wager into the unknown. This is not the *wholly* unknown or undetermined, however, for it is the unknown of *love* and *conscience*, and so not the unknown which, like the way of Nietzsche's overman, might lead one to evil – to true evil, as opposed to the things social morality *considers* evil. Someone might ask whether in this last statement I am not trying surreptitiously to make the "wager" of love *safe* again, trying to ensure that it will be given a morally decent sense. I was not, however, talking about decency – love has no interest in that – but about *evil*, which from the perspective of love simply *is* lovelessness, rejection of openness, in all its forms; decency being, it should be noted, one very common mask behind which

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[188] Rahner, "The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments", p. 452.
[189] Ibid., p. 453.
[190] Ibid. – It is interesting to see one of the foremost Catholic theologians articulating ideas which seem to undermine at the most basic level the legitimacy of all the efforts of ethical codification associated perhaps particularly with the Catholic Church (but every institutionalied church must to some extent inevitably engage in it). Rahner himself thinks that there is still, on another level, a sense in which love is *not* "all", in which we may speak of Christian virtues, norms, and so on, but to my mind the decisive thing are the radical qualifications he is, because of his insights into the nature of love, obliged to preface such language with, not the fact that he will allow it with these qualifications in place.

such lovelessness hides. As for safety, we may indeed think up all kinds of safe thoughts *about* love, but we do so precisely to protect ourselves from *love*, which is not safe at all.

This is perhaps also the place for a comment on the objection someone might raise, that given the way I apparently rejected the concepts of moral education and growth out of hand, my account seems to leave no room for true human development. In response, I would ask the objector to consider whether opening oneself to others in love is not the most challenging task conceivable, and whether talk of "human development" might not, if it means something other than trying to find the humility to love, actually be a way of hiding from love's challenge?[191]

– *Shame and self-love* –

We must ask, however, in regard to what I said about justification: Why do we feel the need to be *justified*? *Why* do we feel *accused*? It is not self-evident that we should, even if we have done bad things. As I have said, when the pang of bad conscience reminds us that we have broken with our neighbour, this as such is *not* an accusation, it is not a call on us to justify ourselves; rather, it is a call back to the openness we have rejected. However, if we reject this call, if we do not open ourselves to it, that we might feel a need to "justify" ourselves *instead*. It is a familiar fact of life that people who have a bad conscience about something but are reluctant to ask for forgiveness, who lack the humility to do so, will often try to "make up" for this by being "good" in different ways, either to the person they wronged, or to someone else. Great sacrifices are made daily thanks to the power of such unforgiven guilt.

In such cases, we might say that the wrong-doer is driven to this compensatory behaviour by his guilt-feelings or, equally naturally, that it is his shame which drives him to it. We might also say, however, that what is driving him is his *pride*, his being too proud to ask for forgiveness, and this indicates how shame and pride are inextricably bound together. In one's proud shame, one dares not open oneself to the other, but instead turns back into oneself,

[191] Cf. the section on "The lure of culture and solitude" in Chapter One.

focusing on *one's own badness* which one is too proud to ask to be forgiven for, and thus one refuses the goodness of being reunited with the other. I now want to say something more about the perspective of shame and pride, which is indeed crucial for understanding our perceived need for justification, and so the character of our moral life.

The sense of shame or decency, that most basic of *cultural man's* emotions, is normally taken to be a force for good. Kant, for instance, holds that "the first incentive for man's development as a moral being came from his *sense of decency*, his inclination to inspire respect in others by good manners (i.e. by concealing all that might invite contempt) as the proper foundation of all true sociability".[192] The context of this statement is a discussion of the myth of the fall in *Genesis*; Kant points out that the mythical fig-leaf with which Adam and Eve covered their nakedness, although it might seem an insignificant matter, was in fact "epoch-making ... in imparting a wholly new direction to thought", and was for this reason "more important than the whole endless series of subsequent cultural developments".[193]

Kant is certainly right that the decisive thing is to understand the character of the perspective of shame as such, rather than the changing conceptions of *what* in particular is shameful and admirable, beautiful and ugly, high and low. Understanding the character of the perspective of shame is a matter of understanding what it *contrasts* with. For Kant, the awakening of a sense of shame in man betokens "his transition from a rude and purely animal existence to a state of humanity, from the leading-strings of instinct to the guidance of reason – in a word, from the guardianship of nature to the state of freedom".[194] To feel shame is an essential first step on the road of moral "*progress* towards perfection".[195] So for Kant, the "fall" into shame is really no fall at all, but an *ascent* onto a higher plane of existence – as most philosophers, and probably most people inclined to speculate about these things, would agree. In *Genesis*, things are judged differently, however, and the sense of shame is

[192] Kant, "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History" in Kant, *Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss. Transdlated by H. B. Nisbet. Second, enlarged edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 224 f. – The connexion between shame and decency is that shame, or its milder form, embarrassment, is what one feels when one has behaved indecently or inadvertently revealed something one should, in the name of decency, have concealed. But shame may also be felt in contexts which cannot be characterised in terms of (in)decency, as, for instance, when one is ashamed of one's humble background, or of one's incompetence or ineptness, or, to take a more clearly moral case, of one's cowardice or small-mindedness.
[193] Ibid., p. 225.
[194] Ibid., p. 226.
[195] Ibid., p. 227.

seen as a curse, as precisely the expression of *a fall into evil from a goodness that knows no shame.* As I will explain, I think the Biblical conception is the truer one.

Kant, for his part, admits that the awakening of shame must be seen as a "fall" with regard to the *individual* who in the very shame he feels discovers himself to fall short of the demands of decency which he now – again in the very shame he feels – finds himself subject to. However, if the individual "has cause to blame himself" for falling short of the ideal he now feels obliged by, he can only, Kant thinks, "admire and praise the wisdom and purposiveness of the overall arrangement" which manifests itself in the fact t*hat* he and his fellow human beings are thus put under obligation.[196] Certainly he now sadly *knows* himself to be evil – to be, that is, shamefully inadequate to the ideal – but he knows this only because he now *knows* good and evil in the sense of knowing that there is a *distinction* between good and evil, whereas the state of animal existence which he has now left behind was a state of "innocence" only *because* it was a state of "ignorance", one where "there were no commandments or prohibitions, so that violations of these were also impossible".[197]

Kant's point can also be expressed by saying that whereas previously, the "natural" instincts of man held sovereign sway, beyond good and evil, the advent of a sense of decency or self-respect created a *conflict* within man, because this sense of self-respect "in all its weakness, came into conflict with animality in all its strength", and yielding to the natural instincts, which previously took place as a matter of course, now came to be viewed as a defeat, as indecently, ignobly letting oneself go, losing control of oneself.[198]

However, what Kant leaves out of his account is the conflict which is provoked in us by love, by our fear of the openness we nonetheless feel called to in conscience. As I have tried to explain, this fundamental conflict cannot be accounted for in terms of shame. The focus of shame is, all the time, on oneself, at the same time as one looks upon oneself through the eyes of others. Shame is thus other-directed and self-centred at the same time: one goes out to others, but only to look for an image of oneself in the "mirror" of their real or imagined reactions to one. Even if it is in one's *own* eyes that one feels contemptible, while knowing, perhaps, that others do not in fact find one contemptible at all,

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[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid. – It should be noted that when the rationalist Kant speaks of "reason" in moral contexts, he means precisely *the sense of self-respect of a reasonable creature*, "rather than reason considered merely as an instrument for the satisfaction of various inclinations" (ibid., p. 226).

but admirable, this does not change the basic perspective of shame, for one is still *looking at oneself*, and doing so in the way one thinks that others *would* or *should* look at one, *if* they knew about one what one takes oneself to know about oneself, or if they had a clearer conception of what is truly shameful.

The suffering of a bad conscience, by contrast, has nothing to do with the way one looks at oneself or is looked at by others. One does not suffer because one failed to live up to one's ideals; rather, one suffers what one made one's victim suffer, one suffers with her in her suffering *and* for oneself as the one who made her suffer. As Ilham Dilman puts it, one "lives the harm one has done in one's callous ignorance of it and in living it one mourns it", in a process which "leaves one's self-regard totally in the shade"; in going through it, "one loses oneself altogether", but "in doing so, one finds one's soul".[199] *In losing oneself one finds one's soul*: that is the crucial insight here. The point is that forgetting about oneself in the sense of forgetting about one's personal standing and appearance, about everything one might be ashamed or proud of, does not mean being reduced to "animality" or anonymity, to something less than a human being. On the contrary, it is only when one forgets about one's person and status and opens up to others that one can be oneself in the full sense.

Conscience calls us, as I have said, to be openly ourselves with others. It does not tell us to be *like* this or that. Our sense of shame or decency, by contrast, tells us precisely what we must and must not be like, and tells us to hide, if we cannot get rid of, everything in ourselves which does not measure up to this standard or ideal. Many of the things we learn to be ashamed of through our own shamefaced reactions to the shaming which others subject us to, are such as we already know in conscience to be wrong; for instance, one may come to be ashamed of having acted greedily or in a cowardly way. Even here, however, one learns a new motive for avoiding such actions, or rather one comes to avoid them out of a *motive* – because it would be shameful to do them – whereas in conscience one was only aware of the painful rejection of the other that they manifested. The *goodness* is taken out of even one's courage or generosity, insofar as they express one's pride in avoiding what is shameful. And we do of course also come to be ashamed of all kinds of things which are, from the perspective of conscience, either quite natural, or even good, which is to say that our sense of shame may prompt us to actively suppress goodness and do evil.

[199] Dilman, "Shame, Guilt and Remorse", *Philosophical Investigations* 22 (1999), p. 325.

To see how the suppression of goodness works, just think of how children are, time and again, told to *behave*, told *not* to do *good* things that they spontaneously want to do. When they feel like jumping or shouting or running around, that is, simply expressing their joy at living, they are told to sit still and be quiet; when they wonder about things and ask questions we do not feel like answering, often because we are afraid of what an answer might bring up, they are told to shut up; and most importantly, when they feel like talking to, or touching, or looking at, or just being close to someone, that is, when they are looking for human contact, when they express their love – for what is love if not desire for contact? – they are told that they should not bother people. In all this, we give the children to understand that, for some unfathomable reason, we do not *want* their joy, their wonder at the world, their love; in short, that we do not want them to be themselves, but prefer a certain *kind* of creature, "a well-behaved child", implying, conversely, that we do not want to be ourselves with them, but the kind of creature called "*a* grown up". As I said in Chapter Three, social morality, which is essentially a morality of shame, reduces us to certain *kinds* of persons who are not to seek contact, or are to seek only a particular and reduced, "appropriate" kind of contact, with others.

Children will for the most part try to twist themselves to fit our wishes, to become the kind of creatures we want them to be, just as we became the kind of creatures our elders wanted us to be. This does not prove, however, that we have an "original desire to please, and ... original aversion to offend our brethren", as Adam Smith claimed. Rather, the desire to please is what our longing to love and be loved gets *perverted* into if others do not respond to this longing by loving us, *and* we let their rejection of us tempt us to settle for getting approval rather than love. This does not happen of any necessity, however, for it is possible to *refuse* the game of pleasing, of making oneself "lovable" or "worthy of love" (that is, *pleasing* to someone or other, in one sense or other). It is possible to go on asking for love in the face even of repeated rejection, even if mostly we are not strong enough in love to do so, and so go into the business of pleasing instead. The tragedy is that in this way we do not get what we in some sense desired and needed to have: we do not get love, but approval, and it is not really we ourselves who get the approval, but the twisted creature we made ourselves into *because* we were rejected by others.

The awakening of the desire to please is simply another name for the fall into shame. To want to please others means trying to present oneself as the kind of person one thinks will please them, and this implies that one feels that simply

being oneself in their company will be displeasing to them, that if one put on no pleasing "countenance" for them they would shun one, would not love one. That is: one feels a need to please others because one is ashamed of oneself or, as one might also put it, because one has *lost faith in love*. This figure of love-rejection-shame-pleasing is, it seems to me, the *original sin* that we fall into ever anew, and in our turn, by rejecting the love of others, tempt them to.

