AN ETHICS OF ATTENTION

by

Warren Heiti

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2014

Simone Weil

L'éducation de l'attention est le principal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This thesis defends Simone Weil's ethics of attention while situating it within the framework of Anglo-American analytic philosophy. John McDowell's argument that virtue is a sensitivity — or a perceptual capacity to recognize requirements that situations impose on one's behaviour — is traceable through the work of Iris Murdoch back to Weil. All three thinkers are committed to some version of the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge. The putatively rival theory is the Humean theory of motivation. That theory maintains that motivation can be analysed into two different mental states — belief and desire — with different "directions of fit." According to this picture, the moral agent is primarily a problem-solver and world-changer. But such a picture of agency assumes the post-Pauline doctrine of freedom of the will — a doctrine of which Plato and Aristotle were innocent. And their innocence has something to teach us. I argue that there is at least one genus of action, which modern philosophy has largely forgotten, which is not aimed at effecting changes in the world. This genus, which covers both aesthetic and ethical contexts, is attention; and it may be generally characterized as patient receptivity. Since this genus of action is not accurately analysed by the Humean theory, I suggest a more complex ethical psychology, which I call the "peripatetic contextualist" psychology. This psychology avails itself of at least two perspectives on the world: the integrative perspective of the virtuous or attentive agent, and the disintegrative perspective of the self-controlled or weak-willed agent. I do not reject the Humean theory; my ecumenical suggestion is that it is encompassed by the peripatetic contextualist psychology. The Humean theory provides a correct analysis of the disintegrative perspective: a state of agency undergoing internal conflict. Furthermore, I suggest that even the virtuous agent must have recourse to the disintegrative perspective, for it is only from that perspective that moral critique is possible. Finally, in defending the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge, I suggest that understanding this thesis requires us to re-imagine knowledge. Inspired by McDowell's reading of Aristotle, I conclude that intellect and character are interdependent.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

MMP	Anscombe, G.E.M. "Modern Moral Philosophy."
T&A	Anscombe, G.E.M. "Thought and Action in Aristotle."
DA	Aristotle. *De Anima*.
NE	Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*.
EWP	Dancy, Jonathan. *Ethics Without Principles*.
MR	Dancy, Jonathan. *Moral Reasons*.
AMP	McDowell, John. "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology."
V&R	McDowell, John. "Virtue and Reason."
SG	Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*.
HTM	Smith, Michael. "The Humean Theory of Motivation."
E	Spinoza. *Ethics*.
G&G	Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*.
WG	Weil, Simone. *Waiting for God*.
MI	Winch, Peter. "Moral Integrity."
C&V	Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*.
PI	Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*.
TLP	Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.
L&E	Zwicky, Jan. "Bringhurst's Presocratics: Lyric and Ecology."
LP	Zwicky, Jan. *Lyric Philosophy*.
PA	Zwicky, Jan. *Plato as Artist*.
W&M	Zwicky, Jan. *Wisdom & Metaphor*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1. Introduction

¶ There are at least two genealogies in ethical psychology. The first genealogy is nearly two thousand five hundred years old: it starts with Plato. The other genealogy goes back only roughly seven hundred and fifty years to a scholastic interpretation of Aristotle. These genealogies offer different *images* of ethical psychology. The first one was inherited, in the twentieth century, by Simone Weil; let us call it the *photosynthetic* ethical psychology. According to this psychology, the ethical agent is a *witness*: her primary responsibility is not to change the world, but *to understand* it. Her fundamental temperament is one of *patience*. Her proper function is *attending*, and its excellence or ἀρετή is *clarity*. Clear perception is a function of an *integrated* character. Insofar as this agent does act, her action is *responsive to* and *determined by* what she understands. For this image of agency, action is always interaction. The energy needed for action is not generated by the agent herself; instead, she receives it, like light, from others.[1]

Let us call the second psychology the *Humean* moral psychology. According to this psychology, the ethical agent is an actor: her primary responsibility is *to change* the world. Importantly, this image distinguishes between two psychological faculties: one (cognitive) faculty — call it *believing* — reflects the way the world is, and the other (non-cognitive) faculty — call it *desiring* — represents some preferred and counterfactual state of the world.[2] Insofar as these faculties operate independently, the agent's psychology is in a *disintegrative* state. Her fundamental temperament, resulting from the discrepancy between the two representations, is one of *dissatisfaction*.[3] Her proper function is *problem-solving*, and its excellence is *prudence*. Crucially, the agent's

---

[1] "The source of man's moral energy is outside him, like that of his physical energy (food, air etc.).... // There is only one remedy for that: a chlorophyll conferring the faculty of feeding on light" (Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 3).

[2] Strictly speaking, a desire, for Hume, is not a "representation"; cf. *Treatise*, III.II.§III.¶5.

[3] Cf. Hobbes: "For there is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind while we live here, because life itself is motion and can never be without desire, nor without fear no more than without sense" (*Leviathan*,VI.58).

action is not determined by anything external to her. Freedom, according to this image, is unimpeded *self-determination*.

Together, the photosynthetic and Humean psychologies are encompassed by what I call *the peripatetic contextualist ethical psychology*.
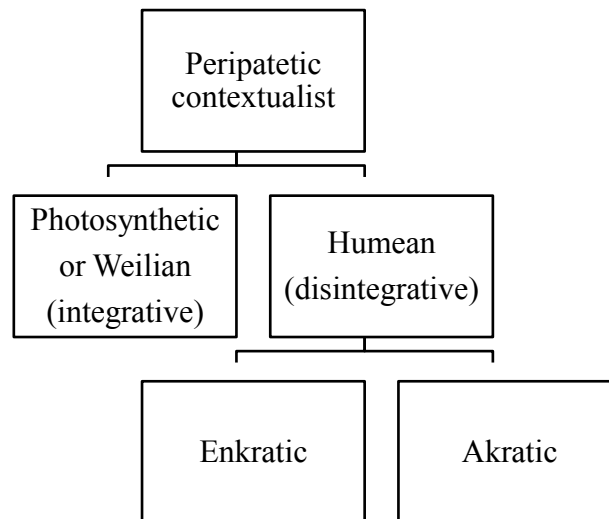
Figure 1: PERIPATETIC CONTEXTUALIST ETHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Let me address the pivotal importance of Aristotle. According to Sokrates and Plato, virtue is knowledge; and no-one can both know what is good and fail to desire it. However, when we face the phenomena, it appears that there are plenty of counter-examples to this thought. That is, it appears that there are examples of agents who know that an action is wrong, but who commit it anyway. Aristotle reports the following apparent fact: "the incontinent man, knowing that what he does is bad, does it as a result of passion."[4] He observes that the view of Sokrates contradicts this fact: it is impossible that an agent should behave incontinently when he has knowledge; "for it would be strange—so Socrates thought—if when knowledge was in a man something else could master it and drag it around like a slave. For Socrates was entirely opposed to the view in question, holding that there is no such thing as incontinence."[5]

---

[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1.1145b10-15.
[5] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.2.1145b20-30.

Aristotle does not wish to reject the Socratic view, but to finesse it so that it does justice to the relevant facts. He emphatically agrees with Sokrates that "*no one* would say that it is the part of a practically wise man to do willingly the basest acts."[6] And he introduces the character of the *incontinent* or *akratic* agent to explain the special sense in which one can know what is wrong and nevertheless do it. The akratic agent is one who experiences some sort of disharmony between the reasoning and desiring components of her soul. This disharmony occludes her knowledge of what is good. The exact nature of the occlusion is not clear; but Aristotle says that the akratic agent has knowledge like someone who is "asleep, mad, or drunk."[7]

For our purposes, here is what is crucial about the akratic agent: she is in *agony*, in the etymological sense: in her soul, a contest is taking place between what she knows and what she wants. The *continent* or *enkratic* agent is no less agonized; indeed, both the akratic and the enkratic agent have the same the psychological structure. They deliberate by weighing putatively competing considerations against each other. The only difference is that the enkratic agent manages, after struggling, to do what is good, while the akratic agent ultimately fails to do it. In the face of some irresoluble ethical predicaments, such agony is appropriate. But arguably there are some contexts, however rare, which invite an uncomplicated response. Simone Weil offers an example:

> There are cases where a thing is necessary from the mere fact that it is possible. Thus to eat when we are hungry, to give a wounded man, dying of thirst, something to drink when there is water quite near. Neither a ruffian nor a saint would refrain from doing so.[8]

Weil is suggesting that clear perception of the relation between the thirsting man and the water is sufficient to motivate the agent.

---

[6] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.2.1146a5-10.
[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.3.1147a10-15. Such knowledge is doubly dormant: it is both unavailable to the agent and unused by her. Nor is drunkenness an excusing condition for Aristotle, who maintains that the agent is responsible for having become drunk (ibid., III.5.1113b30).
[8] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 44.

Where Plato's virtuous soul is harmonized or integrated,[9] it might appear that the Aristotelian soul is broken. The possibility of akrasia depends on a distinction between the reasoning and desiring components of the soul.[10] In drawing this distinction, and the correlative distinction between epistemic and characterological virtues, Aristotle might appear to introduce a hairline fracture into the centre of the soul. G.E.M. Anscombe is one interpreter who purports to find a prototype for the Humean theory of motivation in Aristotle. According to this theory, motivation must be analysed into two "distinct existences": a *belief*, which is true when it fits the world, and a *desire*, which is satisfied when the world fits it. Ultimately, the desire is what motivates: insofar as the agent is dissatisfied with the way the world is, she is moved to change it. However, as John McDowell argues, it is misguided to interpret Aristotle as a proto-Humean. And it is equally misguided to interpret him as a cognitivist: a theorist for whom beliefs alone are sufficient to motivate. For Aristotle, the reasoning and desiring aspects of the soul are *distinct* but *inseparable*, "like concave and convex in the circumference of a circle."[11] Practical wisdom and properly moulded (integrated) character are interdependent.

The problem of akrasia is sometimes called the problem of "weakness of the will." But this phrase is anachronistic and deeply misleading. There is nothing in Aristotle's or Plato's philosophy that answers to the modern notion of the will.[i] On this historical question, I agree with Hannah Arendt: the faculty of the will, she says, is "a faculty of which ancient philosophy knew nothing and which was not discovered in its awesome complexities before Paul and Augustine."[12] According to Arendt, the Pauline soul is split into a conflict between its carnal and spiritual halves.[13] Into this conflict, the will is inserted as a third faculty; it appears "as a kind of *arbiter* ... between the mind that knows and the flesh that desires. In this role of arbiter, the will is free ..."[14] Let us call this

---

[9] Cf. Plato's metaphor for the just soul in the *Republic*, IV.443d-e.

[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13.1102b10 ff.

[11] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13.1102a30.

[12] Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," p. 72.

[13] Cf. Romans 7:13 ff.

[14] Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," p. 119. Compare Nietzsche's genealogical argument that moral accountability is made possible by the invention of the free will, which in turn is made possible by dissevering the subject from her action (cf. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, §§I.13, II.2).

doctrine *voluntarism*: the doctrine that *volition is free*, that is, the doctrine that volition is independent of, and unconstrained by, anything other than itself.[15] The agony of the Pauline soul might look like the agony of the Aristotelian soul, but there is an important difference.

For Aristotle, the reasoning and desiring components can be in conflict, but they are internally related. Insofar as the agent knows what is good, she desires it. The agony of akrasia is the result of epistemic obscurity. For the Pauline soul, the agony is ineradicable. The deliverances of the spirit and the flesh can never determine what the soul will do. This radical indeterminacy is inherited by the Humean moral psychology. As an "original existence," a Humean desire can never be determined by a belief. Here is the fundamental difference between the photosynthetic and the Humean psychology: in the photosynthetic psychology, the desiring component of the soul is capable of *listening to* and *harmonizing with* the reasoning component.[16] In my terminology, the photosynthetic psychology is *integrative*. By contrast, in the Humean psychology, desire and belief are "distinct existences": according to Hume, they do not communicate: it is "impossible, that reason and passion can ever oppose each other, or dispute for the government of the will and actions."[17] In my terminology, the Humean psychology is *disintegrative*. Everything hangs on how we read the enkratic or akratic agent. Here is my suggestion: the agony of the enkratic (or continent) agent is understandable only if we read it by reference to the photosynthetic ethical psychology. The enkratic agent is a character on a spectrum, a character who is aspiring toward the norm of integrative agency: a limiting case which she dimly intuits.

The success of the Humean theory in a large number of cases does not justify its universalization. That universalization is illicit, and stimulated by a prejudice, which

---

[15]Arendt diagnoses the central difficulty for this conception of freedom: "The difficulty lies in there being something that is not determined by anything and yet is still not arbitrary" (Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," p. 129). In my view, this difficulty is insurmountable: the theorist must choose between sacrificing the indeterminacy (viz., the freedom) of this faculty and sacrificing its intelligibility.

[16] Vide Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13.1102b30, II.12.1119b15.

[17] Hume, *Treatise*, II.III.§III.¶7. Cf. Michael Smith: "Hume concludes that belief and desire are therefore distinct existences: that is, that we can always pull belief and desire apart, at least modally" (*The Moral Problem*, p. 7); cf. Hume, *Treatise*, Appendix.

assumes that a thing's essence is hidden and revealed by analysis. Thus when a Humean theorist encounters what appear to be cases of integrative agency, he assumes that analysis will reveal the essential (but hidden) constituents of belief and desire. I appeal to what I call the *Cortez Rule of Thumb*, which counterbalances Ockham's Razor by maintaining that *more than one kind of account* is necessary to explain polydimensional phenomena. There is at least one dimension of action which is not best explained by the Humean theory, and which requires Weil's photosynthetic account. This dimension is *attention*. One species of attention, which is fairly commonplace, is *listening*. Consider the example of listening to someone who has been irreversibly hurt and who is inconsolable. By hypothesis, the situation cannot be changed, and thus the invocation of a Humean desire is distorting or idle. The Humean theory cannot accurately explain the motivation nor the ethical significance of this example. Furthermore, such ethical contexts, in their unchangeability, resemble some aesthetic contexts. Weil offers an example:

> When we listen to Bach or to a Gregorian melody, all the faculties of the soul become tense and silent in order to apprehend this thing of perfect beauty—each after its own fashion—the intelligence among the rest. It finds nothing in this thing it hears to affirm or deny...[18]

This kind of aesthetic appreciation — arguably a real case — is not goal-directed; it does not wish to alter anything in what it perceives; it affords no purchase for a world-changing desire. But it is responsive to the work of art. No less than ethical listening, it requires the photosynthetic psychology for its explanation.

I do not reject the Humean psychology. It correctly analyses cases of enkratic and akratic agency, and thus it is encompassed by the peripatetic contextualist psychology.[19] Furthermore, the Humean psychology is needed for the exercise of what I call *elenctic attention* — in other words, moral critique. The enkratic (or akratic) agent is the disintegrative perspective whose perception approximates (and aspires toward) that of the

---

[18] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 129.

[19] Cf. Wittgenstein on the contextualization of the theory of meaning as reference by the "theory" of meaning as use (*Philosophical Investigations*, §18), and Zwicky on the contextualization of Euclidean geometry by Riemannian geometry (*Wisdom & Metaphor*, L43).

integrative perspective. Where the integrative agent perceives the one thing needed,[20] the enkratic agent agonizes over several considerations even when they are irrelevant. The crucial distinction is between attending to a unified focus, and dispersing attention across a multiplicity of (potentially competing) foci. But the latter, disintegrative perspective remains indispensable even for the integrative agent: it is from this perspective that we can engage in moral critique and revision. In cultures organized by systemic oppression, attention may move along grooves toward unjustly privileged focusses. Prejudice, no less than virtue, silences some aspects of a situation. In order to free our perception from prejudice, we need to have periodic recourse to the disintegrative perspective. By performing the Humean analysis on ourselves (or by submitting ourselves to such analysis by others), we may be able to identify which of our beliefs are false, or which ones have been distorted by hatred or fear. But we also need the photosynthetic psychology — however rare and non-generalizable — as a paradigm to which we may aspire.

---

[20] ὀλίγων δέ ἐστιν χρεία.

CHAPTER 2. Some Remarks on an Ethics of Attention

Summary

¶ *This thesis is a defence of Simone Weil's ethics of attention. At its centre, her ethics is committed to the Platonic thought that virtue is knowledge. I shall argue that this thought is true; and saving it will involve a reconceptualization of what we mean by "knowledge." The intellect is distinct, but not separate, from the passions. Thus knowing a fact never occurs independently of emotional response to that fact's meaning. The position I defend bears a superficial resemblance to "internalist realist moral particularism": the thesis that (1) moral judgements are internally (necessarily) related to motivation (that is, that one cannot make such a judgement without also being motivated to act in accordance with it); that (2) there are "moral facts" or "truths" independently of moral agents; and that (3) moral judgement does not require general principles or rules. While I sympathize with its spirit, I cannot subscribe to this thesis because it depends upon the very dualism which my investigation seeks to undo. I begin with a characterization of attention. Weil is responsible for having introduced attention to moral philosophy. In general, attention may be characterized as a patient receptivity or responsivity. Weil and following her Iris Murdoch draw an analogy between ethical attention and aesthetic appreciation. Furthermore, they claim that school studies train the same attentional capacity that is required in explicitly ethical contexts. Attention, according to these thinkers, is distinguishable from will. The distinction is analogous to that which Descartes articulates, in his fourth meditation, between intellect and will: the intellect is a perceiving faculty, while the will is a faculty for assenting or dissenting (both to truths and to goods). To the extent that the intellect perceives clearly, the will is determined by what is perceived; but when the will assents or dissents before clarity has been achieved, the agent risks falling into error. While we may offer a general characterization of attention and of a methodology for its education and exercise, we cannot provide an analysis of the concept of attention in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Since it consists in responsivity to its object, attention is essentially non-*

criterial; we cannot specify its content in advance of a specification of its object. In this particular respect, it resembles the Aristotelian passive intellect. For political reasons connected with exploitable deferential self-effacement, I decline this comparison, and suggest two different comparisons. Insofar as Weilian attention is a perceptual capacity, it is comparable to the Aristotelian "epistemic" virtue of phronēsis*; and insofar as it is a motivational propensity, it is comparable to the Aristotelian "characterological" virtue of* sōphrosunē*. These two different virtues will turn out, however, to be two internally related aspects of an integrated state of the soul.*

---

§2.1. Simone Weil:

> To strike a cicada in full flight, it is sufficient to see it, and nothing else, in the entire universe; then you cannot miss it. To become an archer, lie for two years under a loom and do not blink your eyes when the shuttle passes; then for three years, facing toward the light, make a louse climb up a silk thread; when the louse appears to be larger than a wheel, larger than a mountain, when it hides the sun, when you see its heart, then you may shoot: you will hit it right in the middle of the heart.[21]

That is the entirety of what I would like to say. — The passage is a distillation of a story in a Daoist text from the fourth century called the *Liezi*;[22] and the distillation is done in the margins of a notebook by Simone Weil, the twentieth-century French philosopher. Weil is responsible for having introduced, to moral philosophy, the concept of attention. Her concept has not been much talked about in Anglophone philosophy, although Iris Murdoch thought it important enough to meditate on in a book-length triptych of essays. Attention seems neither complicated nor unfamiliar; but here I agree with Ludwig Wittgenstein: "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.)"[23] And Weil: "Not to understand the new but to succeed by the

---

[21] Weil, *Notebooks*, Vol. 1, p. 30, n. 1.
[22] Cf. Liezi, *The Book of Lieh-tzŭ*, pp. 112-113.
[23] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §129.

strength of patience, effort and method to understand the obvious truths with all of one's being."[24] My aim in this chapter is modest. I want only to assemble a few reminders, and to sketch a sort of tentative overview of the concept of attention. Central to the concept seems to be something like patient receptivity or responsivity, which is contrasted with muscular efforts of will. Furthermore, both Weil and Murdoch suggest that there is a strong analogy between ethical attention and aesthetic appreciation. Consider Murdoch's remark concerning a moment of focussed attention:

> 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.[25]

Compare Murdoch's remark with the following two remarks from Weil:

> ... [V]irtue is entirely analogous to artistic inspiration.[26]

> The poet produces the beautiful by focussing attention on something real. Same with the act of love. Knowing that this human being, who is hungry and thirsty, really exists as much as I do — that's enough, the rest follows of itself.[27]

Even if some of us can recognize such moments of focussed attention, I suspect that at least a few of us will feel reluctant to accept Weil's final claim. — "Enough for what? If I don't know the context, how am I supposed to interpret this inference?" — The aphorism does not elaborate a context for its insight. Weil is expecting the reader to recognize what she recognizes: in this situation, there are only two salient features: that this human being needs food and water, and that he exists. — "But *what* follows from recognizing these features?" — For Weil, this question does not make sense. Insofar as this question is intelligible to us, we have not yet *read* the situation.[28]

---

[24] Weil qtd in Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, pp. 30-31.

[25] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 84.

[26] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 97.

[27] Weil, G&G, p. 119; translation altered.

[28] For Weil, *reading* is a term of art; to read a fact is *to understand the meaning* of it. Cf. Weil, "Essay on the Notion of Reading."

Weil's concept of attention has its roots in the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge; and she is, in her distinctive way, adapting and developing that thesis.[ii] At least since Hume, the Platonic thesis has seemed dubious to many of us. Especially in the hands of some philosophers inspired by the work of John McDowell — for example, Jonathan Dancy, David McNaughton, Margaret Olivia Little — the thesis seems to implicate a fraught complex of other theses: moral cognitivism, moral internalism, and moral realism, to name a few. Moral cognitivism is the view that desires (or passions or motivational states), liberally interpreted to include emotions in general, are assimilable (that is, reducible) to beliefs; moral internalism is the view that moral beliefs are intrinsically motivating, or that the presence of appropriate motivation is necessary for moral understanding (a view articulated in Murdoch's claim that "true vision occasions right conduct");[29] and moral realism can be construed as the view that there are "mind-independent moral facts" (the accurate perception of which would motivate moral action). At the heart of this tripartite theory is a refusal (by Dancy et al.) to accept Hume's metaphysical decomposition of facts and values.

But to some of us, that decomposition seems minimally plausible, and perhaps even mandatory, to explain some phenomena, for example, the existence of the amoralist: someone who allegedly *understands* the content of morality, but experiences *no motivation* to act in accordance with it. [30] David Brink argues that moral externalism is capable of explaining the amoralist, and that this capability counts decisively in favour of externalism.[31] Whatever the relative strengths of his argument, it does seem peculiar that a moral theory (assuming one is in the business of theory-building) should be constructed with deference to a creature such as the amoralist. Plato arguably regards this creature as seriously as any twentieth or twenty-first century philosopher does — witness Thrasymakhos and Kallikles — but he does not adjust his philosophy to make the

---

[29] Murdoch, SG, p. 66. — "Who cares if internal moral realism is glimpsable in Murdoch? She's not the primary association for the idea in philosophy." — That is correct: she is not the primary association; but she ought to be, because her work (following Weil's) is the unacknowledged origin of the idea.

[30] Or consider Dostoevsky's Underground Man, who wilfully defies the Platonic thesis and affirms his freedom by choosing to do what is bad (Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, I.VII [pp. 19 ff]).

[31] Brink, "Externalist Moral Realism," §3.2.

amoralist comfortable.[iii] — "What is it to make the amoralist comfortable? If it is a logical possibility that someone admits something is the right thing to do, but feels no motivation to do it, that's huge data for any theory of what morality is, isn't it?"[32] To make the amoralist comfortable is to construct a theory which deferentially accommodates the psychology of the amoralist, even at the expense of diminishing the explanatory power of the theory for other psychologies (for example, those which are aretaic).

§2.2. Both Weil and Murdoch offer an undramatic example of the exercise of attention and its relevance to ethics, but because it is undramatic, it is, for that reason, more astonishing. The example will be familiar to us: school studies. Murdoch writes about learning the Russian language, and claims that "studying is normally an exercise of virtue."[33] — Why? — Because there is something here — the Russian language — to which the student must be responsible, and meeting that responsibility requires the exercise of, among other things, respect, patience, honesty or accuracy, and courage. In order to learn that language, I must acknowledge that it is possible for me to go wrong; and I must be prepared to check and to correct my work in the light of the language itself — that is, my teacher, other native speakers, dictionaries, textbooks, et cetera. The accuracy of my translation, for example, can show whether I have attended respectfully to the language (or perhaps to the Russian poem, or to the poet). Weil makes the analogy acute: "The fulfilment of our strictly human duty is of the same order as correctness in the work of drafting, translating, calculating, etc. To be careless about this correctness shows a lack of respect for the object."[34] Undoubtedly, such a stricture will seem too severe to many of us. The stakes don't seem comparable; why should we think that admitting a mere translation mistake, for example, requires courage? — Doesn't it, though? Over and over, I have heard students confess that they are afraid to ask a question in case it will show that they lack knowledge.

---

[32] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[33] Murdoch, SG, p. 89.
[34] Weil, G&G, p. 123.

In a key text, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," Weil insists that school studies educate the very attentional capacity that is relevant to ethics: "a Latin prose or a geometry problem, even if they are done wrong, may be of great service one day, provided we devote the right kind of effort to them. Should the occasion arise, they can one day make us better able to give someone in affliction exactly the help required to save him ..."[35] — I acknowledge that Weil's claim may sound incredible; but what if it were true? What if devoted study could make us better people? What Weil is suggesting is that both attention to a geometry problem and attention to someone in affliction, if they are to be efficacious, should have at their centre a kind of patient receptivity or responsivity. She warns that such attention must not be confused with *willing* in accordance with a (moral) rule; nor should it be confused with "[w]armth of heart, impulsiveness, [or] pity."[36] Perhaps the concept now seems to be slipping away from us; it seems difficult to fix its definition, and difficult to talk about.

Sue Sinclair addresses this difficulty in her attempt to talk about a particular act of attention: "I want to bear witness to a small moment, one that will in fact be difficult to tell because nothing really happened."[37] Murdoch's and Weil's examples of the kestrel and the hungry and thirsty human being show us attention from the perspective of the one who is attending; now Sinclair displays the reciprocal perspective. She recalls a visit to a professor's office: the professor "sat me down in a rocking chair, sat down opposite me, and leaning forward a little said, 'How *are* you?' // That's it. // But the point is the depth of attention I felt focused on me. I could literally feel its weight."[38] It is striking about this episode, as Sinclair herself observes, that it witnesses exactly the exercise of attention that concerns Weil. At the climax of "Reflections," Weil writes, "The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: 'What are you going through?' ... it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a

---

[35] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," *Waiting for God*, p. 65; translation altered.
[36] Weil, "Reflections," p. 64.
[37] Sinclair, "Wisdom," p. 162.
[38] Sinclair, "Wisdom," pp. 162-163.

certain way. // This way of looking is first of all attentive."[39][iv] Consider a third testimony, Jan Zwicky's encomium for James Gray:

> The difficult thing about such genius, especially if one is trying to write about it, is its invisibility. It seeks anonymity the way water seeks low places. It *makes* nothing. Rather, it unmakes trouble. And it does this not by direct application of effort, by 'fixing' things, but by listening — without fear, without an agenda, the way a doctor might listen to a patient's heartbeat or breath. "What am I hearing here?" A completely open, unselfed attention. In the clear light of such attention, what is troubling can *be*, simply, what it is: an odd ambition, a constricted choice, a broken heart. The gift of such seeing, the ability to give such vision to another even if only for a moment, is matchless in its efficacy. It can heal appalling wounds and relieve the deepest, most persistent pain. But, though its effects are often striking, the gift — like light itself — remains something we rarely see: we are aware, mostly, of what it illuminates.[40]

I do not know if you will recognize the kind of attention to which Sinclair, Weil, and Zwicky are bearing witness. I can say that I do recognize it. I recognize its invisibility; its contrast with effortful production; its non-judgemental character; its efficacy. Its open questions, the way they make space for the interlocutor: "How are you? What are you going through? What am I hearing here?" These days, this attention is perhaps more readily associated with something like psychotherapeutic counselling than with moral philosophy; but remember that, for Plato, ethics just was psychology.[41] And Weil and Murdoch are working in the area of what has more recently been called "moral psychology." Over the course of my education, I have been a frequent and fortunate beneficiary of such attention. I have come to think it is something very remarkable, but not often remarked upon. It is something which I would like to try to understand better

---

[39] Weil, "Reflections," p. 64. In French, the question is « *Quel est ton tourment*? » Craufurd's English translation seems more ambiguous, and less severe; in my view, it is an improvement on Weil's own phrasing, since it seems to leave more room for the interlocutor.

[40] Zwicky, "Just the World," p. 36. (The water metaphor is Daoist; cf. Lǎo Zi, *Dao De Jing*, §§8, 32.)

[41] Cf. Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," p. 95.

than I do. — Why is attention difficult to talk about? (Why is discussion of it so rare in philosophy?) The core reason has to do, I think, with the protean and interactive nature of attention. To be genuine, attention needs to be receptive and responsive to its *focus*.[42v] Furthermore, I wish to stress that the focus need not be an atomistic thing — it might, for example, be a collective, such as the Department of Philosophy, or the New Democratic Party — but it must be something upon which it is possible to concentrate attention. Compare Zwicky: "Ontological attention is a response to particularity: *this* porch, *this* laundry basket, *this* day. Its object cannot be substituted for, even when it is an object of considerable generality ('the country', 'cheese', 'garage sales')."[43] And so it is difficult to specify what attention *is* in advance of a specification of its focus; in other words, attention seems ungeneralizable.[vi]

§2.3. Weil's thinking about attention is closely connected with her philosophy of education. Her "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies" belongs to a posthumous collection of writings that Weil bestowed upon J.M. Perrin (the priest who tried, unsuccessfully and not entirely sympathetically, to persuade her to become baptized in the Catholic church). I want to anticipate the aim of her essay; Weil writes, "Although people seem unaware of it today, the development of the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies."[44] Elsewhere, in a set of complementary aphorisms, edited by her friend Gustave Thibon, and titled "Attention and Will,"[45] she repeats this thought: "Teaching should have no aim but to prepare, by training the attention, for the certain application of full attention to an object. // All the other advantages of instruction are without interest."[46] I want to pause and notice how astonishing this claim is. Some of us might think, not without justification, that we go to

---

[42]I shall use the term "focus" to name that which is attended to. I wish to avoid talk of attention's "objects," since such talk can imply (incorrectly) that that which is attended to is passive relative to the agent who is attending. Talk of "objects" can also imply (again incorrectly) that that which is attended to is somehow atomistic, isolatable, or static.
[43] Zwicky, *Wisdom & Metaphor*, L52. Cf. Zwicky, "Imagination & the Good Life," §II.33.
[44] Weil, "Reflections," p. 57.
[45] Weil, "Attention and Will," G&G, pp. 116-122.
[46] Weil, G&G, p. 120.

school to train for a *job* — that school is a kind of accreditation programme for the workforce. Or perhaps we think that school is where we go to learn stuff — and that learning is the accumulation of information or data: when I graduate, I will *know more* than when I started. Weil is insisting that these ideas of, approaches to, education are *without interest*. — What then is the point of education? Why go to school? Isn't it important that I know that *modus ponens* is a valid argument-form; that Odysseus blinded the cyclops, and that Oedipus blinded himself with his wife's (his mother's) brooches; that the "Indian Residential School" system is a great injustice; that climate change is actually happening; et cetera? Am I not a better human for having learned these facts?

Weil is saying no: "There must be method in it. A certain way of doing a Latin prose, a certain way of tackling a problem in geometry (and not just any way) make up a system of gymnastics of the attention...."[47] By analogy with the gym, where one's physical body is exercised, school is a place where one limbers up one's attention, makes it stronger, more flexible.[vii] Recall this claim: "So it comes about that, paradoxical as it may seem, a Latin prose or a geometry problem, even if they are done wrong, may be of great service one day ..."[48] Again I want to pause. First Weil claimed that learning facts (becoming a human encyclopedia) was not the point of school. Now she is claiming that doing your geometry homework can save lives — even if you get the answers wrong. — When I was learning how to conjugate the verb "to be" in ancient Greek, tediously writing the conjugations out on recipe cards, I was learning how to be ethical? That claim is incredible. — Let us return to the question which school studies train us to ask: "What are you going through?"[49] The question expresses perfectly the quality of attention which Weil is elucidating in this essay. We ask this question almost every day — "How are you?" — but we rarely mean it. We tend to ask in a perfunctory way, and heaven forefend that someone should really tell us how she is. Weil imagines us asking this question differently, leaving space for the other person to respond. She does not pretend that such openness is easy — on the contrary, she says that it is "a very rare and difficult

---

[47] Weil, G&G, p. 120.
[48] Weil, "Reflections," p. 65; translation altered.
[49] Weil, "Reflections," p. 64.

thing."[50] Learning how to do it well is a life's work. For Weil, the attention expressed by this question is at the very root of ethical responsibility.[viii]

Let me say a few words about Weil's *method*. The attention she is after is not merely a feeling of pity or charity — such a feeling could be entirely inefficacious. What is needed, she repeatedly insists, is method: "a certain way" of looking. "In every school exercise," she writes, "there is a special way of waiting upon truth ... There is a way of giving our attention to the data of a problem in geometry without trying to find the solution or to the words of a Latin or Greek text without trying to arrive at the meaning ... // Our first duty toward school children and students is to make known this method to them, not only in a general way, but in the particular form that bears on each exercise."[51] Frustratingly, after having emphasized the indispensability of these *specific* methodological forms — for example, attending to a geometry problem is *different*, she insists, from conjugating a Greek verb — she never discloses their contents. However, she does offer some helpful remarks about a *general* method. These remarks draw the distinction between attention and will. "Most often attention is confused with a kind of muscular effort"[52] — but such effort, namely, exerting the will, gritting our teeth, contracting our brows — "has practically no place in study."[53] — Those of us who have stayed awake until four o'clock in the morning, reading the heaps of text needed for the next day's lesson, might disagree. It required a tremendous force of will, we might protest, to keep ourselves from losing consciousness. — But Weil would say: that is irrelevant. Perhaps will-power is needed to pass your eyes across the text. But *learning* is something different.

"The intelligence can only be led by desire," Weil writes. "The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running."[54] She is not promoting the shallow idea that teaching can be "entertaining." Joy, she suggests, is like oxygen. It is not frivolous; it is, quite literally, *necessary* to the life of the mind. Will is what keeps our eyes open when we are tired. But it is joy that lets us learn. Joy (and here is a Spinozistic

---

[50] Weil, "Reflections," p. 65.
[51] Weil, "Reflections," p. 63.
[52] Weil, "Reflections," p. 60.
[53] Weil, "Reflections," p. 61.
[54] Weil, "Reflections," p. 61; cf. Weil, G&G, p. 118.

thought) is the experience of becoming more clear in the presence of something beautiful. This clarification occurs by itself, while the student maintains a stance of patient receptivity. "All wrong translations, all absurdities in geometry problems ... are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is always that we have wanted to be too active ..."[55] Here, Weil is offering a theory of error which she has derived from Descartes. According to Weil and Descartes, error is the result of mis-coordinating the functions of attention and will. Recall Meditation Four ("Concerning the True and the False"). There, Descartes draws a distinction between the faculty of the intellect and that of the will (roughly analogous to Weil's distinction between attention and will). These two faculties have different functions. The intellect perceives, and when it perceives well, it perceives clearly. The will, on the other hand, does something else: in the practical and theoretical realms, it says *yes* or *no*. For example, I perceive some water, and am thirsty. My will says, "Yes, drink" or "no, don't." Or: I perceive "2 + 3 = 5." My will says, "Yes, that's true" or "no, that's false." Error is when the will pre-empts (or outstrips) the intellect. Before the intellect has perceived clearly, the will issues its verdict. (If we accept Plato's definition of justice — performing one's proper function — then the will's impetuosity is a kind of [epistemic] injustice.) For example, I glimpse some liquid, and my will yanks on its leash and barks, "Yes, drink" — but the liquid is gasoline. Or: I see "$25^2 = 255$," and my will impulsively blurts out, "Yes, that's true" — but really it's false (the correct answer is 625). It is for this reason that patiently waiting is crucial for both Descartes and Weil. One keeps one's will on a leash — or better yet, one trains one's will so that a leash is unnecessary.