It is the fundamental difficulty in our friendships, too, and Simone Weil states a plain fact when she says that a friendship "is impure if even a trace of the wish to please ... is found in it".[200] I should note immediately, to forestall misunderstandings, that there is of course nothing wrong with wanting to make one's friend happy, or doing things one knows she likes; the problem arises only when one wants to do this *in order to make her like one* – and this intention need not, of course, be consciously formed. That is what Weil means by "the wish to please". This wish is mostly present in our friendships to some degree, but it is always an indication that the spirit of friendship is weak, precisely because one's wish to please reveals that one dare not be openly oneself with one's friend, but tries instead, to speak in plain terms, to bribe him into liking one.

In wanting to please others, in feeling ashamed of who one is, one reveals that one considers oneself to be *essentially worthless*. This is the case, it should be noted, no matter how self-satisfied and proud one may be. On the face of it, to feel proud is precisely to feel that there is nothing wrong with one, but a closer look reveals that pride is not a straight-forward affirmation of oneself at all, but rather, as Sartre points out, a thoroughly "ambiguous" feeling "built" on a "fundamental shame".[201]

This is illustrated in a striking way by the story of Ajax' suicide in Sophocles' play *Ajax*. Ajax feels slighted when Odysseus is awarded Achilles' arms, and decides to take revenge. But Athena drives him mad, and thinking that he is killing Odysseus and the other Greek leaders he slaughters two herdsmen and their flock of sheep. Bernard Williams, who discusses the example, describes Ajax's reaction upon recovering his senses:

> There is a passionate lyric outburst of despair and, above all, shame: he has made himself, apart from anything else, utterly absurd. It becomes increasingly clear to him that he can only kill himself. He knows that ... after

[200] Weil, *Waiting for God.* Translated by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins, 2001 [1951]), p. 135.
[201] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 386.

> what he has done, this grotesque humiliation, he cannot live the only kind of life his *ethos* demands. ... Being what he is, he could not live as the man who had done these things; it would be merely impossible, in virtue of the relations between *what he expects of the world and what the world expects of a man who expects that of it.*[202]

The "world" is represented in Ajax' thoughts primarily by his father:

> What countenance can I show my father Telamon?
> How will he bear the sight of me
> If I come before him naked, without any glory,
> When he himself had a great crown of men's praise?
> It is not something to be borne.[203]

Williams comments:

> Not only is his language full of the most basic images of shame, of sight and nudity, but it expresses directly a reciprocal relation between what he and his father could not bear. But ... it is not the mere idea of his father's pain that governs the decision, nor the fact that it is, uniquely, his father. Ajax is identified with the standards of excellence represented by his father's honours. ... *He has no way of living that anyone he respects would respect – which means that he cannot live with any self-respect*.[204]

The case of Ajax shows us the extreme possibility of shame- or ideal-based moralities and friendships, the point at which they becomes impossible, as it were. But the limit Ajax comes up against was always there, threatening, for living by an ideal – as opposed to merely pretending to do so, declaring one's allegiance to it "in principle" whenever keeping to it in fact becomes too demanding – *means* that there are certain requirements, failing which makes life simply intolerable.

Morally speaking, the first thing to note about this example is Ajax' apparently total unconcern for the fact that he has actually, in his frenzy, randomly *killed two human beings*. As Williams notes, "Sophocles makes nothing of it",[205] but neither does Williams, even though – or perhaps precisely

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[202] Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 72 f., emphasis added.
[203] Sophocles, *Ajax*, 462 ff, quoted by Williams, ibid.
[204] Ibid., p. 85, emphasis added. – The relation of Ajax to his father is a a paradigmatic case of ideal- or shamebased friendship, even if father and son are not the "standard" pair of friends. Since Ajax and his father share the same heroic ideal, since they strive for the same good, his father is to Ajax just what an Aristotelian friend is to his friend: a mirror in whose reactions he sees himself, sees the character of his life and deeds, revealed in the light of a shared ideal.
[205] Ibid., p. 72.

because – he wants to help rehabilitate shame as a moral concept by showing how Ajax can be seen to exemplify an *ethically serious* response. But surely the ethically salient point is that Ajax feels no remorse for having killed the shepherds; he regrets it only because he is ashamed of having mistaken two simple shepherds for heroes, for his peers![206]

The main contention of the previous chapter was that how we relate to our friends and to strangers are not two separate questions, but the same question seen from two sides. This can be seen in the case of Ajax, too. His suicide reveals how he, who thinks the shepherds are nothing to him, is really, all his heroic posturing notwithstanding, a "nothing" to *himself*. As long as he managed to live up to the ideal, to the demands that he and those he respected put on him, he was proud to be himself, but then he does something "absurd", and his life is suddenly worth nothing at all. This means that *he* has all the time been worth nothing at all. His own father cannot "bear the sight of him" if he comes before him simply as himself, "naked, without any glory". He must have a "countenance" to "show" his father, because his father does not want to see his *face*. In his suicide, Ajax confirms that he can "love" people, himself included, only insofar as they embody the ideal of his social morality, that is: that he *loves* no one at all, or that the love he feels for people is as nothing compared to the shame he feels in face of the ideal, of the all-seeing "One" of his society.[207]

Ajax is, to quote Wittgenstein quite out of context, "held captive" by a "picture" he cannot free himself from, because the very "language" he has been taught to think in, the heroic language of glory and shame, repeats it to him

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[206] This point is made by Christopher Cordner in a discussion of Ajax and Williams; *Ethical Encounter. The Depth of Moral Meaning* (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 40.

[207] Sartre says, correctly as it seems to me, that Heidegger's category of the "they" (*das Man*) should really, although Heidegger himself is not clear about this, be used to refer to this omniprescence of the juding eyes of others given in one's sense of shame: "Wherever I am, *they* are perpetually looking at me" (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 376). Sartre is right, too, that the idea of an omnipresent and all-powerful God is really just a representation of the presence of others (p. 375) – although I would insist on what Sartre would deny, that we are talking of a particular, andf corrupt, *idea of* God, rather than of the reality of God. Huck was haunted precisely by this imaginary God, this idol of the group, who tried to shame and frighten him into submission, as we are perpetually trying with disapproving looks to shame and frighten each other into submission, thus drowning out the testimony of conscience. For this reason I disagree with Sartre when he says that Heidegger's term "they" should be used for the omnipresence of the shaming other "*rather than*", as Heidegger would have it, "for human reality's state of inauthenticity" (p. 375 f., emphasis added). To me, inauthenticity and shame seem to be indissolubly tied together. It is through shame that we "fall" into inauthenticity, a fall that remains quite inexplicable in Heidegger, and necessarily must remain so because he wants his ontological analyses to be morally neutral.

"inexorably".[208] However, the fact that it seems impossible for him to break out of his captivity does not mean that we must, in moral terms, just accept his view of things as it stands. On the contrary, the terribleness of the whole thing *is* precisely his sense of hopeless *fatality*, of there apparently being no way out of the social world, nothing beyond it, even in death, for even Ajax' suicide, which is forced on him by his shame, does not rid him of it. Ajax is driven to suicide because his fear of standing alone, of stepping out of his group, is so all-consuming that he dares not even consider the possibility: *he would rather kill himself than consider it.*[209]

Note, however, that although a social group can of course be more or less brutal in the enforcement of its morality, as the morality itself can be more or less brutal and confining, no group can *make* a person conform. If I am reduced to my social persona it is only because I have not dared to step out of it, just as, conversely, my freedom is not something that anyone can give me, for then it would not be *my* freedom. My social "I" wants to shame me into thinking I am nothing without the group – conscience tells me to be myself. And I will be, *if I dare to.*[210]

One way to try to deal with one's shame, is to try to change oneself so as not to have anything to be ashamed of, "cleaning up one's act" as we say. This means remaining within the perspective of shame, and trying to reach a *modus vivendi* on its terms. On the other hand, there is the possibility of love's

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[208] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), §115.

[209] Ilham Dilman claims that the fact that Ajax does not run from the thought that he cannot go on living, but "sustains it and follows it through" to suicide, makes his suicide "an act of courage, not of cowardliness" ("Shame, Guilt and Remorse", p. 316). The fact that human beings can choose to kill themselves rather than go on living a life they consider not worth having, has indeed often put forward as a kind of proof of the freedom and dignity of the human being, but to me it seems rather a mark of our ability to enslave ourselves, to make ourselves prisoners to various *conceptions of* ourselves. Surely, the first thing that strikes one is how terrible and pitiful it is when a human being becomes so desperate that he sees no way to go on living. Here to speak of *courage* sounds to me like the hollow rhetoric used by people when they want to give the plainly horrible the ring of something "higher"; think of military leaders trying to boost the morale of troops demoralised by a brutal war. Certainly there is such a thing as courage in the face of death, but to speak of courage in connexion with suicide is nonsense: what demands courage is not to die but to go on *living*, not allowing oneself to be paralysed by, for instance, one's *fear* of death.

[210] Perhaps no hero, at least no hero Ajax was aware of, had ever stepped out of their heroic role, questioned it, although many had of course failed it, as Ajax did now. But, someone may ask, is it not, in that case, preposterous to *blame* Ajax for failing to do so? Well, I am not blaming him, nor am I saying that I would have acted differently had I been in his shoes; such statements are completely speculative. I am pointing to what I see as the terribleness of his view of himself. On the difference between pointing to a moral problem and blaming those one gives as examples of it, cf. Cordner, *Ethical Encounter*, p. 39, and the whole discussion on pp. 37–40.

humility, which involves a radical change in one's whole way of relating to oneself and to others. From within the perspective of shame and pride, one cannot distinguish *humility* from *humiliation*, however.

This blindness comes out, for instance, in the inability to distinguish love's *compassion* from a humiliating *pity*. Nietzsche, the great critic of pity and compassion, appears incapable of distinguishing the two precisely because he is so wedded to the perspective of shame. His most important objection to pity is precisely that the person who receives it is *ashamed* of having to do so, and so there is in pity, which tends to present itself as a most humane sentiment, a secret *cruelty*. Nietzsche finds those "who are happy in their compassion ... lacking in shame", whereas for his own part he feels "shame before all sufferers" because he knows that in helping the sufferer or even in witnessing his suffering, one "sorely injure[s] his pride".[211] Therefore, he advises friends to "conceal" their pity for their friend "under a hard shell" so that it may have "delicacy and sweetness".[212]

That there is indeed such a connexion between cruelty and pity is obvious from the fact that it may be consciously exploited, as when one says "I am not angry with you, I pity you", thereby letting the other know that although her actions might have hurt one, one finds her *not worth* one's anger, one finds her pitiful, pathetic in the double sense of that word in modern English, which refers both to what arouses pity and to something that is miserably inadequate.[213] So there is a *condescension* in pity, and condescension is a reaction within the perspective of shame, where the question is always whether one must look up to or down on another. So, contrary to Nietzsche's oft-repeated claim that those who indulge in pity "know no shame", the point is precisely that pity *knows* shame. It is not just that one *can* pity someone because they are in a shameful situation ("Poor man, one would not want to be seen in the state he is in!"); rather, pity *is* a reaction to another's misfortune in which one focuses precisely on the *shameful* aspect of it, or rather on the *impotence* it reveals, which is always what one's shame is about, directly or indirectly. It is not surprising, then, that people who are pitied often say, angrily, "I don't want your pity!"[214]

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[211] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969 [1961]), p. 112 f.
[212] Ibid., p. 83.
[213] Originally, of course, the word "pathetic" just meant "relating to the emotions".
[214] Joan Stambaugh has a helpful discussion of some of the problems connected with pity, and Nietzsche's view of them, in the chapter "Thoughts on Pity and Revenge" in her book *The Other Nietzsche* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 41–58.

Compassion, insofar as it manifests love's humility, involves no such focus on the other as pitifully inadequate, however. In compassion one simply sees that someone suffers, is pained by her suffering and does what one can to relieve it. In compassion, one attends to the person suffering, but does not reduce her to her suffering, as happens in pity. In compassion one sees all the time that whatever it is that the other is afflicted with, whether it is something that has befallen her or something she has brought on herself, she herself is not in the least diminished by it, even though her body, her capacities, her appearance, her standing in the world – in short, everything having to do with her *person* – may indeed have been ruined by her affliction. Compassion, then, separates the sufferer from the suffering, just as forgiveness separates the sinner from the sin. What makes this possible is love's wholehearted desire for the other person, in the light of which the suffering and its relief do not in any way reflect on the sufferer, diminishing him, or putting him in a debt of gratitude towards his benefactor. This is the *humility* of compassion, and it gives the "works" of compassion a self-evidence, a matter-of-factness, a kind of anonymity, at the same time as – and precisely because – they manifest a strictly personal attention to the sufferer.

The matter-of-factness of compassion is not that of mere familiarity, however. Thus, an old man who gradually loses control over his bodily functions may well let his family help him with these intimate problems, knowing that he has no choice and that there is anyway no point in hiding this from them since they all know what the situation is – and yet he may detest them and their help because he feels that they pity him, that they cannot help but think of him as "that poor, smelly old man". By contrast, if they showed him compassion, and if he had the humility to receive it, they may well come into his room one morning, saying "My God, it smells in here!" without that remark in any way humiliating him.

Let me now turn to what I take to be another, and perhaps more surprising, example of humility; having to do with joy rather than suffering. This is Bertrand Russell on the dance floor, as described by his friend Lady Ottoline:

> When there was a general *melée*, Bertie Russell would be dragged in by one of the Aranyis. It was very comic to see him – a stiff little figure, jumping up and down like a child, with an expression of surprised delight on his face at finding himself doing such an ordinary human thing as dancing. It seemed to

> liberate him from himself, and made him very happy for a short time at least.[215]

Normally, Russell would, I take it, have considered it beneath his dignity to dance – and of course such a feeling need not be held as an explicit opinion about oneself, it can come out simply in one's feeling uncomfortable, ashamed or just slightly silly, on the dance floor. On these occasions, however, his friends liberated him from this concern about his dignity by making him feel that they were there with him, not gazing critically at him, but *wanting to dance with him* – and of course they could do it only because he consented to the liberation; otherwise, their insisting that he should join the dance would merely have resulted in a situation that was humiliating for him and embarrassing for them. Note that Russell was not in the state of someone who forgets the critical eyes of others because he is engrossed in some private pursuit, whether it is writing a symphony or picking his nose; such a person forgets other people altogether (which is not to say that his private pursuit may not involve others in some way: think of how one's curiosity may lead one to stare at someone in a very undignified manner). Russell did not forget others, however; he was, on the contrary, alive to his friends on the dance floor, he was there with them, quite open to them; that was both *what* freed him and what he was freed *to*.

Lady Ottoline says that Russell was liberated from himself, but it would be better to say that he dared to *be* himself; what he was liberated from was the concern about his appearance, about his standing in the world. The "expression of surprised delight" on Russell's face came precisely, I should think, from his realising that it *was* actually possible for him simply to be himself, simply enjoying himself, letting himself go, *without* the heavens falling down, without everyone finding him absurd. He was, for a moment, happy "like a child", that is: happy like only someone can be who does not worry at all that there could be something wrong with his happiness, that it could be undignified or shameful. The need to preserve one's dignity could very well be described as the fear of being childish, and in this connexion, the saying of Jesus that only those who "become like children" will enter heaven seems not at all hard to understand.[216]

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[215] Ottoline Morrell, *Ottoline. The Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell*. Edited with an Introduction by Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 277.

[216] One could also express this by saying that heaven is a place of joy, and the fact is that joy is not dignified at all. Whereas one may well be witty and humorous in a dignified way – wit *is* actually a certain kind of elegance or dignity – the "natural expression of joy" is, as Chesterton says, "the grotesque"; a principle he finds confirmed in the stories of Dickens, where "everybody is happy because nobody is dignified", and "we have the feeling somehow" that Scrooge "looked

In openness, in love, the *bodily* aspect of one's being is not experienced as somehow alien and indecent, as is the case in shame. In front of a person one loves, one feels no need to cover oneself, to hide one's nakedness. On the contrary, one wants to tread naked in front of her, in every sense of that word. There is nothing one does not want to reveal, for one wants to know and be known fully, without keeping anything back. If one is caught up in shame, by contrast, one's naked, bodily being is perceived as essentially loathsome.

This is expressed very vividly by something Kant says about why openness "must" be restricted even in friendship. Immediately following an emphatic statement that "the whole end of man" is to find a friend "from whom we can and need hide nothing, to whom we can communicate our whole self", Kant adds a caveat:

> But even between the closest and most intimate friends there are still some things which call for reserve, for the other's sake more than for one's own. There can be perfect and complete intimacy only in matters of disposition and sentiment, but we have certain natural frailties which ought to be concealed for the sake of decency, lest humanity be outraged. Even to our best friend we must not reveal ourselves, in our natural state as we know ourselves. To do so would be loathsome.[217]

This goes much deeper, existentially speaking, than a concern with one's moral stature relative to one's friend, about who is in "debt" to whom, and so on. This is not pride talking, protesting against having one's relative position in a game of prestige worsened, it is the voice of an absolute self-loathing; a human being declaring, in all seriousness, that if he were to show himself as he really is "humanity would be outraged".

Simone Weil's view that friendship and love, also discussed earlier in this thesis, involve a "worship" of the *distance* between the friends and lovers, her inability to see any good way to approach others, to desire them and touch them, is determined by such self-loathing, too. This is not a hypothesis to the effect that her views are to be psychologically explained by reference to self-loathing; my point is rather that the views themselves *express* self-loathing. How else could one characterise the feeling that one pollutes everything one touches and, correlatively, that others will be polluted by touching one?

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even uglier when he was [joyful and] kind than he had looked when he was cruel" (G. K. Chesterton, "Introduction" in Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol, and Other Christmas Books* [London: J. M. Dent, 1969 (1907)], pp. x and xii).

[217] Kant, *Lectures on Ethics.* Translated by Louis Infield (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 206.

Let me quote a letter Weil wrote to a friend, Joë Bousquet, a little more than a year before her early death – not to prove my interpretation but in order to illustrate what is at stake in self-hatred. "You say I pay for my moral qualities by distrust of myself. But my attitude towards myself ... is not distrust, but a mixture of contempt and hatred and repulsion", Weil writes.[218] This, she goes on to say, is so much the case that

> I absolutely cannot imagine the possibility that a human being could feel friendship for me. If I believe in yours it is only because I have confidence in you and you have assured me of it, so that my reason tells me to believe it. But this does not make it seem any the less impossible to my imagination. Because of this propensity of my imagination I am all the more tenderly grateful to those who accomplish this impossibility.[219]

Note that *here* the "miracle" which accomplishes the impossible friendship is the very opposite of the one Weil describes in her essay on friendship – desisting from reaching out to touch one's friend, as one's need for him drives one to do. The miracle *here* is that Joë actually reaches out for Simone. But Weil does not seem really to *believe* in *this* miracle: "my reason tells me to believe it, but this does not make it seem any the less impossible to my imagination". She cannot believe that anyone would want to come in touch with a human being like her. Given this self-hatred, it is perhaps not surprising to hear Weil confess that "By a strange twist, the thought of God's anger only arouses love in me. It is the thought of the possible favour of God and of his mercy that makes me tremble with a sort of fear".[220]

I am not saying that Weil had no reason to be so severe on herself (what do I know about that?). I am not, as it were, telling her "Cheer up, you are not so bad as you think!" The point that my discussion is meant to bring out is rather that our difficulties with openness, with friendship and love and conscience, are always both about our view of others *and* of ourselves. The awkwardness we feel in someone's company is an uneasiness about ourselves as much as about the other; distrust is distrust of others and of ourselves; we

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[218] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*. Edited by George A. Panichas (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1977), p. 90.
[219] Ibid., p. 92.
[220] Ibid., p. 115. – This statement should be born in mind, I think, when reflecting on the central Weilian ideas of "decreation" and "self-efacement" in which one is finally freed of the loathsome self; cf. *Gravity and Grace*. Translated by Emma Craufurd (London & New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1987 [1952]), pp. 28–37. This is not to suggest that they are *merely* the expression of self-hatred, nor that they would lack interest even if, or insofar as, they do express that.

feel ashamed of ourselves in the face of others, and so on. Conversely, and contrary to what the advocates of a "pure" and "selfless" love claim, *loving others implies loving oneself*. If you hate yourself, you cannot love others, for love means wanting to be with the ones you love, opening yourself to them, but if you hate yourself, the thought of *you*, this hateful creature, being with them, soiling them, will be unbearable, and the thought of revealing yourself to them fully will seem loathsome, as Kant said.

Loving others implies loving oneself. Loving oneself does not mean that one looks out for one's own interests – that is merely egoism and has, however "healthy" it may appear, nothing to do with *love*. Nor does it mean that one is *satisfied with oneself*, or that in loving and feeling loved one feels that one's existence is finally "justified", as Sartre claims (and to feel satisfied with oneself *is* to feel "justified").[221] To love means precisely to be *freed* from the anxious need to justify oneself called forth by the self-loathing of shame, freed *to* and *by* the movement of opening up to the other, of touching and being touched.

Given the way we often speak of self-love as an essentially loveless attitude, it may still sound strange that loving others should in this way imply loving oneself. But how could it be otherwise? Love abolishes "yours" and "mine" first of all in regard to *itself*: there is not your love for me and mine for you, but love enveloping both of us. Love is openness, an *opening of oneself to the other*, and in this movement receptivity and giving are one and the same thing; one gives oneself to the other and in so doing receives the gift of, for once, *being oneself with the other*. As Hannes Nykänen says,

> There are no such options as loving yourself *or* loving someone else. The options are loving and not loving. /.../ To love is not to give away love ... To give someone love is to be blessed with it for one's own part as well, and to refuse it [to the other] is to be withdrawn from it [oneself].[222]

Our shame, are self-loathing, stands in the way of our love, however. As Nietzsche remarks, ironically, "They tell me that man loves himself: ah, how great must this self-love be! How much contempt is opposed to it!"[223] In fact, man appears to Nietzsche as *essentially* a creature of shame, as "the animal with red cheeks": "Shame, shame, shame – that is the history of man!"[224] Correlatively, Nietzsche considers the "most human" gesture to be: "To spare someone shame".[225] Nietzsche

[221] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 484.
[222] Nykänen, *The 'I,' the 'You' and the Soul*, p. 43.
[223] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 279.
[224] Ibid., p. 112.
[225] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science.* Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge

knows that shame is bondage, and that the "seal" of one's freedom is "No longer to be ashamed before oneself",[226] but because he refuses to countenance the possibility of love, he takes it for granted that a man, an imperfect, pitiful being, must always feel ashamed and cover himself in something, that shame can be overcome only by man ridding himself of all that is shameful in him, remaking himself in the image of the "overman". *That* is the sense of Zarathustra's mantra, "Man is something that must be overcome".[227] Thus, Zarathustra says, you must not want to "show yourself to [your friend] as you are", for you may "go naked before your friend" only if you are lacking nothing: "If you were gods you could then be ashamed of your clothes!"[228] Until that day, however, "it is part of a more refined humanity to have reverence 'for the mask' and not to practice psychology and inquisitiveness in the wrong place".[229]

My point, by contrast, has been that insofar as one is moved by love's humility one does not need to wait on oneself and the other to become perfect – that would be a long wait indeed! – before one can allow oneself to look at self and other naked. I am not saying that it is *easy* to love and to be open: the opposite is true. My point is only that it will not do to explain the difficulty of loving by reference to our imperfection, for that is a problem only from the perspective of shame. The problem is not that we are imperfect, but that we look at things from a perspective in which our imperfections become a shameful obstacle to self-revelation. Love, by contrast, is simply not interested in such paltry things as perfection. Love is only interested in one thing: in love.

University Press, 2001), §274.

[226] Ibid., §275.

[227] Nietzsche, Thus *Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 279, and passim.

[228] Ibid., p. 83.