Something remarkable emerges from this way of thinking: action *is* attention. It is a radical reconceptualization of freedom, agency, and action. What Descartes claims will likely sound paradoxical: "In order to be free I need not be capable of being moved in each direction; on the contrary, the more I am inclined toward one direction ... because I clearly understand that there is in it an aspect of the good and the true ... the more freely do I choose that direction."[56] He is claiming that *freedom* consists in having one's

---

[55] Weil, "Reflections," p. 62.
[56] Descartes, *Meditations*, AT VII.57-58.

thinking *determined* by the truth (or in having one's action determined by what is good). Consider: "2 + 3 = 5." Descartes is saying that if you let your intellect focus this proposition clearly, if you really understand it, then your will cannot help but say "Yes! True!" This is the experience of necessary truth, and it is this idea which Weil develops in greater detail in the set of aphorisms titled "Necessity and Obedience."[57] Most of us take it for granted that we are actors. We cause our actions, which effect changes in the world. Weil's conception of agency is different. When I understand, I see that I am not an actor, but a *medium*: I should be like an arrow, "impelled," "driven": "To be only an intermediary between the uncultivated ground and the ploughed field, between the data of the problem and the solution, between the blank page and the poem, between the starving beggar and the beggar who has been fed."[58] My primary ethical responsibility, odd as it may sound, is *not* to rush around manipulating the world and making it better; my primary responsibility is witnessing — perceiving the world as clearly as I can. Compare Steven Burns's discussion of Weil's example of a child attending to a mathematical problem: "In Weil's eyes, the real accomplishment of the child is a negative one; he has lost sight of his own ability and of the challenges and rewards of arithmetic, and has concentrated his attention purely on the numbers. If the sum is correctly done, then the sum itself is the reason for this."[59] Weil's thought involves much trust. The trust is that clear perception is enough for action. Just as clearly understanding the formula "2 + 3 = 5" compels us to say "yes, true," so clearly perceiving someone's real need should compel us to *respond* to that need. The conception is ultimately Platonic. The trust is that *desire is for what is true* or *what is good*. If we really perceive what is good, we cannot help reaching out. In other words, virtue is knowledge.

§2.4. Murdoch defends Weil's ethics of attention, and provides a sustained critique of a kind of morality which Murdoch believes to be prevalent, and which she characterizes as "behaviourist, existentialist, and utilitarian."[60] She claims that it is "behaviourist in its

---

[57] Weil, "Necessity and Obedience," G&G, pp. 43-50.
[58] Weil, G&G, p. 46.
[59] Burns, "Justice and Impersonality," §1 (p. 479). Cf. Keats on negative capability: Letter to George and Tom Keats, 22 December 1818 (Keats, *Selected Letters*, pp. 59-61).
[60] Murdoch, SG, p. 8.

connection of the meaning and being of action with the publicly observable, it is existentialist in its elimination of the substantial self and its emphasis on the solitary and omnipotent will, and it is utilitarian in its assumption that morality is and can only be concerned with public acts."[61] She diagnoses the behaviourist constituent as a misinterpretation and a misapplication, to the realm of moral theory, of certain strands of Wittgenstein's anti-private language arguments.[ix] And she claims (rightly, I think) that moral theory "of an existentialist type is still Cartesian and egocentric."[62] Thus there is a kind of conceptual incoherence in the pairing of the public criteria of behaviourism with the Cartesian freedom of existentialism.[x] But Murdoch's main concern is that this kind of morality mistakenly conflates the "inner" with the "private," and therefore eliminates an important dimension of the ethical life. — What, exactly, is conflated? I think that one might say that *ethical psychology* (the so-called "inner" or "interior")[xi] is conflated with *Cartesian privacy* (a special and pernicious version of the "private"). Murdoch applauds Wittgenstein for dissolving the fiction of Cartesian privacy; but she worries that a group of pseudo-Wittgensteinians has misinterpreted the scope and import of Wittgenstein's critique, and has been overly eager to throw out ethical psychology with Descartes's dirty bathwater.[xii] If public observability, according to a very narrow, positivistic standard of the observable, is the ultimate criterion for the morally real, then, according to Murdoch, we sacrifice much that is central to ethics. In particular, she claims that we become unable to explain or to recognize the ethical importance of contemplation or attention. Here is the problem: if the publicly observable act is what counts morally, then the *psychological, characterological work* that surrounds the act seems irrelevant.

Murdoch makes her case acute by offering an example of psychological work that does not produce an observable act nor does it change the world. A mother (M) feels unjustified hostility to her daughter-in-law (D). However, M "behaves beautifully" to D, "not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way"; further, Murdoch underlines this aspect of her example "by supposing that the young couple [viz., M's child and D] have emigrated or that D is now dead."[63] Murdoch tells us that M "is an intelligent and well-

---

[61] Murdoch, SG, p. 9.
[62] Murdoch, SG, p. 47.
[63] Murdoch, SG, p. 17.

intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her."[64] And in the example, this is exactly what M does: she attends to D, "until gradually her vision of D alters."[65] D is discovered to be not reckless but spontaneous, not noisy but joyous, and so on. It is important that this alteration in vision is not misinterpreted as an arbitrarily subjectivist shift; Murdoch emphasizes that "[w]hen M is just and loving she sees D as she really is."[66xiii] The concept "reality," as Murdoch acknowledges, is a normative concept, and it is used here to indicate that it is possible to be *responsible* in one's perceptions, and also that it is possible to perceive *wrongly*. That is, M's initial perception, her hostility, is *inaccurate* or *unclear*, while her altered perception, her acceptance, is *accurate* or *clear*; and in both cases the norm of accuracy arises from the focus, namely D. (Of course, one should not make the mistake of inferring that who D "really is" is something absolutely *independent* of any context and relationship, including her relationship with M. Such a picture of personal identity is metaphysically suspicious. But, importantly, talk of "reality" does not commit one to this picture. By talk of who D "really is," I, along with Murdoch, wish simply to mark that D's identity, while *implicated* [i.e., interrelated] with M and others, is *not absolutely nor solely dependent* on M, and thus is *not reducible* to some function of M's mental or attitudinal state.) By hypothesis, the alteration of M's vision has no correlate in her observable behaviour; and yet the alteration, Murdoch maintains (and expects her reader to agree), is an ethical improvement. The idea is traceable back to Plato: *how* one knows is not ethically neutral; epistemic virtue *is* ethical virtue.

Of course, such an improvement might very well later issue in observable action; and the objective of Murdoch's argument is not to *detach* attention from action. But she writes that "the idea which we are trying to make sense of is that M has in the interim been *active*, she has been *doing* something, something which we approve of, something which is somehow worth doing in itself."[67xiv] Murdoch's point is that in the *interim*, *between* the big Broadway show-tunes of decisions, acts, and outcomes, there is the continuous, sometimes almost imperceptible, humming of ethical psychology — and that

---

[64] Murdoch, SG, p. 17.
[65] Murdoch, SG, p. 17.
[66] Murdoch, SG, p. 37.
[67] Murdoch, SG, p. 19.

this humming is far from negligible, that it can have integrity, or not. (Of course, Murdoch is right to suggest that this humming would be inaudible to card-carrying consequentialists or behaviourists.) Alternatively, the dynamic might be imaged as a river that lives mostly under the earth, emerging only at disparate joints along its course. Although the exposed joints might be the visible and drinkable ones, the river is constantly running (that is, working) in the buried intervals.[xv] Indeed, Murdoch argues that the contemplative work that occurs in the interval between acts is *crucial*. "The moral life," on Murdoch's view, "is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial."[68] With Weil, she suggests that the *way* the agent attends (which is a function of how her capacity for attention has been cultivated)[xvi] can *determine* how she will act. I acknowledge that the intimation of determinism will likely seem far too strong to many of us. Furthermore, the related intimation that there is a "right" way of seeing, which justifies (or undergirds) the determinism, foreshadows Weil's apparent membership in the camp of cognitivist realists. I shall return to these charges. For the moment, I wish only to note them.

Like Weil, Murdoch wishes to reconceptualize ethical agency. She writes, "Moral change and moral achievement are slow; we are not free in the sense of being able suddenly to alter ourselves since we cannot suddenly alter what we can see and ergo what we desire and are compelled by. In a way, explicit choice seems now less important: less decisive (since much of the 'decision' lies elsewhere) and less obviously something to be 'cultivated'. If I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at."[69] If one reads carefully, one sees that Murdoch is not arguing for hard determinism, but rather for a more circumscribed rôle for the will. Like Weil, and Weil's philosophical ancestor, Plato, Murdoch is suggesting that the agent's freedom is located less in the critical instants of decision than it is in how the agent attempts to educate

---

[68] Murdoch, SG, p. 37.

[69] Murdoch, SG, pp. 39-40. On this point, Murdoch is in agreement with Winch (and Aristotle): character determines action. Winch writes that Sartre says "perhaps with exaggeration but still with point, that when I come to deliberate—to consider reasons for and against doing something—'*les jeux sont faits*' ('the chips are down')" (Winch, "Moral Integrity," p. 178); Murdoch: "When I deliberate the die is already cast" (SG, p. 36). Cf. Aristotle, NE, III.4-5.

herself prior to those decisions. An agent is *less* free to the degree that she cannot clearly *perceive* the contexts in which she will be forced to act. Thus, the concept of freedom is re-imagined: according to Murdoch, freedom is not the absence of constraints in the pursuit of my personal desires; rather, freedom is the scouring away of my intellectual and perceptual prejudices, and the enabling of clearer perception. In Murdoch's own words: "Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather *the experience of accurate vision* which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action."[70]

By isolating M's contemplation, Murdoch has controlled for certain variables in the interest of making her case. Of course, our lived exercises in contemplation are rarely, if ever, so isolated. Even in Murdoch's example, in which D is emigrated or dead, M must *interact* with an *image* of D. And I worry that it may be misleading to speak of "something which is somehow worth doing in itself," since Murdoch is not endorsing Kantianism. Furthermore, some of us might think that Murdoch's behaviourist-existentialist-utilitarian theorist is not worth criticizing, since it is at best a sort of generic caricature, and at worst a position that no single theorist ever held because it cannot be taken seriously.[71] Still, I think that Murdoch has identified a powerful and (at the time of her writing) largely unchallenged assumption in Western anglophone moral theory, which theory has been absorbed with systematic principles and decision procedures, and the acts (or acts of will) which are supposed to issue from them, at the expense of a finely detailed investigation into ethical psychology and character. And her argument must be seen as directed at *opening a space* for investigation into this less recognized area. The work of attention is not "private" (in the sense of Cartesian privacy), nor is it unobservable (unless one adheres to the strictures of logical positivism). Nor is it utterly ungeneralizable. However, it is subtle, context-sensitive, and unsystematizable. And it is, as I have indicated, difficult to talk about, and, since theory consists in talking, difficult to theorize.

---

[70] Murdoch, SG, p. 67; emphasis added.
[71] But cf. Campbell: "Most contemporary philosophers hold some version of the thesis that behavior is constitutive of the mental" (*Interpreting the Personal*, p. 61).

§2.5. Attention, I suggest, is *not* entirely *un*generalizable; but there are no general criteria for its identification or application.[72] One needs to trust, ultimately, that the context itself will instruct.[xvii] In making this claim, I do not mean that the contexts and their participants are historically or culturally or otherwise atomic; on the contrary, I acknowledge that attention cannot move freely in a frictionless void.[73] But the world is not a factory for the mass-production of uniform contexts; on the contrary, with each context, the various background factors converge uniquely. Although there are no general *criteria* for the exercise of the attention, it is possible to make some general *remarks* about it, and Weil does make such remarks. — "Either the concept is generically categorizable, or it isn't. If it is, we should be able to fix its extension by articulating its necessary and sufficient conditions (however general). Once articulated, these conditions supply a discriminatory mechanism, a means for correctly applying the concept and for criticizing incorrect applications. Look, if we can't say what class of things would fall outside the concept, then the concept is vacuous. And furthermore, if the concept is ungeneralizable, how can we *use* it?" — While the objection is important, I think that it evidences some confusion between modest generalizations and analyses of concepts. A generalization is like the direction, "Stand roughly there."[74] The direction is *not precise*, but it is *usable* (that is, it is meaningful and understandable). There are *ways* of following it, and *ways* of getting it wrong, but someone who drew a chalk circle around an area, and insisted that "there" was circumscribed by the drawing, would have *interpreted* the direction; and that interpretation is *not equivalent* to the original.[75] There is a way of understanding a generalization that is *not* an interpretation. Weil does offer some general remarks about what attention *is* and about a *method* for its exercise, but she is *not* offering an *analysis* of the concept.

Were the distinction not so fraught, I might be inclined to explain the difficulty of specifying attention in terms of form and content. If form follows content, then the form

---

[72] For my use of the term "criteria," vide Zwicky, *Lyric Philosophy*, §§41 ff.

[73] Cf. Weil on the Kantian dove, *Lectures on Philosophy*, pp. 89, 112, 179.

[74] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §§71, 88.

[75] Consider the assumption that the interpretation is the essential content of the direction, and that the direction is thus reducible to the interpretation. This assumption is an instance of what I later call "the broom prejudice."

of attending follows the content of the focus. In a related connexion, Michael Lipson and Abigail Lipson draw a comparison between attention and "Aristotle's *epistemikon*, the organelle within the psyche that can perceive Forms, and as to which Aristotle says that it is itself formless."[76] Some of us may reasonably doubt that we can elucidate Weilian attention by exposing it to one of the most obscure Aristotelian doctrines; and it is not without irony that Aristotle is conscripted into Weil's service, since she calls him "the corrupt tree which bears only rotten fruit."[77] Anyway, it is not clear that the thinking part of the soul is an *organelle*; the Aristotelian soul itself, insofar as it is susceptible of a general account,[78] is *the set of faculties*[xviii] or (first) *actualities*[xix] — namely, nutrition, perception, and thinking — of a natural organized body.[79] Lipson and Lipson seem to be referring to a subdivision within the thinking faculty.[xx]

This division displays the productive (or active) intellect and the so-called passive intellect.[80] The adjective "passive" (*pathētikos*) — not actually used by Aristotle himself, but arguably implied — cannot accurately characterize my analogue, attention, which is *responsive*, rather than passive, relative to the focus. The passive intellect is not matter, but is *like* the "material cause" relative to the productive intellect (which acts as "efficient cause"); the passive intellect is what Aristotle refers to as "the place of forms," the potentiality to be informed. A more vivid image than matter in general might be water specifically, which takes the shape of (containing or contained) solids. Weil herself frequently thinks through the image of water, calling it an "image of pliant attentiveness";[81] and on one occasion she uses it as a metaphor for intellectual honesty: "The degree of intellectual honesty that is obligatory for me ... demands that my thought should be indifferent to all ideas without exception ... it must be equally welcoming and equally reserved with regard to every one of them. Water is indifferent in this way to the

---

[76] Lipson and Lipson, "Psychotherapy and the Ethics of Attention," p. 19. Lipson and Lipson refer to all of *De Anima* in their citation; but we can be more precise: the relevant passages occur at *De Anima*, III.4.429a10 ff.

[77] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 355.

[78] Aristotle expresses some hesitation on this question (DA, II.3.414b20).

[79] Aristotle, DA, II.2.413b10. Cf. Barnes, *Aristotle*, pp. 106-107.

[80] Aristotle, DA, III.5. Barnes says that the discussion is "perhaps the most perplexing paragraph [Aristotle] ever wrote" (*Aristotle*, p. 108).

[81] Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 111.

objects that fall into it. It does not weigh them; they weigh themselves, after a certain time of oscillation."[82][xxi] What this image emphasizes — like the quasi-material plasticity of the passive intellect — is the *receptivity* of attention: it is prepared to respond to whatever is offered by the focus.

— "Hang on: water isn't form*less* (nor did Aristotle think it was); and, further, it would be a fantastical mistake to suppose that pure formlessness is a necessary condition of fair receptivity. Such a mistake is not unlike supposing that 'objectivity' requires a hyper-purified vantage point, one that is achievable, if at all, only through a total stripping of the epistemic agent's particular character and perspective. (Weil herself seems at least occasionally culpable of this fantasy.)[83] But such a non-perspectival perspective is illusory; and even if it were *possible* to attain such a perspective, we have no reason to believe that it would be a moral *improvement*. Finally, the valorization of this sort of psychological formlessness is politically dangerous: an asymmetrical relation in which the attender is so deferential that her interests are *defined* by those of the attendee is prone to exploitation. In their respective discussions of Weil's work, Hilde Lindemann, Peta Bowden, and Jan Zwicky have warned of the oppressive potential of an ethics that endorses self-*denying* deference to others." — The objection does us the service, I think, of showing why the analogy — between Weilian attention and Aristotelian passive intellect — won't work. Psychological formlessness and passivity cannot accurately characterize the kind of attention that concerns Weil; nor should we imagine that the responsibly attentive agent is one who has transcended her characterological perspective. Indeed, a characterological perspective which I shall call *integrative* is necessary for the exercise of ethical attention. I shall return to discussion of this perspective; for the moment, let me note that there is a distinction between having a *perspective* and being *prejudiced*. Arguably, prejudice consists, minimally and among other things, in a *rigidification* of perspective. Of course, prejudice consists in *more* than rigidification. I am thinking here of "prejudice" in the most general sense of

---

[82] Weil, WG, p. 40.

[83] In a letter dating from around the same time as the one just quoted, Weil describes the effect of some of her practices of attention: these practices, she writes, "tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside space where there is neither perspective nor point of view" (Weil, WG, p. 29).

"prejudgement" or "bias"; I acknowledge that if one thinks of more specific and iniquitous prejudices such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and so on, one will want to characterize the concept more strongly and normatively.

What I want to retain from Aristotle, for the sake of reading Weil, is just the suggestion that clear and careful thinking involves *the capacity to change form*. Or, in Weil's more precise description, it involves *pliancy*. A more promising analogy than the passive intellect would be the Aristotelian virtue of φρόνησις (*phronēsis*),[84] with its sensitivity to particulars. And a different Aristotelian metaphor may be more appropriate: the metaphor of the flexible lead ruler, used by architects in Lesbos, which responds to the shape of the stone[85] — and by so responding, without relinquishing its own form as ruler, it is able to take the measure of the stone. In her study of Aristotle, Martha Nussbaum focusses on this metaphor from the *Nicomachean Ethics* which I find helpful in connexion with Weil's concept of the attention. Aristotle writes, "this is the reason why all things are not determined by law, namely, that about some things it is impossible to lay down a law, so that a decree is needed. For when the thing is indefinite the rule also is indefinite, like the leaden rule used in making the Lesbian moulding; the rule adapts itself to the shape of the stone and is not rigid, and so too the decree is adapted to the facts."[86] Commenting on this passage, Nussbaum writes, "Aristotle tells us that a person who attempts to make every decision by appeal to some antecedent general principle held firm and inflexible for the occasion is like an architect who tries to use a straight ruler on the intricate curves of a fluted column. Instead, the good architect will, like the builders of Lesbos, measure with a flexible strip of metal that 'bends round to fit the shape of the stone and is not fixed' (1137b30-32). Good deliberation, like this ruler, accommodates itself to what it finds, responsively and with respect for complexity. It does not assume that the form of the rule governs the appearances; it allows the appearances to govern themselves and to be normative for correctness of rule."[87]

---

[84] Henceforth transliterated and anglicized as "phronesis."

[85] Aristotle, NE, V.10.1137b30.

[86] Aristotle, NE, V.10.1137b28-32. Irwin notes: "Probably Aristotle refers to a flexible lead ruler that could be made to fit the shape of an irregular stone ..." ("Notes," NE, p. 238).

[87] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 301. (And here the concept of attention might

"To be wise," writes Zwicky, "is to be able to grasp another form of life without abandoning one's own; to be able to translate experience into and out of two original tongues. To resist, then, the translation that is a form of reduction."[88] To suggest that attention must be pliant is not to claim that one must *escape* one's own perspective nor to claim that one must unquestioningly *conform* to the perspective of the focus. Attention to another's experience need not — indeed, should not — involve a *reductive* translation of one's own, or the other's, experience. But a responsible translation will need to respond, without prejudice, to what, *specifically*, is offered.

§2.6. Consider an important passage from Weil's "Reflections": "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready ... Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive ..."[89] As I have acknowledged, some commentators have worried that an ethics of emptied attention can degenerate into a politically dangerous self-abnegation. Commenting on the preceding passage, Hilde Lindemann (formerly Nelson) writes, "Neither Weil nor Murdoch seem to have devoted much thought to the political consequences for women [and, one might add, for members of other oppressed groups] of a morality that promotes receptivity and submission."[90] Peta Bowden has also criticized (rightly, I think) the narrowness of Weil's focus, and its dangerous political implications. Of Weil and Murdoch, Bowden writes, "[T]he accounts of attention described thus far are severely flawed by their own inattention to the socio-political impacts on personal capacities for responsive attentiveness in particular situations and the general perspectives persons bring into play to inform and illuminate that attention.... For example, many writers have pointed out how, under western social norms governing gender, women often define their self-interests and desires almost entirely in terms of the interests of their family members. As a result attention to others is burdened not so much by the impositions of self-centred

---

be suspected to intersect with moral particularism.)
[88] Zwicky, W&M, L94.
[89] Weil, "Reflections," p. 62.
[90] Nelson, "Against Caring," p. 13.

aims and images but by those of self-denial."[91] Zwicky makes a not-dissimilar criticism of Weil.[92]

Furthermore, Weil and Murdoch seem to assume that the self necessarily interferes with receptivity. Murdoch writes, "In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. Moral philosophy is properly ... the discussion of this ego and of the techniques (if any) for its defeat."[93] Her thinking here is consonant with Weil's. For Weil, the existence of the self is the primary obstacle to ethical integration; and her technique for the defeat of the (egoistic) self is called "decreation."[94][xxii] However, Weil and Murdoch's assumption is questionable: namely, the assumption that concern for the self is always a vice, and that attention to others is unequivocally good. If Bowden is right, then there can be pathologies and excesses of the attention, resulting from systemically unjust socio-political conditions. Weil and Murdoch's assumption of default egoism,[95] and their prescription that self-concern should be corrected through dedicated, other-directed attention, seem similarly questionable, especially in cultures where the responsibility of attending has not been fairly distributed.

But suppose that Weilian attention might be generally characterized as *patient* and *receptive* or *responsive*.[96] I do think that it is possible to distinguish *receptivity* from politically dangerous forms of *submission*. If Laurence Thomas's account of "moral deference," defined as a species of "listening,"[97] is consonant with Weil's account of attention, then it may be that attention can be instrumental in correcting for some of the pernicious effects of oppression. Thomas argues that, due to a history of systemic injustice, those who are "upwardly socially constituted" owe attention (that is, moral deference) to those who are "downwardly socially constituted." But Thomas himself distinguishes receptivity from submission, and suggests that the promise of moral deference depends on *mutual* receptivity: "[B]oth those who have been downwardly

---

[91] Bowden, "Ethical Attention," p. 70.
[92] Cf. Zwicky and Lilburn, *Contemplation & Resistance*, pp. 8-11.
[93] Murdoch, SG, p. 52.
[94] Vide, e.g., the sections on "The Self," "Decreation," and "Self-Effacement" in G&G (pp. 26-42).
[95] For an incisive critique of default egoism, vide Campbell, "Empathy and Egoism."
[96] Cf. Corbí, "First Person Authority and Self-Knowledge as an Achievement," §9.
[97] Thomas, "Moral Deference," p. 377.

constituted by society and those who have not should be more responsive to one another. If, as I have argued, those who have not been should be willing to earn the trust of the downwardly constituted, then the downwardly constituted must not insist that, as a matter of principle, this is impossible."[98][xxiii] Here, responsivity or receptivity is not coextensive with submission; to respond to moral deference is not to submit, nor does moral deference *oblige* one's interlocutor to offer up an account of herself. On Thomas's account, moral deference represents an opportunity — which one's interlocutor may choose to decline. But responsivity to the opportunity is shown, minimally, in acknowledging the possibility of trans-category communication.

Furthermore, let me suggest that there is a difference between *self-abnegation* (which can indeed be a species or instrument of oppressive violence) and something like *self-moderation* or *self-regulation.* Stuart Shanker's recent research into the psychology of self-regulation is relevant here.[xxiv] Self-regulation interests me because it is a current empirical concept, devised independently of Weil's work, but which seems analogous to her concept of attention; and because it appears that one can tell a (virtue-ethical) developmental story about its cultivation. Shanker writes that "self-regulation can be defined as the ability to stay calmly focused and alert, which often involves — but cannot be reduced to — self-control."[99][xxv] Self-control is similar to abnegation in its attitude to the self. Both abnegation and wilful control assume that the self is a threat, which must be either eliminated or muzzled. By contrast, moderation or regulation, as I understand it, assumes that the self, qua self, is a neutral medium of relation, which can be in or out of tune. The confusion between moderation and control is exemplified in English translations of the Greek virtue σωφροσύνη (*sōphrosunē*),[100] which has been rendered variously as "moderation," "temperance," and "self-control." At its most extreme, the virtue begins to look like a steely vigilance, a muscular policing of monstrous impulses.

But this picture is, I believe, a misinterpretation of the virtue: it confuses ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*),[101] which is not a virtue, with sophrosune, which is a virtue. In later chapters, I shall say elaborate on this distinction. For now, let me say that an agent with

---

[98] Thomas, "Moral Deference," p. 379.
[99] Shanker, "Self-Regulation," p. 4.
[100] Henceforth transliterated and anglicized as "sophrosune."
[101] Henceforth transliterated and anglicized as "enkrateia."

sophrosune is someone who has moderated her self and its energies, and is free to experience them in beneficial ways.[102] The Aristotelian doctrine of the mean is relevant here. The self and its energies are not essentially vicious, and not essentially in need of suppression. Rather, it is more appropriate to see the self as a phenomenon susceptible to deficiencies, excesses, and a eudaemonic mean. When the self is moderated or regulated, it can be a medium of ethical relation. The goal of self-regulation, as Shanker makes clear, is not abnegation or control, but balance. And this balance will be achieved, if at all, not through the repression of emotions, but through collaborative expression.[103] Self-regulation, he argues, is learned through *co*-regulation: that is, it is learned both by imitating self-regulators, and by collaborating with them in the process of understanding one's own responses to environmental stimuli. I conclude that Weil's major insights are conceptually independent of the rhetoric of self-abnegation into which she occasionally drifts.[xxvi] The major insights are (1) that *a disciplined attention is indispensable for appropriate response* in various contexts, from school studies to the appreciation of art to more obviously ethical situations; (2) that *attention is educated or disciplined or regulated through its exercise* in these contexts; and (3) that *the focus will communicate with that which is attending*, or, in short, that attention is interactive.[xxvii] Although it is not often discussed in moral philosophy, such attention is, I suggest, needed for any liveable ethics.[xxviii]

§2.7. The relationship between attention and patience is even clearer in Weil's native French, because the relevant terms are cognate: *attendre* (to wait), *attente* (waiting), *attention*. Attention is slow and focussed; it is not possible, or is at least extremely difficult, to practise under conditions of acceleration and distraction.[xxix] (In such contexts, the best that we can achieve might be enkrateia.) Steven Burns and Alice MacLachlan compare aesthetic appreciation to the appreciation of jokes. In the course of their

---

[102] Cf. Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," pp. 88, 90. In my view, Zwicky is mistaken to refer to the relevant virtue as "enkrateia." For a beautiful articulation of the distinction between sophrosune and enkrateia, vide Kosman, "Self-Knowledge and Self-Control in the *Charmides*," §4.

[103] Shanker, "Self-Regulation," p. 7. On collaborative expression, vide Zwicky, LP, L250; Campbell, "Expression and the Individuation of Feeling," *Interpreting the Personal*, pp. 47-67.

discussion, they refer to Richard Wollheim's testimony of his method of looking at paintings:

> I evolved a way of looking at paintings which was massively time-consuming and deeply rewarding. For I came to recognize that it often took the first hour or so in front of a painting for stray associations or motivated misperceptions to settle down, and it was only then, with the same amount of time or more to spend looking at it, that the picture could be relied upon to disclose itself as it was.[104]

Notice how closely Wollheim's method resembles Weil's:

> Method for understanding images, symbols, etc. Not to try to interpret them, but to look at them till the light suddenly dawns.
>
> Generally speaking, a method for the exercise of the intelligence, which consists of looking.
>
> Application of this rule for the discrimination between the real and the illusory. In our sense perceptions, if we are not sure of what we see we change our position while looking, and what is real becomes evident. In the inner life, time takes the place of space. With time we are altered, and, if as we change we keep our gaze directed towards the same thing, in the end illusions are scattered and the real becomes visible. This is on condition that the attention be a looking and not an attachment.[105]

Of course, the focus changes, too. However, Weil's spatial analogy can accommodate this recognition: we may change our position relative to that which we are perceiving, and of course its position is also changing, relative to, for example, the sun. Analogously, we do not need to pretend that the focus is removed from historical time, nor should Weil be misunderstood to be so pretending. What Wollheim and Weil are suggesting is that one can exercise patient receptivity relative to some particular — to a painting, or to a problem, for example. It isn't that the perceiver is dynamic while the painting is static,

---

[104] Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, p. 8; quoted in Burns and MacLachlan, "Getting It," §I (and quoted in the obituary by Arthur Danto, *The Guardian*, 4 November 2003).
[105] Weil, G&G, p. 120.

but that the perceiver and the painting are, in a sense, synchronizing their rhythms;[106] the perceiver adjusts herself to the painting, analogously to the way an animal researcher in the field may need to adjust herself to the rhythms of the animals. Both Wollheim and Weil accept *accuracy* as a norm of perception, and their suggestion is that patient receptivity is a means for realizing this norm. Stray associations and motivated misperceptions should be allowed time to settle down; illusions, to scatter. Then the painting discloses itself as it is; the real becomes visible.[xxx]

To repeat a point from earlier: Weil judiciously distinguishes *attention* from *will*. In this distinction, she indicates a difference between her ethics and deontological ethics (which latter ethics she undeniably respects). Recall that for Kant a rational, autonomous, and good will is criterial for moral agency.[107] It should be noted that Weil wrote a "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations," and she took the notion of a moral obligation terribly seriously. While both Weil and Kant recognize obligations, Weil differs from Kant by denying that the energy for meeting an obligation can be supplied by strength of will. The gist of her dissidence is a psychological observation: one cannot successfully *will* oneself to see how other beings are, and it is from others that one receives the vital energy for ethical action. This observation requires some qualification: Weil does argue that one can *train* or *discipline* oneself to see accurately, and she does suspect that the will might have some *rôle* in this training,[108] but its rôle is not a central one. The contrast is illustrated, I think, by Peter Winch in his consideration of two examples (to which I shall return in Chapter 12): the first is Ibsen's Mrs. Solness, who fixes her gaze, over the shoulder of her guest, on the moral law, and thus wills herself to fulfil a duty of hospitality, meanwhile suppressing dangerous resentments. Winch contrasts this example with one from Weil, in which a father is attending directly to his child, and playing spontaneously, "not out of a sense of duty but out of pure joy and pleasure."[109] Consider one of Weil's many examples of the contrast: unlike the looking or listening connotative of attention, "what language designates as will is something suggestive of muscular

---

[106] Cf. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 54.
[107] Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 393.
[108] Cf. Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," p. 85.
[109] Winch, "Moral Integrity," pp. 180-183. For problems with Winch's reading of Aline Solness, vide the discussion in §12.2.

effort... // The right use of the will is ... necessary no doubt but remote, inferior, very subordinate and purely negative. The weeds are pulled up by the muscular effort ... but only sun and water can make the corn grow."[110] While the will is often imagined by Weil as a muscle, the capacity for attention is imagined as chlorophyll.[111]

Weil's contrast between will and attention may seem to imply a regression to my earlier worry that the former is active, while the latter is passive. But the concepts are not straightforward binaries. Consider the analogy of the relation of the extra-ocular muscles to seeing itself. The extra-ocular muscles can indeed position the eye, and, in a sense, frame the field of vision; but they do not determine what is salient in the field, nor do they reduce seeing to passivity. Burns and MacLachlan offer an elucidating analogy:

> We do not say "passivity" ... there is activity in the preparations for receptivity. Remember the *time* that Wollheim takes in front of a painting. Similarly, one does not fall asleep by making an effort to fall asleep, but one does typically prepare mind and body for rest, putting aside the dirt and clothing and troubles of the day, finding a dark and quiet place to lie down, and so on.[112]

The analogy with falling asleep is helpful because it shows that the will can have a rôle in the preparations; and it also shows that, while will and receptivity are not opposed binaries, an improper exercise of the will can be *counter-productive*. Consider efforts *to will oneself to sleep*. I trust that most of us are familiar with this experience: the effort seems guaranteed to thwart the desired end.

Let me pause to gather together a few of the general remarks. Weil and Murdoch suggest that ethical attention is analogous to aesthetic appreciation, and that it may be exercised and trained in seemingly extra-moral contexts, such as studying geometry or learning a foreign language. It may be characterized as a pliant and patient responsivity; it is closer to the virtues of phronesis and sophrosune than to self-control. While it may be contrasted with efforts of will, it should not be confused with conformity or passivity. It is, finally, difficult to talk about.

---

[110] Weil, WG, p. 126.
[111] Cf. Weil, G&G, p. 3.
[112] Burns and MacLachlan, "Getting It," §I.

CHAPTER 3. Attention (Some Further Remarks)

Summary

¶ *In this chapter, I defend two claims. One is Weil's claim that the appropriate action follows from perceiving the "right relationship" among things in an ethical context. The other is the negative claim that the Humean moral psychology — which is a kind of psychological dualism — is not always the best explanation of an ethical action. The positive corollary is the claim that there is a set of cases — an internally diverse and wide-ranging set — which is better explained by an alternative psychology (namely, the "peripatetic contextualist" psychology). In later chapters, I shall characterize this alternative in greater detail; for now, I focus on considering some examples which derive from this set. Weil's claim instantly confronts an objection: if clear perception is sufficient for motivation, what about the vicious agent or the amoral agent or the akratic (incontinent) agent? By hypothesis, each of these agents shares the same perception (or the same belief) as the virtuous agent, and yet they act differently; hence, to explain the difference, we must follow Hume and postulate a desire in addition to the belief. My initial response to this objection is to affirm that the Humean moral psychology is the best explanation in some, but not all, cases. Supposing that it explains, for example, the case of the akratic agent — it does not follow, from its success in this case, that it will also explain all other cases, including, for example, the case of the paradigmatic virtuous agent. The universalizing inference is illicit. I urge us to "look and see" what psychological account is needed in each particular case. And I argue that the Humean psychology is contextualized within the Aristotelian psychology: the former accurately diagnoses states of disintegrated agency, namely, enkratic (continent) or akratic (incontinent) agency. I consider a series of five examples to illustrate these claims. In the first example, a plumber saves a police officer; this is an example of aretaic or virtuous agency. In the second example, two agents save a drowning person; here, the aretaic agent is contrasted with the merely enkratic agent. But for my purposes, the third, fourth, and fifth examples are most important. In the third example, a mother learns of the death*

of her son; in the fourth, a viewer understands a film (that is, a work of art); and in the fifth, an agent listens to a friend's irreversible distress. In these last three examples, the fact to which the agent is responding is not changeable; by hypothesis, the agent's response is not aimed at changing the world. In this respect, these examples are not dissimilar to Murdoch's story of M and D, which I discussed in Chapter 2. I argue that, in postulating a world-changing desire, the Humean psychology needlessly multiplies entities and distorts the nature of the responses in each of these cases.