[229] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil.* Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), §270. – How central Nietzsche thinks the problem of shame is, can be gauged from the fact that he even connects his famous thesis of the death of God with man's shame of himself. According to him, "the murderer of God" was a character Zarathustra encounters called "the ugliest man" – and these characters are of course, like those Bunyan meets, meant to portray traits or tendencies which in some people determine their whole character but which are more or less present in all of us. The ugliest man's deed is characterised as "the revenge on the witness" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 276). In explanation of it the ugliest man says: "But he [God] – *had* to die: he looked with eyes that saw everything – he saw the depths and abysses of man, all man's hidden disgrace and ugliness. His pity knew no shame: he crept into my dirtiest corners. ... He always saw *me*: I desired to take revenge on such a witness – or cease to live myself. The god who saw everything, *even man*: this god had to die! Man could not *endure* that such a witness should live" (ibid., p. 278 f.).

– *"A narrow, yet unbridgeable chasm"* –

To conclude this chapter, I want to say something about a question that may have come up in the minds of some readers; the question where what I have said in this chapter and in the thesis as a whole leaves us with regard to the issue of *responsibility* and the classic question "What is to be done?". "It may be true", it could be said, "that in friendship 'yours' and 'mine' are abolished, that there is a freedom without shame, anxiety and demands; in short, that everything looks quite different and much better, if there is friendship, and it would be very good if everyone could love their friends all the time. But doesn't it remain true, as Kant and many others have said, that love can't be commanded, but comes when *it* wills, so that if it isn't there, there's nothing one can do? And doesn't that mean that all this talk about 'openness' and 'unity of feeling' leaves us hanging in mid air, morally and existentially speaking, with at most the hope that the revelation of friendship will one day be granted us? Would it not, therefore, be better to stop wasting time on all this talk about love, and to concentrate instead, as traditional ethics has indeed urged us to do, on getting our *act* together? At least that would give us a clear sense of what we should *do*!"

Yes, perhaps it would. Nonetheless, it seems to me that there is something fundamentally wrong with the whole perspective on moral and existential issues which makes us want someone to tell us what we should do. The cry at the heart of all moralities that place the good in something less than love is precisely: "Please, give us something to *do,* something the doing of which gives us the right to say that we have been good!" We are ridden by anxiety and want to have something – anything! – to do, since it takes our attention off what we anxiously do not want to face, namely the possibility of openness, and we want to have some achievement – the good works we have done, the fine character we have formed – to point to as proof that our life has not been wasted, even though we never dared to love.

In thus choosing "work" over love we make the easy choice, while in another sense we make our life very hard. The life of the resentful mother who has spent her life in self-denying service to her family but "never complained" is in one sense not easy at all; it is hell. But on the other hand, she apparently finds it even harder to give up her resentment, to *leave* her hell – and I do not mean: to leave her family, but to stop looking at their life together in the resentful way she does. If she did not feel more afraid of leaving than of staying, surely she would leave.

It has been said that "the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*"; that hell is not a place where one is sent by God, but a place where one sends oneself.[230] I would add that heaven and hell are not different places at all; "hell" is rather the terrible, accursed, aspect life with others shows us if we do not want to receive it as the blessing it is – or would be if we just wanted to receive it. Hell *is* the feeling that one is locked in, that one would need to get out of this life with others, a feeling both produced by, and in its turn producing, all sorts of impossible, destructive desires and demeanours. "The kingdom of heaven is among you." But we do not want it, and so we think we are in hell.

Our staying in "hell" becomes slightly less incomprehensible if we recall that what is waiting behind the door is not at all like the heaven we often imagine, a place where all our wishes come true, where everything goes as we would want it to. What waits behind the door is rather a life of love, and loving does not mean having your wishes come true; it means opening yourself to others; something infinitely greater than having all one's wishes come true – but for that very reason more frightening.

Here someone may ask, impatiently, whether it does not still remain true that we cannot change the way we feel at will; if we can change it at all it is only through patient work on ourselves. Yes, it is certainly true that we cannot change the way we feel at will. Whatever we *can* change at will is not very important, morally and existentially speaking; its being one way or the other does not make any real difference. That is what it *means* to say that we can change it at will. But if our feelings and emotions are too important to be changeable at will, by the same token we cannot see them as some kind of discreet psychological events which suddenly appear, one at a time, as if from nowhere, unaccountably and uncontrollably ("What could I do? I suddenly felt so angry!"). Emotions are important, and so not changeable at will, precisely because they are not isolable like that; on the contrary our emotional reactions form *patterns* in our lives; we may not be aware of them, and more importantly we often do not *want* to see them, but they are there. Three aspects of such patterns should perhaps be noted in particular.

First, emotional reactions are obviously connected to what we *want*, to what we are striving for or trying to avoid; thus, if I do not get what I wanted to have I get angry, irritated, depressed, while having things go my way calls forth all manner of "positive" emotional reactions. Here we see how absurd it is to

[230] C. S. Lewis reports the saying, without mentioning a source, in *The Problem of Pain*, p. 115.

see "will" in general as a psychological factor (it used to be called a "faculty") separate from the emotions; one could rather say that emotions are *what it feels like to have a will, to will something*. That we may sometimes suppress emotional reactions "by will power", as we say, is true, but it only goes to show how divided we often are in our will and our emotional reactions, how we simultaneously feel, and want many and incompatible things.

Secondly, emotional reactions are not just in a general sense responses to other people, but they grow out of, and in their turn shape, our relationships with *particular* others, and the patterns of my emotional reactions are often the patterns of my way of relating to *you* or to *him* or to *them* – and it is always responsive in some way to how you or he or they relate and react to me, of course. Thus I may have a tendency to blame you for things, while I tend to overlook the faults of someone else, or I tend to feel, for whatever reason, relaxed and benevolent in your company but tense and aggressive in someone else's. What needs to be understood if the emotional reactions in particular cases are to be understood, is the whole relationship between the people involved.

Thirdly, particular emotional reactions and whole patterns of reactions can very often be seen to be pervaded by, "carried" by and expressive of, a *spirit* of one kind or another; a contentious spirit, a listless spirit, a spirit of aloofness, of admiration, of submission, of hopelessness and so on and so on. To understand our emotions we need to grasp not the details, the particular reactions as such, but the whole picture. And what we in fact do react to, even if inarticulately, is precisely the big picture which we feel *in* the details. As Sartre says, "A gesture refers to a *Weltanschauung* and we *sense* it".[231]

All this is to say that emotions are fruit, and the character of the fruit is determined by the character of the tree that bears it. That tree is we ourselves in our relations to each other. Emotions do not just happen to us, *we* bring forth emotions that are like us, like the relationships we have come to stand in. The fact that anger and other emotions may take us by surprise, come *as if* out of nowhere, does indeed show how intractable phenomena emotions are, but it is not as though the problem was with *them* (the emotions), and not at all with *us*. Rather this intractability bears witness to how poorly we know ourselves, that is, to how thoroughly self-deceived we are. Of course my angry reaction to a seemingly innocent remark you made will seem bizarre and frightening to me, *if*

[231] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 589.

I have, for instance, successfully convinced myself that I love you dearly, even though I have in fact always resented you for being so much luckier and more talented than I am. Of course these reactions will seem inexplicable to me, since I have carefully hid their root – namely my resentment of you – from my own view. And as I have said, it is not just that *some* emotions are intractable, but rather emotions as such, even in the cases where we have a firmer grasp of their character and motivation than in the case I just described, register our *difficulties* with, our *refusals of*, openness

If all this is true, changing one's feelings and emotions appears a daunting task, to say the least, involving as it seems to do changing not just an isolated aspect of ones reactions or behaviour, but somehow or other *changing oneself*, becoming another. Now precisely because this is so, because the change from evil to good in a human being is a matter of a *change of heart*, it cannot, as Kant pointed out, using unabashedly Christian language, be achieved little by little, through "gradual *reform*", but must rather come through "a *revolution* in the disposition of the human being"; "'a new man' can come about only through a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation".[232] The difference between good and evil is a matter of the heart's *orientation* – I would say, as Kant would not, of its openness or closedness – and as long as the orientation remains unchanged, even successful work to change one's behaviour or improve one's character will, Kant notes, morally speaking signify no more than "a liar's converting to truth for the sake of reputation".[233]

According to Kant, his words about rebirth and revolution are not to be understood, however, as some kind of magical change whereby from one moment to the next everything is made new in people's lives, after which they are all good, whereas before they were all evil. Looked at from an empirical, biographical, psychological, point of view, the change from evil to good will indeed, Kant admits, appear as "incessant labouring and becoming" and "is to be regarded only as an ever-continuing striving for the better, hence as a gradual reformation of the propensity to evil, of the perverted attitude of mind".[234] It may seem that Kant is now taking back what he just said about change being a matter *not* of reformation but of revolution. I do not think it has to be seen in

[232] Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology* [The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant]. Translated and edited by Allen W. Wood & George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 92/6:47. – In this connexion Kant is explicitly referring his readers to the Bible; John 3:5 and Genesis 1:2.
[233] Ibid., p. 91/6:47.
[234] Ibid., p. 92/6:48.

that way, however, although what Kant says in explanation of this seeming contradiction is not very helpful.

I would express the point by saying that the question is not whether there are moral struggles and work of moral improvement – there will certainly be enough work and struggles for everybody – but rather the question is from what perspective one should look at the work and the struggles. If one's heart remains closed, if one does not want to acknowledge that the whole evil and tragedy lies in one's closedness and the only hope, but also the whole difficulty, in opening one's heart, then however much one struggles and whatever work of moral "improvement" one undertakes, it will all be done from the wrong motives, in the wrong spirit, and hence in vain, and the fruit that it may produce will be only seemingly good.

Think of the smug tone of voice in which someone might explain, for instance, how he has had to struggle to overcome his tendency to treat his wife condescendingly, how he has had to realise that she is not stupid or lazy but that *some things are just very hard for her*; a tone betraying not only how very satisfied he is with himself for having managed to see this and to change his manner towards her, but also how he in fact despises her even more now – just as she probably despises him more than ever for his priggishness. Or, to take a different example, think of how a couple who used to fight incessantly tell you that things have been going much better between them, and then proceed to explain how they have learned to *deal* with their problems and to *arrange* their life in a way which, in sum, allows them to live together without too much contact and so without too much friction. In both these examples, it is only the symptoms of the moral problem that are dealt with, while the problem itself is left untouched. In the prig's case, the problem, his self-satisfaction and his condescension towards his wife, is only exacerbated through the success of his work of "moral reform", while in the case of the fighting couple the problems which caused them to fight in the first place are as it were only contained, stored away somewhere, but they have certainly not been solved. For they could be solved, just as the problems of the prig and his wife, only through a truthful confrontation, that is, through a confrontation in a spirit which, paradoxical as this may sound, would be as merciless as it was forgiving. What is needed is not containment or a change of manners, but a reawakening of love; a rebirth, to use Kant's Christian term.

I would not deny that very often the best we can in fact get ourselves to do is to contain our negative feelings, or try to forget about them, or work on

them in various ways; that even just getting some decency into our proceedings, to achieve some kind of *modus vivendi*, is already something to be thankful for – just as one may often have cause to be glad and proud of simply getting one's rights respected, although it would be incomparably better if one did not need to worry about rights at all. I am simply saying that we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that such things are more than half-measures, we should not flatter ourselves with the thought that there is any real *goodness* in achieving such things, nor calm ourselves with the thought that there is nothing more to goodness than such things.

Kant, however, does not say any of this – as indeed he could not, given that he himself wanted, his insight about the need for a change of heart notwithstanding, or rather in opposition to it, to hold on to the idea of morality as always a matter only of a firm will struggling against temptation; he insisted that what we need to do is clench our teeth and try harder, *not* open up. "We stand under a *discipline* of reason, and in all our maxims must not forget our subjection to it", he says; "duty and what is owed are the only names that we must give to our relation to the moral law".[235] What we can and should strive for is not any uncoerced goodness, but "virtue", which Kant defines as "moral disposition *in struggle*".[236] To my mind this is, precisely *in* its very sternness, a very *safe* idea. For as I noted in discussing forgiveness, we have nothing much against *working* on forgiveness as long as we do not have to *forgive*. Simone Weil expresses the point about the safety of the "work"-perspective in more general terms, when she writes:

> The will cannot produce any good in the soul. ... That we have to strive after goodness with an effort of our will is one of the lies invented by the mediocre part of ourselves in its fear of being destroyed. Such an effort does not threaten it in any way, it does not even disturb its comfort – not even when it entails a great deal of fatigue and suffering, For the mediocre part of ourselves is not afraid of fatigue and suffering; it is afraid of being killed.[237]

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[235] Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, p. 206/5:82.

[236] Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* und *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Frankfurt am M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 207/5:84. – Gregor tranlsates Kant's "moralische Gesinnung im *Kampfe*" as "moral disposition in *conflict*" (*Practical Philosophy*, p. 208), but "struggle" seems a better rendering. Abbot translated it "the moral disposition militant" which, as Lewis White Beck remarks "aptly preserves the military symbolism" of the original passage as a whole (Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960], p. 227 and footnote 48).

[237] Weil, *Waiting for God*, p. 126 f.

In the face of our ill will and intractable emotions, what we need to do is not, essentially, to *struggle*, to suppress our feelings or try to *make ourselves feel* nicer things. Such manoeuvres are merely the "mediocre part of ourselves" fighting with itself. The one thing needful is to open ourselves in love, and love is not something that we need to, or could, somehow produce in ourselves. It is already *there*. To love means to have *faith* in its being there, to *believe* in the reality of love. To love is not a *personal achievement*, something *I* managed to do and might be *proud* of. It is a grace, or a gift that somehow does not seem to come from me, but from some place else altogether.

Think again of forgiveness, which is one "face" of love. To treat forgiveness as one's personal achievement is the very epitome of unforgivingness. "Despite of the terrible thing she had done, *I forgave her*...", would typically be an accusation, perhaps continued by "... and how did she thank me? By doing it again!". On the other hand, forgiveness is not anything that happens of itself, behind one's back as it were, so that one could one day discover that forgiveness had somehow come to pass, and then one would have to try to come to terms with it. Love does not sneak up on us, like a thief at night. Openness means opening *oneself*: it does not come to be without one's participation.

The suggestion that what is needed is that we open ourselves to a love that is already there in us, or for us, may sound utterly unbelievable, considering how we feel about many people, how impossible it would seem to *love* them, to love *them* – no doubt, they mostly feel the same about us. Is it not obvious that we *simply do not love* most people? Is it obvious? As I said, the difficulty lies precisely in *believing* in love. Consider how your perception of someone who is, you would have thought, "nobody" to you, or who you positively loathe, may change quite suddenly and dramatically, and in that face which a moment ago was completely loathsome or indifferent to you, you suddenly see a very human being. Perhaps you see the helplessness of the one you loathe, or the kindness he shows someone else, and suddenly you would never want to hurt him; or you just see a smile light up that "indifferent" face, and it is suddenly a different face, the face of someone you smile back at.

Are these examples not just an expression of a vague romanticism? They would be, if offered to convince someone that all our problems would be solved if we just remembered to smile more often, or some such thing. But that is not my point; I simply take note of a common experience – I mean an experience that we have all had; how common it is statistically speaking I have no idea

how to assess – in order to question the assumption that talk of "opening up to love" must be a mystification. That there is a *mystery* in it, I would not deny, however.

Why is it "hard" to love – as in some sense it is obviously is? It seems that this question must, in the final analysis, be left standing. For we all know, in some sense, that a life devoid of love is a terrible tragedy, a kind of living death – and yet we also constantly escape from love, into this death. One can describe, or at least indicate, the character of various ways of escape – their "how", as it were – but the final "why" must remain elusive. While one can, for instance, very well understand that someone closes himself to his friends because he is ashamed of some terrible aspect of his past, one may still ask "But why does he not confess and ask forgiveness? Why does he insist on closing himself up in this self-constructed prison of his shame? Why does he waste his life in this misery?"

On the other hand, this question is clearly unlike the incomprehension we may express in regard to unusual and perverse forms of evildoing or enjoyment, which we cannot understand that anyone could be tempted by. We all know very well from our own experience how hard forgiveness is, and the difficulty the man in our example has with finding the humility to ask his friends for forgiveness will typically be matched by the difficulty they would have in finding the humility to forgive him. We are all familiar with these difficulties, we all know how destructive it is to refuse forgiveness, to refuse love, and yet we constantly do it, although we also know that love is freedom, and that we ourselves are the only thing that stands in the way of our freedom.

As Gabriel Marcel says, freedom is "somehow the soul of our soul", and "the central mystery of our being" is that precisely "*because we are identified with our freedom, our freedom sometimes seems unrealizable*", and "everything happens as though a narrow, yet unbridgeable chasm separated us from it, as though we could not reach it".[238] It *is* not so, it is only *as if* it was so, and yet everything really seems to *happen* as if it was so.

[238] Marcel, *Creative Fidelity.* Translated by Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002 [1964]), p. 55.

– Conclusion –

In conclusion I want, briefly, to say something about four questions which may be raised in regard to what I have said. All these questions are in a sense methodological in character, but they would perhaps be more accurately characterised as questions which reveal the *impossibility* of "method" in moral philosophy, or indeed in philosophy generally.

First, there is a question of the status of the heterodox claims I have made, of my "right" to make them, as it were. Secondly, there is a question about God, about the relation of my claims to theological discourse. This question is raised by the fact that my perspective on love and on good and evil is, as I have stressed, in central ways very close to that opened up in the Bible and more especially the gospels – and yet I have nowhere said anything explicitly of how, if at all, God comes into it. Some readers may suspect that my perspective in fact relies covertly on a religious interpretation which I am unwilling to acknowledge – and so this question, too, concerns my "right" to make the claims I make.

Thirdly, there is a question about the grounds and the consequences of my insisting on the impossibility of defining or, in a sense, even characterising the central concept of this study, namely openness – an insistence which makes it dubious whether openness can be characterised as a *concept* at all.

Finally, I will return once more to the crucial problem of self-deception, and to the complications it introduces into moral philosophy.

– Truth, not method –

I believe many readers will have misgivings because they feel that I am arrogantly asserting supposedly "eternal truths" about the human condition which are in fact, if not quite arbitrary, at least very doubtful. In response to this, I would have it be known that I welcome any objections, doubts and

criticisms that anyone may wish to direct at what I have said. I am quite sure that most readers have them in abundance.

However, if someone objects not to the substance, the content, of the claims I make, but to the very act of making the kind of "grand" claims I make, on the grounds that it is in itself arrogant, I will not accept the objection: it seems to me confused. The point is that whatever one says about human life, in philosophy or elsewhere, will in fact imply certain general views about what human life is like. If those views are not explicitly reflected on, they will nonetheless be there and show themselves in the way one's remarks are framed, in what one finds it worth remarking on at all, in what one says about it, and in what does not even realise could be said, or questioned. Particular remarks have a place only within a broader picture: there is no such thing as an "isolated" remark. This is a simple fact about what it is means for remarks to *mean* anything, and no amount of "modesty" on the part of the philosopher making a remark, of assurances that he is not "building a system" or presenting "a grand theory", and that he does not presume to know how things "really are", can change this fact. If someone feels that making explicitly "grand" claims is arrogant, I would reply that "modest" claims are simply claims that are unaware of their own "arrogance".

Basically the same misgiving, the same unease with what I say, may also be expressed in the feeling that it is arrogant for me to make all these claims which go against very deep preconceptions, widely shared in and out of philosophy, about the character of friendship, morality and life in general – preconceptions, I would add (no doubt very "arrogantly"), which are deep not only in the sense of structuring thought at a very basic level, but also in the sense of being held from very deep and obscure motives. But again, it seems to me that it is only apparently "modest" to show deference to traditional or widely shared contemporary views, or again to our so-called "pre-reflective intuitions". Such deference is in fact only the covert arrogance of assuming that one is part of a "we" – be it the "we" which refers to itself by invoking "the philosophical tradition" or what "any decent person" would think – which already *has* "the truth". One does not for one's own part presume to be able to discern the truth, but one does presume to know that one belongs to a group that has discerned it. What all social groups ask of their members, what they are based on, is precisely deference to their "truth", to their "order of things".

If there is real arrogance in what I have said, then, as opposed to mere lack of deference, it cannot be a function of the fact that I make "grand" claims that go against received views. Rather, the arrogance, if such there be, will have

shown itself in my not being open to the thinkers and the views I criticise, explicitly or by implication; in my attacking straw men rather than engaging with the real insights and real complexities I might have discovered, if only I had been willing to look for them. In short: if I have been arrogant it is only in not being open. Someone writing about openness, but doing it with a closed mind, now there is a real irony.

Beyond the irony, however, it may seem as if I have now in fact made a very devious move, trying to assure that I get the last word whichever way my interlocutor turns. For have I not said that the only way you can prove me wrong is in proving that I have not been open? But if you manage to prove that, you have in effect proven me right, because my basic claim is that what is at stake in all our relationships is openness, and at the root of all our difficulties is the lack of openness.

My response at this point would be to ask the reader to consider whether it is not a simple fact, rather than any invention of mine, that we speak about the shortcomings and lacunae in a philosophical text, or for that matter in the claims put forward in any controversy, precisely in terms of a lack of openness? Do we not say that someone is not open to the merits of another's position, or to the problems in his own, that his mind is closed, that he does not listen to others, but only hears what he wants to hear? And insofar as it can be shown that what I say about openness is marked by my not being open to other ways of seeing the issues, this would certainly be no victory for me, for it would simply mean that I was *wrong*, that I was deaf to others and blind to how things actually are – and in this connexion, the deaf will also be blind, and vice versa.

In general, it seems to me that the way I have approached the issues I have discussed in this thesis does not make me vulnerable to, *nor* protect me from, any particular *kind* of criticism. My text is prone to the same problems as any other philosophical text. Putting the same point differently, I would say that there are, and can be, no "methodological" questions in philosophy. This claim may seem positively perverse, for surely sustained reflection on the nature of philosophy itself has been a very marked feature of all good philosophy, certainly of all the philosophical texts usually counted "great", from Plato to Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Derrida?

Certainly, I am not denying that. In fact, my discussion right now itself concerns the nature of philosophy. What I mean is only that insofar as philosophy is, or aspires to be, a thinking about the presuppositions of our everyday thinking – including, of course, the thinking that is carried on by

specialists such as scientists in their everyday-work – philosophising itself must as far as possible be free from the limitation of any particular presuppositions. To be more exact: to philosophise is precisely the attempt to free oneself from such limitations as far as possible – and this work of liberation, of clearing away the prejudices about how things "must" be, is by definition a never-ending one. Any "methodological" strictures, any rules laid down as to the particular ways in which one must or must not go about liberating oneself from prejudices, will obviously *themselves* be based on certain prejudices about what "proper" thinking "must" look like, and consequently will be part of the very problem, the very bondage, that philosophising is an attempt to get free from.

I would say that the only philosophical question to be asked about a claim or remark, *any* claim or remark, is: "Does this make sense? Does it help me make sense of anything?" Because making sense of things is what one tries to do in philosophising; that is the only thing of concern. One is not, or should not be, out to try to convince anybody of anything, or trying to achieve any purpose – and here it makes no difference whether the purpose is a private and mundane one, like getting one's book published, or a noble one, like ending economic exploitation.

However, if all one wants is to make better sense of things, one can never come upon the idea that a thought someone expresses must be rejected because it was not arrived at using the "proper" method. Regardless of how unfamiliar and in all sorts of ways problematic the idiom in which a thought is expressed, and the intellectual setting in which it arises, may be, it is a good thought if it illuminates something, if it makes something clearer, if it opens a way for further thought. If it does not do this, it is worthless, no matter how "properly" by some standard or other it may have been arrived at.

Good thoughts, one could say, are like dynamite. Their worth lies not in how they are constructed, but in the effect they have, in the way they manage to blow holes in the walls of our self-constructed prisons. One could also say that a good thought is like a flashlight, whose value lies not in itself but in its illuminating the dark road ahead. Or to try yet a third metaphor, good thoughts are like seeds out of which plants grow, plants which in growing break through the concrete, and which bear fruit in the form of new thoughts, further reorientations.