---

§3.1. I want to return now to Weil's suggestion from the previous chapter: "Knowing that this human being, who is hungry and thirsty, really exists as much as I do — that's enough, the rest follows of itself."[113] I acknowledged earlier that at least some of us would find her claim outrageous; let me try to flesh out that claim. Weil asserts, "There are cases where a thing is necessary from the mere fact that it is possible."[114] Elaborating on what she means by necessity, she writes, "We have to see things in their right relationship and ourselves ... as one of the terms of that relationship. Action follows naturally from this."[115] She proceeds to offer an example: here is a person dying of thirst, and there is a glass of water; and she suggests that the connexion, accurately perceived, compels a response: "to give a wounded man, dying of thirst, something to drink when there is water quite near. Neither a ruffian nor a saint would refrain from doing so."[116] — At this point, somebody might object: "There are so many flaws with the example that I don't know where to start. Firstly, it is terrifically under-described. You've been stressing the importance of specificity, but the situation is so generic that I pull a muscle when I strain to imagine it. I definitely don't have enough information to know how to act, even granting, for the sake of argument, that barefaced facts alone could move me. A novelist might be able to supply enough sordid details to make the situation compelling; but details could also backfire, defeating whatever alleged reason I had for acting. Suppose I learn that the water was gathered from the well by Rhea, a young woman with opalescent

---

[113] Weil, G&G, p. 119; translation altered.
[114] Weil, G&G, p. 44.
[115] Weil, G&G, p. 48.
[116] Weil, G&G, p. 44.

eyes and no living relatives, recovering from acute cholera in the next bed? Or suppose I learn that the man, a hijacker by the name of Wallach, has just been admitted to the field hospital after having wandered for days in a state of severe dehydration, and his rehydration must be administered gingerly by professionals? Et cetera. Furthermore, Weil's final remark is so wilfully naive that it's almost laughable. The counter-examples are legion: we can easily imagine a ruffian, or an amoralist, or a run-of-the-mill depressive, who sees whatever it is that Weil sees, but refrains from doing what she prescribes. And the simplest explanation of their refraining is that they don't share her desires. Which just goes to show that Weil's Neoplatonic internalist cognitivism — the thesis that a moral judgement is necessarily motivating, and that a moral judgement just is a sort of belief — is wrong, and that the Humean theory, or what Bernard Williams calls 'the sub-Humean theory,' is right: every complete motivating state has got to be a belief-desire combo."

Starting with the last part of this objection, my humble thumbnail response is that we are not obliged to universalize whatever explanatory apparatus is applicable in the case of the amoralist. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that the behaviour of the amoralist is best explained by analysing his motivation into two distinct mental states, a belief and a desire (or the absence of a desire). But then let us *look and see* whether or not this analytical picture is universally applicable; and let us investigate particular examples. In preparation for fleshing out this thumbnail sketch, I shall do three things: I shall consider a couple of other examples, analogous to Weil's; I shall consider John McDowell's account, which accommodates these examples; and I shall indicate why I think that one interpretation of his account is ultimately unsatisfactory. (It is unsatisfactory because it is constructed by *contrast* with the Humean theory — whereas I wish to find an account which can dissolve the dualism assumed by both theories.) I apologize for the sensationalism of the first examples; with your patience, I shall gradually proceed to more subtle ones.

§3.2. Here is an example from January 2011, which you may have heard on CBC Radio. In Victoria, British Columbia, Blair Bater, a 45-year-old plumber from Saanich, saved a police officer's life. According to the *Times Colonist* newspaper, Bater "was driving

north near the 800-block of Douglas Street around 9:15 a.m. when he saw the female officer being stabbed over and over ... By the time Bater pulled his car up to the curb in front of the 7-Eleven convenience store, the two were on the ground in a struggle, with the man on top ... 'She looked like she was in trouble,' he said."[117] In a moment of respect, Bater paused just long enough to ask the officer if she could use a hand.[118] When the officer said yes, he "intervened" and "subdued" the assailant. The officer's hands were so badly lacerated from the steak knife that she gave her handcuffs to Bater, and he cuffed the assailant. What interests me is Bater's report of his decision to intervene: "Bater said he didn't think twice about coming to the officer's rescue. 'I wasn't even thinking,' [he said,] 'it was something I had to do.'"[119] I am also interested in Bater's attitude toward the police: he "admits having the odd run-in with police in the past ... 'They [the police] all know me, but whether the person's a cop or not has nothing to do with it,' he said. 'I just knew there was a knife involved and it didn't look good for her.'"[120] "His generally negative attitude toward police officers 'didn't become part of that process. If it was anybody getting stabbed, you know — the uniform doesn't change anything.'"[121]

There are three features of this short story which I want to emphasize: (1) The protagonist perceives an aspect of the situation as salient, which aspect may be suggested by the verbal gestures, "She was in trouble" or "It didn't look good for her." (2) The perception of this aspect is sufficient to motivate action: "It was something I had to do." Compare Weil's remark: "The words of the Breton ship's boy to the journalist who asked him how he had been able to act as he did: 'There was nothing else for it.'"[122] Compare also the case of Lora Shrake: when asked what went through her mind when she climbed over an electrified fence to rescue a woman getting mauled by a 950-pound Jersey bull,

---

[117] DeRosa, "Citizen saves Victoria police officer stabbed in the neck."

[118] Meredith Schwartz has alerted me to prevailing sexist attitudes to gendered-female police officers, and cautioned me in the use of this particular example. For this reason, I think that Bater's deference to the officer, in this moment, is important.

[119] DeRosa, "Citizen saves Victoria police officer." Cf. Burgmann, "B.C. plumber intercepts 'vicious' knife attack."

[120] Clarke, "Passersby race to aid policewoman 'fighting for her life.'"

[121] Cardone, "Saanich samaritan helps save VicPD cop's life."

[122] Weil, G&G, p. 49; cf. Weil, *Œuvres* VI.2.201: « *Fallait bi.* ».

Shrake replied: "It was just 'here's the problem, here's what I need to do,' and something needed to happen."[123] Similar examples could be multiplied indefinitely. Compare John McDowell's claim that the virtuous person need not possess an articulate concept of the virtue according to which he — or she — acts; and if he does possess such a concept, it need not enter his reason for acting virtuously: "It is enough if he thinks of what he does, when — as we put it — he shows himself to be kind [viz., virtuous], under some such description as 'the thing to do.'"[124] (Such unselfconsciousness might very well be a defining characteristic of virtue.) Finally, (3) other aspects of the situation, which might otherwise offer countervailing reasons, are dismissed as irrelevant ("the uniform doesn't change anything").

In his essay "Virtue and Reason," John McDowell offers an account that can accommodate both Weil's example and the example of Bater. We may call this account the *peripatetic contextualist* ethical psychology (or, less technically, the Aristotelian psychology). While McDowell foregrounds Aristotle, and does not acknowledge Weil, the genealogy of his account is traceable through Murdoch to Weil.[125] It is thus arguable that the origin of moral particularism — a theory inspired by McDowell's work — is locatable in the work of Weil. McDowell suggests that ἀρετή (*aretē*)[126] is a *sensitivity*, an aptitude for perceiving the needs displayed by a particular situation; virtue, in general, is "an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behaviour."[127] (What exactly is a "requirement"? A requirement is not a *thing* to which one might directly refer [as one might refer to the particular participants of the situation]; for example, if we enumerate the participants, the requirement is not among them. The requirement must rather be a structural aspect of the situation; for example, "this person needs that water," where the thirsting person stands in relation both to the water and to the agent witnessing the situation, which polydimensional set of relations displays the

---

[123] Shrake qtd in Abumrad and Krulwich, "The Good Show," *Radiolab*, 14 December 2010. Vide also Shrake's story on the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission website: <carnegiehero.org>. Thanks to Carolyn Richardson for this example.

[124] McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," p. 332.

[125] For acknowledgement of his debt to Murdoch, vide McDowell, V&R, p. 350, nn. 35-37. For Murdoch's debt to Weil, vide Murdoch, SG, pp. 34, 40, 50, 104.

[126] Henceforth transliterated and anglicized as "arete."

[127] McDowell, V&R, p. 333.

situation's requirement. In terminology which I shall introduce in Chapter 5, a requirement is a *gestalt*.)

McDowell further argues for the Platonic claim that this sensitivity (namely, virtue) is knowledge. For the purposes of his case, McDowell focusses on the particular virtue of kindness. "A kind person," he writes, "can be relied on to behave kindly when that is what the situation requires.... [Furthermore,] that the situation requires a certain sort of behaviour is (one way of formulating) his reason for behaving in that way, on each of the relevant occasions."[128] The requirement may be cited as a reason for the agent's action only if she perceives it; McDowell thus suggests that the perception of the requirement is a necessary condition for the behaviour to qualify as a kind (namely, virtuous) action. He further suggests that the perception is a sufficient condition: "the requirement imposed by the situation, and detected by the agent's sensitivity to such requirements, must exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[129] The reasons for virtuous action, according to McDowell, are what may be called *silencing* reasons; they focus the agent's attention such that the pull of otherwise competing reasons is not felt. "The view of a situation which he arrives at by exercising his sensitivity is one in which some aspect of the situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way; this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any reasons for acting in other ways which would otherwise be constituted by other aspects of the situation ..., but as silencing them."[130] Here, the proper state to contrast with virtue is enkrateia or (mere) continence: an enkratic or continent person does not perceive an aspect of a situation as imposing a requirement, but as trumping the competing demands of other aspects. Recall the contrast that I drew earlier between (1) *sophrosune*, understood as the virtue of moderation, and (2) less-than-fully virtuous, effortful *self-control*. The same contrast shows up here between aretaic sensitivity and enkrateia.

§3.3. Here is an anecdote which should illustrate the contrast. One afternoon a number of summers ago, a couple, let us call them Erica and Andrea, had gone for a walk and a

---

[128] McDowell, V&R, p. 331.
[129] McDowell, V&R, p. 332.
[130] McDowell, V&R, p. 335.

swim at Long Lake, and were drying off on the shore. They noticed a man who was attempting to swim to an island in the middle of the lake. But it was windy that day, and the man had misjudged the distance, or his own fitness: halfway there, he turned, and started swimming back to shore. But he was already exhausted. Even from shore, one could see that his efforts were becoming feeble. He called for help and instantly Erica dove into the lake. There was a half-beat while Andrea hesitated, and then followed. Together they tugged the man to shore. Why did they act as they did? Erica reports that she responded, reflexively, to the man's call. She wouldn't describe it as deliberating. She might say, "All that I knew was that someone had called for help and I was diving into the water." Andrea, too, reports that she recognized that the man was in trouble, but hesitated because the thought flickered through her mind, "What if I'm not strong enough?" She might alternatively describe her hesitation as a brief prick of fear. She did overcome this hesitation, but there was a moment's struggle. By hypothesis, she was wrong: as a matter of fact, established retroactively, she was strong enough. One way to describe her hesitation, then, is to say that she lacked the relevant knowledge regarding her own abilities. We might explain Erica's and Andrea's motivations differently, but however they are explained, this contrast should be saved: there is a sense in which Erica's action occurs naturally (or effortlessly), and Andrea's action is forced (or effortful).

McDowell could account for the contrast in the following way: Erica perceives an aspect of the situation as salient, while other aspects are silenced. Andrea, too, perceives the aspect that moves Erica, but she doesn't see it in exactly the same way. She perceives, we might say, that she has an obligation to the exhausted swimmer; or perhaps she perceives that she has an obligation to assist Erica; but she also feels concerned for her own safety, or she believes that her intervention would probably turn out badly for everybody. Again, by hypothesis, these worries derive from an inadequate knowledge of her own abilities; and they interfere with her perception of what is salient in this situation. However we describe things, we can imagine that there is a split-second conflict of deliberation, and that Andrea decides that, on balance, the consideration of her obligation trumps other considerations. The scales quiver, and then tip. She does the right thing, but

she is merely enkratic. Erica's difference is that she is moved immediately by what she sees.

McDowell's contrast between virtue (arete) and continence (enkrateia) is intended to circumvent an objection that the sensitivity to situational (or contextual) requirements cannot be sufficient for virtue, since, according to that objection, "a person's perception of a situation may precisely match what a virtuous person's perception of it would be, although he does not act as the virtuous person would."[131] Indeed, as I have acknowledged, it seems that there are plenty of counter-examples of persons who allege to understand what they ought to do, but who are unmoved, or paralysed, or who act contrary to the allegedly perceived requirement. And, as McDowell observes, such counter-examples, if authentic, would demand an extra, motivational component in the explanation of the virtuous person's action. McDowell's response is that the virtuous person's perception is *not* precisely matched by the continent (or incontinent) person: to exercise the sensitivity (which is virtue), the agent must perceive an aspect of a situation as a *requirement*. The virtuous agent perceives *clearly* what the continent agent perceives unclearly. — "Why could we not as easily say that the merely continent person perceives *more than one thing* as clearly as the virtuous person perceives only one?"[132] — If something, by hypothesis, is a requirement, then to perceive it clearly is also to understand that it is unconditional. If an agent perceives a putative "requirement" while also entertaining "countervailing" considerations, then either the putative "requirement" is not really a requirement, or the agent is failing accurately to perceive the requirement qua requirement. What counts as a requirement is, of course, contextual.

— "This makes me wonder whether virtue is a virtue. Is there anything at all wrong with have a moment's thought before plunging in? Oughtn't there be some evaluation of risks, other duties one might be failing by jumping in?"[133] — The enkratic person, no less than the aretaic one, does the right thing; but an important difference is that the enkratic person must force herself to do it by overriding allegedly competing considerations. Consider the difference between someone who can see (in a flash) the

---

[131] McDowell, V&R, p. 333.
[132] Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011.
[133] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

solution to a mathematical problem, versus someone who must do a longhand calculation. Is there anything wrong with doing the calculation? Insofar as it produces the solution, it isn't wrong; it might even be a way of training oneself to see solutions more immediately. But seeing (in a flash) and calculating are nevertheless different epistemic processes which are manifest in different behaviours; and the Aristotelian ethical psychology is meant to reflect this difference. — "I'm not sure how much is shown about morality by these cases requiring quick action. I wonder, for example, whether the instancy of response found in your idea of attention would capture what it is truly to morally deliberate when one faces difficult conflicts, moral dilemmas, complex moral problems."[134] — The cases requiring quick action are merely paradigmatic, limiting cases. In these cases, we observe an internal relation between clear perception and spontaneous, appropriate response. There will be complex and fraught situations where such a response is not appropriate. The cost of admitting this possibility is that a large portion of our actions will turn out to be merely enkratic, not aretaic; they will be performed under conditions where clear perception is not realizable and where spontaneous response would be inappropriate.[xxxi] True virtue will turn out to be rare. A further cost is that a major portion of our actions will be better explained by the Humean theory of motivation. But I am happy to concede these two points.

The major objection, which McDowell himself notes,[135] accuses his argument of having confused facts and values (or cognition and appetite); and this objection further threatens to deprive McDowell's account of virtue of its aspirations to objectivity. According to the objection, which issues from the camp which credits Hume as its progenitor, a (cognitive) description of the facts cannot, by itself, motivate action; one must further add some (non-cognitive) appetitive extra. To the belief, for example, that one's friend is in trouble and open to being comforted must be added the desire to attend to the needs of one's friends. McDowell's suggestion is that perceiving the fact — that one's friend is in trouble and open to being comforted — as salient (that is, as a silencing reason) is not fully explained by adding the desire, because one may have other desires, which may conflict with this one. — "Well, isn't the answer simply that the added desire

---

[134] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[135] McDowell, V&R, §3 and §6.

is specified to be the strongest desire; or more precisely, that, in the person's overall preference-function, helping the friend is preferred to all other options?"[136] — The case described (in the objection) is a real one, and the Humean theory can explain it. (So can the Aristotelian theory.) But it is not the only possible case. According to McDowell's account, there is at least another possibility: in this other case, it is not accurate to say that one acts on the most preferred option: because *there are no other options*. The case of spontaneous response — in which calculative deliberation does not occur — is a limiting case, but we can also imagine a less urgent case where one contemplates the situation and gradually comes to understand that there is only one action available. That is, sometimes acting *is* the result of having weighed our preferences; but sometimes it *isn't*. In some cases, when an agent is asked to explain her actions, she will say (with the Breton cabin-boy), "There was nothing else for it." This testimony cannot be explained by the Humean theory. And it is only if we have a prior and exclusive commitment to the Humean theory that we will refuse to countenance the testimony. Instead, I suggest that we expand our explanatory repertoire and attempt to exercise some contextualist flexibility.

§3.4. While I am sympathetic to McDowell's account, I think that his interpreters (Dancy, McNaughton, Little, et al.) make a number of mistakes. One of the most serious mistakes is their attribution of moral cognitivism, that is, the *reduction* of desires to beliefs. Some of us might feel that moral cognitivism and non-cognitivism are like the mythical Skylla and Kharybdis, that they are the extremes of the only available strait, and that one is forced to choose between steering closer to one or the other. The metaphor is so trite that we may have forgotten that there was originally a third way. In Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, the goddess Kirke is telling Odysseus what to expect on his voyage home, and she says, You can attempt the πλαγκταὶ πέτραι, the "crazy rocks," against which all but one ship have been wrecked; or you can brave the dangerous strait between Skylla and Kharybdis.[xxxii] Transfixed by the monsters, Odysseus does not even consider the so-called crazy rocks, and instead asks, But can't I defeat Skylla, and sail past untouched? And Kirke admonishes him, saying, "Must you have battle in your heart forever?"[137]

---

[136] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[137] Homer (Fitzgerald's translation and lineation), *Odyssey*, XII.136.

When some of us are transfixed by the debate between cognitivists and non-cognitivists, what, exactly, is transfixing us? What is the picture that holds us captive?[138] The first step, the one that altogether escapes notice, the decisive movement in the conjuring trick,[139] is the one that commits us exclusively to a Humean theory of motivation, a picture of two radically distinct mental states, with, it is said, distinct "directions of fit." This figurative distinction has been attributed to G.E.M. Anscombe, who draws a contrast between two lists: the one in the shopper's hand, and the one in the hand of the detective following the shopper. The shopper's list is like desire: it is satisfied when the world fits it; the detective's list is like belief: it is true when it fits the world.[140] (Anscombe alleges to trace this distinction back to Aristotle; but that is a different story, which I shall address in Chapter 8.)

Even McDowell's interpreters, who want to free us from the monopoly of such a picture, confront it too squarely, on its own turf, like Odysseus ignoring Kirke's advice: standing on the ship's foredeck and gripping two heavy spears, ready to grapple with Skylla. Trying to save the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge, with appropriate Aristotelian revisions, McDowell's interpreters effectively reduce what a Humean would call "desires" to what a Humean would call "beliefs."[141] That is, they start with a nice, dualistic theory of motivation, and condense it into a monistic one. And these well-meaning folks try to defend this theoretical position by arguing (not entirely elegantly) that some beliefs can have two directions of fit. However noble these tactics might be, those of us who find them dissatisfying may be forgiven. Seeing this picture as a palimpsest on a Humean original, we might feel that an entire dimension of psychology has been submerged or obscured. And faced with Kirke's choice, and respecting those who arm themselves to fight Skylla or Kharybdis, some of us might feel tempted to lower one of the rowboats and to try our luck at the crazy rocks.

Let me stress how very little I wish to achieve here. I have no illusions of unseating the Humean theory; I do not even want to challenge its legitimacy. On the contrary, I think that the Humean theory is correctly applied to explaining cases of

---

[138] Wittgenstein, PI, §115.
[139] Wittgenstein, PI, §308.
[140] Anscombe, *Intention*, §32.
[141] E.g., McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, pp. 109 ff; Little, "Seeing and Caring," p. 132.

continence and incontinence; furthermore, I think that the disintegrative psychology pictured by that theory is needed for the exercise of moral critique.[142] That is, in order to criticize ourselves and others, we may need to analyse agency into belief and desire; and from this perspective of disintegration, we may be in a position to identify and discard false beliefs or eradicate rotten desires. But from the possibility of such analysis, it does not follow that agency is always originally dualistic in structure. What I want to do in this chapter is to draw our attention to some further examples, examples of what I think are aesthetic and ethical contexts. And we all know that ethical contexts are practical ones. But what is remarkable about these contexts is that *there is nothing to be done*; there is no problem to be solved, or there is no solution to the problem. The examples that I shall consider are examples of attending, or listening, or witnessing.

§3.5. I hesitate to call them examples of "action." I would prefer to call them examples of "reaction," or "response," or what Jan Zwicky would call "gesture," "the immediate, untutored response of a human being to meaning."[143][xxxiii] What I have in mind here is the thought that relatively sophisticated and complicated actions, the kind of actions that might be analysable by a theory of practical reasoning, unfurl from a more fundamental root. Recall Wittgenstein's remark: "The origin and primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. // Language—I want to say—is a refinement. 'In the beginning was the deed.'"[144] For my part, I want to say that the origin and primitive form of action is a *reaction*, a gesture. And while a gesture is immediate, and in a sense reflexive, it cannot be reduced to a mechanism. On the contrary, as familiar and even instinctive as many gestures seem to be, they often require a deeply polydimensional context for their appreciation. Consider another remark by Wittgenstein: "Two people are laughing together, say at a joke. One of them has used certain somewhat unusual words and now they both break out into a sort of bleating. That might appear *very* extraordinary to a visitor coming from quite a different environment.

---

[142] Many thanks to Meredith Schwartz and Michael Doan for helping me to understand this important point.
[143] Zwicky, LP, L242.
[144] Wittgenstein (quoting Goethe), "Cause and Effect," 21.10.

Whereas we find it completely *reasonable*."[145] The practice of joke-telling and laughing, call and response, finds its place in the midst of a terrifically complex form of life. And much training and acculturation precedes, and is compressed into, the single gesture of laughing at a joke.

Compare an activity as ordinary as reading the newspaper; perhaps one reads some sad news, and weeps. But how extraordinary! Just *how* extraordinary is illustrated, I think, by Simone Weil in her essay on the notion of reading:

> Black marks on a piece of white paper are quite different from a punch in the stomach. But sometimes the effect is the same.... Two women each receive a letter, announcing to each that her son is dead. The first, upon just glancing at the paper, faints, and until her death, her eyes, her mouth, her movements will never again be as they were. The second woman remains the same: her expression, her attitude do not change; she doesn't know how to read. It's not the sensation but the meaning which has seized the first woman, reaching immediately, brutally into her mind ...[146]

The contrast between the two women illustrates something to which I am trying to point. The response of the first, literate woman, her fainting, is a completely natural, appropriate, understandable response; it is only by contrast with the non-response of the second, illiterate woman that it might begin to seem extraordinary. And what is extraordinary about it is not: that she responds to the death of her son by fainting. No: what is extraordinary is that an extremely complex training prepares her to *understand* what is communicated by the letter — the extremely complex practice of literacy, in whose context, and with a fluent practitioner, it is possible for black marks on a piece of paper to be transparent to their meaning. And what is extraordinary is that an explanation of the woman's response can be complete without including mention of this extremely complex practice — because this practice finds its place in a shared form of life. Suppose that the woman's daughter enters the room, and, finding her mother lifting herself from the floor, bends to offer her hand, asking, What's wrong? Why have you fallen? In response, the mother may say any number of things: Because your brother has died; or,

---

[145] Wittgenstein, C&V, p. 78e.
[146] Weil, "Essay on the Notion of Reading," pp. 297-298; translation altered.

Because I have just heard some very sad news; or, Here, see for yourself. At no point is she obliged to mention that she has just interpreted some arcane, printed hieroglyphics. And that is what is extraordinary: her not mentioning them is *not an omission*. No *interpreting* has taken place.[147] The gesture of the letter, its meaning, and the woman's gesture of understanding, her fainting, together constitute a complete arc, a complete structure of call and response. In giving her reason for what she did, the woman is not culpable for not mentioning the complex practice of literacy that enabled her to understand the letter. It would be wrong to say that the practice is even assumed; it is much deeper than that; it is rather embossed in the background of a form of life in which such calls and such responses are possible.

And while the woman's fainting is non-arbitrarily connected with the letter, while it is a gesture of understanding, that understanding could be manifested in different ways. Suppose that the woman gives the letter to her daughter, and, instead of fainting, the daughter crumples the paper; or she cries out; or she places the paper carefully on a table and walks over to the window and stares out at the blowing snow. Compare Wittgenstein's remark: "Recall that after Schubert's death his brother cut some of Schubert's scores into small pieces and gave such pieces, consisting of a few bars, to his favorite pupils. This act, as a sign of piety, is *just as* understandable to us as the different one of keeping the scores untouched, accessible to no one. And if Schubert's brother had burned the scores, that too would be understandable as a sign of piety."[148] There is a diverse range of gestures that we are prepared to call — or at least that I am prepared to call — understanding the letter or being pious. And we will seek in vain for some common feature that runs, like a fibre,[149] through each and every one. — "Maybe this is true, but I doubt it; and I would like to hear some reason for believing it. Surely, after all, there is something in virtue of which all these things are piety."[150] — *Must* there be something in common among the different acts of Schubert's brother? What about

---

[147] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §201: "there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases"; and cf. Zwicky, LP, L245-L246.

[148] Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*," p. 127.

[149] Like the red thread of the British Navy. Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §67; and Ginzburg (quoting Goethe), "Family Resemblances," p. 539.

[150] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

keeping the scores untouched and burning them: aren't these acts opposed to each other? "Don't say: 'There *must* be something common, or they would not be called [*pious*]'— but *look and see* whether there is something common to all."[151] Should we say that all of these acts are expressions of a *reverent* attitude? But sometimes at a wake we tell humorous stories about the deceased — and these stories are not necessarily impious.

§3.6. Let me turn now to another example: a work of art. I shall be discussing Vittorio De Sica's film, *Bicycle Thieves*, particularly a gesture that occurs at the end; and if you have not seen this film, I would apologize for spoiling it, but it is an interesting fact about certain works of art that they cannot be spoiled by the mere disclosure of plot. Indeed, if you have not seen the film, I will not be able to elaborate enough context to communicate the meaning of the final gesture; but let me sketch some of it. In post-war, poverty-stricken Rome, Antonio Ricci is hoping to support his family with a new job. To do this job, he depends on his bicycle, which the family has pawned its bed-sheets to acquire. On Antonio's first day at work, his bicycle is stolen. With his son Bruno, he sets off the next morning to track down the thief. At the end of the long day, having failed to recover his own bicycle, he tries to steal another. That's it; the plot could fit on the back of an envelope, in the palm of your hand. The French film critic André Bazin writes, "[The film's] social message is not detached, it remains immanent in the event, but it is so clear that nobody can overlook it, still less take exception to it, since it is never made explicitly a message. The thesis implied is wondrously, outrageously simple: in the world where this workman lives, the poor must steal from each other in order to survive."[152]

When we finally meet the thief, near the end of the film, he is shown with great humanity: that is, he is not particularly likeable, but we see that he is, if possible, even more destitute than Antonio, that he lives in one room with his mother and two siblings, possibly contending with epilepsy, and, it seems, trying financially to assist an elderly man. Most of the film occurs in the space between the two, symmetrical thefts. And what happens in that space is nothing more than the camera witnessing a relatively uneventful, undramatic day: the father and son shelter under some eaves during a rainstorm; they stop

---

[151] Wittgenstein, PI, §66.

[152] Bazin, "*Bicycle Thief*," *What Is Cinema?*, p. 51.

at a restaurant and share mozzarella sandwiches and a bottle of wine, which their family cannot afford. Et cetera. Bazin writes, "It would be no exaggeration to say that *Ladri di Biciclette* is the story of a walk through Rome by a father and his son."[153] Compare a neorealist scenario described by De Sica's collaborator and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini:

> A woman is going to buy a pair of shoes. Upon this elementary situation it is possible to build a film. All we have to do is to discover and then show all the elements that go to create this adventure, in all their banal 'dailiness,' and it will become worthy of attention, it will even become 'spectacular.' But it will become spectacular not through its exceptional, but through its *normal* qualities; it will astonish us by showing so many things that happen every day under our eyes, things we have never noticed before.[154]

Finally, compare a scene in De Sica and Zavattini's *Umberto D*, the scene in which the maid wakes up:

> The camera confines itself to watching her doing her little chores: moving around the kitchen still half asleep, drowning the ants that have invaded the sink, grinding the coffee.... We see how the grinding of the coffee is divided in turn into a series of independent moments; for example, when she shuts the door with the tip of her outstretched foot. As it goes in on her the camera follows the movement of her leg so that the image finally concentrates on her toes feeling the surface of the door.[155]

Zavattini's love of ordinary reality, and his critique of the consolations of fantasy, is reminiscent of Weil. "The keenest necessity of our time is 'social attention.' // Attention, though, to what is there, *directly*."[156] A walk through Rome by a father and his son. A woman going to buy a pair of shoes. A maid weeping quietly while she grinds coffee. The point of these films is not the excitement of plot; instead, the camera concentrates on the "concrete instants of life," bearing witness to "their ontological equality."[157]

---

[153] Bazin, "*Bicycle Thief*," *What Is Cinema*?, p. 55.
[154] Zavattini, "Some Ideas on the Cinema," §5.
[155] Bazin, "*Umberto D*: A Great Work," *What Is Cinema*?, pp. 81-82.
[156] Zavattini, "Some Ideas on the Cinema," §3.
[157] Bazin, "*Umberto D*: A Great Work," *What Is Cinema*?, p. 81.

Let me focus, now, on the final gesture of *Bicycle Thieves*. Antonio has attempted to steal an unwatched bicycle, but he has been chased and caught. While he has been pardoned by the owner of the bicycle, he is ashamed in front of his son. Antonio and Bruno are dissolving into the crowd, and Antonio begins publicly to weep. Bruno reaches up and takes his father's hand. I gather that different film critics have championed competing analyses of the symbolic significance of this gesture. But the gesture need not be a symbol for something other than itself, and I regard these analyses exactly as helpful as explanations of a joke. There is something deep about the gesture, which I can't reproduce here, which requires the context of the complete film for its full appreciation. Let me suggest that one understandable audience response to the gesture would be to weep. Of course, one might not weep. What I want to say is that we can imagine a range of audience gestures, which we needn't specify in advance, which would express an understanding of the gesture on the screen. Furthermore, reasons can be offered for these gestures, and the reasons needn't be analyses of symbolism. Suppose that someone, let me call her Larisa, has just watched the film, and is weeping. I come into the room, and ask her, What's wrong, why are you weeping? She points to the screen and says, Look; or, Look, Bruno is holding Antonio's hand. Here are some possibilities: I have previously seen the film, and when I recognize its final image, her weeping makes sense to me. Or: I have not seen the film. The image on the screen, deprived of context, strikes me as maudlin, and her behaviour seems overly sentimental. She promptly shows me the whole film, and then I understand. (In other words, she introduces me to these characters, their world, their form of life, in which this gesture has its place.) Or: she shows me the whole film, and the final gesture still fails to make an impression on me.

At this point, someone might despair, "Well, that's the end of it. The impossibility of agreeing on a single best interpretation of a work of art just shows that infinitely many interpretations are equal." — But such despair would be premature. Larisa has other techniques for reorienting my vision. She says, Reflect on the film: throughout their day together, the father has not once touched the son with tenderness; in fact, on two previous occasions, when the son stumbled and fell in the rain, when he was nearly run over by a car, the father was oblivious. You must see Bruno's gesture against that background. Or: she reads Bazin's observation aloud: "Before choosing this particular child, De Sica [the

director] did not ask him to perform, just to walk. He wanted to play off the striding gait of the man against the short trotting steps of the child, the harmony of this discord being for him of capital importance for the understanding of the film as a whole."[158] Or she says, Do you remember when we read Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*? How astonished you were by the end of the fifth chapter, the deaf hunter standing in the train compartment as it is plunged into darkness, holding out in his hand the gift of the wild duck, how that gesture held the rest of the chapter in the balance?[159] *That* gesture is like *this* one. And so on. These are the sorts of reasons that we can offer to facilitate appreciation of a work of art. One emphasizes other features of the work that are salient in relation to this feature; or one sets up objects of comparison. And so on.

I am trying to offer an example of the form of reason-giving that Wittgenstein sketches in a lecture that was recorded by G.E. Moore. "*Reasons*, [Wittgenstein] said, in Aesthetics, are 'of the nature of further descriptions'; *e.g.* you can make a person see what Brahms was driving at by showing him lots of different pieces by Brahms, or by comparing him with a contemporary author; and all that Aesthetics does is 'to draw your attention to a thing', to 'place things side by side'. He said ... that what he, Wittgenstein, had 'at the back of his mind' was 'the idea that aesthetic discussions were like discussions in a court of law', where you try to 'clear up the circumstances' of the action which is being tried, hoping that in the end what you say will 'appeal to the judge'. And he said that the same sort of 'reasons' were given, not only in Ethics, but also in Philosophy."[160] Following Wittgenstein, McDowell defends this form of reason-giving. When one gives reasons in ethics, he writes, "one exploits contrivances similar to those one exploits in other areas where the task is to back up the injunction 'See it like this': helpful juxtaposition of cases, descriptions with carefully chosen terms and carefully placed emphasis, and the like. (Compare, for instance, what one might do and say to someone who says 'Jazz sounds to me like a mess, a mere welter of uncoordinated

---

[158] Bazin, "*Bicycle Thief*," *What Is Cinema*?, pp. 54-55.
[159] Vide Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, p. 165. For the structure of lyric closure, vide Zwicky, LP, L211-R212.
[160] Moore, "Wittgenstein's Lectures," p. 106. On this methodology, cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §§122, 127, 130; and Zwicky, W&M, L2. Vide also the discussion of unconventional reasons in this thesis, §7.2.

noise'.)"[161] As both Wittgenstein and McDowell acknowledge, such reason-giving is not foolproof. One presents one's case to the judge. And it is a possibility that the case won't secure the judge's assent, even if one has all the relevant facts, and the case is well assembled.

§3.7. Let me conclude by returning to an example with which I began: the student who visits the professor's office, and the professor sits her down in a rocking chair, sits down opposite her, and asks, "How are you?" And I trust we can imagine illustrative cases of talking with students in our offices, or of being students ourselves and talking with professors. But I shall shift the example slightly, to something even more mundane, something so commonplace as to escape remark. — You have put on your coat, and are lacing up your boots, when the phone rings. It is your friend. Something terrible has happened to her. And it is irreversible. What can you do? Here is the analogy with the work of art: you are witnessing something that you cannot change. So you sink down against the kitchen wall, and you listen.

Perhaps the action can be forced into the Humean frame. Let's try: you desire that your friend's sadness be lessened, and while you accept that you cannot change the event that caused the sadness, you believe that listening to her will lessen her sadness. — But no-one seems to reason in this way. Suppose that, by the time you hang up the phone, you are late for your appointment; when you arrive, someone asks why you are late. And you say, Because my friend was in trouble. No mention need be made of mental states. Everything is open to view.[162] It would be natural to say that what motivated you, what moved you, was your friend. If she were present, you could nod toward her. Weil would recognize this as a *photosynthetic ethical psychology*. Action is always interactive. The energy that we need to act isn't our private property; we receive it, like light, from others. Ordinarily, a gesture toward the source would be enough to render the action understandable. Only if we have a prior commitment to the Humean picture are we likely

---

[161] McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," §6 (p. 21).