The professional disease of philosophers, however, is precisely to forget that the thoughts are, or should be, there to make us understand ourselves and our life better. Instead we lose ourselves in inspection of the thoughts themselves, as it were. What happens then is that the philosophical desire to make sense of things is replaced by a concern with proper "method", or with the

intellectual ancestry and kinship between different ideas. Thus, the thoughts get reified, objectified into "positions"; they are put in an intellectual museum as things to look at, not use. And this means that the thoughts are not really understood, for understanding a thought means taking it up into one's life with others, rather than just looking at it.

In speaking of the philosophical desire to make sense of things we must not, however, forget the ominous question mark put in front of *all* our endeavours, in the real world and in the world of thought, by the pervasiveness of self-deception. In all we do and think and are, we make *some* kind of sense to ourselves, and to others. But *what* kind? It might be, for instance, the kind of sense both secreted *and* needed by one's vanity or greed or bitterness, or by one's small-minded desire for comfort, or an equally small-minded fear of being "used" or denied the "respect" one thinks due to one, and so on. All these attitudes make their own kind of sense, as all attitudes do, and it has been one aim of this thesis to explore – that is, expose – the kind of sense some of them make. There is no such thing as a desire to make sense of things, to find out the truth about them, *as such*. There is indeed such a thing as truthfulness, but it is not the name of some neutral or merely contemplative "interest"; rather, it is another name for openness itself, for the wholehearted desire to be oneself with others. To live by that desire is what "living in truth" would mean.

It might be asked how we are to know whether we are speaking the truth or not, whether we are deceiving ourselves or not? As I noted above, however, this question itself appears to be self-deceived. "How am *I* to know whether *I*...?" Am I not the person who *must* know? If I did not know, then *I* would not be deceiving *myself*. I will come back to this question at the end of this Conclusion.

– *God* –

As I noted in the Introduction and at many later points in this text, there are many Biblical, and more specifically Christian, parallels to what I have said. This is true also for the central thought guiding this thesis, that our life is lived in a tension between the goodness of an open encounter which we simultaneously both desire and fear, and the various reactions of closing ourselves to each other expressive of our fear of openness. Christianity has always conceived of the state of human beings as essentially one of paradoxical tension. We were created good, but we

live in sin. This does not mean, however, that we are now all evil, quite dead to goodness, but rather that our life is spent in *fleeing* the good, that is, in constantly turning away from or subverting the good, because we feel somehow or other threatened or oppressed by it. Thus, Calvin claims that God has "indelibly engraven" in our hearts a "sense of Deity", so that the desire for the supernatural is in a sense a "natural instinct" for us – and yet this desire makes us aware of a truth about ourselves we are "desirous *not* to know", and which we therefore "intentionally stupify" ourselves against; we cannot help but know God's goodness, and yet we "deliberately turn our thoughts away from him", and bow down before idols instead.[1]

Christianly speaking, our life is in truth understandable only through our God-relationship, while at the same time that life is marked through and through by our refusing to understand ourselves in that way – or, simply, by our refusing to understand ourselves, refusing to acknowledge the truth about our state. In everything we do, we are on the run from God, from the one there is no hiding from, but we pretend to ourselves that everything is fine with us, or at least we misdescribe the source and character of our problems. In other words, to move to a more mythical way of speaking, paradise is not a place or a state we were once in, but have now definitely been expelled from; rather, our life itself is lived out as *our flight from* paradise. To understand our life as it is, *is* to understand that it is not as it should be, and that this is so because we turn away from the goodness which could be ours, if we wanted it.[2]

This is what Christianity claims. In the same way, I have been saying that we are on the run from openness, but pretend otherwise, and that this gives our life the paradoxical shape it has. There are, then, obvious similarities between

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[1] Quoted in Merold Westphal, "Taking St. Paul Seriously: Sin as an Epistemological Category" in Thomas P. Flint (ed.) *Christian Philosophy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 201.

[2] Emil Brunner, *Der Mensch im Widerspruch. Die Christliche Lehre vom Wahren und vom Wirklichen Menschen* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1937), discusses this dialectic at play in the Christian view of the human predicament, and the way that this view differs from classical pagan and modern secular views,. Cf. also Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man. A Christian Interpretation*. One Volume Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946). Brunner and Niebuhr are Protestant theologians; an interesting Catholic interpretation, although hardly a quite standard one, of the meaning of our impossible flight before God, centred on the myth of paradise and the fall, is Eugen Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen I-III.* 5. Auflage (Ferdinand Schöningh: München & Paderborn, 1984-6). Drewermann summarises his position in the Postscript to vol. I, pp. 356–410. – Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), argues persuasively that Nietzsche, Heidegger and, perhaps more surprisingly, Wittgenstein, can all be read as responding to, and rethinking in their own ways, the Biblical myth of the fall.

what I say about the tension between our desire for and fear of openness, and what Christian thinkers have said about our conflicting relation to God. But the difference seems just as obvious: while I speak about the openness of human beings to each other, they speak primarily about our relationship to God, and about our relationship to each other only as an aspect of our God-relationship.

Some readers of a religious cast of mind will no doubt feel that what I say is an example of the familiar strategy of secular intellectuals to take an idea or a figure of thinking from religion, purge it of all its truly religious elements – which to the secular are frightening and perhaps distasteful – and then put it to their own use, a use which from the religious perspective will appear both limited and false. These readers will feel, then, that in speaking about friendship and goodness in the way I have done, I have helped myself to an idiom which they think makes sense only insofar as one explicitly confesses, as I do not, to belief in a God who can "support" all this talk about absolutes, who can give one the "right" to use it. Readers hostile to religion may for their part in effect feel the same way, that I have helped myself to all too much of an essentially religious way of speaking, but they will of course think that this whole way of speaking is confused, even when avowedly religious people engage in it.

In the face of such criticisms, the first thing to note is that there is no agreed upon way to distinguish "religious" from "non-religious" understanding, "divine" from "human" insight, theology from philosophy. On the contrary, how exactly such distinctions are to be drawn – if indeed they can be drawn at all – has been a *question* for as long as there has been any such apparent distinction to make, and it has been a question both for philosophers and theologians, both for those professing a particular religious faith and those who do not.[3] This means that no one – whether professing believer, atheist or agnostic – is in a position to declare from on high what can and cannot be said in merely human terms, without appeal to explicitly religious language, without bringing in God. Rather, we need to ask what expressions such as "bringing in God" or "merely human terms" might *mean*.

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[3] Two examples of more recent debates about the relationship between philosophy and theology, the one sparked by the influence of Heidegger's thought on theology (and vice versa), the other by recent developments in French phenomenology, are the collections of articles by Gerhard Noller (Hrsg.), *Heidegger und die Theologie. Beginn und Fortgang der Diskussion*. Theologische Bücherei, 38 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967), and Dominic Janicaud, J-F. Courtine, J-L. Chrétien, M. Henry, J-L. Marion & P. Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn". The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). Cf. also the more eclectic collection of articles in Niels Grønkjær (ed.), *The Return of God. Theological Perspectives in Contemporary Philosophy* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998).

Perhaps God *cannot* be "brought in" because he is already there, in our supposedly "merely human" terms? At any rate, it is clear that the instant someone professes to speak in merely "human" or "natural" terms, they have implied a contrast with terms that are *not* merely human or natural, and once this implicit admission of the supernatural is made, it becomes unclear what the denial that there is anything "beyond nature" amounts to. The professed naturalist or atheist says, as it were: "I can understand what God would be, but he does not exist". But *where* could such an understanding come from, in that case? And how could one know that it corresponds to nothing real? Conversely, if a professed believer claims insights into the supernatural which are supposed to be somehow beyond "merely human" comprehension, we are faced with the equally paradoxical situation of someone claiming to have insight into something which cannot be understood.

Suppose, however, that we take seriously the Biblical declaration that God is *love*.[4] Might that not place the question of the relation of "human" and "divine" in a new light? Anders Nygren claims that Martin Luther's "Copernican revolution"[5] in the history of the Christian understanding of love and faith consisted in replacing the anthropocentric "perversion" of the idea of love to be found in Catholicism with "a thoroughly theocentric idea of love":

> When Luther wishes to say what love in the Christian sense is, he draws his picture not from our love, not from the realm of human love at all, but from God's love, especially as this has been revealed in Christ. [...] Christian love is strictly not concerned with the love with which we love God, but essentially with the love with which God Himself loves.[6]

Faced with this supposed contrast between divine and human love, we need to ask how the contrast is articulated, however. As I explained in my earlier discussion of Luther, there is a crucial aspect of his description of "divine" love, namely its supposedly *sacrificial* character, which in fact turns it into a description of lovelessness of a familiar, human-all-too-human, kind.[7] I see no sense in speaking of "kinds" of love. The assertion "God is love" I can understand, in a way, but I am quite certain that God is *not* a *kind* of love – "divine" love, for instance. Insofar as we can say anything about it at all, the

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[4] 1 John 4:16.
[5] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*. Translated by Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 681.
[6] Ibid., p. 683 f.
[7] Cf. the section "The dirty secret of sacrificial purity" in Chapter Two.

difference between divine and human love cannot, as I have said, be that we desire to be loved by those we love, while God does not.[8] It would rather have to be a difference between a love that is mixed up with all sorts of other things, with selfishness and fear, and one that is "pure" in the sense of *unmixed*, not in the sense of being sacrificial in essence. We long and strive for, but we also fear, the love that God simply *is*; that would be the radical difference, not between our love and God's, but rather between us and God – the point being that "our" love *is not* ours, rather we are defined by our *distance* – at the same time desirous and fearful – to love, which is God.

As for the attitude Luther calls "human love", it is clearly *no love at all*, but simply selfishness. The point is not merely that it contradicts what the Bible tells us about divine love; rather, it contradicts what we ourselves must admit to be *our own understanding of love*. More precisely, it contradicts *love's self-understanding*, which is known to us not from consulting some holy book, but through the call of conscience. It is what we feel in our hearts to be the truth about love.[9]

In theological jargon, this would be called "natural" revelation – granted to all humans, as opposed to "special" revelation, granted only to those to

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[8] Cf. p. 194 f., above.

[9] We might note, by the way, that in Luther's statement quoted above (p. 361, and footnote 65) that in love there is "keyn gesetz, keyn recht, keyn zwang, keyn nodt, ssondern eyttel freyheyt und gunst" – no law, no right, no force, no necessity, but only freedom and grace – he is explicitly talking about *friendship between human beings*. What he says is not an idealisation born of religious speculations about divine love; on the contrary, the unforced goodness of the love of human friendship stands for him as a model of divine love. Let me add that, as I see it, the revolutionary aspect of Luther's teachings is not that he insists on the primacy of a "divine" love that is qualitatively different from "merely human" love, as Nygren claims. Rather, his thought was a revolutionary return to the teaching of the gospels precisely insofar as he attempted, his confusedly self-sacrifical ideas about divine love notwithstanding, *to think theology in the light of love*, instead of articulating it in terms borrowed from a worldly moralism, as in talk about making oneself "worthy" of God's grace, or from the realms of social power, as in conceiving of God as an "omnipotent ruler", for instance. It is this very shift of focus that is expressed in Luther's famous formula *sola fide*, "through faith alone", on which his whole theology is based (for Nygren's discussion of Luther's thinking here, see *Agape and Eros*, pp. 684–691). Against the fantasy of a "justification through works", of human beings making themselves good and "worthy" of the love of God by good works and spiritual exercises, Luther simply declares that *God loves us already*, before we ever do anything to make ourselves "worthy" of him. God's love for us is a gift which is there for us to receive if we will, the difficulty being not that we are not worthy enough to merit God's grace – for the grace of love is precisely not merited – but it is hard for us to find the humility to receive the love we are offered, to overcome both our *shame* in accepting that God can indeed love us, worthless sinners that we are, and or *pride* in accepting that God's gift to us does not in any way reflect favourably on our persons. What Luther says here of God's love is true of love as such – and Biblically speaking, God *is* precisely love *as such*. Love is a gift, someone in love does not think of the love she feels as being somehow meritorious or of the love another bears her as showing her worthiness, as being flattering to her. Furthermore, in love the faith that one is, in some sense, *already loved* is also fundamental, as I have explained (cf. p. 207 f., above).

whom God speaks his word directly, or through his Apostles – but this terminology is very misleading, for there is nothing merely human or natural about the truth about love revealed in conscience, there is nothing with which it could be contrasted as "merely" anything. It is a *revelation*, that is, a truth that is at the same time the greatest promise of our existence and the most radical challenge to, indeed condemnation of, the selfishness which marks our life so thoroughly. I can make no sense of the suggestion that one could fully open oneself to the call of conscience to love, yet still miss some supposedly more ultimate truth about oneself and others revealed to us only in some specifically confessional way, in some holy text, for instance. I can make no sense of it because it implies that there would be something more ultimate than love, that one could somehow perceive an existential limit to love's openness, beyond which something else, namely "religious belief" would unfold, and as far as I can see, such a perception of a limit to love, to its challenge and promise, can only mark a *refusal* to open oneself in love.