[162] — "Is it fair to say that for different purposes different kinds of explanation will be appropriate?" (Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011). — Yes. One thing I am trying to do here is to make space for the possibility that an explanation of human action could refer to an unornamented fact as a reason.

to suspect that this gesture is an enthymeme, in need of further analysis. But in some contexts, further analysis would unearth something quite grotesque. Suppose that your friend learns that you were detained by her phone call, and that evening asks you why you let yourself be detained; and you respond, Because I desired to lessen your sadness, and I believed that listening to you would lessen it. This sentence is not only tactless and mechanically clinical when addressed to your friend; it isn't an accurate account of why we listen to each other. The point can be made acute by supposing that you know, in this particular context, that listening *won't* lessen your friend's sadness; she is, we can imagine, inconsolable; or perhaps her sadness is wholly appropriate to her circumstances and something she needs to feel. But notice what this adjustment does to the example: it certainly doesn't excuse you from listening. Actually, ordinarily, we don't need articulable reasons to listen to our friends. We don't need articulable reasons to listen to anybody. This is simply what we need to do.

CHAPTER 4. A Footnote on Moral Particularism

Summary

¶ *In this chapter and the next one, I conduct a "deconstruction" of Jonathan Dancy's theory of moral particularism. That theory is the denial of moral generalism, which is the theory that the possibility of moral thought and judgement depends on general moral principles. Dancy claims that the core particularist doctrine is holism in the theory of reasons: what counts as a reason in one context might not so count in another. His metaphysics is two-tiered: at the first, lower tier are reasons, and at the second, higher tier are valences. Dancy may be a holist and a particularist about valences — he maintains that they vary across contexts — but he is an atomist and a generalist about reasons. His argument is an argument-type, whose genealogy we can trace back to Descartes and then to scholasticism. The metaphysics to which he subscribes is substance/accident metaphysics: the reason is substantial, while its valence is accidental. In the quadripartite spectrum of positions — (1) absolute generalism; (2) moderate generalism; (3) moderate particularism; (4) absolute particularism — Dancy's recent work seems to fall somewhere between (3) and (4). His main adversary is W.D. Ross, who represents (2) a moderate generalist theory of contributory reasons. This theory is general about moral principles and atomistic about reasons, according to Dancy: a reason is atomic insofar as its valence is context-independent: it always makes the same contribution, although it may be defeated by other contributions. In developing his rival position, Dancy makes numerous technical distinctions: a moral context has two bases, resultance and supervenience: the supervenient base is larger, and contains all the natural "non-moral" properties, including what Dancy calls enabling (or disabling) conditions; whereas the narrower resultance base contains those properties which favour (or disfavour) a given action. This theory assumes that moral deliberations like the practical syllogism — if p, then q; p; therefore q — are necessarily enthymemic. When we successfully analyse the minor premise, we are supposed to discover an indefinitely long list of enabling conditions, an indefinite number of which are expressed as the*

absence of disabling conditions. In light of the foregoing, I wish to make two objections to Dancy's theory: (i) it is self-undermining, because it re-inscribes atomism at the level of reasons: that is, it maintains that a reason's substantial identity is always the same, independently of context. And (ii) the analysis of the supervenience base cannot be the best explanation because it unnecessarily multiplies entities (that is, an indefinite number of enabling conditions).

---

§4.1. What is moral particularism? One way of articulating the theory — for it is a *theory* — is by contrast with generalism in moral philosophy, the theory that "the very possibility of moral thought and judgement depends on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principles."[163] Particularism can then be defined as the denial of generalism: "the possibility of moral thought and judgement does not depend on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principles."[164] In light of my remarks about attention, one might reasonably suspect that I have been defending a kind of moral particularism, or at least that I would be sympathetic to particularist theory. Indeed, one way of characterizing what I have been doing would be to call it a genealogy of the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge, as that thesis is refracted through Weil, Murdoch, and McDowell; and Jonathan Dancy, who is a champion of moral particularism in contemporary philosophy, understands his early work as an extrapolation and correction of McDowell.[165] And I guess that I have no objection to the mere denial of moral generalism; but I depart from Dancy when he seeks to augment that denial with a militant theory, replete with barbed wire and artillery.

Consider a significant irony: Dancy's moral particularism, which is the *denial* of the *generalist* theory that the possibility of moral thought depends on moral principles, itself depends on *general* principles. Here is one of them: "[W]hat are reasons *here* may

---

[163] Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, p. 7; cf. ibid., p. 73.
[164] Dancy, EWP, p. 7.
[165] Vide Dancy: "I owe a different sort of debt to John McDowell. Although I spend a fair amount of time in early chapters saying that he has made various unnecessary mistakes, the general structure of my approach to ethics, and indeed of my overall philosophical orientation, is owed in large measure to him" (*Moral Reasons*, p. xii).

not be the same reasons *there*, because of the presence of further reasons in the second case."[166] More precisely, "what is a reason in one case may be no reason at all in another, or even a reason on the other side."[167] Dancy calls this principle "the core particularist doctrine,"[168] which doctrine may be characterized as *holism in the theory of reasons*. There is nothing surprising about the irony of formulating a general doctrine of particularism: this type of irony haunts most revolutionaries. One of the least interesting things that we can say about such a position is that it carries the germ of its own refutation. Perhaps more critically, we can say that it evidences a lack of integrity to resort to the very regime of thought that one endeavours to dethrone. (*This doctoral thesis is no exception*.) But one might have hoped that moral particularism would refrain from formulating doctrines — that is, that it would be genuinely particularist, not only in its analysis of a given context, but also in the realm of theory. That is, one might have hoped that particularism would be anti-theoretical in a Wittgensteinian spirit: instead of legislating a general, a priori doctrine for analysing cases, it might have exhorted us to look and see on a case by case basis.

Let me consider Dancy's theory in more detail. One of the first things that I would like to point out is that the theory is explicitly *metaphysical*: "particularism is a view in moral metaphysics: it is a view about the ways in which actions get to be right and wrong."[169] Although the adjective "metaphysical" seems to have a vaguely pejorative connotation in current Anglo-American philosophical discourse, I personally have no allergies to metaphysics *per se*. But let me try to say why I do not accept Dancy's metaphysical picture. The gist of my critique can be stated simply enough: Dancy's picture is disingenuous. He wants to be a particularist about the behaviour of reasons, but

---

[166] Dancy, MR, p. 24.

[167] Dancy, "Moral Particularism," §3; cf. EWP, pp. 7, 73.

[168] Dancy, "Moral Particularism," §3.

[169] Dancy, EWP, p. 140. The passage continues: "I used to think that particularism was a position in moral epistemology, and to suppose that I was therefore working in a sort of hinterland between pure ethics and pure epistemology—a hinterland that was very sparsely populated. But it now seems to me that the real battleground lies in moral metaphysics." The militaristic metaphor with which I introduced Dancy's work was his own metaphor.

he is an unacknowledged generalist about what reasons *are*.[170] His metaphysics of reasons is *two-tiered*, and the first tier is dissonant with the second. At the first tier we identify a reason, and at the second tier we find the reason's valence. (In Dancy's terminology, a "valence" is the charge of a reason: *for* or *against* a proposed action.) The picture that Dancy is attacking is one in which a reason always carries with it the same valence regardless of context. By contrast, he maintains that the valence is variable: it varies across particular contexts, and this variability is to be explained by the doctrine of holism: reasons come in bunches; and the valence of *this* reason in *this* bunch can be the reverse of the *same* reason in *that* bunch. The valence of a reason is a result of the reason's combination with other reasons. But notice what the chemical metaphor implies: there is an *independently identifiable atomic base*, an invariant substratum to which the variable valence somehow attaches. The reason is, in some sense, always the *same*, and can be identified and described independently of the particular contexts which fix its valence. — "Well, maybe the factor in question is always the same; what varies is whether that factor is a reason for or against the same sort of action in different situations.... But what's problematic about that?"[171] — Built into Dancy's theory are some significant metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. One major assumption is that valence is an *accidental* property; it can vary without affecting the essence of the underlying reason (or factor). However, as I shall argue, this assumption is not innocuous. Changing the "valence" of a factor will at least sometimes change the very identity of the factor; and this change will be reflected in our descriptions. The altered factor, under its new description, may be not be identifiable with its former self. And so it is illicit to speak of the "same" factor.

§4.2. In what follows, I shall offer a "deconstruction" of Dancy's theory of moral particularism; that is, I shall argue that his theory is self-undermining insofar as it re-inscribes the very generalism about which it complains.[172] The least that can be said

---

[170] And what are reasons? In *Practical Reality*, it seems that reasons are (extra-psychological) facts (and not, for example, psychological states of the reasoning agent). But that is another story.
[171] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[172] I use the term "deconstruction" not in a technical, postmodern sense, but loosely to

about Dancy's picture is that it is not unequivocally particularist; it seems only to have made generalism retreat and go underground. When the spectacular twentieth and twenty-first century dust has settled, we can see that Dancy's "cutting edge"[173] laser is not much different from Descartes's old-fashioned, naked-eyed analysis of the piece of wax (which, in turn, is, ironically, analogous to one of Aristotle's strategies in his *Metaphysics*).[174] Recall that Descartes examines a piece of wax in two different contexts, and asks an ancient, Presocratic question, How is it possible for something to remain (recognizably) the same while changing? And his answer (again, ironically)[xxxiv] is Aristotle's answer: the explanation of identity through change is *substance*.[175] Descartes subjects the wax to a (thought) experiment, which amounts to the early modern version of a strip search: "I distinguish the wax from its external forms, as if stripping it of its clothing, and look at the wax in its nakedness ..."[176] The metaphor is not idle, but charged with an analytic prejudice: that *the essence is hidden*, and that it can be revealed through a method that will separate the essence from the accidents.

The experiment is vividly, sensuously described: "Let us take, for instance, this piece of wax. It has been taken quite recently from the honeycomb; it has not yet lost all the honey flavor...."[177] And so on. Descartes exposes the wax to the heat of the fire, and it melts. We are familiar with this passage; we have read it countless times.[xxxv] Nevertheless, let us look again at what Descartes takes himself to be establishing. He examines a solid piece of wax which changes into a melted piece of wax; let us call them "wax_{t1}" and "wax_{t2}," respectively. He observes that all of the sensible qualities of wax_{t1} are different from those of wax_{t2}; and yet wax_{t2} can be identified with wax_{t1}. Descartes: "whatever came under the senses of taste, smell, sight, touch, or hearing has now

---

mean a strategy for reading a text. Such a reading "marks out places where the function of the text works against its apparent meaning" (Aylesworth, "Postmodernism," §5); cf. Lawlor, "Jacques Derrida," §5.

[173] Timothy Chappell, blurb on the back of *Ethics Without Principles*.

[174] Vide Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Z.3.1029a10-20: "For if this [matter] is not substance, it baffles us to say what else is. When all else is stripped off evidently nothing but matter remains," etc. Of course, in his next breath (ibid., 1029a25-30), Aristotle rejects matter as a candidate for substance, and turns to the consideration of form.

[175] Vide, e.g., Aristotle, *Categories*, 5.4a10 ff.

[176] Descartes, *Meditations*, AT VII.32.

[177] Descartes, *Meditations*, AT VII.30.

changed; and yet the wax remains."[178] What explains this identifiability? (At this point, some students are inclined to answer, He watched it changing! That answer is not without sense, but it evades Descartes's question: what *is* "it" which is subject to change?) Why are we inclined to call wax$_{t1}$ and wax$_{t2}$ different instances of one and the same piece of wax? Phrased this way, the question is similar to one of the questions which obsessed Plato. Descartes seems to proceed on an impulse: wax$_{t1}$ and wax$_{t2}$ *must have something in common* which justifies their identifiability. By hypothesis that commonality cannot be a sensible quality; hence, it must be something non-sensible (in fact, argues Descartes, it must be extended substance).[xxxvi] But recall Wittgenstein's response to the impulse: "Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say: 'There *must* be something common, or they would not be called "games"'—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!"[179]

What is the point of this digression on Descartes? The point is that Dancy's argument is an argument *type*, one which exploits a metaphysical distinction between essence and accidents. (In Descartes's metaphor, there is the naked body, and then there are the ornaments, such as clothing, with which that body is hidden. [Of course, analysis must reveal not only the naked body, but, seeking like an X-ray, the skeleton hidden inside the flesh.]) One considers a number of things, which one recognizes to be related with each other, dispersed in time or space. And one proceeds to eliminate all of the differences among these things, expecting, by this process, to reveal the common, invariant element. That commonality must be what these things *really are*. — And I wish to call this picture into question. Why should we assume, with Dancy, that we *must* be able to identify the "same" factor or feature, combined with other, different factors, in two different contexts? Perhaps, across *some* contexts, we can identify the same factor (by holding something constant for the purpose of comparison). What I object to is the *doctrine* that we must be able, a priori, to identify such a factor. And what I suggest is

---

[178] Descartes, *Meditations*, AT VII.30.
[179] Wittgenstein, PI, §66.

that we start our investigations not with the atomic factors out of which contexts are supposedly constructed, but with the contexts in which we find ourselves. And then we *look and see* whether a particular context is susceptible to Dancy's analysis — or not. — "But this view is merely atomism at a different level of analysis: here the context is a non-decomposable unit." — No: contextualism is not reducible to a kind of atomism. The extension of a context is not definite or fixed. In fact, its extension can fluctuate in response to particular actions and particular movements of contemplation.

§4.3. As I mentioned, Dancy is attacking a picture in which a reason's valence is invariant across different particular contexts. The picture is susceptible of division into at least two sub-pictures:[180] (1) according to an absolute generalism, moral principles articulate (in advance of all particular cases) general features which, when they obtain, make an action overall right or wrong. In Dancy's example, that an action would break a promise makes the action wrong, whatever other features attach to the action. (2) According to a more moderate generalism, moral principles articulate general features which, when they obtain, make some regular *contribution* to the overall moral valence of an action. But the overall valence is the result of some calculation of contributions. That an action would break a promise always counts against doing it, but more powerful reasons in favour of doing the action could trump and thus reverse the negative charge. Dancy positions W.D. Ross as the main proponent of this species of generalism, and as his (Dancy's) primary adversary and target. We can continue, elaborating the other half of a quadripartite spectrum: (4) at the far end, in the realm of extreme particularism, moral principles cannot capture generally relevant features, because reasons are irreducibly particular and variable across contexts. The very idea of a moral principle is a mistake. In his earlier work, Dancy seems to lean toward this end of the spectrum.[181] More recently, he seems to be countenancing a stance somewhere between (4) and (3) moderate particularism. According to moderate particularism, in its various permutations,

---

[180] Vide Dancy, "Moral Particularism," §1.
[181] "On occasions I have been rash enough to claim that, given holism, moral principles are impossible" (Dancy, EWP, pp. 80-81).

reasons are rooted in particular contexts and can behave unpredictably, but we should explain the undeniable rôle of moral principles in our lives.

Even in his earlier work, Dancy wavers: "It seems wise for particularism to allow *some* role to moral principles" — and he makes the very promising but underdeveloped suggestion that "a moral principle amounts to a reminder of the sort of importance a property *can* have in suitable circumstances."[182] In his more recent work, he seems (reluctantly) prepared to admit "the possibility of invariant reasons; and if there can be such things, and some of them are moral reasons, there can certainly be true general statements whose role is to articulate that fact."[183] At the limit, he is committed, if not to the impossibility of moral principles, then to the safer claim that "the possibility of moral thought and judgement (and in general, one might say, of moral distinctions) in no way depends on the provision of a suitable set of moral principles."[184] For theorists such as Martha Nussbaum, who understands herself to be defending an Aristotelian particularism, *the particular is prior*,[185] and yet we do learn from experience and can make useful generalizations on the basis of that experience; but the generalizations, in their turn, must always be answerable to the surprises of future experience. Other theorists appear to conglomerate in this moderate particularist camp: such as Margaret Olivia Little, who argues that particularism can accommodate defeasible generalizations,[186] and Margaret Urban Walker, whose argument I find difficult to sift out.[xxxvii] — But let me be clear: I myself hope to resist occupying any position on this spectrum.

Dancy takes (1) absolute generalism to be "largely discredited" for three reasons: "It gives the wrong sense to the notion of moral conflict, it can make no sense of the

---

[182] Dancy, MR, p. 67; vide §4.4 (pp. 66-71) for what little elaboration this suggestion receives.

[183] Dancy, EWP, p. 81.

[184] Dancy, EWP, p. 82.

[185] Cf. Nussbaum, "Non-scientific deliberation," *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 294, 300-301; and "The Discernment of Perception," §II.

[186] Reasons are particular and thus variable, but they are riffs on a theme, and the theme is epistemically privileged (vide Little, "On Knowing the 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory," pp. 781b-782a). Responding to Little's thesis, Dancy writes that "it promises to establish a middle ground between particularism and generalism" (EWP, p. 117). His verdict is that it fails.

relevant notion of moral regret, and it lacks a persuasive epistemology."[187] As I have indicated, Dancy positions Ross as his adversary, a representative of (2) *a generalist moral theory of contributory reasons* (which reasons Ross would call "prima facie" and which have also been called "pro tanto").[188] Dancy defines a contributory reason for action as "a feature whose presence makes something of a case for acting, but in such a way that the overall case for doing that action can be improved or strengthened by the addition of a second feature playing a similar role"[189] (and, he should add, can be weakened by a further feature playing a different rôle). And he claims that generalism (about moral principles) is significantly (and normally) connected with *atomism* in the theory of reasons: the thesis that "a feature that is a reason in one case must remain a reason, and retain the same polarity, in any other."[190] If reasons are atomistic — if a reason's valence is not context-dependent, if it is fixed independently and in advance of the reason's combination with other reasons — then it is not implausible to argue that a general principle could be articulated which would predict a given reason's behaviour across different contexts. (All actions with feature *x* have valence +; or whatever.) That valence might not be decisive — if reasons are contributory, then an action's overall valence will be the result of some calculation of the contributed valences. But the point of the atomistic picture is that each reason carries its proper valence with it, and contributes it *individually*. (As though one's friends are personalities who bring their respective behaviours to the party, and then toss those behaviours, like poker chips, into the pot.)[191] And it is upon this metaphysical picture that Dancy concentrates his attack. A key thought of atomism is that the feature and its contribution should be isolatable (that is, determinable in isolation from other features). Dancy protests that this thought is "no better than trying to characterize the contribution made by a football player to his side's

---

[187] Dancy, EWP, p. 3; cf. ibid., pp. 4-5; and for discussion of the first reason, cf. "Moral Particularism," §4. Although Dancy does not mention them, McDowell (V&R, §4) offers a compelling discussion of the first reason, and Williams's "critique of utilitarianism," a compelling discussion of the second.

[188] Cf. Dancy, EWP, p. 17, n. 3.

[189] Dancy, EWP, p. 15.

[190] Dancy, EWP, p. 7; cf. ibid., p. 74.

[191] The analogy is intended to be exact, but more complex than the atomistic theory. For there is a sense in which the behaviours (or the poker habits) of one's friends can be predicted on the basis of their personalities; and there is a sense in which they cannot.

victory by talking only about how things would have been had he been the only player on the field. This is no better than trying to give an account of what it is to contribute to a conversation in terms of the nature of a monologue."[192] These two analogies are elucidatory. But they will be equally applicable, at a different level of analysis, to Dancy's own theory.

§4.4. Dancy himself offers a modified theory of contributory reasons. An action's overall valence will be some result of contributions made by various features of the action; and the features themselves can be subdivided into active and inert backgrounds.[193] At one point, Dancy seems to flirt with the hypothesis that this tripartite structure might have some affinities with a hierarchy of thin (for example, "right," "wrong"), thick (for example, "thoughtless," "tactful," "kind," "brave," etc.), and "non-ethical."[194] (Thin concepts are more generic than thick ones. A thick concept might describe some specific feature of an allegedly "non-ethical" fact, and from the thick description we might infer a thin judgement. For example, when you took my bicycle ["non-ethical"], you stole it [thick], and that was wrong [thin]. — But we could replace this bit of reasoning with the claim, "you stole my bicycle"; and, arguably, this claim is not necessarily an enthymeme.) Dancy seems to accept some version of a theory of *defeasible reasons*: something that is putatively a reason can be defeated by another reason (that is, its valence can be neutralized or reversed). Dancy's metaphysics of reasons involves a number of technical distinctions, and perhaps it would be best to place them face up on the table: *favouring* and *enabling*; and *resultance* and *supervenience*. That is, there is a bunch of stuff in Dancy's substratum; let me try to analyse this stuff.

Contributory reasons are what Dancy calls "favourers," but they drag other things in their undercarriages. "The general message," writes Dancy, "[is] that there is more than one conception of moral relevance, more than one way of being relevant to the answer to moral questions. A feature that favours one action or another ... is certainly relevant. So are the enabling conditions, those which do not favour but whose presence or

---

[192] Dancy, EWP, p. 19.
[193] Cf. Dancy, MR, pp. 55-56.
[194] Dancy, EWP, p. 84.

absence is required for others to do the favouring job."[195] (Dancy actually makes *three* distinctions among *forms* of relevance: "a relevant consideration can be a favourer/disfavourer, it can be an enabler/disabler for another favourer/disfavourer, and it can intensify/attenuate the favouring/disfavouring done by something else."[196] As far as I can tell, the intensifying/attenuating form of relevance is an epicycle; it is like the volume knob on the favouring/disfavouring stereo, while enabling/disabling is like the on/off switch; and it is this switch that interests Dancy.) Now, although Dancy officially subscribes to holism, he is already thinking of contexts as *analytically structured*, that is, as *analysable* into relatively atomistic (that is, discrete) *elements*, which elements (and this is a distinct but related point) are categorizable into a hierarchical ordering. I shall return to this point later; for the moment, I want only to notice it. Let me consider Dancy's example, "a piece of practical 'reasoning,'" which he offers in lieu of a definition of these concepts:

> 1. I promised to do it.
>
> 2. My promise was not given under duress.
>
> 3. I am able to do it.
>
> 4. There is no greater reason not to do it.
>
> 5. So: I do it.[197]

Here is how Dancy analyses the example: (1) is a favourer, while (2) is an enabler, which enables (1) to favour (5). (3) also enables (1) to favour (5), but more generically than does (2).[198] (4) is trickier: Dancy claims that it, too, is an enabler, but that it does not enable (1) to favour (5); instead, it enables "the move" from (1) to (5). It is "verdictive": it passes judgement "on the balance of reasons present in the case."[199] But these distinctions among enablers are perhaps picayune: "The crucial point for further reference," writes Dancy, "is just that there is a difference between favouring and enabling, even though there are different sorts of enabler."[200] He claims that this

---

[195] Dancy, EWP, p. 52.
[196] Dancy, EWP, p. 42.
[197] Dancy, EWP, p. 38.
[198] Dancy, EWP, p. 39-40.
[199] Dancy, EWP, p. 40.
[200] Dancy, EWP, p. 41.

difference is a special case of a more general distinction "between a feature that plays a certain role and a feature whose presence or absence is required for the first feature to play its role, but which does not play that role itself."[201] Constantine Sandis alerts Dancy to the earliest explicit articulation of the general distinction, by Plato: "Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause [αἴτιον] from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause."[202] — Anyway, the sought-after distinction can perhaps be clarified by focussing on the relations among (1), (2), and (5). Dancy wants to say that the absence of (2) — or perhaps its negation? — would disable (1) the favourer. That is, if my promise had been given under duress, then *that I promised to do it* would not favour my doing it. However, assuming that my promise is *not* given under duress, that is not itself a reason for doing it, but rather an (enabling) condition that the reason drags in its undercarriage.

I sympathize with anyone who finds this way of talking murky. To me, talk of the presence or absence of enabling conditions becomes very abstruse: what exactly does it mean to speak of the "absence" of the enabler *that my promise was not given under duress*? In what sense is that enabler "present"? Consider: there is a spring-thawed stream running down the gutter beside the sidewalk; and I have temporarily blocked the stream with a bit of cardboard. When I remove the cardboard, I "enable" the stream to run smoothly again. (I remove an obstruction which had defeated the smooth running of the stream.) But prior to my arriving on the scene with my bit of cardboard, was the stream's running *enabled* by not being obstructed? — I don't know what to say about this. I sense that I would be inclined to say different things in different circumstances. In many circumstances, I shall have *no* inclination even to mention so-called enabling conditions such as the scarcity of obstructions. An enabler seems to be equivalent to the absence (or negation) of a disabler. But the *possibility* of disabling (defeasibility) does not require us to build enabling conditions into a metaphysical substratum of reasons. Such a project seems to be a sort of paranoia: as though something couldn't succeed in being a reason unless we could (at least hypothetically) defend it against potential disablers by specifying their absence. But there is *no end* to the list of considerations that we might

---

[201] Dancy, EWP, p. 45.
[202] Plato, *Phaedo*, 99b; cf. Dancy, EWP, p. 45.

specify: I promised to do it; my promise was not given under duress; my fingers were not crossed when I promised; what I promised to do was not "to break my promise"; the person to whom I promised has not dissolved the promise; the date by which I promised to do it has not passed; aliens have not intervened to invert the conventions of promise-keeping and promise-breaking; et cetera. The list is intended to be ridiculous; that is part of my point. Consider this instance of practical reasoning: "I promised to do it; so: I do it." Dancy's taxonomy seems to assume that this reasoning is *necessarily* enthymemic. For my part, I do not even want to say that ordinarily, absenting other considerations, we take it for granted that a promise was not given under duress — for saying that much is already saying *too much*. As though the so-called enabling conditions are part of our considerations, but subliminally — granted to us, permitted, like an extra thought untaxed by the caesar of thinking.[203]

§4.5. Let me now turn to a further complication, the technical distinction between *resultance* and *supervenience*. In his earlier work, when he introduces these apparatuses, Dancy claims that resultance is "an endemic feature of our conceptual scheme, or indeed of anything recognizable as a scheme," and supervenience, too, is "a pervasive feature of our or of any conceptual scheme."[204] But the terms refer to highly technical, very special metaphysical relations, and I am reluctant to accede to his claims of their alleged pervasiveness. I am now using the adjective "metaphysical" in a more precise sense (than I have been using it), to indicate a more-than-one-tiered reality. Both resultance and supervenience are relations between two tiers: a base tier, and then the tier which results from, or supervenes upon, the base. I see no reason to accept the claim that thinking in tiers is "a pervasive feature of our or of any conceptual scheme," and I resist Dancy's analysis of some otherwise unexceptional expressions: "We often express this relationship [i.e., the relationship of resultance] using the word 'because'. The square object is square because of the relative lengths and number of its sides, and the angles which they subtend to each other. The cliff is dangerous because of its steepness and

---

[203] On the "extra thought," cf. Williams, "Persons, character and morality," p. 18.
[204] Dancy, MR, pp. 73, 77.

friability, and so on."[205] There is nothing especially occult about these expressions, or the use of the word "because." I can imagine a context for the first usage, in which a teacher is defining the concept *square* for a student of mathematics; and I can imagine a context for the second, in which I have been warned not to go hiking near a particular cliff, and I scoff, and my interlocutor elaborates, "No, believe me, it *is* dangerous: it's steep, and the ground crumbles easily underfoot." (And suppose that I ask, "Do you mean that its property of dangerousness is a *result* of its properties of steepness and friability?" Wouldn't it be perfectly natural for my interlocutor to reply, "Why do you put it so oddly?")

Anyway, I am anticipating. Here is how Dancy defines resultance: it is "a relation between a property of an object and the features that 'give' it that property"; a resultant property is "one which 'depends' on other properties in a certain way."[206] According to this theory, the moral properties of an object *result* from some of its other, "non-moral" properties. Dancy writes, "The 'resultance base' for the wrongness of a particular action consists in those features that make it wrong, the wrong-making features."[207] These "wrong-making" features are the *disfavourers*, in the sense in which Dancy has adumbrated the concept of disfavouring. Supervenience is a relation that is similar to resultance — so similar that Dancy worries that they are easily confused. Like resultance, supervenience is a relation between two tiers, in this case a subvenient base tier (containing a bunch of "non-moral" stuff), and a supervening second tier (containing some moral property). For both resultance and supervenience, differences in the base tier are reflected by differences in the second tier. The crucial disparity between resultance and supervenience is that the base of the latter is *larger* than the base of the former.[208] The supervenience base "consists in *all the non-moral features of the action*, not just those that make it wrong. The supervenience base is far larger than the resultance base,

---

[205] Dancy, MR, p. 73.
[206] Dancy, EWP, p. 85.
[207] Dancy, EWP, p. 86.
[208] How much larger is a debatable question. Dancy does entertain the proposal that the resultance base might be expanded (EWP, §5.4). The supervenience base, he argues, is useless for generating applicable moral principles; but there appears to be no non-arbitrary, stable stopping-point for the resultance base once one has begun to expand it past the category of favouring.

then, and it includes crucially all the features that count in favour of the wrong action (defeated reasons for doing it) as well as those that count against, all enablers and the absence of all disablers, quite apart from all the other non-moral features as well."[209][xxxviii] We can diagram the hierarchy of relations (the abstracted supervenience and nested resultance tree for the example of the moral property of wrongness).

Figure 2: DANCY'S METAPHYSICS
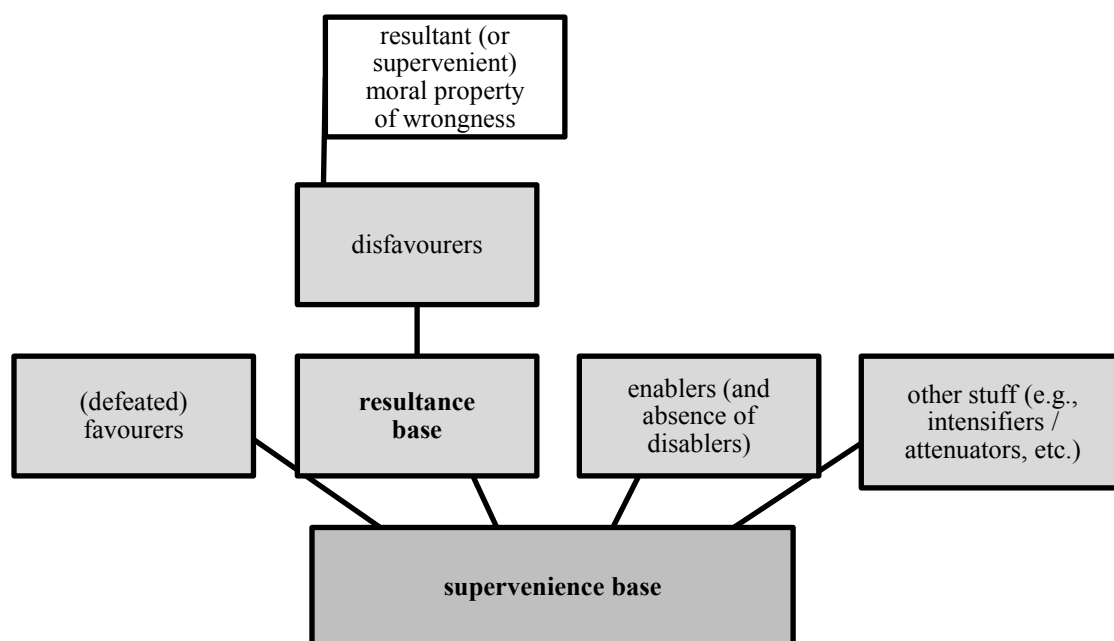
This complicated architecture is designed to undermine the craving for general moral principles. Dancy's adversary might claim that the supervenience of the moral on the "non-moral" — where differences in the "non-moral" subvenient base can be expected to be reflected in the supervening moral properties — provides the kind of regularity needed to construct moral principles. Such principles supply a decision procedure for projecting certain natural descriptions into moral evaluations. Dancy's response to this manoeuvre is that the supervenience base is *too large* (too general) to generate usable principles, while the resultance base is *too narrow* (too specific). He

---

[209] Dancy, EWP, p. 86.

concedes to a principle of supervenience — in a simplified formulation, we might say that if an object has a moral property w, any other object that is "non-morally" indiscernible from the first object will also have moral property w.[210] And such a principle seems compatible with a moral rule of the following form: "where things are in non-moral way N, there will be an action with moral property M. Supervenience generates things of that form, whose distinguishing feature is that they have an enormous left-hand side."[211] Dancy raises a number of objections, the most forceful of which is the observation that the left-hand side will be so enormously cumbersome that the alleged principle will be unusable. He then turns to resultance, which is the wrong sort of relation, he claims, for generating general principles; it is not plausible to suggest "that if an action is wrong, every other action that shares the features that make the first one wrong must also be wrong."[212] To make this point, Dancy relies on his distinction between (dis)favourers and (dis)enablers. Two objects might have a common resultance base: that is, they might have the same disfavourers (or wrong-making features); but it does not follow that they will have the same resultant moral properties, for they might have different supervenience bases. In one case, suppose that there is an enabler in the supervenience base; in the other case, a disabler. We can explain why this action is wrong by pointing to its resultance base; but we cannot generalize from this resultance base to instances of wrongness elsewhere. Compare: the dangerousness of the cliff is a result of its steepness and friability. But dangerousness cannot be guaranteed *in general* to result from steepness and friability, because the dangerousness-favouring done by these latter properties can be disabled (defeated) — for example, by the cliff's property of being securely fenced, or perhaps its property of being a movie set with a two-foot drop from the nevertheless severely inclined edge. I sympathize with anyone who finds this way of talking awkward to the point of grotesqueness; but I am simply permitting Dancy the long knotted rope that he seems to want.

---

[210] Notice that this principle seems to be related to Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles. Cf. Leibniz, *Discourse,* art. 9; *Monadology*, §9.
[211] Dancy, EWP, p. 87.
[212] Dancy, EWP, p. 87.

§4.6. I have now set in place the metaphysical backdrop for Dancy's marquee example of holism in the theory of reasons. And my criticism, again, is that Dancy is disingenuous: he espouses holism, but partly due to his two-tiered metaphysics, the holism is only superficial: (combinatory) atomism is re-scribed at the substratum. His view is that a reason's overall valence is a result of contributions at a lower tier: we may say that (dis)favourers in a reason's resultance base combine with (dis)enablers in the reason's supervenience base. Here is his (borrowed) example, which will be familiar to us:

> We will quickly find that theoretical reasons are perfectly capable of changing their polarity according to context, without anyone making the slightest fuss about the matter. For instance, suppose that it currently seems to me that something before me is red. Normally, one might say, that is a reason (*some* reason, that is, not necessarily sufficient reason) for me to believe that there is something red before me. But in a case where I also believe that I have recently taken a drug that makes blue things look red and red things look blue, the appearance of a red-looking thing before me is reason for me to believe that there is a blue, not a red, thing before me. It is not as if it is some reason for me to believe that there is something red before me, though that reason is overwhelmed by contrary reasons. It is no longer *any reason at all* to believe that there is something red before me; indeed, it is a reason for believing the opposite.[213]

By analogy, practical reasons are supposed to be "holistic" in this sense, too.[214] — But I want to pause here. My criticism, I guess, is directed not only against Dancy, but also against *a theory of defeasible reasoning*, as he presents it. And my criticism, again, is simply that what has been illustrated is not really holism, but combinatory (that is, aggregative) atomism. (I am not advocating for either holism or atomism; I am just remarking on some false advertising.) We start with something that looks like a reason

---

[213] Dancy, EWP, p. 74.

[214] The argument goes like this: reasons for belief are holistic; there is no plausible argument that establishes a categorical difference between "non-moral" reasons and moral ones; therefore, we may presume that moral reasons, like epistemic ones, are holistic (vide Dancy, EWP, p. 76).

for belief: I am "appeared to redly,"[215] or it seems to me that there is something red before me. That looks like a reason for believing that the thing *is* red.[xxxix] But we acknowledge that the *same* feature — the appearance of red — in a different context can fail to count as a reason for the same belief. If something seems red but I have taken the red-to-blue converter drug (call it "the RBC drug"), then that is a reason to believe that the thing is blue. Now, mainly what I want to say is that the concept of "same" is being used here in an atomistic way. We can see this usage, I hope, in the standard equations:

1. If something seems red to me, then I have reason to believe that something before me is red. ($p \rightarrow q$)

2. If p and I have taken the RBC drug, then I do not have reason to believe that something before me is red. ((p & r) $\rightarrow \neg q$)

3. If p and r and I have a rare genetic immunity to the RBC drug, then I have reason to believe that something before me is red. ((p & r & s) $\rightarrow q$)

Etc.

This schema is not quite perspicuous, because what Dancy means to claim is: (1*) If something seems red to me, then its seeming red to me is *reason for* my believing that the thing before me is red; and (2*) if something seems red to me and I have taken the RBC drug, then something's seeming red to me is *reason against* my believing that the thing before me is red; et cetera.[216] Anyway, Dancy is explicit about his brand of "holism": it is *not* the *combo* (of features, pictured here as "propositions"), taken as a whole, whose valence changes from context to context; rather, it is an *individual feature* (here, the "proposition" p), in combination with others, whose valence changes.[217] The point is fine, but fatal. Notice what Dancy assumes: as we roam across different contexts, we can identify the "same" feature — in this example, "appearing redly." And we ask: what is the epistemic valence of this feature? And to answer this question, we analyse the context, which, unsurprisingly to us in this mood, yields to analysis, revealing itself to be an aggregate. *Added to* the intact and unvarying feature are other features, which affect its

---

[215] I gather that Roderick Chisholm is the originator of this vintage example.

[216] Using "+" and "−" to indicate the relative valence (or polarity) of some feature qua reason, we might make a very informal sketch: 1* (p → p+); and 2* ((p & r) → p-); etc.

[217] Dancy, EWP, pp. 8-9.

valence, that is, enable or disable it. But these added features do not affect *the essential identity* of the core feature itself; that essential identity is *independent* of the feature's valence and of the feature's collisions with other features. The invariability of the placeholder *p* in the schema above reflects this fixity of essential identity. For all of its complications, this is nothing more than an atomistic, digital theory of reasons. νόμῳ γλυκύ, νόμῳ πικρόν, νόμῳ θερμόν, νόμῳ ψυχρόν, νόμῳ χροιή, ἐτεῇ δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν: *by convention sweet, by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention colour: but in reality ones and zeroes.*[218]

   — "But it seems to me that Dancy is allowing that, relative to different background facts, a given fact can flip the valence of another fact positively or negatively — true holism. // It is no problem for him if the same FACT pulls one way on one occasion, and a different way on another. In fact, he HAS to have it that it's the same fact that can pull different ways. Otherwise, *he has no way of saying* what same thing it is that is differently a reason on different occasions."[219] — This objection correctly describes Dancy's theory, and explains why his "holism" must have recourse to some complementary form of atomism: if his theory does not hold something constant, then he has no basis for comparing different contexts and identifying their differences. That is, the view that each particular context is absolutely unique — where "unique" is synonymous with "incommensurable" — is not tenable. Indeed, if we follow Davidson, then the very idea of incommensurable contexts is internally incoherent.[220] However, my critique does not depend on absolute incommensurability of contexts. For the sake of argument, I may allow that the contrast of two different contexts requires us to hold something constant between them. What I object to is the general doctrine which draws a metaphysical distinction between reason and valence, and maintains that the reason's identity stays the same while its valence changes.

---

[218] Demokritos (DK 68B9). I have obviously taken considerable liberty with the tail of the translation.

[219] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011; italics added.

[220] Associating conceptual schemes with languages, Davidson argues that "we cannot make sense of total failure" of intertranslatability ("On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 7).

It may be instructive to compare J.L. Austin's response to A.J. Ayer's argument from illusion. Recall that Ayer uses the example of the straight stick refracted in water, and its alleged indistinguishability from a bent stick, to motivate his argument that we only ever perceive sense-data.[221] Austin responds, "Is it the case that 'delusive' and 'veridical' experiences are not 'qualitatively different'? Well, at least it seems perfectly extraordinary to say so in this sweeping way.... it is simply not true to say that seeing a bright green after-image against a white wall is exactly like seeing a bright green patch actually on the wall; or that seeing a white wall through blue spectacles is exactly like seeing a blue wall; or that seeing pink rats in D.T.s is exactly like really seeing pink rats; or (once again) that seeing a stick refracted in water is exactly like seeing a bent stick. In all these cases we may *say* the same things ('It looks blue', 'It looks bent', &c.), but this is no reason at all for denying the obvious fact that the 'experiences' are *different*."[222] — It isn't that I see a sense-datum representing a crooked stick, which is a prima facie reason for believing that the stick is crooked, and which may be defeated by added information that the stick is in water. (That is, it isn't that I see the *same* thing in two different cases: a crooked-seeming stick [which really is crooked] and a crooked-seeming stick [which is really straight but refracted in water].) No: a crooked stick and a straight stick in water are *different phenomena*, and though we can be occasionally tricked, we can learn to tell the difference. My failing to tell the difference on occasion no more establishes that the phenomena are indistinguishable than my failing to discern different vintages of wine (or blends of tea) proves that they are indistinguishable: I may be helped with a little training.[223]

— "I read you as in effect proposing a distinction between a fact's having different valences on different occasions (being reason to do x on one occasion, reason not to do x on another), and the identity of a fact being different on different occasions (for example, the character of a promise-making being different given different background conditions). I'm not sure the idea in the second half of the distinction makes sense; for in what sense would it be that the same fact is a different fact given different

---

[221] It is not without irony that Ayer deploys an originally Platonic example for his empiricist agenda; the unacknowledged source of the example is *Republic*, X.602c-d.
[222] Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, §V.3 (pp. 48-50).
[223] Cf. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, §V.5.

background conditions? What's same about it? At any rate, you seem to think Dancy is somehow in trouble if his view is merely the first one of your disjuncts. But why?"[224] — Dancy is claiming to be a particularist/holist about reasons, in opposition to theorists (Ross et al.) who, he claims, are generalists/atomists about reasons. But Dancy is only a holist about valences, that is, about whether a given factor is a reason *for* or *against* an action. At the level of factors, Dancy is a generalist/atomist. For example, "looking red" is always the same atomic factor, regardless of the different contexts in which it appears.

  — "There is a question about whether this criticism of Dancy's holism can be made to work. (If Dancy is not a holist, then neither is Quine.) Consider 'looking red.' This factor is like a syntactically stabilizable aspect of a context, which we can identify and hold constant for the purposes of comparing or contrasting its function across different contexts, on pain of incommensurability. 'Looking red,' then, may not be exactly the same across these different contexts, since its valence changes, but it is minimally similar. Why isn't this view holistic?" — I have no objection to noticing similarities across different contexts. What I object to is an a priori commitment to a metaphysical theory which distinguishes between essence and accident, that is, between reasons and their valences. At least sometimes, changing a "valence" will change the character of the "reason." And the most accurate description of such a situation will not be an analytic one in which reasons can be distinguished from their valences. Dancy's theory rules out the possibility of gestalt perception. Borrowing Weil's metaphor, I wish to say that an aretaic agent *reads* a situation.[225] What she reads is not composite: just as a reader does not read letters *and* their meanings, so the agent does not perceive reasons *and* their valences.

  Consider, by contrast with Dancy's combinatory atomism, a thoroughgoing holism, which would be committed to something like the following claim: the character of each component is determined by the whole. (And what is "the whole"? Not a thing additional to the components, but rather a function of their interrelations.) Nota bene: I am not endorsing any *theory* of holism — I am just setting it beside (what I am calling) Dancy's combinatory atomism for the sake of contrast. But a thoroughgoing holist would

---

[224] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[225] Cf. Weil, "Essay on the Notion of Reading."

be suspicious of the suggestion that there is a single, uniform feature — "appearing redly" — which can be identified in each of the scenarios (1-3) in the schema above. "Wait a minute," she might say, "*context makes a difference*, and the difference it makes is not restricted to flipping the on/off switch on epistemic or moral valence. Context makes a difference to the *character* of the contextualized components. You represent things as though we are adding situational atoms: *p* (I see red) PLUS *r* (I have taken the RBC drug), et cetera. But (*p* & *r*) is not merely the *sum* of *p* and *r*, even though the schematic representations might mislead us; *p* and (*p* & *r*) represent *two different contexts*, and I might describe them differently. For example: instead of *p*, I might say, That pepper is blood-coloured; instead of (*p* & *r*), I might say, The drug's working! Look at the sky! My point is simply that the context represented by (*p* & *r*) can be differently (but not inaccurately) described so that *p* (qua atomic constituent) disappears. I am *not denying* that this context *can* be represented by (*p* & *r*); what I am denying is the suggestion that the *possibility* of so representing it implies some kind of normative, epistemic *priority* for that type of representation. — *What* type of representation? — A type in which the context's components *must* be *separately identifiable*. This type assumes that a context is analytically structured, that is, susceptible to analysis into independent parts. These parts are independent in the sense that any one of them can recur in a different context (that is, in a network of different parts) while remaining identifiable as the 'same' part. (Like a rude tourist, exported to a foreign country, who remains indifferent to and unaffected by the language and customs there — for example, makes no effort to learn even a morsel of French, but continues to order his drinks and souvenirs in Albertan English.)"

CHAPTER 5. The Broom Prejudice (or the Fiction of a Final Analysis)

Summary

¶ *In this chapter, I test Dancy's theory in an example. I argue that his theory, in this example, is not the best explanation of the agent's perception and action, nor does it provide the best characterization of the facts. Furthermore, I argue that the two-tiered metaphysics on which his theory depends leaves that theory vulnerable to moral skepticism. Dancy develops his metaphysics by analogy with the epistemic theory of defeasible reasoning. That something appears red to me may or may not be a reason for believing that it is red, depending on how this feature interacts with other features of the situation; similarly, that a given action would break a promise may or may not be a reason for doing it, et cetera. This theory is only superficially holistic, at the second tier of valences; at the bottom tier of reasons, it is atomistic. A thoroughgoing holism would need to maintain that the identities of the "parts" (in this case, reasons) are determined by the whole. Dancy's representation of a context with analytically identifiable constituents is just one description, and it is not compulsory. I hold Dancy's theory up to a non-fictional story about Chernobyl concerning a firefighter and his wife. The firefighter has been exposed to radiation, and he is thus dangerous, but his wife decides to keep him company. I consider two different readings of this action: on one reading, she acts bravely (virtuously); on the other reading, she acts rashly (viciously). The story is elaborated and we learn a further fact: the wife is pregnant, and her child later dies from radiation poisoning. Whatever our final verdict, according to Dancy's account, this further fact makes a further contribution to the sum of contributions; by recalculating, we can determine the valence of the total context. However, I argue that some contexts are not analytic structures; they are gestalt structures, that is, structures in which the whole emerges from the relations among the components, and in which the character of the components is determined by the character of the whole. If the Chernobyl story offers an example of such a context, then Dancy's theory is inadequate, because his theory suffers from "the broom prejudice": the assumption that any knowable whole is analytically*

structured, and that it is most clearly known by arriving at a final analysis of its discrete parts. On this theory, the difference between the initial story and its elaboration is additive: let us call the initial story "p," and let us call the added information (that the protagonist is pregnant) "q." The initial story and its elaboration will then equal p + q. But this analysis conflates internal complexification with addition. The additive approach assumes that the character of p remains constant while we add q. By contrast, a gestalt theory will acknowledge that the very character of p is potentially changeable under the aegis of the re-gestalt-ed whole. That is, not only its valence, but its very identity may be affected. Finally, I argue that Dancy's two-tiered metaphysics, which assumes a "non-moral" supervenience base upon which a moral property supervenes, is vulnerable to moral skepticism. But "moral properties" do not result from "non-moral" ones any more than pain-talk refers to hidden sensations of pain.

---

§5.1. Dancy writes:

> The book I have not written would really be an investigation of the subtleties of our moral thought and the actual complexities of life. The book I have written is about how to understand the way in which reasons work, and deals largely with *theories* about reasons rather than with life. As you can see, I would like to have been able to write the other book, the one about life, but this one is all I could manage.[226]

In this lament, Dancy is echoing Wittgenstein. More specifically, he is echoing Wittgenstein's contrast, in his letter to Ludwig von Ficker, between his written and unwritten work. There, Wittgenstein insists that his written work — the *Tractatus* — has delimited the ethical; and the "important" work, the work which, by implication, *is* ethical, is the unwritten one.[227] Dancy represents his more recent work as a turn from arguing by *example* to constructing a *theory*: "In the past I tended to argue largely from example. This persuades some people but not others. Here my argument will be

---

[226] Dancy, EWP, p. 2.
[227] Vide Wittgenstein's letter to Ludwig von Ficker (in Luckhardt, *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, pp. 94-95).

theoretically grounded."[228] The "past" to which Dancy refers is his *Moral Reasons*, specifically Chapter 4. Turning to that book, we find: "I am very bad at examples."[229] Chapter 4 does indeed contain a number of examples, but schematic ones, several of them borrowed from Roy Hattersley, David McNaughton, and David Bakhurst. In more recent work, we find the rare caricature of an example: "Let us consider ... how the supposed invariant reasons function as reasons in the particular case. Take the well-known example of the fat man stuck in the only outlet from a cave that is rapidly filling with water from below. We and our families are caught in between the fat man and the rising water. But we have some dynamite."[230] I want to say: this is not a particular ethical problem at all. It is a comedy, or, at best, a tragedy. As Wittgenstein observes, "it [is] strange that you [can] find books on ethics in which there [is] no mention of a genuine ethical or moral problem."[231]

§5.2. We have been trudging through a discursive wasteland more or less devoid of examples, and I want now to consider one. The example that I wish to consider is difficult, in fact painful, and I fear that it verges on indecency to use it to illustrate a merely theoretical point. I heard this testimony on the radio one evening. It belongs to a woman named Lyudmilla Ignatenko. Here is a transcription of the radio host's introduction: "Her husband Vasily got dosed with about as severe a dose of radiation as somebody can get. He was a firefighter sent in the first day of the explosions of the Chernobyl reactor number four. He was sent in in his shirt sleeves, no protective equipment at all. And was in hospital by seven that night with radiation poisoning so severe that over the next week his skin started coming off in layers. Within two weeks he was coughing up pieces of his lungs and other organs as his body disintegrated from inside. But they were newly-weds. And although it was forbidden, Lyudmilla somehow got herself into the hospital where the radiation patients were, so she could be with him. Inside there the doctors and nurses would give him shots and treat him through this transparent curtain that would shield them from radiation that was now pouring out of his

---

[228] Dancy, "Particularist's Progress," pp. 131-132.
[229] Dancy, MR, p. 37, n. 8.
[230] Dancy, EWP, pp. 77-78.
[231] Rhees, "Some Developments in Wittgenstein's View of Ethics," p. 21.

body, but she went inside that curtain day after day to sit with him."[232] Then a fragment of Lyudmilla Ignatenko's testimony was read aloud:

> I go back to the hospital and there's an orange on the bedside table. A big one, and pink. He's smiling: "I got a gift. Take it." Meanwhile the nurse is gesturing through the film that I can't eat it. It's been near him a while, so not only can you not eat it, you shouldn't even touch it. "Come on, eat it," he says. "You like oranges." I take the orange in my hand. Meanwhile he shuts his eyes and goes to sleep. They were always giving shots to put him to sleep. The nurse is looking at me in horror. And me? I'm ready to do whatever it takes so that he doesn't think about death. And about the fact that his death is horrible, that I'm afraid of him. There's a fragment of some conversation, I'm remembering it. Someone is saying: "You have to understand: this is not your husband anymore, not a beloved person, but a radioactive object with a strong density of poisoning. You're not suicidal. Get ahold of yourself." And I'm like someone who's lost her mind: "But I love him! I love him!" He's sleeping, and I'm whispering: "I love you!" Walking in the hospital courtyard, "I love you." Carrying his sanitary tray, "I love you." I remembered how we used to live at home. He only fell asleep at night after he'd taken my hand. That was a habit of his—to hold my hand while he slept. All night. So in the hospital I take his hand and don't let go.[233]

I do not know how you will respond to this testimony. I sense that one's response will depend, partially, upon one's temperament; and I do not believe that there is a *single* right way to read the testimony or to respond to it. I can say that Lyudmilla Ignatenko's actions are understandable to me. I do not mean that they are third-personally explicable, that a Humean could analytically unpack her psychology and pin the various mistaken beliefs on a dissection board. I mean that I can imagine how *these* actions — sitting on a chair inside the curtain, taking the orange, taking this man's hand — in *this* context *could be necessitated*. I cannot predict how I myself would act if I were similarly situated. But I

---

[232] Glass, "See No Evil," *This American Life*, 3 April 2011.
[233] Ignatenko, "A Solitary Human Voice," pp. 15-16.

can see that *it is possible* for someone to act this way, for her self-described state — "I'm ready to do whatever it takes" — to be understandable. One way of characterizing her action would be to call it an exemplification of *bravery*: "a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear, in the circumstances that have been stated; and it chooses or endures things because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to do so."[234][xl] In particular, bravery seems to be concerned with fear of *death*;[235] and a brave person is not fear*less* of death, since death really is frightening.[236] But she experiences fear in the appropriate measure, and is not mastered by it; the fear does not push her around. And, indeed, Lyudmilla Ignatenko does express appropriate respect for death: "his death is horrible" and "I'm afraid of him." But notice what is astonishing: this fear *does not move her*. She is moved by something else. Regarding her testimony, McDowell could say that what is *salient* for her, what moves her, is the man in the bed, her husband, the fact that he is suffering and the fact that her holding his hand enables him to sleep. That her life is risked by holding his hand is *not* salient. She is not insensitive to the risk; but as McDowell would say, the risk is *silenced* as a consideration for how she should act; it is silenced by something else, by the man, his suffering, and so on.

— "How much hangs on the difference between something being an outweighed consideration and something being silenced, not salient? For example, is the thing supposedly silenced thereby made morally irrelevant?"[237] — The silenced consideration is not *made* morally irrelevant; it *is* morally irrelevant. Recall that McDowell is defending the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge. Not every context will call out for a single response. But where a single response is required by a feature of a context, the aretaic agent will know what that feature is, and will focus on it to the exclusion of other (potentially distracting) features. A less knowledgeable agent will instead weigh putatively competing features. What hangs on the difference between an outweighed consideration and a silenced one is the difference between two accounts of motivation: the Humean account is capable of describing the weighing, but we need the Aristotelian

---

[234] Aristotle, NE, III.7. 1116a10-14.
[235] Cf. Aristotle, NE, III.6.1115a27. Aristotle's analysis is stronger: fear of death must be the proper concern of bravery.
[236] Pace Epicurus (vide his "Letter to Menoeceus").
[237] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

account to describe the phenomenon of silencing.

Attributing bravery to Ignatenko is one way of reading her testimony. But I said that I do not believe that there is a single right way of reading it. A different way is suggested in the same fragment quoted above: "the nurse is gesturing through the film that I can't eat it [the orange].... The nurse is looking at me in horror.... Someone is saying: 'You have to understand: this is not your husband anymore, not a beloved person, but a radioactive object with a strong density of poisoning. You're not suicidal. Get ahold of yourself.' And I'm like someone who's lost her mind ..." On this different reading, Lyudmilla Ignatenko is not brave, but *rash*.[238][xli] Her perception of the context is distorted: what she is *really* confronting is "a radioactive object," an object that is a threat to her. One appropriate response to such an object would be to keep oneself at a safe distance. We can explain her actions by pointing to some items, some beliefs and desires, in her psychological inventory: for example, her love for this object, and her belief that these actions, et cetera. But is there anything in the object that (objectively) requires this behaviour? Arguably, the nurse's horror is not inappropriate: she doesn't love this man, and thus has no reason to take mortal risks for him.

These two readings are significantly different. On the first reading, Lyudmilla Ignatenko is exhibiting a virtue, bravery; and on the second, she is exhibiting a vice, rashness. (These two readings might be roughly coordinated with Ignatenko's and the nurse's perspectives on Ignatenko's actions; and notice that Ignatenko is capable of recognizing the nurse's perspective on her actions.) According to an Aristotelian analysis, these two readings are incompatible: the virtue and the vice in the same domain are mutually exclusive. There must be a fact of the matter (we might assume) that will determine the correct reading; and perhaps we can fix that fact by disambiguating the metaphysical status of the object — the man in the bed. Is the object "a beloved person," *or* "a radioactive object"? — "But," someone might interject, "surely the dilemma you construct is a false one: the man is *obviously* just a radioactive object; how anyone *feels* about the object is *irrelevant* to its metaphysical status, in this case its radioactivity. It might very well be a radioactive object that is (inscrutably, in this case) beloved; but its being beloved has no effect on its metaphysical status — loving it does not eliminate or

---

[238] Cf. Aristotle, NE, III.7.1115b30.

lessen its radioactivity. To make the point acute, consider an analogy: when a husband is abusive, the fact that he is abusive is not affected by any feelings his wife might have for him (or he for her). These areas are terribly complicated, but in many cases we can say that what is *salient* is the fact that a man is a threat to his wife. Here, too: Lyudmilla Ignatenko's behaviour is *explicable*, yes, by reference to items in her psychological inventory; but she has *reason*, good reason, connected with an *objective threat*, which she ignores, to refrain from intimate contact with this man. The dilemma that you are considering, by contrast, promises to forfeit the *critical* dimension of reason-giving, and to hold rationality hostage to the idiosyncrasies of individual psychologies."

But the example *is* complex: for it is *possible* to see this radioactive object in such a way that its radioactivity (the threat it presents to one's life) is *not salient*.[xlii] This possibility is demonstrated by Lyudmilla Ignatenko's actions. It is possible to be brave in relation to a radioactive object; that is, it is possible to love this man, even though he is also a radioactive object. I do not wish to legislate any normative priority for this way of seeing; I do not wish to prescribe this way of seeing to the nurse (or to anyone else); I do not wish to insist that this man *ought* to be loved. But nor do I wish to imply that Lyudmilla Ignatenko's love for her husband is just a subjective, dispensable projection onto a value-neutralized world — as though Vasily Ignatenko really is nothing more than a radioactive object. (— "Well, we could say that their love changes the moral geometry of the situation – changes it objectively.")[239]

§5.3. I want now to render the example even more complex. I have recounted the entirety of what I heard on the radio. But when I tracked down the complete text of Lyudmilla Ignatenko's testimony, I learned something new: she was six-months pregnant when she went to visit her husband in the hospital. And realizing that she would not be permitted entrance if the doctors knew, she lied about her pregnancy.[240] Roughly three months after the death of her husband, she goes into labour.

---

[239] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

[240] "I can see already I need to hide that I'm pregnant. They won't let me see him! It's good I'm thin, you can't really tell anything" (Ignatenko, "A Solitary Human Voice," p. 9). And later: "If I'd told you, you'd send me home. It was a sacred lie!" (Ignatenko, "A Solitary Human Voice," p. 14).

> They showed her to me—a girl. "Natashenka," I called out. "Your father named you Natashenka." She looked healthy. Arms, legs. But she had cirrhosis of the liver. Her liver had twenty-eight roentgen. Congenital heart disease. Four hours later they told me she was dead.[241]

Again, I do not know how you will respond to this further feature of the story. I can imagine a range of responses. Minimally, I think that we can agree that the story is more complex than we initially thought. I suggested earlier that it verges on indecency to use this story to illustrate a merely theoretical point; I want now to elaborate that suggestion. Consider this story in the light of a theory of defeasible reasoning; consider it before and after the addition of this new item of "information." How does that new item of information affect the overall "moral valence" of Lyudmilla Ignatenko's situation? As soon as we move away from the security of artificially controlled experimental conditions (appearing redly and red-blue converter drugs; dry, well-made matches and electromagnetic fields, etc.) and into even slightly textured ethical examples, the metaphysics presupposed by a theory of defeasible reasoning becomes less plausible. According to that theory, we should be able to perform something like the following analysis: for the sake of convenience, let us call the first block of Ignatenko's testimony p, and the second block r. Now we can say: p, in isolation, has some determinate moral valence. When we add r to p, it affects the settled moral valence in some determinate way (maybe it attenuates or intensifies it, defeats it or not). — "Actually, this seems to me exactly what's going on. This doesn't mean that now the way she ought to act is definitely different. But it does mean that now it's even more complicated whether she ought to act that way – there is a further consideration against."[242] — I agree that the situation is complicated. My disagreement with Dancy concerns *the way* in which the situation becomes complicated. According to his theory, the overall valence of the situation is the sum of an additive operation. *Some* situations may be perceived in this way: sometimes we deliberate by weighing considerations against each other. This way of looking at a situation is proper to the enkrateia or akrasia. But some situations are not sums of their parts, and our perception of those situations does not consist in weighing

---

[241] Ignatenko, "A Solitary Human Voice," p. 21.
[242] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

considerations.

Returning to the equation representing Ignatenko's testimony: if I thought, after long reflection, that I understood the "moral valence" of *p,* and am now, suddenly, confronted with *r,* and asked to recalculate the valence for (*p & r*), it is no simple matter for me. Nor should it be assumed without argument, I think, that there must be a definite answer, and that any difficulties I might experience are mechanical, arithmetical ones. For I might say, "I thought that I was being told a certain story, but I see that I was being told a very different one. I can't just keep all of my former thinking about the first story, and adjust for this fresh 'information' — no, this fresh 'information' changes everything. I need to start my thinking over from scratch, and try to understand this different story." At least sometimes, I want to suggest, a situation is (or has the structure of) a *gestalt*. (By "gestalt," I mean a non-analytic, resonant whole.)[243] Although I might learn about the situation in a narrative (that is, linear) order, it does not follow that the situation itself is composed of atomic parts, narratively ordered. (For example: suppose that I am slowly circling a sculpture; from the back, where I start, it appears to be an amorphous blob, but as I circle to the front, and see the head, I recognize that it is a seal. It does not follow that the sculpture really is a blob *plus* a head. Indeed, recognizing that the sculpture *is a seal* helps me to appreciate that what I mistook for a blob is a fluidly sculpted continuation of the seal's body.) What we have called fresh "information" is just a perception of a further aspect, which perception helps *to re-contextualize* the whole.

— "I take you to mean that the addition of a fact makes you see the whole thing differently, makes you re-gestalt it. How is that inimical to Dancy? Is your worry that if it's gestalted, then it's not a logical accumulation of facts? But how are the two incompatible. The new gestalt is supervening on a different subvenience base, one with different facts in it; so a new gestalt is both what we would expect, and is explainable by the addition of the new fact, or by the totality of facts which now include the new fact."[244] — The structure of a sum total is different from the structure of a gestalt. A sum

---

[243] The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* offers a usable definition: "An organized whole in which each individual part affects every other, the whole being more than the sum of its parts ... [G, = form, shape]."

[244] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011. Alice MacLachlan has suggested that there are at least three kinds of case: (1) addition, (2) transformation, and (3) transformation by

total may become more complicated by the addition of further factors; and this complication may prompt us to recalculate. And when we perceive a further aspect of a gestalt structure, we do perceive *more* of the gestalt; but what we perceive, in this latter case, is not quantitative. Suppose one is looking at the bottom half of a portrait, depicting a mouth and nose, while the upper half of the portrait is covered. When the cover is removed to reveal the eyes, one suddenly recognizes the face of an old friend. It would be odd to explain the recognition in this way: first I saw two things, a mouth and nose, and then a third thing was added, a pair of eyes; the sum of these three things is a face. We can flesh out the difference by imagining that I have three puzzle pieces in my palm, depicting mouth, nose, and eyes respectively: so I have a sum of parts, but I do not have a face. I might even understand that these are parts of a face — without recognizing whose face it is. — "But a *logical* accumulation isn't a mere heap! It matters *how* the parts are related to each other." Agreed; but at this point the analogy breaks down. The relations among the components of a face are not inferential relations, but spatial ones.

A gestalt structure and an analytic structure (namely, "a logical accumulation of facts") are different. The relation of a gestalt to its aspects, unlike the relation of a sum to its parts, *is not a relation of supervenience*. The former relation is a reciprocal relation of co-determination: the aspects determine the character of the whole, and the whole determines the character of the aspects. Consider an example offered by Max Wertheimer: he contrasts two brief melodies, each consisting in five notes.[245] The three middle notes of both melodies — when considered independently of their respective contexts — are "the same." But in the context of each melody, framed by different notes, these three notes are different. We may choose to hold these three notes constant for the purpose of contrast, but it would be a mistake to infer that they are atoms belonging to some substratum. If we insist that we can always substitute an analytic structure for a gestalt structure, that we can, without loss of meaning, re-describe the gestalt in analytic terms, then we have sacrificed at least one phenomenon to theory — the epistemic stance of the aretaic agent. Recall that the aretaic agent's perception differs from the perception

---

addition. Alternatively, we might distinguish between two kinds of gestalt perception: (a) "the dawning of aspects," and (b) "seeing x as y" (cf. Zwicky, W&M, L25).
[245] Wertheimer, qtd in Zwicky, W&M, R93.

of the enkratic agent. The latter does perceive the situation as an analytic structure; she sees the field of reasons fractured; she weighs the pros and cons. After she has acted, she should be able to tell a story about how she deliberated, explaining why she chose to act on one consideration rather than another. ("I recognized the danger to the fetus and to myself, and I was afraid, but I decided that, all things considered, keeping him company was more important.") But the aretaic agent does not perceive in this way. She does not see a multiplicity of competing considerations. One feature leaps out, and she is moved to respond to it. Afterwards, she might say things like "I was ready to do whatever it takes." Recall Weil's example: "The words of the Breton ship's boy to the journalist who asked him how he had been able to act as he did: 'There was nothing else for it.'"[246] I wish to notice two things about this example: the boy testifies that his action was *necessitated*, and he offers this testimony in response to being asked *how he had been able* to act as he did. According to this example, the perception of salience empowers the agent to act (in analytic terms, the perception is both necessary and sufficient for action). If Dancy wishes to substitute his general analysis for the particular testimonies of the agents themselves, even at the expense of some of those testimonies, then the burden of justification should fall to him.

§5.4. In his earlier work, Dancy makes some very promising remarks that sound, on the surface, sympathetic to gestalt perception.[247] He considers the metaphor of *shape*: "Some of the properties of a situation are relevant to the question what one should do, and some are not. And even among those which are relevant, some are more relevant than others. These relevant features are *salient*; they stick out or obtrude, and should catch our attention if we are alert.... Since there are normally several different salient features, related to each other in various ways, a full view of the circumstances will not only see each feature for what it is but will also see how they are related to each other. Such a view will grasp the *shape* of the circumstances."[248] (The closest that Dancy comes to

---

[246] Weil, G&G, p. 49.
[247] Vide, esp., MR, §7.2.
[248] Dancy, MR, p. 112.

defining "shape" is to say that it is like the "narrative structure" of a situation;[249] one can depict the "shape" of a situation, and give reasons for one's response to that situation, by telling a story about it.) The metaphor is promising, as I said, but underdeveloped, and also unduly complicated. It seems that the view involves properties, which themselves possess the property of relevance; in their turn, relevant properties can be salient ones, and salient properties can be shapely. I cannot see the point of these multiple theoretical distinctions and epicycles; and the burden of justification should belong to the author of the garrulous theory. Dancy never tests this theory on an example; but consider any of the examples mentioned in Chapter 3, the example of Blair Bater or the example of Lora Shrake. Recall that Shrake says, "here's the problem, here's what I need to do." If we press her for more detail, asking what, exactly, moved her, she might say, "That woman was being mauled by a bull." — What, then, would be achieved by analysing this situation into four categories: (1) properties; (2) relevant properties; (3) relevant properties which are salient; and (4) salient properties which are shapely? Even if we would not be moved to act by what Shrake mentions, nevertheless what she identifies as salient is a reason which renders her act understandable. Dancy claims that he is "heavily influenced" by McDowell,[250] but McDowell's distinction — between salience and the other considerations silenced by the salient one — is more elegant.

Dancy does try to inject some content into his concept of shape; he suggests that it might be related, somehow, to "the so-called thin moral properties of rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness."[251] He considers two options: the first is to see these thin moral properties "as resultant properties, discernible independently of the properties from which they result ... these thin properties will always be the most salient ones."[252] The second, alternative option is "to hold that the thin moral properties are not further

---

[249] Dancy, MR, p. 113. But a narrative structure is not identical with a gestalt structure. For a discussion of some of the differences, vide Zwicky, "Lyric, Narrative, Memory."
[250] Dancy, MR, p. 126, n. 4.
[251] Dancy, MR, p. 115. "Thick properties are so called because they have more empirical content than the thin ones have. Generousness is a thick property; if you know that an action is generous, you know more about what it is like than if you merely know that it is good" (ibid., p. 126, n. 5). Dancy credits the idea of thin properties to Wiggins; but as I shall show in Chapter 8, the idea is actually due to Anscombe.
[252] Dancy, MR, p. 115.

properties just like the others. Instead of taking the thin properties as the final level in the resultance tree, we are to see an action's being right or one which ought to be done as identical with the *shape* of the circumstances — what it is about them which calls for just this action. To see the action as required by the circumstances is to see the situation as having a certain shape.... The thin property results from (exists in virtue of) the properties that are salient here without being among those properties itself."[253]

  I have some difficulty understanding these two options, much less sifting between them. Both options assume that thin moral properties are *resultant* properties; the question seems to be: at which stratum, in this theoretical picture, should we pin these thin moral properties? According to the first option, we pin them *among* the salient properties (all of which properties result from further properties below them); according to the second option, we pin them *above* the salient properties — that is, they (the moral properties) *result from* the salient properties, and we *call* these resultant moral properties "shape." But the abstraction machine and the metaphor mixer have been cranked sufficiently high that I begin to lose a grasp on what is being talked about. Let me return to Dancy's own words: "Here we are trying to tread a difficult path between saying that the thin property is distinct from the thicker ones from which it results, and saying that it is somehow identical with them ... The notion of shape enables us to do this. The shape which the thick properties adopt is not exactly distinct from them there, but it is not quite identical with them either. We could perhaps express this intermediate position by saying that the thin property is *constituted* by the shape of the thick ones in this case."[254] That concluding passage approaches coherence, but remains confused. I have said that Dancy's metaphor of shape is promising, but his formulation of that metaphor is flawed, and his mistake is a mistake of the imagination. That mistake consists in imagining that shape is a (resultant) property,[xliii] and that analysis can separate shape from what is shaped. As I have already suggested, the relation between a gestalt and its aspects is not one of supervenience — nor is it one of resultance.

§5.5. In Dancy's disingenuous atomism, I detect another analytic prejudice: I shall call it

---

[253] Dancy, MR, p. 115.
[254] Dancy, MR, p. 116.

the fiction of a final analysis, or the prejudice of the broom.