This is obviously not to say that I would call love "merely human" or "natural", either; on the contrary, my point is precisely that calling love "merely" *anything* is a way of refusing to open oneself to it. As I said above, the call to love of conscience is certainly *neither* natural nor cultural in the sense of being something created or even formed by us in any way, nor is it something we can merely take note of as being an inescapable part of our supposed "nature"; rather, conscience calls us, claims us, puts our life under judgment in the strangely non-judgmental way I have described.[10] In terms of the contrast natural/supernatural this means, as far as I can see, that conscience and love can only be designated supernatural.

To acknowledge the other-worldliness, the mystery, in the call of conscience is, as R. F. Holland says, "more a matter of registering an experience or marking an encounter than passing a judgment".[11] It is certainly quite different from assenting, in some merely intellectual sense, to religious dogma or a metaphysical world-view, which is what Raimond Gaita apparently has in mind in denying that what he calls "ethical other-worldliness" stands in need of "a religious (really a metaphysical) underwriting".[12] Gaita says that, on

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[10] Cf. the section "Goodness, guilt, and bad conscience" in Chapter Four.
[11] Holland, *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 2.
[12] Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (Houndmills & London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 217. – On the metaphysical reading of other-wordliness Gaita wants to reject, cf. p. 224 f. Gaita's discussion is, I should note, partly a response to the perspective articulated in Holland's book, and he quotes the passage from Holland I just quoted at the beginning of his chapter on "Ethical Other-worldliness" (p. 209).

his understanding, "the sense of other-worldliness is ethically conditioned, rather than the other way around".[13] The contrast Gaita plays on collapses, however, for what is at stake here is precisely the *sense* of the ethical, what it *means* for something to be "ethically conditioned" at all. To acknowledge the mystery in the call of conscience is to acknowledge the other-worldliness at the heart of ethics and our whole life.

Is such acknowledgment to be characterised as *religious*? I do not know. Perhaps what I have been saying now, and all through this thesis, is religious, although not in an explicit, confessional sense. It does seems to me that if explicit religious speech does not attempt to express and deepen one's understanding of love, its very heart will be lacking, but that is obviously not to deny that one might feel a need for an explicitly religious idiom in order to express a deepened understanding of love. *What* is it one then feels a need for? I do not know, perhaps I am afraid to know.[14]

At any rate, the difference between someone who speaks in explicitly religious terms about love, and someone who does not, is not that only the former speaks personally, or expresses belief, while the latter can speak quite "objectively". There is certainly no way of proving that what one says about love is objectively right. The difficulty with regard to love does not lie in proving things, but in having *faith* in love, daring to be open. In the absence of that faith, one will close oneself, thus reducing one's relationships to the level of negotiating a *modus vivendi* of some more or less happy or unhappy kind, while in reflecting about life one will *refuse* to see any sense in claims that love lies beyond such human, all too human negotiations – or, to the extent that one makes such claims, one will in fact not believe what one is saying, one will fail to *understand oneself in them*.

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[13] Ibid., p. 217.

[14] Gaita, too, confesses that he "does not know" what the difference is "between those who can speak of life as a gift but who cannot speak of it as God's gift, and those who can" (p. 224). Later on he claims, however, that the movement from one of these position to the other "*must be a movement of the same kind as led someone to speaking of life as a gift*" in the first place (p. 226). I wonder: How does he know, how could hee know, what it "must" be like? Gaita also says that although someone like Mother Theresa may say that she "would not be able to do what she does were it not for her love of Jesus", Gaita or someone else who is not religious, "need not even understand what that means, let alone 'believe it'", in order to feel the revelatory power of the "pure love" in her compassionate actions (p. 214). I would agree that acts of love *speak* to us, regardless of our religious or other attitudes, but I wonder whether there is not in Gaita's remark something of an anxious attempt to determine *what exactly* it is they say – i.e. something we can understand completely without any need to change our secular outlook – where the anxiety is rooted in a fear of what *more* might be revealed to one in love?

– Negative mythology?–

There is also a striking parallel between the way I have insisted all through my text on the impossibility to determine or describe what love's openness is, and the so-called "negative theology" so pronounced in Biblical thought, where "every statement we can make about God is denied as inadequate" because God is "the transcendent source of being who is himself beyond being and thought, whom our thought and language cannot describe or encompass but only point to and reach towards without ever attaining".[15]

As A. H. Armstrong, whom I just quoted, notes, this conception of God's transcendence to definitions must be distinguished from the Greek conception of the *apeiron*, "the unbounded, inexhaustible reservoir of living stuff from which all things come and to which they return ... the formless substrate from which formed, definite things come to be by the imposition of Form".[16] To the Greek way of thinking, "the good and the divine is essentially form and definition, light and clarity, as opposed to vague formless darkness", and their philosophical vocabulary "has no word for 'infinite' which does not convey the idea of vague formless indefiniteness".[17] To Biblical thinking, by contrast, the thought that God is *apeiros*, unlimited, carries no such essentially negative connotations of formless vagueness. God's infinity is not a *lack* of anything, it is superabundance, infinite goodness.

If someone tries to reduce God to the level of being this-or-that, thus making him manageable and comprehensible to our worldly understanding – for instance by claiming that God is just in the retributive, essentially moralistic sense of giving each what he *deserves* – Biblical theology will counter by showing its "negative" side, denying that God can be contained in our categories. This negative move is not an end in itself, however, it is not the end of the matter. On the contrary, what prompts it is precisely the sense that the

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[15] A. H. Armstrong & R. A. Markus, *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964 [1960]), p. 9. – As Armstrong notes, "the language of negative ... theology" has not only been insisted on by the mystics, but has also been accepted by "sober and balanced Christian philosophers like Aquinas as a necessary element in any truthful human speaking about God" (p. 10).
[16] Ibid., p. 10 f.
[17] Ibid., p. 11.

positive reality of God, his infinite *love*, is lost sight of, or kept purposely out of view, in the attempts to make him fit into our definitions. Biblical theology is negative precisely because its God is so eminently positive.

The point of negative theology is not, then, to refuse to speak of God. On the contrary, what is at stake is precisely *how* we are to speak of God. In other words, the point is not to stress that God is simply inaccessible to us, but rather to say something about the way in which he *is* accessible to us, which is *not*, Biblically speaking, by way of *knowledge* in the sense of an ability to define what God is, or to determine what he supposedly demands of us, but rather only by way of opening ourselves to the love that God is. By contrast, the desire for definitions and determinations actually betrays a desire to control things, if only in the sense of knowing, holding fast in knowledge, what things mean, who is right, what is possible, and so on. In truth, this desire to know marks the most fundamental and insidious aspect of the desire to control things, and the mild, collected expression on the face of the *wise man* who "understands how things are", is actually the clearest revelation of the anxiety, the lack of faith and humility, which is the other side of the need to control things. Knowledge is power – and power is the revelation of a fundamental impotence, of *anxiety in the face of love*.

It should be noted that the conception of God's transcendence at work in negative theology is not to be understood as God's being somehow outside and above the world; that idea in fact amounts to thinking of God on analogy with a thing or being in the world, and then adding, confusedly, that this particular being, "God", is *not* in the world. By contrast, on the Biblical conception God is really, as Armstrong explains, "*wholly other*" than everything in the world, and therefore his transcendence is "compatible with the deepest immanence; the two are in fact different ways of looking at the same thing. Just because God is other than all things he is free from the sundering limitations of every definite thing and can be immediately present to all things everywhere".[18]

If God names something *other* than love, then I do not know what to make of this claim, how to fill its formal schema with any meaning. If God *is* love, however, the claim makes sense, for as I have said the openness of love, while impossible to define or pinpoint as residing in any particular thing, is present *in* the way we relate to each other – present very differently depending on whether we open ourselves to it or reject it, but always present, as the very light in which we are, whether we like it or not, known to ourselves.

[18] Ibid., p. 8 f.

At this point I will take up Michael Theunissen's critique of the philosophers of dialogue, which I mentioned in the Introduction: it is directly relevant to the question at issue. Theunissen concedes that dialogue-philosophy "has its definitive component of truth", and that it rightly claims that the relationship between human beings "cannot be thematized in an appropriate manner within the framework of transcendental philosophy" – in a framework, that is, which conceptualises others as appearing always against the horizon of "my" world, with its structures of meaning and its "projects".[19] On the other hand, he believes that dialogue-philosophy can only unfold as a *critique* of such inappropriate conceptualisations, so that its character is in fact "determined by its opposition to transcendental philosophy", a fact which comes to light in "the negativity which attaches to the ontology of dialogical reality",[20] in which "only what the Thou is not, not what it is, remains certain", and the I-Thou relationship is delimited only in a constant refusal or "transcending" of every "empirically determined" conception of it.[21] Theunissen asks himself whether this pervasively negative character of the writings of dialogue-philosophers is due to their remaining, in their very critique of it, so "caught up in the schema of intentionality" (in which "I" think of, grasp, handle, and experience various kinds of "object"), that they are "unable to grasp the complete reality of the Thou".[22] However, he comes to the conclusion that this negativity is a necessary feature of the very attempt to philosophise about the I-Thou-relationship; it inevitably brings up against the *limits* of philosophy as such.[23]

Theunissen believes that dialogue-philosophy tries to articulate a "determinate truth ... though one which cannot be reached by philosophy".[24] He thinks that "*for us*", who have established a reflective and objectified relationship to ourselves and our surroundings, there is no other "origin" or "reality" than the one, essentially egocentric and impersonal at the same time, described by transcendental philosophy.[25] Theunissen concedes, in line with

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[19] Theunissen, *The Other. Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986 [1964]), p. 362.
[20] Ibid., p. 265.
[21] Ibid., p. 321 f.
[22] Ibid., p. 322.
[23] Theunissen speaks of "eine grundsätzliche Grenze der Philosophie überhaupt" (*Der Andere. Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart*. Zweite, um eine Vorrede vermehrte Auflage [Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977], p. 496). At this point, the English translation (p. 374) is inadequate. The German edition is to be recommended anyway, because the translation omits much very interesting material.
[24] *The Other*, p. 377.
[25] Ibid., p. 380.

what the dialogue-philosophers say and what I have insisted on in this thesis, that unity with the other is in some sense both where we "come from" and what we long for in love,[26] but he believes that is accessible to us on the level of *thinking* only in *mythological* thinking.[27]

It seems to me that Theunissen, while pointing to a crucial problematic, presents the situation of transcendental –we might say "standard" – philosophy as unproblematic in a way it is not. I would say that trying to understand the world in abstraction from the I-Thou relationship, or given only the essentially falsifying picture of it which is all transcendental philosophy allows for, is in itself a kind of to mythological thinking, whose apparent clarity and determinateness is bought at the price of a fundamental obscurity, precisely because the *ground* of everything, our relationship to each other, is left unarticulated. All through this thesis I have in fact been trying to show, from slightly different perspectives, how this happens, how friendship and morality are at the same time misrepresented and left hanging in the air by standard accounts of them.