> When I say: 'My broom is in the corner',—is this really a statement about the broomstick and the brush? Well, it could at any rate be replaced by a statement giving the position of the stick and the position of the brush. And this statement is surely a further analysed form of the first one.—But why do I call it 'further analysed'?... Suppose that, instead of saying 'Bring me the broom,' you said 'Bring me the broomstick and the brush that is fitted on to it!'—Isn't the answer: 'Do you want the broom? Why do you put it so oddly?'[255]

Suppose that I don't know what a broom is. Then you might say to me: "Do you know what a stick is? And a brush? Well, a broom is a brush fitted to the end of a stick." Or you might say: "A broom is the sort of tool that is used for sweeping." Or you might say: "That thing in the corner, not the mop, but the other one: that is a broom." None of these gestures, by itself, might be sufficient to teach me the concept *broom*, but any or all of them might be appropriately used in the process of such teaching. What I mean to say is that, on those occasions when I don't understand the reason that you have offered, sometimes an analysis will be one heuristic to assist me in understanding. But analysis needn't exhaust the available heuristics. And from the possibility of analytically distinguishing constituents of a reason, it does not follow that all reasons *must* consist in secret constituents, nor that all reasons *must* be analysed to be understood. Sometimes analysis *does* clarify; the prejudice consists in assuming that clarity *requires* analysis. This prejudice might be expressed in various ways: something has not been clearly understood unless it has been analysed; or if something *can* be clarified, then it *must* be analysable; or if something *is analysable*, then it *must* be analytically structured (that is, it must consist of relatively atomistic parts, which are linearly related and hierarchically ordered). Notice that these different expressions aren't equivalent: we might understand some things without analysing them; and when we don't understand something, there might be non-analytic ways of clarifying it; and the possibility of our applying a procedure to a thing does not establish that the thing's structure answers to the procedure. More generally, the possibility of replacing *x* with *y* (or of transforming *x* into *y* or of

---

[255] Wittgenstein, PI, §60.

seeing *x* as *y*) does not show that *x* really is (that is, really is reducible to) *y*. It is not only analytic philosophers who succumb to the temptation; some poets succumb, too: for example, "we see things as solid, *when in fact* they consist mostly of empty space."[256] I do not deny that scientific analysis can tell us truths about atoms and void; what I am denying is that these truths must undermine our acceptance of the solidity of things, that these truths reveal the solidity of this table to be nothing more than a superficial, *unreal appearance*.

One reason that I wish to resist Dancy's analysis is that it leaves one vulnerable to exactly the kind of skepticism championed by someone like Gilbert Harman. All that Harman needs is the gap opened by a two-tiered metaphysics: a gap between *kinds* of properties, with the second tier of properties *supervening* (somehow) on the first. The relationship between tiers is then susceptible to the demand for explanation, and the skeptic is entitled to make this demand of someone who identifies as a moral realist (someone who claims to believe in moral facts). — "Won't your preferred analysis have this problem too? We hear a story, or find ourselves in a situation; and some things seem salient, others, silenced. And now a philosopher can come along and ask how we get from the story, or from the situation, to the saliencing of one thing, the silencing of another."[257] — But salience is not a *property* attaching to an object. It is a function of the polydimensional relations among attendant, focus, and context. We can recognize salience to the degree that we can share the perspective of the attendant. But when we perceive salience, we are not perceiving anything additional to the focus. — "Identifying salience with the focus elucidates nothing. You still need to explain why *x* is salient or focussed in this context, while *y* is salient or focussed in that context." — Consider, by analogy, being *centred*: something's being centred is nothing other than its standing in certain relations with other things. For example, an actor stands centre-stage when she stands equidistant from both wings. — "A relational property is nevertheless a property. And you still owe us an explanation of how this property obtains in a given context. In Weil's example, what *makes* this person's thirst salient?" — There is not a single decision procedure which we can apply to all contexts to detect what is salient. Rather,

---

[256] Domanski, "Poetry and the Sacred," p. 11; emphasis added.
[257] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

we are introduced to illustrative cases, and, with practice, eventually we learn how to go on to new cases.

Returning to Harman's horrible example: a group of hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it.[258] And the (callous) skeptic can say, "There is an epistemological problem here, and a metaphysical one: you observe the hoodlums igniting the gasoline-saturated cat, and your knee-jerk judgement is that what they are doing is wrong; but is their act *really* wrong? How, exactly, would wrongness *result* from igniting a gasoline-saturated cat? What special perceptual organ would you use to detect this wrongness?" — And I want to respond: the analysis which carves out a "non-moral" resultance base and a resultant moral property is already corrupt; if we commit ourselves to that analysis, which the skeptic is happy to share with us, then we are already lost. That analysis makes wrongness (among other moral properties) look like a *peculiar* kind of property, inscrutably hovering over everyday things, bereft of an explicable connection with them. But "moral properties" do not *result* from "non-moral properties," any more than pain-talk *refers* to darkly hidden, irredeemably private sensations.

> How do words *refer* to sensations?—There doesn't seem to be any problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day, and give them names? But how is the connexion between the name and the thing named set up? This question is the same as: how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations?—of the word "pain" for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensation, and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour.
>
> "So you are saying that the word 'pain' really means crying?"—On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it.[259]

---

[258] Harman, "Ethics and Observation," p. 37a. Notice, incidentally, that "hoodlum" (Harman's own term) is already a normatively thick concept.

[259] Wittgenstein, PI, §244. The diction of "replacing" is not quite felicitous, I think. It is not as though crying is made obsolete by pain-talk; but rather that each can serve in the other's place. But I suspect that that is what Wittgenstein means.

Here is the analogy between *reference* and *resultance*: prima facie, in cases of sensation talk and moral talk, the referent is supposed to be unobservable. And then the relation between the talk and its referent seems peculiar and requiring special explanation. But what if sensation talk does not refer to hidden mental states; what if it is, instead, a linguistic gesture which we have learned to associate with non-linguistic, reflexive gestures of sensation. And now we can use these gestures interchangeably. Similarly, the resultance of the moral from the "non-moral" is allegedly weird. We have no trouble referring to the "non-moral," which is observable; however, the moral is supposed to be problematic: "how is the connexion between the non-moral and the moral set up?" What I want to suggest, by analogy with Wittgenstein's treatment of sensation talk, is that we learn to associate explicitly moral talk with "the primitive, the natural expressions" of joy and sadness; and we can then use this moral talk in place of the expressions.[260] We must be careful here, because I am not endorsing anything like Ayer's crude expressivism. Our expressions of joy and sadness will be *responses* to joyous and saddening aspects of the world. And in particular contexts, such expressions can be appropriate or not.

— "The question of whether there can be a true, compact ethics, or whether ethics is particularist, seems separable from the problem of whether value can be inferred from fact, whether we must posit objective value facts, and so on."[261] — In principle, these two positions might be separable. But Dancy argues for particularism by constructing a metaphysical theory. According to Dancy, the identities of reasons (or factors) are independent of their valences; and this assumption of independence permits him to hold the reasons constant while comparing different contexts, and thus to conclude, from the variability of valences across contexts, that moral generalism is false. In other words, Dancy's moral particularism depends on his two-tiered metaphysical theory. According to my "deconstructive" reading, Dancy re-inscribes generalism at the first-tier of reasons (or factors). Instead of a reason's *valence* remaining constant from context to context, it is the reason's *identity* which remains constant. I have suggested that this theory is not genuinely holistic; it is a theory of combinatory atomism in the space of reasons. Regardless of whether that deconstructive reading is persuasive, it is

---

[260] Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIP11S.
[261] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

minimally true that Dancy distinguishes between a reason and its valence. And that distinction is congruent with the (Humean) distinction between fact and value. The variable valence is the moral charge of the reason — and this means that a fact can be distinguished from its value. At least since J.L. Mackie's "argument from queerness,"[262] the notion of a "moral fact" has seemed peculiar to many of us. But Mackie's caricature of the Platonic epistemology is spurious; according to Julia Annas, "The notion of a peculiar intuition is a construct of the empiricist assumption we saw at work in Mackie's interpretation, and does not correspond to anything in Plato."[263] Virtue — such as bravery, et cetera — is a *skill* (or art or expertise), and it is no less perceptible in the ordinary world than other skills such as carpentry or playing the clarinet. Furthermore, both Hume and following him Mackie make an undefended assumption. Hume writes, "For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason shou'd be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are <u>entirely different</u> from it."[264] Compare Mackie: "What is the *connection* between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty — say, causing pain just for fun — and the moral fact that it is wrong?"[265] What is the *connexion* between the "natural fact" and the *entirely different* "moral fact"? This ostensible coordination problem is an invention of moral theory. Mackie's example is self-undermining: there is no connexion between a wrong act and an act that is deliberately cruel because they are the same act. If we are puzzled about how an instance of deliberate cruelty gets to be wrong, then we have not yet understood how these concepts are internally related.

---

[262] Mackie, *Ethics*, §1.9 (pp. 38-42). The argument needs either a re-christening or a critique by queer theory.

[263] Annas, "Moral Knowledge as Practical Knowledge," p. 243. Of the three assumptions identified by Annas (ibid., §II), the crucial one is that "our epistemological access to values is 'utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else'" (ibid., p. 238).

[264] Hume, *Treatise*, III.I.§2.¶27; underlining added.

[265] Mackie, *Ethics*, §1.9 (p. 41); emphasis added.

§5.6. Consider the Platonic theorems of virtue: "Courage is spirit disciplined by wisdom";[266] "Virtue is the only thing that always follows wisdom."[267] Or the sorts of judgements that Wittgenstein discusses in his "Lecture on Ethics": "You *ought* to want to behave better."[268] Or homely old moral platitudes deploying "thin" moral concepts: "Murder is wrong." — Pace Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*, such thoughts aren't unsayable, since they've just been said. — But what I want to suggest is that these linguistic formulae are flimsy and graceless, that they can just barely carry an ounce of an overburden of meaning. Zwicky writes, "The 'theorems' of virtue can, of course, be articulated, rehearsed, and memorized ... but such theorems have as much meaning in the absence of understanding as mathematical theorems which are memorized but not understood."[269] Whatever ethical understanding is, it is not reducible to such linguistic formulae. My memorizing moral judgements or platitudes, my ability to reproduce these platitudes on demand or to bring them before my mind — none of this touches the important point, which is that I should be able to apply my understanding in appropriate contexts — that I should be able to *act*. And the linguistic formulae play, at best, only a partial rôle in helping me to act. (This is not to say that these formulae are irrelevant to ethical understanding. In appropriate contexts, flashing one of these formulae might be one way of *showing* my understanding, or of assisting someone else to understanding. But it is only *one* way; and the contexts are fewer than we might at first imagine.)

As Dancy has suggested, one meaningful use of general moral principles, in a mature ethical life, may be *to remind*. But such principles cannot usually be used *to transmit information* to a mature agent. Consider the following policy recommendation, drawn from a recent textbook of political philosophy: "Western governments should accept their responsibilities."[270] But what does this *mean*? Who is the *audience*? The recommendation occurs at the end of an argument that poverty in "developing" countries is a major cause of child labour, and that affluent "developed" countries bear some causal

---

[266]Cf. Zwicky, *Plato as Artist*, p. 69
[267] Cf. Zwicky, PA, pp. 28-29.
[268] Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," p. 5. Or Rainer Maria Rilke in his "Archaic Torso of Apollo": "You must change your life."
[269] Zwicky, PA, p. 70. Cf. Zwicky, W&M, L90-L91.
[270] Pierik, "Child Labor and Global Inequality." *Moral Issues in Global Perspective*. Vol. I. Ed. C. Koggel. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 263.

responsibility for that poverty. Suppose that the recommendation were addressed to an individual: "When you have exploited someone, you *should* accept responsibility." In reply, I am inclined to say, "Of course." These moralistic exhortations have *the form of pieces of information*; and yet, I want to ask, whom could they possibly be informing, and of what? Consider the following sentences: "Darrell Dexter is the Premier of Nova Scotia"; "The grapefruit is in the fridge"; "Exploitation is wrong." If I didn't know who the Premier of Nova Scotia was, or where the grapefruit was, you could *tell* me. But now imagine — if you can — someone who is *genuinely* ignorant about the ethical nature of exploitation: let me ask: can you *inform* this person? "Exploitation is wrong" — to whom, in what contexts, can I meaningfully address this sentence? An enormous amount of stage-setting is required to provide a context in which this sentence can have a (non-absurd) sense, and even then, that sense may be superfluous.

Consider Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*.[271] A sentence such as "Exploitation is wrong" is analogous to G.E. Moore's infamous assertion, "Here is one hand," by which he hoped, in vain, to prove the existence of the external world. This insight has been articulated by Nigel Pleasants in his "Wittgenstein, Ethics and Basic Moral Certainty." While I have reservations regarding various parts of Pleasants's argument, I agree with his thesis: general moral principles are *like* the so-called "hinge propositions" of the later Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. (Since we so rarely have occasion to use the "hinge propositions," I hesitate to call them "propositions"; they are rather more like a proto-linguistic and proto-epistemic riverbed,[272] out of which propositions and beliefs emerge.) But it makes sense to say "Here is one hand" only in exceptional contexts; for example, if I am admitted to a military hospital after having detonated a mine. I cannot brandish the external world for scrutiny — as I might brandish my hand to the surgeon — because the external world *is* the context in which brandishing and scrutinizing could take place. Similarly with the sentence "Exploitation is wrong" — its intelligibility *presupposes* an extremely complex ethical form of life — and in such a context, the sentence is superfluous. I can imagine that such sentences, *in conjunction with various other extra-linguistic strategies*, might serve some rudimentary rôle in the context of an early ethical

---

[271] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§460-461.
[272] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§97, 99.

education. But in those contexts, the student is not being *informed*, but rather *trained*: to connect these linguistic gestures with other gestural reflexes of disgust, or sorrow, or horror, and so on.[273]

§5.7. Let me return to the difference between theory and example from the beginning of this chapter. Consider Wittgenstein's vehement rejection of moral theory:

> Is value a particular state of mind? Or a form inhering in certain data of consciousness? My answer is: Whatever one said to me, I would reject it; not indeed because the explanation is false but because it is an *explanation*.
>
> If anybody offers me a *theory*, I would say: No, no, that doesn't interest me. Even if the theory were true that would not interest me—it would not be *what* I seek. The ethical cannot be taught. If I needed a theory in order to explain to another the essence of the ethical, the ethical would have no value at all.
>
> At the end of my lecture on ethics, I spoke in the first person. I believe that is quite essential. Here nothing more can be established, I can only appear as a person speaking for myself.
>
> *For me* the theory has no value. A theory gives me nothing.[274]

Let me notice a couple of things about this passage. Wittgenstein connects theorization with explanation. And even if the theory were true, he insists, he would reject it qua theory. Furthermore, he seems to imply that the value (or perhaps the meaning) of "the ethical" depends on its being untheorizable. We can reconstruct the reasons for these remarks by contextualizing them against the background of the Tractarian theory of meaning and Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" (to which he refers in Waismann's notes above). A theory would be built out of fact-stating propositions (ultimately analysable into names referring to objects). According to the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* and the "Lecture," facts are radically distinct from values.[275] Hence there cannot be a science (or

---

[273] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §§6, 15, 26, 49, 244.

[274] Wittgenstein, qtd in Waismann, "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," pp. 15-16.

[275] Wittgenstein seems uncritically to accept this Humean distinction. (Coincidentally,

theory) of ethics.[276] But if we relinquish the metaphysics, are any of these thoughts salvageable? I think so. Wittgenstein's resistance to moral theory may be transposed into a resistance to the demand to legitimate ethical understanding in the terms of discursive theory. Regarding analytic theories of metaphor, Zwicky writes, "developing an understanding of metaphor is taken to be tantamount to developing a *theory* of how metaphor manages to (appear to) mean. // What this highlights is the fact that systematic philosophy's notion of understanding is in fact a form of legitimation: a person cannot claim to have understood the meaning of a metaphor unless he or she can provide a 'rational reconstruction', *criteria*."[277] Analogously, ethical understanding — even particularist ethical understanding — might be taken to be tantamount to having a moral theory. Or, minimally, ethical understanding might be taken to be tantamount to having tacit but potentially theorizable moral presuppositions. But there is a difference, which Dancy himself acknowledges, between a phronetic approach to particular ethical contexts and a theory of "moral particularism."

What is at stake may be thrown into relief by assembling a few of Aristotle's methodological remarks:

> Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions ... Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admit of much variety and fluctuation of opinion ... And goods also give rise to a similar fluctuation ... We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premisses to indicate the truth roughly and in outline ...[278]

> And we must also remember what has been said before, and not look for precision in all things alike, but in each class of things such

---

Weber makes the same assumption in his lecture "Science as a Vocation," pp. 20-21.)
[276] Wittgenstein, TLP #6.42-6.421 and "Lecture on Ethics," p. 12.
[277] Zwicky, LP, L83; for definitions of "criterion," vide ibid., R41. Cf. Zwicky, "Dream Logic," pp. 141-142, and Zwicky, "What Is Lyric Philosophy?," §26.
[278] Aristotle, NE, I.3.1094b10-20.

precision as accords with the subject-matter, and so much as is appropriate to the inquiry....[279]

> Since, then, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use), we must examine the nature of actions ... But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning, that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation.[280]

Three times Aristotle emphasizes that the account of ethics must fit the subject-matter: it must be given "roughly and in outline." Beside this claim, I wish to set Wittgenstein's only explicitly ethical remark from the *Investigations*: "For imagine having to sketch a sharply defined picture 'corresponding' to a blurred one. In the latter there is a blurred red rectangle: for it you put down a sharply defined one.... Won't you then have to say: 'Here I might just as well draw a circle or heart as a rectangle, for all the colours merge. Anything—and nothing—is right.'——And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics."[281] The (feigned) despair is premature: it is prompted by importing, into this "blurred" context, an inappropriately

---

[279] Aristotle, NE, I.7.1098a25.

[280] Aristotle, NE, II.2.1103b25-1104a5. Irwin argues strenuously against a particularist interpretation of these passages, and concludes: "In ethics as in natural science, Aristotle believes he can find theoretically significant generalizations" (Irwin, "Ethics as an Inexact Science," p. 129).

[281] Wittgenstein, PI, §77.

"sharp" standard of accuracy. Instead of clinging, rigidly, to this standard, we might defer to the discernment of the phronetic agent and the Lesbian rule.[282]

Consider Aristotle's comparison of ethics with the art of medicine and of navigation: in all three areas, when the agent is faced with a particular case, she herself must "consider what is appropriate to the occasion" — and what is appropriate in this particular case is not prescribed by "any art [τέχνη] or precept [παραγγελία]." If we are attempting to train an agent's sensitivity — instead of transmitting a decision procedure — then our approach might be other than theoretical (or might involve other-than-theoretical strategies). We might expose her to particular exemplars of the sort of sensitivity that we are trying to train; or we might expose her to particular contexts in which that sensitivity is exercised. Both Shiner and McDowell compare the subsequent three books to a gallery of character sketches or a set of exemplars. McDowell writes that Aristotle gives "his character sketches of the possessors of the various virtues in books 3 to 5 of *NE*."[283] Compare Shiner: "Fundamentally, the φρόνιμος is just one more character in the succession of 'types' that Aristotle parades past us in the *E.N.*, like the incontinent, the self-indulgent man, the great-souled man, the properly proud man, the courageous man, and the rest. These persons are not Platonic ideals; they are living flesh-and-blood embodiments of the best and the worst in ordinary human nature."[284] In general, we might say that this methodology is not dissimilar to Wittgenstein's: Aristotle "does not try to *say*" what phronesis is; "he *shows* what it is by portraying various cases."[285]

Dancy is not really a particularist, but a polemicist. All of the intellectual energy becomes devoted to engineering trench warfare, and in the midst of the internecine skirmishes, the original *insight* gets lost.[xliv] Constructing and fortifying a theory, and contending against other theories, is one way of doing philosophy; but it is not the only way, and here we might witness some of the diverse exemplars from the history of

---

[282] Recall Aristotle, NE, V.10.1137b30.

[283] McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," p. 28, n. 12.

[284] Shiner, "Ethical Perception in Aristotle," p. 80. This claim in unfair to Plato, whose characters are more "flesh-and-blood" than Aristotle's.

[285] Winch, MI, p. 180. Winch is talking about Kierkegaard's approach to getting clear about "purity of heart," and comparing it with Wittgenstein's methodology. I have adapted the comparison to include Aristotle.

philosophy. (Sokrates. Weil. Et cetera.) Consider, for example, Wittgenstein's characterization of his work as *reproductive* and *clarificatory*:

> I think there is some truth in my idea that I really only think reproductively. I don't believe that I have ever *invented* a line of thinking, I have always taken one over from someone else. I have simply straightaway seized on it with enthusiasm for my work of clarification....
> — What I invent are new *similes*.
>
> ... What I do think essential is carrying out the work of clarification with COURAGE: otherwise it becomes just a clever game.[286]

In the next entry, Wittgenstein compares his work to the framing or hanging of pictures (which have been painted by someone else);[287] and later, he suggests that his originality belongs to the soil rather than the seed.[288] In both analogies, Wittgenstein is conceiving of his work as the work of (re-)*contextualization*, and what is contextualized is contributed by someone else. His error (if indeed he does make this error) consists in undervaluing the work of contextualization, and envying the genius of the seed. But they are just different *kinds* of creativity. Consider the crucial importance of framing — that is, composing — a photograph. The analogy is exact. The art of photography is almost (but not entirely) exhausted by the work of composing the photograph. And consequently there have been debates about whether photography is art or "merely" reproductive documentary. It can seem as though the photographer is contributing nothing, as though all of the work is done by the world (or, in acute cases where the subject-matter is itself an artefact, by another artist).[289] But composition can make all the difference: between a profound photograph that shows us an aspect of a thing that we have missed,[290] and a shallow photograph that captures the same thing, obscured by its usual shabby aspect.

---

[286] Wittgenstein, C&V, pp. 18e-19e.

[287] Wittgenstein, C&V, pp. 19e-20e.

[288] Wittgenstein, C&V, p. 36e.

[289] The acuteness becomes extreme in the genre of so-called "conceptual art" with examples such as Duchamp's "ready-mades." I am inclined to call the infamous fountain a limiting case: it is a splendid, inspired gesture, and a good political joke. But it is not complex enough to be an art*work*.

[290] Consider Yousef Karsh's photos of Pablo Casals. (Thanks to Michael Hymers for suggesting this example.)

With respect for the construction of theories, and for the genuine insights which they are designed to guard, I want to acknowledge this different way of doing philosophy. If we are concerned not with inventing a novel theory, but with clarifying old and entrenched habits of thinking, then this concern should be reflected in our methodology.

> ... We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.... The problems are solved, not by reporting new experience, but by arranging what we have always known.[291]

> Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces everything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain....[292]

> The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.[293]

Notice the repeated aversion to explanation; this aversion is consistent with Wittgenstein's rejection of moral theory above in conversation with Waismann. I might speculatively sketch Wittgenstein's reasoning as follows: if two agents are to understand each other, ethically — where understanding includes disagreement — then they must share some form of life; and if they do not share a form of life, then no explanatory moral theory will transmit the understanding across the gap. When Wittgenstein says that philosophy "simply puts everything before us," he is not making a descriptive claim; he is making a normative claim about how we should practise philosophy. One way of doing philosophy is by building an argumentative theory — with inferential relations between its premises and conclusions — which is designed to explain a phenomenon. However, if the experience of understanding is "the dawning of an aspect that is simultaneously a perception or reperception of a whole," then one way the facilitation of understanding may proceed "is by the judicious selection and arrangement of elements of that whole. Another is by setting up of objects of comparison."[294] Furthermore, Zwicky suggests that theory-building is not the only way to argue: "The positioning of resonant particulars to

---

[291] Wittgenstein, PI, §109.
[292] Wittgenstein, PI, §126.
[293] Wittgenstein, PI, §127.
[294] Zwicky, W&M, L2. On the perspicuous arrangement of elements and setting up objects of comparison, cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §§122, 130.

facilitate perception of their attunement, the presentation of other texts or works or things for comparison, constitute lyric arguments."[295] A lyric argument, in this sense, is not an explanation but a clarification of a phenomenon.

      The objection occurs: "What is the point of clarity if it contributes nothing to progress? What you are describing sounds like a culpably *academic* exercise; it amounts to nothing more than accumulating palimpsests, pencilling marginalia in the faded manuscripts of dead philosophers. The library shelves are already overpopulated with corpulent monographs that contain little more than esoteric footnotes. That is the life of an anaemic, the life of a mushroom, a fungus, something that has withdrawn from the light. Wouldn't you agree? Surely we express appropriate respect for our masters *by surpassing* them? Otherwise, what have we learned? What is the use of philosophy 'if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life'? To improve our thinking about these questions is *to solve problems*, *to make progress*. Let me repeat: why seek to clarify a problem if clarification is not a means to its solution?" — Some of the deepest problems are ineliminable. Consider, for example, the relation between parent and child. Or the death of someone we love. Concerning these "problems," it does not make sense to muster a world-changing attitude. However, by clarifying the nature of these and other "problems," we may be freed from the pain of misunderstanding.

---

[295] Zwicky, "What Is Lyric Philosophy?," §34.

CHAPTER 6. A Footnote on Internalism and Externalism: Motives

Summary

¶ *In this chapter and the next one, I discuss two theories: internalism and externalism about motivation, and internalism and externalism about reasons. Concerning the first theory, here is the relevant inquiry: is there an internal (necessary or conceptual) connexion between moral judgement and motivation? (Motivational internalism answers "yes"; externalism answers "no.") Concerning the second theory, here is the relevant inquiry: can extra-psychological facts serve as reasons for an agent who is not yet motivated by these facts? (Internalism about reasons answers "no"; externalism answers "yes.") Some of the parties to this discussion risk confusing the two theories. To be clear: the Humean theory is internalist about both motivation and reasons, while McDowell's Aristotelian psychology is internalist about motivation but externalist about reasons. I turn to consideration of work by Michael Smith (who defends motivational internalism) and David Brink (who defends motivational externalism). Each theorist is striving to save a real phenomenon: the internalist saves those (virtuous) agents who act in accordance with moral judgement (that is, sometimes moral judgement is sufficient for action), while the externalist saves those (amoral) agents who can make a moral judgement without being moved by it (that is, sometimes moral judgement is not sufficient for action). Brink's externalism is attempting to circumscribe internalism: the apparently "necessary" connexion between judgement and action, felt by the internalist, is to be explained, objectively, as a kind of training or habituation. Smith and Brink disagree in their theorization of the amoralist: according to Smith, the amoralist tries to make a moral judgement, but fails because he is not appropriately motivated; according to Brink, the mastery (that is, reliable use) of moral terms does not require appropriate motivation. Both theories depend on the detection of the mental state of "motivation." I draw an analogy between the amoralist and someone who claims to know how to read, and who can reliably identify instances of reading behaviour in others, but who himself holds books upside down and moves his eyes from right to left, et cetera. Does this person know*

how to read? Minimally, the attribution of knowledge, in this peculiar case, is questionable. I raise a further objection, connected with my criticism of the universalizing of the Humean theory. Motivational externalism is sympathetic insofar as it is inspired by the insight that an agent may recognize and credit the motive of another agent — a motive which the first agent does not share. But externalism asks us to universalize from this case: to alienate ourselves from the real connexion that we often feel between moral judgement and motivation, and to attempt an analysis of that connexion from a position outside our form of life. The inference is illicit: since it is possible, sometimes, to make a moral judgement without being appropriately motivated, then the connexion between moral judgement and motivation is never necessary. Like Dancy's combinatory atomism, motivational externalism is additive: it assumes that motivation is added to the judgement, which judgement is basic and which addition is accidental. That is, in externalism, we see, again, the broom prejudice and recourse to substance/accident metaphysics. But normally our emotional responses are not additional. Suppose that I care about object x; and I judge that it needs water. Let me then try to imagine making this judgement about x, minus my attitude of caring. Insofar as I can imagine it, what I imagine is not the same judgement minus the attitude, but a different relation to x. The change in attitude is a re-gestalt of the situation. It is only by discounting the reality of such relations that we can conceive of the situation as a mere aggregate.

---

§6.1. The account of attention that I have defended might appear to be "internalist," because I have suggested that clear perception of a particular situation elicits, spontaneously, an appropriate response from a virtuous agent. Or, more strongly (echoing Murdoch and McDowell), clearly to perceive is to respond appropriately. But what, exactly, is internalism? Metaethical theory is not unequivocal in its theorizing about internalism, and at least two (potentially distinct) inquiries are lumped under this heading. On the one hand, there is internalism (and externalism) *about motivation*, and on the other, internalism (and externalism) *about reasons*. Dancy credits W.D. Falk and Thomas Nagel with having classified, and having excited discussion around, theories of

motivational internalism (and externalism), and Bernard Williams with having initiated discussion of internal (and external) reasons. Here is Dancy, setting out the distinction in the reverse order: "What makes this muddle unfortunate is that it tempts one to confuse two quite different questions, which are anyway easy enough to run together because they are discussed in the same vocabulary of 'internal' and 'external'. The first of these is raised by Bernard Williams (1980) as the question whether there can be both internal and external reasons; external reasons, in Williams' sense, are facts rather than beliefs. The second is what Nagel is discussing when he speaks of internalism and externalism in the theory of motivation."[296] Shafer-Landau and Cuneo offer the following gloss on the distinction: "motivational internalism says that something qualifies as a sincere moral judgment only if it motivates the one who holds the judgment. Reasons internalism says that something qualifies as a good reason only if it is capable of motivating the agent whose reason it is."[297] But the latter gloss seems too weak to distinguish reasons internalism from (at least some versions of) reasons externalism, since an external reasons theorist need be committed only to denying the claim that something qualifies as a good reason only if it either (1) does motivate the agent whose reason it is or (2) would motivate her after having been arrived at by some reasoning process starting from her pre-existing subjective motivational set.[298] But the denial of this claim does not require the external reasons theorist to deny that a good reason must be capable of motivating — capable somehow, to be specified. (In a sense, the argument between Williams and McDowell occurs on just this ground.) Matters become especially muddled because there is a further issue, in this general area, about what sorts of things reasons *are*, and how, exactly, they are related to motivation. I can discern at least two distinct questions in this general area of metaethical theory: (1) is there an internal (necessary or conceptual) connexion between moral judgement and motivation? (2) Might there be external reasons? — which latter question could be rephrased: can (extra-psychological) facts

---

[296] Dancy, MR, p. 14, n.3.

[297] Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 284-285, n. 2.

[298] Cf. Williams, "Internal and external reasons," p. 102. Williams does not provide a technical definition of "subjective motivational set," but he specifies that its content is the agent's "desires," and provides examples: "dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects ... embodying commitments of the agent" (ibid., p. 105).

serve as reasons for an agent who is not yet motivated by these facts? But I am already walking ahead of the discussion. What I want to do is simply to warn us, at the outset, that two (potentially distinct) inquiries, with related subject-matters, are at risk of colliding.

Let me consider some definitions of *motivational* internalism (or internalism about motivation, or internalism in the theory of motivation, et cetera). David McNaughton defines it as the view "that a moral conviction, coupled with suitable beliefs, is sufficient to supply the agent with reason to act, and thus to motivate him to act"; it is called *internalism* "because it postulates an internal or conceptual connection between an agent's moral attitude and his choice of action."[299] David Brink formulates internalism as the claim that "the concept of a moral consideration itself (read 'concept itself') necessarily motivates the agent to perform the moral action or necessarily provides the agent with reason to perform the moral action."[300] Michael Smith initially considers the following internalist thesis: "If an agent judges that it is right for her to φ in circumstances C, then she is motivated to φ in C."[301] He rejects this thesis, claiming that it implausibly crowds out the possibility of weakness of the will, and offers instead this revision, which also posits a conceptual connection between "moral judgement and the will," but a "*defeasible* one": "If an agent judges that it is right for her to φ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to φ in C or she is practically irrational."[302][xlv] Now, I want to point out that these three definitions — McNaughton's, Brink's, and Smith's — of motivational internalism are not exactly the same. Importantly, McNaughton's and Brink's definitions contain reference to both *reasons* and *motives*, which minimally promotes confusion between internalism/externalism about

---

[299] McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, p. 22. He gives the following example: "my conviction that I ought to visit my sick grandmother, coupled with my belief that she lives in Birmingham, gives me reason to travel there" (*Moral Vision*, p. 21). Notice that McNaughton's definition is not especially troubled about potential difference between reasons and motives.

[300] Brink, "Externalist Moral Realism," p. 26. Brink complains about theorists' failure to distinguish clearly between reasons and motives; but except for claiming that they (reasons and motives) can come apart (ibid., p. 28), he does not help to make precise the alleged distinction.

[301] Smith, "The Externalist Challenge," §3.1 (p. 231b).

[302] Smith, "Externalist," §3.1 (p. 232a).

reasons and motivational internalism/externalism. And the Socratic questions — "What is a reason?" and "What is a motive?" — are not directly addressed. Are all reasons motives, or at least necessarily related to, or derivable from, motives? In a sense, this question is a question about whether the Humean theory of motivation is true. If that theory is true, then we explain an agent's action — we give a *reason* for it — by explicating a relevant *belief-desire combo* that belongs to the agent, and in this combo, it is the *desire* that does the *motivating* work.

But what, *exactly*, does it mean *to motivate*? Smith suggests that (Humean) desires should be analysed *not phenomenologically*, but *functionally*:[303] a desire is a *dispositional state* which has a "world-to-mind direction of fit." The metaphor of "direction of fit" can allegedly be cashed out in literal terms, by examining "the counterfactual dependence of ... a desire that *p*, on a perception that *not p*": "a desire that *p* is a state that tends to endure [in the presence of a perception that *not p*], disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that *p*."[304] But what, exactly, does it mean to be disposed to bring it about that *p*? I confess that I have some difficulty appreciating what these complicated epicycles add to Plato's old suggestion that "a thing that desires desires something of which it is in need."[305] — "You seriously think what these people are saying is inferable from that line in Plato?"[306] — Smith's thesis is not exactly inferable from Plato's thought. But the crucial point is the same. Plato is making a claim about the logic of desire: it is a necessary condition on desiring *x* that the agent does not have *x*.[307] In the post-Humean theorizing about motives, or desires, or dispositions to change the world, it is difficult for me to see much more than the mechanical, interior *pushes* described in McDowell's hydraulic metaphor and disavowed by Smith.[308] To be motivated, according to this account, is, in large part, to be pushed from inside (more precisely, when one believes that *not p*, &c., to be pushed from inside toward an end or

---

[303] Smith, "Humean Theory of Motivation," p. 52.
[304] Smith, HTM, p. 54.
[305] Plato, *Symposium*, 200b.
[306] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[307] But don't we sometimes desire what we already have? Plato concedes this point, and explains that we desire to continue having *x* in the future. A further necessary condition, for Plato, is that the agent perceives *x* as beautiful or good.
[308] McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," §4; Smith, HTM, p. 43.

goal that *p*). But what work, exactly, is done by these interior pushes in the explanation of action?

When someone acts for a particular end, we may, retrospectively, in explaining the action, *ascribe* to that person a desire for that end.[309] But we have not seen *motivation*, much less *desire*; what we have seen is an *action* being committed. — "But the desire, its rôle in the belief-desire combo, is our criterion for distinguishing *action* from mere *behaviour*! Action, we could say, is *motivated* behaviour. What you are calling 'interior pushes' make all the difference between intentionally pushing oneself, that is, acting, and being pushed around by the world." — There are different ways of theorizing about action. According to cognitivism, desire drops out of consideration as irrelevant; the explanatory work is done by the remaining constituent of the psychological economy, namely, belief. I have already rehearsed one objection to such a theory: beliefs and desires are supposed to be functionally *asymmetrical*; they allegedly have different "directions of fit." Desires are *players*, while beliefs are *announcers*; or, perhaps better, desires are *drivers*, while beliefs are *passengers who navigate* (or perhaps beliefs are geo-positioning systems). If one eliminates the driver, but retains the passenger (or GPS), the vehicle does not move. The function of a belief is to reflect the world, not to change it, and all action aims at world-change. I have suggested that at least the last claim is false, and that we need to meditate on some real examples of action (or reaction) that is non-teleological but ethically significant. I have offered the example of *listening*. — "Suppose as you say that listening is an action. You deny that it is aimed at world-changing. But when we listen, don't we bring it about that someone has been heard. Isn't the world different in all kinds of ways after there has been a listening than before? Then why not say that this is the objective of listening? What is your stake in its being false that all action is world-changing?"[310]

— What is at stake is the scope of the Humean theory. The goal of a Humean desire is world-change: it is a desire that *p* in circumstances in which it is the case that *not-p*. According to this story, it is the discrepancy between the desire and the world that motivates action; we act to change the world from its current state, with which we are

---

[309] Dancy, MR, §1.3.
[310] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

dissatisfied, into the state represented by our desire. If there is some action which is not motivated by world-change, then arguably the Humean theory is not sufficient to explain all action. There may be cases of listening which are motivated by a desire to change the world and which do succeed in changing it. But by hypothesis there are also cases in which the relevant state of the world cannot be changed and in which listening is nevertheless ethically significant. In §3.7, I considered the example of listening to a friend who has been irreversibly hurt. One might argue that the act of listening helps to ease the friend's pain, and hence it is goal-directed, et cetera. But let us also consider the hypothetical case in which it is certain that listening will not help (suppose our friend is inconsolable). Again, as I suggested in §3.7, in this case we are not relieved of the responsibility of listening. If there are such cases — and I believe that there are — then they will not be best explained by analysing the agent's reason into two mental items with different "directions of fit." In such cases, one of the mental items — called "desire" — is idle; it contributes nothing to the explanation of action. And now the theorist must make a choice between marching under the banner of cognitivism (the thesis that beliefs are sufficient to motivate), or considering a third way.

The third way that I have suggested is the "peripatetic contextualist" psychology, which conserves the Humean theory for the particular purpose of explaining enkratic and akratic action; but it does not restrict itself exclusively to that theory. The false generalization that all action aims at world-change is, I think, connected with a picture of the world as a set of problems, that is, a set of goals and obstacles to those goals. In this picture, an actor is (essentially) a problem-solver, someone who attempts to attain goals by dispatching obstacles to them. *Whatever the local merits of this picture* — and I do not dispute that it *does* have merits in some, even many, areas of our lives — *it cannot cover the field*.[311] Again, I am walking ahead of the discussion, but I want to warn us that internalism/externalism about reasons, which delivers a verdict on the Humean theory of motivation, has some bearing on motivational internalism/externalism, as that latter thesis is defined by McNaughton and Brink. (I have not yet defined reasons

---

[311] Of the many other examples besides listening, consider waiting, a large genus with many species. I do not mean waiting to be called to the dentist's chair. I mean waiting for something not specifiable in advance (as one sometimes waits while composing art).

internalism/externalism; but let me say that Williams, who defends internalism about reasons, is affirming a version of the Humean theory; and McDowell, who defends the possibility of externalism, is trying to displace the Humean theory.)

§6.2. I shall focus, for the moment, on Smith's revised definition of motivational internalism, which has the advantage of confining itself to talk of motivation. To repeat, "If an agent judges that it is right for her to φ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to φ in C or she is practically irrational."[312] Smith seeks to defend this thesis; Brink, for his part, seeks to attack it. Each theorist insists that his respective theory can better save the phenomena. What are these phenomena? Smith writes that "it is a striking fact about moral motivation that a *change in motivation* follows reliably in the wake of a *change in moral judgement*, at least in the good and strong-willed person."[313] More generally, there is a "reliable connection between moral judgement and motivation in the good and strong-willed person."[314] The claim is, I hope, relatively uncontroversial. We not infrequently see folks acting (or refraining from acting) in accordance with their moral judgements (or in accordance with their sensitive evaluations of cases immediately at hand); we sometimes say that these folks have *integrity*, and we tend to admire them for it. That is, being motivated in accordance with moral judgement is not a phenomenon that we can afford to lose on the cutting-room floor of moral theory. The question is how the connection (between judgement and motivation) is to be best explained, and whether or not judgement is sufficient for motivation. The internalist says, Yes, the agent's judgement is sufficient; the externalist says, No, we must look elsewhere in the agent's psychology for a further necessary component. Why? Because at least sometimes judgement is *not* sufficient for motivation. Enter the amoralist. The amoralist is a creature who can allegedly make a moral judgement without activating the expected motivation, a kind of skeptic "who recognizes the existence of moral considerations and remains unmoved."[315] For example, this creature can allegedly judge that those hoodlums are

---

[312] Smith, "Externalist," §3.1 (p. 232a). Smith calls this internalist thesis "the practicality requirement on moral judgement" (ibid., p. 232b).
[313] Smith, "Externalist," §3.5 (p. 236b).
[314] Smith, "Externalist," §3.5 (p. 236a).
[315] Brink, "Externalist," §3.2 (p. 30).

doing something wrong to that cat, and then shrug. This creature is the phenomenon that externalist theory is designed to save, according to Brink. "Externalism provides a more plausible account of the connection between morality and motivation," writes Brink; "it makes the motivational force of moral considerations a matter of contingent psychological fact."[316]

So there are two phenomena, each of which allegedly vindicates a rival theory: those who are moved in accordance with their moral judgements, and those who aren't. If internalism is true, then there should be virtuous persons — and there are. If externalism is true, then there should be amoralists — and there are. — If I may make a confession: it seems to me that what motivational internalism *means* is quite correct, only it cannot be said; the theoretical position that it articulates is indefensible, but the truth that inspires that position is shown by our inability sincerely to imagine *what things are like* for the amoralist. In the interest of refraining from discursive coercion, let me speak for myself: I do not deny that there are "amoralists," that is, those who are unmoved by moral considerations. And I have no difficulty imagining examples in which my judgement and motivation are discordant: I judge that something is wrong, and do it anyway, or I judge that it is right, and fail to do it — there is no shortage of such cases of akrasia. Nor do I have difficulty imagining examples in which I act viciously: I judge that something is wrong and do it *because* it is wrong; I can say that I know what that is like, too. What I cannot imagine is *genuinely* judging that something is wrong, or that it is right, *and shrugging*. What I am denying is that the amoralist and I share the same understanding; I am denying that the emotional or motivational response is *arbitrarily detachable* from the understanding.

But this is not intended to be idle, anecdotal self-reportage. There is nothing special about me. It might be true, as externalism claims, that the connexion between moral considerations and motivation is a matter of contingent psychological fact; but for those of us who *have already been contingently, psychologically configured* to experience the motivational force of moral considerations, the alleged truth of externalism remains speculative. It is a truth to which we do not have imaginative access. Externalism says that the motivational force of moral considerations is a sort of custom or

---

[316] Brink, "Externalist," §3.2 (pp. 30-31).

habit of thought; things could have been otherwise for us. But when we try to break this habit, we find that we can't. Externalism is, quite ambitiously in Brink's account, compatible with a kind of *foundationalist realism* regarding morality. He writes, "if we are to take the amoralist challenge seriously, we must attempt to explain why the amoralist should care about morality."[317] The felt, reflexive connexion between moral judgement and motivation is *to be explained and justified* by reference to something else, something external. We who are accustomed to the connexion might describe ourselves, if asked, as "internalists"; but properly understood, internalism is, in a sense, circumscribed by externalism, and in principle we should be able to alienate ourselves from the connexion (between moral judgement and motivation), to join the amoralist in the external, circumscribing perspective, and to explain to him how and *why* our judgements and motivations are connected. I shall return to these suggestions in my discussion of Winch on moral integrity; for the moment, I wish only to say that it is fantastic to suppose that we can *explain* our morality *from the outside*. — "Doesn't this depend on what kind of question we are asking and what kind of explanation we are looking for? Someone who offers, e.g., an evolutionary account of human moral practices in response to the question, 'Why did you do what you did?' will have missed the point of the question in that context. But in another context the answer might be just what is wanted."[318] — Yes, I agree that different kinds of explanations will be keyed to different kinds of contexts. But the amoralist (or moral skeptic) imagined by Anglophone moral theorists tends to be a creature who is stationed outside the borders of our form of life, and who is demanding that we provide some "non-moral" justification for morality, that is, a justification that is intelligible and persuasive to someone who has not been contingently psychologically configured to find moral reasons compelling.

§6.3. I have two further comments to make about the amoralist. The first is that there are at least two kinds of amoralist: the detected and the undetected. And the detected kind represents no trouble for motivational internalism. Smith writes, "amoralists are among the more popular heroes of both philosophical fantasy and non-philosophical fiction.

---

[317] Brink, "Externalist," §3.2 (p. 30).
[318] Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011.

Brink mentions Plato's Thrasymachus and Dickens's Uriah Heep. But nor are amoralists confined to the world of make-believe. There are, after all, real-life sociopaths like Robert Harris ... Harris claims that he knew that what he was doing was wrong and that he simply chose to do it anyway ..."[319] Now, what I want to say about this last example is that it straightforwardly fails to illustrate the amoralist of externalism. Someone who claims "that he knew that what he was doing was wrong and that he simply chose to do it anyway" is either vicious, akratic, or mistaken in his knowledge claim. The latter case is the interesting one. Smith argues that "*the very best* we can say about amoralists is that they try to make moral judgements but fail."[320] It seems to me that his suggestion is on the right track; but his strategy of argumentation is misguided. He writes that Brink's externalist "assumes that the amoralist's reliable use [of moral terms] is evidence of her mastery of those terms; [and Brink's externalist] assumes that being suitably motivated under the appropriate conditions is not a condition of mastery of moral terms."[321] Smith's internalist predictably opposes these assumptions. But this shared emphasis on motivation, pictured as an unseen psychological ingredient, looks in the wrong place. Some of Wittgenstein's remarks on understanding are relevant here: "—The application is still a criterion of understanding."[322] And: "when he suddenly knew how to go on, when he understood the principle, then possibly he had a special experience—and if he is asked: 'What was it? What took place in you when you suddenly grasped the principle?' perhaps he will describe it much as we described it above—but for us it is *the circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on."[323]

I wish to suggest that motivation, if it is pictured as some kind of private mental process, cannot be criterial *for us* for deciding whether or not an agent has understood a moral concept (although the presence or absence of motivation might feel significant, first-personally, for the agent). But furthermore, the mere labelling, however reliably, of wrong actions as "wrong" will not (in many circumstances) justify an agent in claiming

---

[319] Smith, "Externalist," §3.3 (p. 234b).
[320] Smith, "Externalist," §3.4 (p. 235a).
[321] Smith, "Externalist," §3.4 (p. 236a).
[322] Wittgenstein, PI, §146.
[323] Wittgenstein, PI, §155; underlining added.

that he understands. As Aristotle says, "The fact that men use the language that flows from knowledge proves nothing; for even men under the influence of these passions utter scientific proofs and verses of Empedocles, and those who have just begun to learn a science can string together its phrases, but do not yet know it."[324] Consider the example under discussion above: the killer claims to know that what he is doing is wrong but does it anyway. The example requires considerable fleshing out; it is terribly rudimentary. But we can imagine circumstances in which his doing something wrong defeats his claim to know (or to understand) that it is wrong. —"True enough—but doesn't this point to the fact that with moral concepts, as with other concepts, there is more than one criterion for determining what a person believes? One criterion, which may be thought inapplicable in special circumstances, is *what she says she believes.* Another criterion is *what she does* (not including what she says). There will be cases in which there seems to be a conflict between these criteria, but is there a general rule for deciding how to resolve that conflict? I would say not, but you seem to be saying that there is (the qualification at the start of your next paragraph notwithstanding)."[325] — But consider a limiting case: what if she never does what she says she believes? Would this scenario not constitute a special circumstance? That is, if the discrepancy between behaviour and an espoused belief becomes regular, does that discrepancy not invite a special explanation? Perhaps we would not be automatically entitled to discredit her belief claim; but perhaps that claim becomes questionable under these circumstances. (Consider, by analogy, a very sentimental country-western song: "Maybe I didn't hold you / all those lonely, lonely times. / And I guess I never told you: / I'm so happy that you're mine. / Little things I should have said and done; / I just never took the time. / But you were always on my mind." A mental state that never makes itself manifest in action begins to look awfully feeble. If the lover to whom the song is addressed were to question the contention of the last line, we could perhaps sympathize with that question.)

There is not a strict rule here which will guarantee identification of understanding and of misunderstanding; it is not that it is *impossible* both to understand that something is wrong and to do it; but that conjunction is not the normal one, and invites special

---

[324] Aristotle, NE, VII.3.1147a15-20.
[325] Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011.

explanation. Consider an analogy: someone claims that he knows how to read, but usually holds books upside-down, turns the pages starting from back to front, moves his eyes from right to left, et cetera. Are we prepared to agree that this person can read? Well, let's look closer. He himself never reads aloud, for example, but he can reliably identify instances of other people reading silently or aloud from books. When he sees a child holding a book upside-down and pretending to read, he says, You can't read that way. The child protests, But *you* can't read that way, either. And he replies, Yes, I know, but I do anyway. — Can this man read? — What I want to say is that his knowledge claim looks very precarious in these very peculiar circumstances. — But why are theorists *so ready* to credit the so-called amoralist with moral understanding? Surely there is some burden of proof, on the amoralist's part, to show us that he *does* understand; and this demonstration should usually consist in more than merely reliable labelling. The more difficult case must be the *undetected pretender*: not the detected amoralist, who betrays his misunderstanding by acting *im*morally, but the undetected one, who systematically refrains from doing anything immoral. Such a creature is, by hypothesis, completely unmoved by morality, but behaves *indistinguishably* from someone who is so moved. —"This is ... a sceptical example in the Cartesian tradition—a case of an undetectable illusion. But it seems to me that introducing it has the opposite of the effect that you intend because if it is tempting to launch an argument to the effect that the idea of such an undetectable illusion is incoherent, this serves to reinforce the point that the traditional example of the amoralist *escapes* this kind of critique. It is *not* an undetectable illusion."[326]

— Yes: what I wish to suggest is that the traditional amoralist exploits a confusion between these two cases — the case of the detected pretender, and the case of the undetected pretender. To the extent that theorists are prepared to grant understanding to the amoralist, they are assuming that he remains undetected. But to the extent that he remains undetected, he is indistinguishable from someone with genuine moral understanding. In the face of the possibility of such a creature, it seems that the internalist theorist has a choice; recall that, for this theorist, the presence of appropriate motivation is supposed to be criterial for moral understanding: now, either we see the motivation on

---

[326] Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011.

the basis of which we attribute understanding, or we don't. If we do see it — if, for example, it is manifest in the *acts* of an agent — then the internalist has no basis for denying that this (undetected) amoralist understands. Motivation, or at least a certain conception of motivation, drops out of consideration as irrelevant. On the other hand, if we don't see motivation — if, for example, it is a hidden mental state — then there is in theory some means of distinguishing the undetected amoralist from the moral agent, but by hypothesis those means are undetected (even if not logically undetectable). Again, motivation becomes irrelevant. That is, to repeat: the undetected amoralist is indistinguishable from someone with moral understanding. It is only when the amoralist behaves differently from someone with moral understanding that he calls attention to himself — but it is at this moment that the ascription of understanding to him becomes questionable. In other words, I am prepared to let the undetectable amoralist vanish as irrelevant or incoherent. But that leaves us with the unproblematic case of the detected amoralist — someone who has exposed his alleged moral understanding to a demand for justification.

Wittgenstein faces an analogous problem when he considers the possibility of faking pain. And I think that the possibility of faking just remains a *risk*, against which there is *no principled defence*, no systematic method which will guarantee detection. We *will* be deceived — and *when* we are, we won't know it. But this possibility of deception leaves our normal ways of sifting between understanding and misunderstanding *unaffected*. Indeed, the possibility of deception is parasitic on those ways; it depends on the regularities of normal practice. But it is also ineliminable. We might say: the possibility of being deceived is internally related to the activity of trusting. — "The two cases seem to me to be importantly disanalogous. It's true that sometimes we can be deceived by someone who pretends to be in pain, but it is by no means clear that we could *always* be deceived in this way. In fact, the inference from the one to the other is fallacious unless some fairly substantive and controversial premises are added."[327] — I am prepared to retreat from the hypothesis of the undetect*able* amoralist (and it is for this

---

[327] Hymers, Scholium, 21 August 2011. Hymers refers to Wittgenstein, "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data,'" (*Philosophical Occasions*), pp. 285-286.

reason that I have referred instead to the *undetected* amoralist). My point is not that we could *always* be deceived, but that, to the extent that we *are* deceived — to the extent that the amoralist successfully imitates our ethical form of life — we will not *know* that we are deceived; and the amoralist will be indistinguishable from the genuinely moral agent. The point is almost tautologous, but not insignificant, I think. For the moment that we detect the amoralist is the moment that his behaviour has called his alleged moral understanding into question. We can imagine circumstances and tests which might restore our confidence in his understanding, and we can imagine borderline cases; but the amoralist has inherited, by his anomalous behaviour, the burden of justifying his alleged understanding.

   — "A challenge for you: could there be a secretly amoralist attention-payer, someone who only goes through the motions of listening, etc., and who is not in fact directly moved by the predicaments of those to whom he listens, but only by, say, the accolades and acceptance he receives for this?"[328] In the limiting case, the attentive agent does not deliberate. This lack of deliberation is manifest in the spontaneity and immediacy of her response. Perception moves without a gap into action: in such cases, perceiving *is* acting. As we shall see in a Chapter 12, such spontaneity is not unconditionally good; but, again, it does mark the limiting case of attention. Could there be a secretly amoralist attention-payer? I am tempted to give two different answers here. To the extent that the end is not inherent in attending to the immediate fact — to the extent that attending is merely a means to securing some further desired end — the agent will need to deliberate and to decide that attending is the best means to securing that end. To the extent that these deliberations are observable in behaviour, the agent exposes herself (that is, exposes herself as less than fully attentive to what is in front of her). On the other hand, to the extent that she succeeds in concealing her instrumentalist deliberations, she remains undetected; and to the extent that she remains undetected, she drops out of consideration as irrelevant. Like the traditional amoralist, the amoralist attention-payer is either detected or not. And insofar as she is detected, she has acted in such as way as to call her attention-paying into question.

---

[328] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

§6.4. The last comment that I wish to make about externalism is, inter alia, a reiteration of one of my critiques of Dancy. I charged Dancy with an analytic prejudice that *the essence is hidden*, and revealed through analysis. This prejudice, I suggest, is also perceivable in externalism. The externalist proposal — that one could coherently understand something's value without valuing it — verges on unintelligibility to me, and strains my imagination. But this sort of suggestion frequently issues without compunction from the lips of intelligent thinkers. It is connected, I guess, with a reasonable sort of relativism and lower-case liberalism: a recognition that one's own valuing isn't obviously universalizable, and that others aren't obviously criticizable for not sharing it; furthermore, a recognition that the values held by others can be legitimate even when they diverge from one's own. But there is an illicit sleight-of-hand transition from these recognitions to the suggestion that valuing itself is somehow *optional*, an *ornament* that can be worn, or not. This transition seems inconsistent: genuine *respect* for another's different valuing seems to depend on that valuing being *sincere* (that is, inalienable). Conversely, if I suspect that someone is not committed to what she alleges to value, then I may have difficulty respecting her. I might feel that she lacks *integrity*.

Consider an externalist challenge: excellence at a practice does not require a practitioner to be motivated by that practice's internal goods. It might be contingently true that someone who hated tennis was not as excellent a player as someone who loved it, but this is not a conceptual or necessary truth about tennis or other practices.[329] An initial response to this objection doesn't satisfy me: one might respond: "Why bewail the lack of a necessary connexion here? Just build the contingency into the very root-cellar of the practice: tennis is a human convention; its practitioners are human beings, the sorts of critters that are subject to contingency and psychology. So it's no objection to say that the connexion between doing well and desiring internal goods is a matter of contingent fact or human psychology; of course it is. If humans had developed differently, this practice might not have exhibited this connexion." — This response is, in a sense, deflationary; despite my respect for those who might offer this sort of response, I am not satisfied by it.

Part of my dissatisfaction arises from my anxiety around externalism generally: it (externalism) seems to require us to alienate ourselves from the *experience* of an internal

---

[329] Thanks to Alice MacLachlan for suggesting this challenge.

connexion between understanding and responding emotionally to what one understands. We can speculate about what this disconnection would be like. But what we imagine is *not* understanding this *same* object minus emotional response it; we imagine a *different relationship* to the object. —"It seems to me that whether we call it the same or different is a matter of what we want to emphasize—no more. For certain purposes it may be the same, for others different. More generally, the whole debate between internalists and externalists strikes me as having this character."[330] — I am sympathetic to the suggestion; it offers the sort of contextual flexibility afforded by the "peripatetic" psychology. But in order to make sense of that flexibility, I need to consider particular examples of each sort of purpose. Suppose that I am sitting at my kitchen table, listening to someone, whom I care about, telling a story. I can imagine what it might be like to listen to this story, and not care about this person. Perhaps I have even had such an experience in the past. But what I imagine is not *this* relationship, minus care; I imagine a *different relationship*. To borrow MacIntosh's metaphor: omitting the emotion of care changes the moral geometry of the situation. — What would be an example of a purpose which would induce us to say that the moral understanding remained the same while the expected motivational response was cancelled? Perhaps transitions between Kant's test cases would furnish such an example: one might transition from action overdetermined by inclination and duty to action solely from duty.[331] The agent both likes and respects the patient; gradually, in light of some new information about the patient, the agent's affection wilts; but the agent continues to believe that she owes respect to the patient.

What the externalist wants to say is that you can have exactly the *same* thing, success at tennis, but subtract love of the sport. And again, this is to regard desire as nothing more than ornament. (Or perhaps as an extra but dispensable outboard motor.) That is, it is the externalist, surprisingly, who is covertly resorting to metaphysics, who is fiddling around with essences and accidents. The externalist is insisting that there's an essence here, the practice, like a dress-maker's dummy, and it can be dressed up with emotional accidents, or not. And (the possibility of) the existence of the practice without the emotional accidents (or with a different emotional accident) *proves* that its essence is

---

[330] Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011.
[331] Cf. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 397-399.

emotionless; that it is, in essence, nothing more than a dress-maker's dummy. And I want to say: this is the suspicious move that should occasion reflection. (The possibility of) the existence of an emotionless practice (or a practice differently emotionally inflected) doesn't reveal the foundational essence of the practice, minus the emotional accidents: instead, to imagine such a possibility is just to imagine a *different* activity. Here is the dressed mannequin, but the real mannequin is the naked one. No: we need to change the analogy: here is a living organism, and there is the organism's skeleton. From our recognizing that we *can* find a skeleton independently of an organism, it *doesn't follow* that the essence of the organism is its skeleton. The flesh, with its nervous and respiratory and circulatory and digestive systems, is not *added* onto the skeleton; they grow together. The skeleton is, in a sense, a crucial component of the organism; but it isn't an *additive* or *detachable* component. And when we find a skeleton in isolation, we haven't found the true essence of an organism — we've found a dead one.

— "So are you saying that no one who truly understands what's right can fail to be moved to do it? So you are an internalist. Do you also want to say that necessarily someone who understands what's right desires in some degree to do what's right? If so, aren't you engaging in beetle in the box metaphysics too? You've just said it's something we can't necessarily tell."[332] — The position I am exploring — if it is a "position" — is not internalist. Externalism and internalism are defined as contrary positions. And I do not wish to deny that externalism is true — *some* of the time. Externalism allows us to explain the occasions when an agent's psychology is in a disintegrative state. On such occasions, a moral judgement may be insufficient to motivate. But from the fact that there are such occasions, it does not follow that moral judgement is, in general, insufficient to motivate; that is, it does not follow, from the occasional correctness of the externalist analysis, that what internalism means is false.

---

[332] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

CHAPTER 7. A Further Footnote on Internalism and Externalism: Reasons

Summary

¶ *Here I consider the debate between Williams and McDowell concerning the question, "Might there be external reasons?" The internalist (Williams) answers negatively, while the externalist (McDowell) answers affirmatively. Williams is defending a more sophisticated version of what he calls the "sub-Humean" theory: reasons are always reasons for some agent, and are always relative to that agent's subjective motivational set (S). For Williams, there are only two possible ways in which a reason statement can be true of an agent: either the agent already believes and is motivated by some true reason statement about himself, or he can discover such a statement by starting with some item in S and reasoning practically from that item. This constraint is significant. While Williams's conception of practical reason is not especially parsimonious, he nevertheless assumes that only items already in S or inferentially related to S could count as reasons for the agent in question. This view is continuous with the Cartesian rule that rationality orders its objects sequentially. But this view requires argumentative support which Williams does not provide. By contrast, McDowell allows that there can be extra-rational spaces between an agent and reasons which are reasons for that agent. According to Williams, the point of external reasons statements is that they can (allegedly) be true independently of the agent's motivations; and he wishes to scrutinize the transition from lacking motivation to acquiring it. McDowell charges Williams with having constructed a false dilemma based on a questionable assumption: either the reason is internal to S, or it is external and must be reached by reason alone. The assumption is that if there are external reasons, the only way to reach them is by ratiocination. But there may be other ways of effecting the transition: for example, being persuaded by moving rhetoric, inspiration, or conversion. The last example, conversion, is analogous to having been "properly brought up"; that is, having been trained, in Aristotelian fashion, in the dispositions of an ethical form of life. Like the process of having been properly brought up, conversion is not itself a rational process; but it*

restructures the agent's S such that some considerations, which did not previously motivate the agent, become recognized as reasons for her. I do not wish to take a theoretical stand on the debate between internalism and externalism about reasons; but by resisting Williams's picture of the space of reasons (a space whose members are related unidimensionally and inferentially), I hope to open our imagination to a more diverse range of what may serve as reasons.

§7.1. As Dancy observes, discussion of external reasons was initiated by Williams, and started a debate between him and McDowell. The debate circles around a question, which doubles as the title of McDowell's essay: might there be external reasons? (Or, more elaborately, can [extra-psychological] facts serve as reasons for an agent who is not yet [or already] motivated by these facts?) To anticipate: Williams is inclined to deliver a negative verdict on this question, while McDowell is inclined to deliver an affirmative one. But let me begin by setting out the terrain in which the debate takes place. Williams introduces his topic in this way: "Sentences of the forms '*A* has reason to *φ*' or 'There is a reason for *A* to *φ*' (where '*φ*' stands in for some verb of action) seem on the face of it to have two different sorts of interpretation. On the first [internal interpretation], the truth of the sentence implies, very roughly, that *A* has some motive which will be served or furthered by his *φ*-ing ... On the second [external] interpretation, there is no such condition, and the reason-sentence will not be falsified by the absence of an appropriate motive."[333] Williams then provides a simple model for the internal interpretation, which he calls "the sub-Humean model": "*A* has reason to *φ* iff *A* has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his *φ*-ing. Alternatively, we might say ... some desire, the satisfaction of which *A* believes will be served by his *φ*-ing."[334] Compare Smith's formula: "R at t constitutes a motivating reason of agent A to *φ* iff there is some *ψ* such that R at t consists of a desire of A to *ψ* and a belief that were he to *φ* he would

---

[333] Williams, "Internal and external reasons," p. 101.
[334] Williams, "Internal," p. 101.

ψ."[335] (Do we honestly believe that we can explicate the human psychology of motivation with such formulae?)

Williams promptly discusses the following example: an agent desires a gin and tonic, and believes (falsely) that this stuff is gin (when it fact it is petrol). We might be tempted to say that the agent does have a reason to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it — because if he does so, we can explain his action by citing the relevant desire-belief combo. But Williams resists this temptation, claiming that the internal reason theory is concerned not only with explaining action, but also with the agent's rationality: "What we can correctly ascribe to him in a third-personal internal reason statement is also what he can ascribe to himself as a result of deliberation."[336] This idea is connected with what has been called "the explanatory constraint," which involves, inter alia, a cognitive link (namely, a belief) between the agent and some fact that enters into explanation of his behaviour. Williams next articulates a qualifying proposition: "(ii) A member of S, D, will not give A a reason for ϕ-ing if either the existence of D is dependent on a false belief, or A's belief in the relevance of ϕ-ing to the satisfaction of D is false."[337] This proposition seems intended to qualify the simple sub-Humean model, at least on that model's second, alternative formulation (which makes explicit reference to a belief). The agent has a desire for a gin and tonic, which he believes (falsely) will be satisfied by mixing this stuff (that is, petrol) with tonic and drinking it. This situation satisfies the conditions of rationality on the simplest sub-Humean model, but violates the condition stipulated in qualification (ii). Thus, this agent does not have a reason to drink this stuff (that is, petrol). However, Williams claims that it will "be true that if he does ϕ in these circumstances, there was not only a reason why he ϕ-ed, but also that that displays him as, relative to his false belief, acting rationally."[338] There seems to be some tension between this last claim and qualification (ii). Williams seems to be wanting to claim that false beliefs do, and do not, defeat putative reasons, and I worry that this ambiguity is reinforced by equivocating on the concept of a reason.

---

[335] Smith, HTM, p. 36.
[336] Williams, "Internal," p. 103.
[337] Williams, "Internal," p. 103.
[338] Williams, "Internal," p. 103.

Smith replies to this equivocation by distinguishing between "a motivating reason" and "a normative reason."[339] He writes, "The distinctive feature of a motivating reason to ϕ is that in virtue of having such a reason an agent is in a state that is potentially explanatory of his ϕ-ing.... However, to say that someone has a normative reason to ϕ is to say something different. It is to say that there is some normative requirement that he ϕ's."[340] Importantly, the two can come apart, according to Smith. Furthermore, a motivating reason is associated with the agent's perspective, while a normative reason is associated with a spectator's perspective. On this analysis, we can say that the agent in the example has a motivating reason to drink the petrol, but no normative reason. Smith's analysis attempts to insulate the Humean theory of motivation from the broader implications of theories of internal and external reasons. Dancy's recent work questions the distinction (between motivating and normative reasons), and indeed the picture of mind, upon which Smith's analysis depends.

Williams will defend the qualified "sub-Humean" model, with some complexification and qualification. A "desire" (what Williams calls D), as we know, is a technical term for an item in an agent's "subjective motivational set" (S),[341] and covers a range of things that we might not colloquially call "desires" (for example, "dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects").[342] And Williams will shortly make a couple of remarks (in the course of discussing external reasons) which confirm that he accepts an agent's *belief* as a necessary condition on any reason for that agent's action: "But nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) actions except something that motivates him so to act. So something else is needed besides the truth of the external reason statement to explain action, some psychological link; and that psychological link would seem to be belief."[343] Finally, Williams subscribes to motivational internalism, granting that the following claim "seems plausible": "*believing*

---

[339] Smith, HTM, §2; he borrows the distinction from Nagel.
[340] Smith, HTM, §2 (pp. 38-39).
[341] Williams, "Internal," p. 102.
[342] Williams, "Internal," p. 105.
[343] Williams, "Internal," p. 107. (In *Practical Reality*, Dancy, following Collins, argues that this "psychological link" is not only unnecessary, but, strictly understood, it renders motivation incoherent. But that is another story.)

that a particular consideration is a reason to act in a particular way provide[s], or indeed constitute[s], a *motivation* to act."[344]

Williams includes the qualification that "the connexion between such beliefs and the disposition to act" should not be "tightened to that unnecessary degree which excludes *akrasia*."[345] Williams's qualified characterization of motivational internalism is thus shared by Smith,[346] and their subscription to this thesis is consistent with their defence of the Humean theory of motivation. Interestingly, McDowell also seems to accept motivational internalism, while seeking to evade the Humean theory. These various ways of reckoning one's metaethical theoretical position are elegantly schematized in Smith's apparently inconsistent triad: (1) cognitivism, (2) motivational internalism, and (3) the Humean theory of motivation.[347] According to this schema, Williams seems to accept (2) and (3), while rejecting (1); and if he were a theorist, McDowell would accept (1) and (2), while rejecting (3).

On William's account, internal reasons are not simply *reducible* to motives — things are more subtle than that. For Williams allows that it is possible to make a true internal reason statement about an agent who does not yet believe (and is not yet motivated by) that statement.[348] But it seems exegetically correct to claim something like the following: internal reasons are always reasons *for some particular agent*, and are always *relative* to that agent's subjective motivational set. There are two possibilities here: (1) the agent already believes, and is thus motivated by, some true internal reason statement about himself; or (2) the agent is not motivated by some internal reason statement about himself, but that statement is nevertheless true if and only if, starting from his current subjective motivational set, and resorting to some process of deliberative reasoning controlled by that set, the agent can discover that internal reason. These two possibilities are not especially miserly, especially since Williams denies that deliberative reasoning must be confined to means/end parameters, and instead offers (exclusively via examples) a fairly generous and cultured reconceptualization of such reasoning: "But

---

[344] Williams, "Internal," p. 107; emphasis added.
[345] Williams, "Internal," p. 107.
[346] Smith, "The Externalist Challenge," §3.1 (p. 232a).
[347] Vide Smith, *The Moral Problem*, p. 12; cf. McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, pp. 23, 46.
[348] Cf. Williams, "Internal," p. 103 (proposition [iii.b]).

there are much wider possibilities for deliberation, such as: thinking how the satisfaction of elements in *S* can be combined, e.g. by time-ordering; where there is some irresoluble conflict among the elements of *S*, considering which [of the elements] one attaches most weight to (which, importantly, does not imply that there is some one commodity of which they provide varying amounts); or, again, finding constitutive solutions, such as deciding what would make for an entertaining evening, granted that one wants entertainment."[349]

§7.2. McDowell rightly observes that Williams's refinement insists "on the relevance of imagination to deliberation."[350] Williams himself writes, "Practical reasoning is a heuristic process, and an imaginative one, and there are no fixed boundaries on the continuum from rational thought to inspiration and conversion."[351] Deliberative, imaginative reasoning can be self-reflexive; it can have "all sorts of effect on *S*,"[352] including the discovery and dissolution of desires. But however generous this refinement, the two possibilities above exhaust the field for Williams. "The general idea," writes McDowell, "is that one has reason to do what practical reasoning, starting from one's existing motivations, would reveal that one has reason to do—even if one has not realized that one has reason to do it."[353] Concerning Williams's refinement, McDowell adds: "The significance of elements in one's subjective motivational set is not that one has reason to do only what is conducive to, or constitutes, their satisfaction, but that they 'control' the thinking by which one determines what one has reason to do."[354] On Williams's account, there are no objective reasons *simpliciter*, independently of anyone; reasons are always reasons *for someone*, for some particular agent. McDowell does not quarrel with this point, and, I think, neither should we. But Williams places a further constraint on how agents can be related to reasons: he insists that reasons for an agent are always *relative* to that agent's subjective motivational set.

---

[349] Williams, "Internal," p. 104.
[350] McDowell, "Might There Be External Reasons?," p. 97.
[351] Williams, "Internal," p. 110.
[352] Williams, "Internal," p. 105.
[353] McDowell, "External," p. 96.
[354] McDowell, "External," p. 97.