As for the idea that love's openness is only accessible to us in *mythological* thinking, I would agree that if one tries to substantialise and define openness in metaphysical or ontological terms, one will indeed land in mythology. It is also true, in a sense, that we can only indicate what openness is negatively (this is so in *thinking*, our concrete turning to each other is as positive as can be) – but on the other hand this negative move has its own underlying positivity, as we shall see. Just as it is a misunderstanding to say that negative theology's rejection of various proposed determinations of God will, as such, merely leave us with an *un*determined "x" called "God", characterising the kind of philosophical approach developed in these pages as merely negative would be wrong.

There is a guessing-game where one asks general questions which may only be answered with "yes" or "no", until one is able to guess what the other person is thinking of. In the case of openness, by contrast, one can *only* answer "no" to questions asking for general characteristics, because what one is thinking of is *essentially* indescribable, it is nothing determinate, has no features of conditions or limits or motives or characteristic expressions. Thus, if I decide to pardon you, my motives for so doing can be discussed, justifications and criticisms can be brought forward ("You shouldn't have let him off the hook so

[26] Ibid., p. 378 f.
[27] Ibid., p. 380 ff.

easily, he will do it again! You only did it because you wanted to curry favour with his mother, didn't you?"), but if I open myself to you in *forgiveness*, there is nothing to discuss or justify or criticise, for as we saw earlier, one does not forgive out of any motive, nor in view of any consequences doing so might have, one does so simply because one's love for the offender is reawakened; the forgiving *is* this reawakening.

On the other hand, while one can only reject proposed specifications of openness, these rejections for their meaningfulness actually presuppose –appeal to or evoke – a knowledge of what openness *is* in oneself and one's interlocutors. The negative delimitations are thus carried by something positive, though unspecifiable. If this knowledge was not there, if we did not in some sense already know quite well what forgiveness is, for instance, the suggestion that it might be something else altogether than the games of power and mutual acccomodation played with pardons, excuses and so on, would be met with simple incomprehension – which, it should be noted, would be something altogether different from reacting to talk of forgiveness with a cynical sneer or by expressing a learned doubt whether such forgiveness has or can been made intellectually satisfying sense of, for in both *these* reactions the *reality* of forgiveness (as something to be rejected or to be discussed further) is actually conceded. If we did not know what forgiveness was, and that it was "wholly other" than the worldly-moralistic games we play, forgiveness would also not be as difficult as it is, difficult in the way it is, nor could it be existentially decisive and liberating the way it is.

To take love's openness as the centre point in philosophy does not mean divulging hidden mysteries in some supposedly "mythological thinking". It is rather an exercise in anti-reduction *and* simplification, in deconstructing the false reductionist perspectives we construct in which openness is reduced to "merely" this or that, at the same time as its simplicity or infinity is covered over with spurious complexities. The philosophical task consists, as Wittgenstein said, in "assembling reminders for a particular purpose", and that needs doing because we are blind to "the aspects of things that are most important to us", to the "real foundations" of what we do; "we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful".[28] We must add that, in moral contexts, failing to be struck by something important is connected with not *wanting* to see something.

[28] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), §§ 127, 129.

– Thinking against one's own grain –

Our difficulties with goodness – or the *difficulty* in the singular, the fear of openness – is visible everywhere. As I have emphasised repeatedly, it is not bracketed in philosophising. This means that doing ethics is difficult in essentially the *same* kind of way as moral matters are difficult in "real life", when one is tempted to treat others badly in concrete situations.

It might be asked how doing ethics could possibly be difficult in the same kind of way as it may be difficult, because one is a coward, to dare to intervene when someone is treated badly by others, for instance? Would it not, similarly, be a sign of a deluded intellectual pride to claim that sitting in the seminar room pondering matters of life and death *in principle*, is "difficult" in the same kind of way as it is difficult to sit by someone's deathbed? Yes, in an obvious sense it certainly would. On the other hand, it sounds equally absurd to claim that moral philosophy, which is after all a reflection on moral matters, is not difficult at all, other than in a merely intellectual sense, for then it becomes quite unclear what the connection would be between this reflection and the matters it is supposed to be a reflection on. For the matters themselves are difficult, they have an urgency to them, and then how could reflection on them, which is after all supposed to tell us something about these urgent matters, be quite devoid of any urgency?

Socrates, attempting to bring out the peculiar character of philosophical questions, said of the philosopher that he "abandons ... questions of 'My injustice towards you, or yours towards me' for an investigation of justice and injustice in themselves – what they are, and how they differ from everything else and from each other".[29] This is quite true, of course. Philosophy investigates the connections, the implications and contradictions and kinships, we can see between different ways of speaking, the sense we can make of different kinds of description, the *meaning* we can ascribe to, or see in, different kinds of experience or fact, for instance the fact that someone was mean to someone else. It is *not* concerned with which particular facts happen to obtain, for instance the fact that I was mean to you at the party yesterday.

[29] Plato, *Theatetus*, 175c. Translated by M. J. Levett, revised by M. F. Burnyeat, in Plato, *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

Philosophical questions do not, then, challenge us the way *conscience* does. For conscience concerns itself precisely with "My injustice towards you". Whereas the philosopher asks "What is Man?", conscience does not ask me, as it were *out of general interest*, what *a* human being is; it asks *me* who *I* am, *here and now*, in relation to *you*, to the people I live with. Nonetheless, a philosophical discussion about the human condition, or about justice and injustice, *can* indeed, as Socrates' experience shows, get very charged in moral terms. What this *means* is that the participants feel that the discussion is not merely theoretical, but has become personal, so that the points made are not debating points scored or points coolly to be noted and considered, but actually *point straight at* the participants themselves. That is, the discussion has turned into a matter of conscience. The force of Socrates' *maieutic* is due precisely to the way he often transforms talks which start as mere speculation into matters of conscience for the participants. As one of his interlocutors says: a person who talks with Socrates, "even if he began by conversing about something quite different" has before very long to submit to "answering questions about *himself* concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto".[30]

How is this possible? I would say that if one has a bad conscience, anything – a glance, a smile, an incident one happens to witness – can be the occasion that brings it to the fore, reminds one of what one does not want to think of. And a philosophical discussion can be such an occasion, too, it can act as a *catalyst* which makes one *conscious of conscience*. Still, one might wonder how a seemingly theoretical and general discussion *can* function as such a catalyst, can turn in this way into a highly personal one. I think this is explained by the fact that we come up with all sorts of general and sophistic claims about "what life is like", about its supposed inevitabilities and impossibilities, precisely in order to excuse and *justify* our own quite *personal* shortcomings; we settle for a very petty view of what a human being is in order to disguise the fact that our pettiness is quite homespun. As Nietzsche said, we are bigoted enough to paint ourselves – that is: ourselves in the far from truthful version of our own imagination – on the wall and say "Ecce homo!"[31] And if a philosophical discussion reveals that one's petty notions about life are untenable, it will upset one not so much because it is hard on one's pride to be

[30] The speaker is Nicias in Plato's *Laches*, 187e, translated by Rosamond Kent Sprague, in Plato, *Complete Works* (emphasis added).
[31] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 56.

proven wrong, but because one is robbed of the defence one has set up against having to face the question who one really is.[32]

The fact that moral philosophy deals with *moral* matters – with matters that have, even as we discuss them merely "in principle", a moral *urgency* – *means* that the confusions here are in the first instance *moral* confusions, confusions, that is, having to do with an *unwillingness to own, and so a need to suppress, certain aspects of moral experience* which would make it impossible for one to hold on to a view of morality, of oneself as a moral person and of one's relationship to others, which is in some way more comfortable for one. This moral confusion will also come out in confusions of an intellectual nature; in all kinds of unclarities, paradoxes and an inability to account for obvious facts of experience. The intellectual confusion is a symptom of the moral confusion, however, not the other way around; one's inability to see certain things is explained by one's not *wanting* to look in certain directions.

This priority of moral confusion to intellectual confusion will also show itself in the fact that there is no way to establish conclusively, on "purely intellectual" grounds, that one is right in what one says. Thus, while I claim to see confusions, paradoxes and an inability to account for obvious facts of experience in the views I have criticised in this thesis, proponents of those views are likely to find the problems on my side rather than theirs, and the fact that *I think* that this is due to their not *wanting* to see certain things clearly will not of itself do anything to convince them that I am right.

I do not, then, think that I can win arguments by claiming that those who disagree with me are self-deceived; that would merely be stupid. It would be equally misguided, however, to demand that I should refrain from characterising the positions I criticise as in different ways self-deceived, for such characterisations are not a rhetorical device or a sign of arrogance, but rather the very *substance* of my critique of various moral ideas and positions. My point is that, whether one is a philosopher or not, the only way one can criticise an idea in *moral* terms is by exposing the traces of self-deception in it, the things that those holding the idea do not want to acknowledge, and want to

[32] Regardless of how convinced one becomes of the truth *in principle* of the conclusions reached in a discussion, one does not necessarily connect what was said with oneself personally. Thus, a philosopher may write about friendship in the most illuminating way, yet be a terrible friend to his friends, and never allow himself to see the contradiction between what he writes and how he lives. He may see the contradiction in the sense of knowing intellectually that it is there, and yet not be struck and shattered by it. But *if* he feels smote by a philosophical point, it happens because at that point, his conscience made itself felt, or because at that point he was unable to suppress it any longer.

suppress *by* holding it. Insofar as what I say is sometimes merely rhetorical or arrogant, it means that I have *failed* in the task of philosophical clarification I have set myself.

The basic issue here is not about argumentative strategies, but about how one sees the character of moral difficulties, *and so* of philosophical reflection about them. It seems to me, and I hope this thesis as a whole has made this point of view seem worth inquiring further into, that moral difficulties essentially involve our unwillingness to be open to others *and* our simultaneously deceiving ourselves about that unwillingness. That the intellectualist views I criticise do not seriously consider this possibility is my chief complaint against them.

If all this is true, if the arguments we conduct in moral philosophy are inescapably implicated in our moral difficulties, and so in our self-deceptions, it means two things. First, it means that one has to give up the idea that one could even aim at universal acceptance for what one says in ethics. For as Hannes Nykänen notes, "If we wanted to have a moral philosophy which everyone agreed about, the first condition of this philosophy would have to be that it challenges no one morally".[33] In other words, only by limiting oneself to trivialities, to saying things there is *morally speaking no need to say*, could one even hope for anything like general agreement. A good point in moral philosophy will be, in some measure, an *unwelcome* point, a point that *hurts*.

Secondly, and more importantly, it means that moral philosophy is a struggle with *one's own* moral difficulties, and this means that making a good point is making a point that points at *oneself*, that exposes some self-deception on one's own part. It is only against this background that I can make sense of Wittgenstein's oft-quoted remark that "Working in philosophy ... is really more a working on oneself ... On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them)".[34] This means that if there is one thing one should fear more than winning general, easy agreement from others, it is to win it from oneself. One must rather try to think somehow against one's own grain.

One might ask whether one *can* do that, whether one can *want* to prove oneself a liar in this way? The question may sound pertinent, and the answer may seem to be: "No". Note, however, that insofar as this were really the case,

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[33] Nykänen, *The 'I', the 'You' and the Soul. An Ethics of Conscience* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002), p. 15.
[34] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value.* Translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 16.

it would mean that moral philosophy was simply an elaborate exercise in lying to oneself. Perhaps this is the case. But *is* it the case? How is this question to be decided? Must this not be, in itself, a question of conscience?

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The goodness of moral attitudes such as respect, loyalty, reciprocity and altruism seems beyond question. What if they involve a partial rejection of goodness, however, a rejection not acknowledged by us? What if our morality and our whole life is marked by a deep confusion, indeed by a desire on our part not to know what is actually going on between us?

This book raises and discusses these unsettling questions. It is indeed meant to be an unsettling book, questioning fundamentals taken for granted both in our everyday thinking and in philosophy. Starting from a discussion of friendship, the goodness of which is seen to lie in a wholehearted openness between people, it proceeds to uncover a dialectics of desire for, and fear of, openness at work in all our dealings with each other.

The perspective articulated here should be of interest to continental and analytic philosophers alike, as well as to theologians and psychologists. Written in an engaging, non-academic style, the book should be accessible to anyone thinking about existential questions.

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