This constraint is reflected in Williams's picture of the plane of thought. *Crucially, in this picture, there can be no empty spaces* between an agent and his reasons. If something is a reason for me, then either I already occupy that place, or my reasoning must engineer a road or a bridge to that place using the materials in my subjective motivational set. That engineering can be very creative; but there is no third, vertical axis, and so it is not possible to circumvent an obstacle (or a gap) by ascending or descending to a different plane. It is this picture of the plane of thought that some of Zwicky's work is concerned to call into question — and with it, the assumption that only certain kinds of connexion, namely, linear, systematic ones, are capable of making sense.

> Our imaginations have become rutted — we follow the cow-paths across the pasture even though it might be more pleasant, more enlightening, faster, or cleaner, to go cross-country.[355]
>
> *
>
> A person who discounts backpacking as a means of travel is liable also to discount the potential interest of places that can be reached only by that means.[356]
>
> *
>
> As though when we looked at the night sky, our eyes could travel only along the imaginary lines shown in drawings of the constellations; and as though if it lacked such a line of access, a star would be invisible.[357]

Consider the last analogy: there is more than one way of seeing connexions among stars in the night sky, and not all of them are linear. For example: one might notice that the magnitude of this star is similar to the magnitude of that star; or that these stars are cool-hued, those ones, warm. My point is that the stars can be collected according to more than one pattern (they embody more than one pattern),[xlvi] there is no obvious hierarchical order among these different patterns (no final or foundational pattern),[358] and some of the

---

[355] Zwicky, LP, L41. Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, p. ixe: "For this [the very nature of the investigation] compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction."

[356] Zwicky, LP, L47.

[357] Zwicky, LP (1st edition), L128.

[358] Cf. Wittgenstein on the different analyses of the chessboard language-game (PI, §48).

patterns are not linear, but associative (or as Zwicky would say, resonant). *It does not follow* that the stars can be conglomerated arbitrarily, according to the whims of the viewer. To say that there is *more than one* way of seeing things is *not* to say that there are infinitely many ways of seeing things, or that everything is permitted. An insistence on only one way tends to be reductionist, and only two tends to be dualistic; but there are more than a few compromises between two and infinity.

— "Surely all you're trying to say here is that your antecedent subjective motivational set doesn't exhaust the factors which can be reasons for you; and other things can be regulative of what you'll get to having reason to do; and maybe, further, no matter what we cite in this capacity, it won't provide a reason in the way a syllogism will. Saying this kind of thing would be a lot more helpful to the reader than these metaphors."[359] — But the use of metaphors is itself an exercise in a sort of thinking that I am endorsing. Consider: the appreciation of a true metaphor may itself be a reason for changing one's mind about some phenomenon. As we shall see in Chapter 11, a metaphor can reconfigure our understanding; and if asked, we may point to that metaphor to explain the reconfiguration. But the relation of the metaphor to the insight it elicits is different from the relation between the premises of an argument and its conclusion. On at least some occasions, we might say that the relation, in the case of metaphor, is not inferential but epiphanic. To insist that the metaphorical thoughts above are paraphrasable, without loss of meaning, in discursive, argumentative prose is tacitly to accept the picture of reasoning which they are trying to resist.

The preceding remarks about space and patterns may appear to be a detour, but they actually touch on the very heart of the disagreement between Williams and McDowell. Despite his defence of the Humean theory of motivation, Williams turns out to subscribe to a specific brand of rationality, which can be traced to Descartes. Compare, especially, Rule 6 of *The Rules for the Direction of Mind*: "Although this proposition appears to teach nothing new, it contains nevertheless the chief secret of this art, and there is no more useful proposition in all this treatise; for it counsels that all things can be arranged in certain *sequences*."[360] Williams's picture of rationality, as I have said, is

---

[359] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.
[360] Descartes, *Rules*, AT X.381; emphasis added. Cf. Descartes, *Discourse*, Part Two, AT

generous and worldly, but it is inlaid in a relatively conservative background. In that background, the relations between an agent and his reasons are sequentially ordered, and those relations must be systematically reconstructable, along (deductive) inferential lines, according to a rationalistic method.[361] To repeat: in this system, *there can be no empty spaces* — no discontinuities — between an agent and his reasons. That metaphorical point is crucial for understanding the disagreement. In this picture, rationality operates, however ingeniously, by drawing lines on a plane.[xlvii] By contrast, McDowell is interested in a picture of rationality in which there *can* be empty spaces, that is, *extra-rational dimensions*, between an agent and reasons which are reasons *for* that agent. And in this picture, it is possible to cross these spaces using extra-rational means. What emerges are two different pictures of the space of reasons, and two different conceptions of reason itself, with early modern and ancient provenances, respectively.

I mean reason conceived as *ratio* and reason conceived as λόγος. Zwicky writes, "'Rationality' is a post-Enlightenment term of philosophical art ... Its root is Latin: *ratio*, to calculate or reckon, as in the apportioning of goods or money. It has come to indicate primarily skill in algebra and formal logic."[362] Compare Hobbes's definition: "REASON ... is nothing but *reckoning* (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names."[363] By contrast, consider Zwicky's reading of Herakleitean λόγος: "If we attend to Herakleitos' use, and not the letter of the word's etymology, a logos emerges in his work ... as a coherent pattern, shaped by ... resonances, whose integrity forms the basis of its ability to sustain meaning."[364] Both Heidegger and Weil, in their different ways, have worried about the Latinization of early Greek thinking, and have warned that the translation of λόγος by *ratio* is not only the translation of a word, but also of a concept. In Greek thinking, before reason was enmeshed in the Cartesian system, where it is permitted only two functions — as an intuitable, self-justifying epistemic atom, or as an

---

VI.18-19, esp. third rule.

[361] Perhaps this caricature is not entirely fair to Williams. But it is an ancestor of which Williams is offering a refinement.

[362] Zwicky, "Lyric and Ecology," §3.7.

[363] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, V.2.

[364] Zwicky, "Dream Logic," pp. 138-139.

epistemic atom justified by deduction from the former kind of atom[365] — it (reason) was considerably more flexible. It is an anachronistic travesty to claim, as some twentieth-century philosophers do, that when Plato talks of the rôle of λόγος in knowledge,[366] he means justification qua rational reconstruction. The concept of reason qua λόγος simply does not have that kind of restricted technical connotation for Plato. With Zwicky, I wish to defend a more flexible and imaginative conception of thinking: "I am looking for a way of thinking that in addition to using analysis can travel by extra-logical connections of images, similarities in overtone and structure; thought that is at once clear *and* resonant; in which clarity can assume the form of resonance."[367]

§7.3. It is time, I think, to discuss an example. Here is Williams's example of a putative *external* reason:

> In James' story of Owen Wingrave, from which Britten made an opera, Owen's father urges on him the necessity and importance of his joining the army, since all his male ancestors were soldiers, and family pride requires him to do the same. Owen Wingrave has no motivation to join the army at all, and all his desires lead in another direction: he hates everything about military life and what it means. His father might have expressed himself by saying that *there was a reason for Owen to join the army*. Knowing that there was nothing in Owen's *S* which would lead, through deliberative reasoning, to his doing this would not make him withdraw the claim or admit that he made it under misapprehension. He means it in an external sense. What is that sense?[368]

Someone might say, "There are *reasons* for Owen Wingrave to join the army. That is, there are objectively intelligible considerations, which are articulated by Owen's father. But these considerations aren't decisive; suppose that Owen can understand them, but is under no logical compulsion to accept them (and so an irrationality charge has no traction here). He can understand them, but isn't moved by them; they are reasons, but not *for*

---

[365] Cf. Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of Mind*, Rule 3.
[366] Plato, *Meno*, 98a.
[367] Zwicky, LP, L48.
[368] Williams, "Internal," p. 106.

him. This scenario is just grist to the mill of the distinction between normative and motivating reasons — or between reasons *simpliciter* and motives." — Williams would respond that this line of objection risks becoming self-contradictory: there is a *reason* for an agent which is not a reason *for him*? In their natural habitat, in the default case, reasons bear motivational force. We start with my subjective motivational set: a reason either engages some item in that set, or can be reached by reasoning controlled by that set. But by hypothesis, there is nothing in Owen's subjective motivational set which does engage or will engage with the putative reason offered by his father. Well, is there a reason for Owen to join the army, or not?[369]

The question may be rephrased: can an external reason statement be truly made about Owen with respect to his joining the army? And what would that involve? "The whole point of external reason statements," writes Williams, "is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations."[370] An external reason statement would be made about an agent who did not believe that statement and was not motivated by it. If he *were* motivated by it, the statement would simply concern an *internal* reason for that agent. Williams claims that "the content of the external type of statement will have to be revealed by considering what it is to *come to believe* such a statement."[371] Assuming motivational internalism,[xlviii] Williams expects that coming to believe a reason statement will entail motivation, and he wishes to scrutinize that transition from lacking motivation to acquiring it. And he observes that this examination is related "to an old question, of 'how reason can give rise to a motivation', a question which has famously received from Hume a negative answer."[372] Williams reminds us that his generous reconceptualization of deliberative reasoning allows considerable leeway here, and so the external reasons theorist must be an especially extreme anti-Humean, who wants to conceive "*in a special way* the connexion between acquiring a motivation and coming to believe the reason

---

[369] — "At this point I find myself wanting to ask, 'Aren't there different kinds of reasons? –Moral reasons, pragmatic reasons, political reasons, mathematical reasons, reasons in the game of chess …'" (Hymers, Scholium, 22 August 2011). Perhaps we could say: in different contexts, different things will count as reasons?
[370] Williams, "Internal," p. 107.
[371] Williams, "Internal," p. 108.
[372] Williams, "Internal," p. 108.

statement."[373] McDowell rightly draws attention to the following passages as central to Williams's argument:

> Owen might be so persuaded by his father's moving rhetoric that he acquired both the motivation and the belief. But this excludes an element which the external reasons theorist essentially wants, that the agent should acquire the motivation _because_ he comes to believe the reason statement, and that he should do the latter, moreover, because, in some way, he is considering the matter aright.[374]

McDowell will accept these conditions, but will resist the further condition stipulated, on behalf of the external reasons theorist, by Williams:

> If the theorist is to hold on to these conditions, he will, I think, have to make the condition under which the agent appropriately comes to have the motivation something like this, _that he should deliberate correctly_; and the external reasons statement itself will have to be taken as roughly equivalent to, or at least entailing, the claim that if the agent rationally deliberated, then, whatever motivations he originally had, he would come to be motivated to ϕ.[375]

McDowell agrees that this process, as depicted by Williams, "looks like a supposed exercise of that bloodless or dispassionate Reason that stands opposed to Passion in a familiar and unprepossessing genre of moral psychology, one that Hume made it difficult to take seriously."[376]

McDowell's strategy is to argue that Williams presents us with a mistaken dilemma, which involves a questionable assumption. Here is the dilemma: either (1) a reason is internal to an agent's subjective motivational set — "internal," that is, relative, in the two senses that Williams allows: the agent is already motivated by the reason, or can become motivated by a reasoning process controlled by the pre-existing motivational set — or (2) a reason is external to that set, and can be reached by reason alone. On the second horn, dispassionate reason must be capable, incredibly, of igniting a passion. And

---

[373] Williams, "Internal," p. 108.
[374] Williams, "Internal," pp. 108-109; underline added.
[375] Williams, "Internal," pp. 108-109; emphasis added.
[376] McDowell, "External," p. 111.

here is the assumption: if there are reasons which are independent of one's subjective motivational set, then the *only* way to reach them is through dispassionate, deliberative ratiocination, utterly uncontrolled by that set. "The crucial question," writes McDowell, "is this: why must the external reasons theorist envisage this transition to considering the matter aright [i.e., to recognizing the reason] as being effected by *correct deliberation*?"[377] That is, assuming that the external reasons theorist accepts (as McDowell does) Williams's claim that, in the transition to believing and being motivated by the external reason statement, the agent is "considering the matter aright," then what is the ground for excluding other ways of effecting the transition, "for instance (p. 108), being persuaded by moving rhetoric, and, by implication (p. 110), inspiration and conversion"?[378] McDowell places some weight on the latter possibility in particular: "The idea of conversion would function here as the idea of an intelligible shift in motivational orientation that is exactly *not* effected by inducing a person to discover, by practical reasoning controlled by existing motivations, some internal reasons that he did not previously realize he had."[379] He admits that the idea "points at best to a schema for explanations of shifts of character,"[380] and at this juncture, someone might object: "McDowell is talking about some kind of spurious magical procedure, or he is attempting an *ad hoc* feint, but in either case he is failing to address Williams's argument. Williams has argued that the sort of transition imagined by McDowell is massively implausible, and McDowell has merely decreed that we should *call* this transition 'conversion.' But so what? What is accomplished by this captioning of the picture?"

§7.4. McDowell's general point, which we have anticipated above, is, I think, quite radical, and it countenances a possibility excluded by Williams. Suppose that "from certain starting-points there is no rational route"[381] to a certain place of reasons; nevertheless, suggests McDowell, it is possible that there is an *extra-rational route* to that place. To some, McDowell's suggestion might appear to be on the verge of collapsing

---

[377] McDowell, "External," pp. 99-100.
[378] McDowell, "External," p. 100; the page numbers are references to Williams's essay.
[379] McDowell, "External," p. 102.
[380] McDowell, "External," p. 102.
[381] McDowell, "External," p. 102.

into incoherence: what could it mean for an agent to be related extra-rationally to reasons? Isn't it virtually an analytic truth that reasons, whatever they are, are the sorts of thing to which one is rationally related? But McDowell gradually settles the turned earth around his suggestion with a number of examples. One example concerns an analogy between ethical upbringing and conversion; another example reminds us, again by analogy, that individual failures to recognize reasons do not delegitimize the shared practices of exchanging these reasons. The example of ethical upbringing focusses explicitly on one of the stakes of Williams's general discussion: "a familiar problem about ethical reasons in particular, in view of the evident possibility of being left cold by them."[382] McDowell accepts a roughly Aristotelian story about ethical upbringing: "a process of habituation into suitable modes of behaviour, inextricably bound up with the inculcation of suitably related modes of thought," which process is simultaneously the acquisition of "a way of seeing things and of a collection of motivational directions or practical concerns, focused and activated in particular cases by exercises of the way of seeing things."[383] According to this story, ethical reasons are the sorts of reasons that engage with the psychology of someone who has been properly brought up. McDowell is careful to emphasize that he is not using the notion of proper upbringing "as a foundational element in some sort of ethical theory";[384] that is, it is not as though proper upbringing is already independently justified from some external vantage point, and can then be used to justify deliverances derivative of that upbringing. (For his part, Williams reads Aristotelianism as a failed effort at foundationalism in moral theory, an effort to justify human ethics by reference to an implausible teleological physics and a view of εὐδαιμονία as the ultimate τέλος of the human animal.)[385] For McDowell, the notion of such an upbringing is invoked "to defuse the threat of metaphysical peculiarity";[386] in other words, to concede Williams's point that reasons are reasons *for someone*, rather than weird metaphysical relics that eternally broadcast imperatives, independently of

---

[382] McDowell, "External," p. 95.
[383] McDowell, "External," p. 101. McDowell adds that "no specific Aristotelian detail matters to the point I am making—what is in question is barely more than common sense" ("External," p. 101, n. 6). He is not, in my view, exaggerating.
[384] McDowell, "External," p. 101.
[385] Cf. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Chapter 3.
[386] McDowell, "External," p. 101.

receivers. The general point is that ethical upbringing and ethical reasons are mutually complementary. We can imagine someone who has not been properly brought up, who remains unmoved by ethical reasons.

—"Well, for someone properly brought up, wouldn't there be something in their adult subjective set from which they could deliberate to having the required thing as a reason? To be sure, maybe there is no justification for them having acquired the set. But Hume wouldn't care about that, and neither should Williams. // But perhaps you are talking about someone's motivational set changing on analogy with the way it was originally formed, perhaps a way that didn't involve deliberation from other extant motivations. Might that involve a kind of rational intelligibility that didn't involve deliberation from one's extant motivational set?"[387] — Regarding the first issue: for someone "properly brought up," ethical reasons would be internal reasons: that is, they are reasons relative to that agent's subjective motivational set, which happens to have been formed ethically. This case is not controversial for Williams or McDowell. The more interesting issue is the second: McDowell's suggestion is exactly the one identified above: a change in someone's motivational set might be *analogous* to the original formation of that set. It might be induced by something other than deliberating from the agent's extant motivations. What is at stake here is whether something which would count as an (internal) reason *after* the change could be called an (external) reason *before* the change. The scenario is, I think, imaginable. Suppose that an agent is completely unmoved by a consideration, but sees that, were she to submit herself to a certain (non-rational or non-deliberative) process, she would then be moved by that consideration (it would be a reason for her). For example, suppose that I am completely unmoved by the suffering of livestock; but I see that, if I were to visit a factory farm and witness the suffering directly, I would come to experience that suffering as a reason against eating factory-farmed meat. We can assume that I am not already inclined, on the basis of my current motivational set, to visit the farm — the visit would be painful for me, and the change it would induce in my life would involve what are, from the perspective of my current motivational set, various kinds of inconveniences. What is in question here is

---

[387] MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011.

whether the suffering of livestock can be a reason for me before the reformation of my motivational set.

Returning to the person who has not been properly brought up and who is unmoved by ethical reasons: if the external reasons theorist wishes to reserve the right to hold this person hostage to the charge of irrationality, then McDowell agrees with Williams that such a charge is nothing more than "bluff."[388] But McDowell is not this sort of external reasons theorist; he claims that "we surely do not need to embrace the massively implausible implication that someone who has not been properly brought up—someone who has slipped through the net, so to speak—can be induced into seeing things straight by directing some piece of *reasoning* at him."[389] On this matter, McDowell is in agreement with Aristotle: "What argument would remould such people? It is hard, if not impossible, to remove by argument the traits that have long since been incorporated in the character ... argument and teaching, we may suspect, are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like earth which is to nourish seed."[390] (Aristotle's point has prompted one theorist to claim that for most of us, it is already too late. But the point [which again seems not restrictively Aristotelian but amenable to common sense] does not, of course, preclude the possibility that arguments can be used as tools in a process of habituation; nor need it imply that bad habits — even deeply ingrained ones — cannot be broken or at least mitigated.) The trouble with someone whose soul has not been properly prepared is that "there may be no such point of leverage for reasoning aimed at generating the motivations that are characteristic of someone who has been properly brought up."[391] And now McDowell suggests that something like conversion might effect the transition (from being completely unmovable by putative [external] reasons, to being in a state potentially movable by them). Conversion would be a restructuring of the agent's subjective motivational set, a restructuring which is not a rational consequence of

---

[388] McDowell, "External," p. 103; Williams, "Internal," pp. 110-111.
[389] McDowell, "External," p. 101.
[390] Aristotle, NE, X.9.1179b17-27.
[391] McDowell, "External," p. 102. — "Oh, I don't know; you might get a lot of it for free just by virtue of having the nervous system of a human animal" (MacIntosh, Scholium, 21 August 2011).

deliberating about the putative reason ("a transition *to* deliberating correctly, not one effected *by* deliberating correctly").[392]

§7.5. The introduction of the concept of conversion is not merely an *ad hoc* manoeuvre: consider an apparently offhand but actually crucial remark that McDowell confines to parenthesis: "(Being properly brought up is not itself a rational route into being that way.)"[393] If the internal reasons theorist accepts this relatively innocuous claim,[394] then his theoretical position is, I think, forfeit. If we can agree with McDowell that an ethically brought-up psychology is a place of reasons (a place from which reasons are potentially motivating), then we can ask whether ethical reasons can be reasons for children who have not yet been brought up. (And this question is a variation on the question, Might there be external reasons?) By hypothesis, a very young child who has not yet been brought up does not meet the minimal conditions for occupying the space of (internal) reasons: her psychology does not yet have enough structure for us to ascribe to her a subjective motivational set; it is more like an amorphous swarm of energy and needs. But if there is no sense in which ethical reasons can be reasons *for the child*, and there is no *rational* route from *her* starting-point to *our* place of reasons, then the distinction between ethical upbringing and arbitrary inculcation into a cult begins to look precarious. But that is a little fast: I do *not* mean that ethical upbringing requires a rationalistic justification to distinguish it from inculcation into a cult. Nor do I mean to imply that the existence of pre-ethical infants somehow imperils the correctness our ethical practices, as though their existence summons the skeptical demand that we must find some neutral terrain, external to our practices, from which we can *explain* those practices to these infants. What I mean is just that our practice of bringing children, by the extra-rational route of training and habituation, from insensitivity to sensitivity to reasons, does not impugn those reasons. Many of us do not believe that we are inculcating our children into a cult, nor do we believe that it would be better (more rational, more prudent, et cetera),

---

[392] McDowell, "External," p. 107.
[393] McDowell, "External," p. 102.
[394] Notice that Williams does not accept it ("Internal," p. 113).

for example, to teach them that justice is the advantage of the stronger. We believe that we are bringing them to see reasons, reasons which they did not (could not) see.

In conclusion, consider McDowell's other major example: imagine that one says, "to someone who cannot find anything to appreciate in, say, twelve-tone music, 'You are missing the reasons there are for seeking out opportunities to hear this music'. (It might take something like a conversion to bring the reasons within the person's notice; there is no suggestion that he is failing to be swayed by something that would sway anyone capable of being influenced by reasons at all.)"[395] What is important about the example is that there are reasons here, and that the person who is insensitive to them is not "irrational" in the strong sense indicated by the "bluff" of Williams's version of the external reasons theorist. Furthermore, the rational person's insensitivity to these reasons does not impugn their status as reasons. Consider the testimony of a convert, someone who accidentally hits on the key to appreciating this music: she *might* say, "All these years, I have been missing something." (That is, she might affirm that an external reason statement had been true of her, prior to her having come to believe it. And I cannot see that we are under any obligation to disallow such testimonies, unless we are already committed to internal reasons theory.)

As another example, consider the testimony of the novelist Zadie Smith.[396] She describes her conversion from hating the music of Joni Mitchell to loving it:

> But I didn't come to love Joni Mitchell by knowing anything more about her, or understanding what an open-tuned guitar is, or even by sitting down and forcing myself to listen and re-listen to her songs. I hated Joni Mitchell—and then I loved her. Her voice did nothing to me—until the day it undid me completely.[397]

The long dash has semantic value here: it gestures toward the unfathomable crossing of a gap. Smith describes it as "[a] sudden, unexpected attunement."[398] Like Williams and McDowell, she is especially intrigued by the moment of transition from lacking

---

[395] McDowell, "External," p. 107.

[396] Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement." Thanks to Alice MacLachlan for drawing my attention to this article.

[397] Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement."

[398] Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement."

motivation (or in this case aesthetic appreciation) to acquiring it. "How is it possible," she asks, "to hate something so completely and then suddenly love it so unreasonably? How does such a change occur?"[399] Notice the suggestion that the new motivation (or appreciation) is not regarded as rationally explicable. In meditating upon the shift, Smith makes a helpful distinction between "transformation" and "progressive change": "I don't want to confuse this phenomenon [transformation] with a progressive change in taste. The sensation of progressive change is different in kind: it usually follows a conscious act of will."[400] Of such a change, she gives the example of forcing herself to reread *Crime and Punishment* and thereby stimulating appreciation of Dostoevsky. By contrast, "the structure of the sensation" of transformation is comparable to "a leap of faith." An agent who undertakes such a leap is marked by a "breach" or a "discontinuity": "I find myself to be radically discontinuous with myself."[401] How should we imagine this discontinuity? Smith emphasizes that it is not susceptible to rational explanation. Pace Williams, we cannot identify the states of character on either side of this gap through some process of reasoning controlled by and relative to the agent's subjective motivational set. The relation between the two states is more like a short circuit.[402] Or suppose we think of the space between the two states not as a discontinuity (requiring an inferential or narrative bridge), but as a resonance chamber?[403] In this discussion, I do not mean to be defending or fortifying external reasons *theory*. But I do mean to be endorsing McDowell's question concerning the internal reasons theorist's exclusions. If we resist Williams's Cartesian picture of the space of reasons, then I think that we shall be open to considering a more complex space, and to countenancing a more diverse range of things *as* reasons. And some of these reasons will be reachable, not through rational deliberation, but through the sort of method presented earlier in §3.6 and §5.7: setting things side by side, and meditating on their similarities and dissimilarities.

---

[399] Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement."
[400] Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement."
[401] Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement."
[402] For the metaphor of short circuit, vide Zwicky, W&M, L68.
[403] For the image of the chamber, vide Zwicky, LP, L34.

CHAPTER 8. Medieval Moral Philosophy

Summary

¶ *In this chapter, I consider the default metaphor for picturing the distinction between beliefs and desires, and trace it back to G.E.M. Anscombe's interpretation of Aristotle. In her essay "Modern Moral Philosophy," Anscombe distinguishes between two senses of the terms "should" or "ought": an ordinary, ancient use, which applies equally to humans, non-human animals, and artefacts; and a special "moral" sense, which we have inherited from the Christian law-like conception of morality, and which has drifted outside the context in which it was meaningful. From the same theological framework, I claim, we have inherited a disintegrated picture of moral psychology: a picture in which intellect and volition are independent of each other. (This claim is not novel: both Nietzsche and Arendt have made it previously.) I turn to Aristotle's analysis of the structure of the soul, its four components: nutritive, desiring, practical reasoning, and theoretical reasoning. Michael Pakaluk invokes Mark Platts's version of Anscombe's distinction between intending and observing to theorize practical and theoretical reasoning: they are distinguishable by their different directions of fit. Practical reasoning, like intending, has a "world-to-mind direction of fit," while theoretical reasoning, like observing, has a "mind-to-world direction of fit." But this theory is suspiciously anachronistic. Consulting Anscombe's work, we find that she is the author of this confusion. In her interpretation of Aristotelian practical knowledge, she wishes to find what is distinctive about this kind of knowledge; if it is to be different from theoretical knowledge, then it should not involve the mind becoming like what it perceives. She infers that practical knowledge represents a counterfactual, and it succeeds when it changes the world to conform to its representation. My main claim is that this account describes Aquinas's conception of practical knowledge, not Aristotle's. The Thomistic conception of practical knowledge requires the Christian doctrine of voluntarism: the doctrine that volition is free, that is, independent of, and unconstrained by, intellection. But this view is not coherently attributable to Aristotle. Indeed, in*

developing this view, Anscombe refers to Aquinas's claim that practical knowledge is the "cause" of what it understands; in its deployment of this creative faculty, the human agent resembles God. Anscombe, Smith, and Dancy seem to assume that all action is teleological; but the argument for this assumption is not forthcoming, and I have argued that there is at least one genus of action, consisting of species such as listening, which is not best explained by ascribing a goal to the agent. I argue that Anscombe conflates acting with producing, and technical knowledge with practical knowledge; but Aristotle judiciously draws these distinctions. Both acting and producing are concerned with the realm of what admits of being otherwise; but there is at least one genus of activity, properly governed by phronesis, which is not aimed at producing something: this genus is attention. Anscombe tries to make Aristotle the source of the Humean view that desire is primarily what motivates; but while Aristotle does think that desire is involved in motivation, he does not think that it can stipulate goals independently of intellection. Anscombe caricatures Aristotle's account of deliberation as means/end reckoning; but the proper Aristotelian term for such reckoning is not deliberation but mere cleverness. Again, deliberating well is deliberating with phronesis; and while phronesis may be conceived as an epistemic virtue, it requires characterological virtue.

---

§8.1. Although it is not generally acknowledged, it is worth remembering that it was G.E.M. Anscombe who, in the first month of 1958, gave to moral philosophy the general concept of "consequentialism." She introduces the concept as a new coinage in her essay "Modern Moral Philosophy": "The denial of *any* distinction between foreseen and intended consequences, as far as responsibility is concerned,... explains the difference between old-fashioned Utilitarianism and that *consequentialism*, as I name it, which marks [Sidgwick] and every English academic philosopher since him."[404] This distinguishing feature of consequentialism is what Williams later calls "negative responsibility."[405] The burden of Anscombe's essay is a ferocious attack on British moral philosophy since Sidgwick, which attack depends on a contrast between that philosophy

---

[404] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," p. 12.
[405] Williams, "A critique of utilitarianism," §3 (esp. p. 95).

and classical Greek ethics. Her target is the countenancing, by consequentialists in their moral theories, of what Williams would call (in his own critique of utilitarianism) "unthinkable" actions;[406] the example on which she focusses is the judicial punishment or execution of the innocent. Her complaint is that such an action, which could not be shown to be just, might nevertheless be moralized (that is, morally justified) according to these theories; and this discrepancy points to a deep difference between the ancient concept of "justice" and the modern notion of "moral" rightness — what Williams would call a "thick" concept and a "thin" one, respectively.[407] (Thick concepts — such as *justice* "and *treachery* and *brutality* and *courage*" — are more specific than thin ones — such as *right* or *wrong* — and their application is "at the same time world-guided and action-guiding.")[408]

Anscombe's opening observation is that our term "moral," which we *seem* to have inherited from Aristotle, does not fit in descriptions of his ethics: "Have some of what he calls 'intellectual' virtues what *we* should call a 'moral' aspect? It would seem so ... If someone professes to be expounding Aristotle and talks in a modern fashion about 'moral' such-and-such, he must be 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."[409] Again, Williams later elaborates this misalignment into his distinction between *ethics* and *morality*: "morality should be understood as a particular development of the ethical, one that has a special significance in modern Western culture. It peculiarly emphasizes ... in particular a special notion of obligation."[410] (I cite Williams several times in connexion with Anscombe to make a point: although Anglo-American moral philosophers tend to be more familiar with his discussion of these issues, his discussion is clearly indebted to Anscombe — whose essay receives passing mention in one of his footnotes.)[411] The "special notion" of obligation brings me to what is, for my purposes, the most crucial insight in Anscombe's essay.

---

[406] Williams, "Critique,"§2 (pp. 92-93).
[407] Cf. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 129.
[408] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 141.
[409] Anscombe, MMP, pp. 1-2.
[410] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 6.
[411] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 223, n. 18.

Anscombe distinguishes between two senses of "ought," one of which is unremarkable, and the other, suspicious (especially if one has been reading Hume): "The terms 'should' or 'ought' or 'needs' relate to good and bad: e.g., machinery needs oil, or should or ought to be oiled, in that running without oil is bad for it, or it runs badly without oil."[412] This usage, Anscombe implies, is not inconsistent with Aristotle's (and, I would add, Plato's): arete applies indifferently — we could say "non-morally," in that special sense of "moral" — to human beings, horses, horsepower motors, grape vines, and pruning knives. (— Oh, we *could* say that, from an impartial, perspective-less perspective of the universe, it isn't good or bad for a human being or a horse to flourish; but that is just to retire the word "good" from circulation.) But we depart from the classical world when these terms ("should," et cetera) acquire "a special so-called 'moral' sense—i.e. a sense in which they imply some absolute verdict (like one of guilty / not guilty on a man) ..."

> The ordinary (and quite indispensable) terms "should," "needs," "ought," "must"—acquired this special sense by being equated in the relevant context with "is obliged," or "is bound," or "is required to," in the sense in which one can be obliged or bound by law, or something can be required by law.
>
> How did this come about? The answer is in history: between Aristotle and us came Christianity, with its *law* conception of ethics.[413]

And between us and Christianity came the Reformation, among other things. Nietzsche made the critical point that secular European morality was in a state of incoherence, because it depended, for its justification, on a theological foundation which was not available to it. Without acknowledging Nietzsche, Anscombe puts his insight to a Wittgensteinian use: "Hume discovered the situation in which the notion of 'obligation' survived, and the notion 'ought' was invested with that peculiar force having which it is said to be used in a 'moral' sense, but in which the belief in divine law had long since been abandoned ... The situation, if I am right, was the interesting one of the survival of

---

[412] Anscombe, MMP, p. 5.
[413] Anscombe, MMP, p. 5.

a concept outside of the framework of thought that made it a really intelligible one."[414] The situation is like this: one encounters the command (perhaps one whispers it to oneself, through clenched teeth), "You *shall not* steal," intoned with that special moral emphasis. But one finds that one is rational and self-interested, and moreover, no-one else appears to be watching; and one asks oneself, "What if I do steal?" The question reaches out in the darkness for a railing, but the anticipated (or dreaded, or hoped for) support isn't there. The question asked by Hobbes's fool is the same as that asked by Glaucon: "whether injustice, taking away the fear of God ... [does] not sometimes stand with that reason which dictateth to every man his own good."[415] And notwithstanding the numerous complicated theoretical campaigns to deal with this question, the answer surely is: in those exceptional circumstances where one can reasonably expect that no external coercive power — deity, sovereign, angry mob, or one's partner in iterated prisoner's dilemmas, et cetera — will punish the transgression, then the unjust act in question is not irrational. — Anscombe proceeds to recommend that modern philosophy should dispense with its deracinated notion of "morally ought": "you can do ethics without it, as is shown by the example of Aristotle."[416]

Part of Anscombe's argument, as I have said, is that modern moral philosophy is characterized by a law-like conception of morality, one which it inherits from Christianity. But I would add a point which Anscombe is predisposed to miss: that it is equally characterized by a disintegration of intellect and appetite, which it equally inherits from Christian philosophy. And, indeed, the two aspects of the inheritance are interrelated: a disintegrated moral psychology especially requires laws to force the cooperation of its fractured components.

---

[414] Anscombe, MMP, p. 6. Anscombe is of course referring to Hume's infamous analysis of "ought"; cf. Hume, *Treatise,* III.I.§II.¶27. Among the several places where Nietzsche makes the point made here by Anscombe, one is *On the Genealogy of Morality*, §II.4. Cf. also Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125. Anscombe's thesis — about the survival of a concept outside of its proper framework — is elaborated at book-length by Alasdair MacIntyre in his *After Virtue*.

[415] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I.XV.4. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, II.358c.

[416] Anscombe, MMP, p. 8.

The suggestion that I wish to make is that we may discern two major genealogies in moral psychology, and that Aquinas is the fork.[417] The first genealogy, now mostly forgotten, is what I wish to call the *integrative (or photosynthetic) ethical psychology*: for the purposes of this story, it begins with Plato, is refined by Aristotle, and then goes underground for roughly 1900 years, until it is recovered by Spinoza. In the twentieth (and twenty-first) century it is rekindled again, though largely marginally, by Weil, Murdoch, and McDowell.[xlix] The other genealogy, the *disintegrative moral psychology*, which is now dominant, emerges from a shift in the philosophical imagination made possible by Christianity and initiated by a Thomistic misinterpretation of Aristotle. The bifurcation of the faculties (of reason and passion), articulated by Aquinas, receives its consolidation in Cartesian dualism; and the stage is thus set for the dualistic Humean theory of motivation which is the default in current Anglo-American moral philosophy.

And I insist that we need them both. The project of this thesis, as I have emphasized, is not to refute the Humean theory. On the contrary, I agree that the theory provides an accurate analysis of motivation — some of the time. Furthermore, it is from the disintegrative perspective that moral critique is possible. My claim is, rather, that not all of the relevant phenomena are saved by the Humean theory; and that if we are concerned to do justice to these phenomena (however rare), we need to have recourse to the other model of ethical psychology — the one that Aquinas, partly through his massive invisibility to current analytic discourse, obscures from view.

§8.2. In what follows, it is important to remember McDowell's observation that enkrateia and akrasia are *formally similar* states: both are characterized by a counterbalancing of, and a conflict among, reasons; and this conflict distinguishes them from arete. The enkratic agent, unlike the akratic one, usually manages *to control* this conflict, and to decide in favour of the most appropriate reason. But we should conceive both agents as effortful, wilful decision-makers, for whom moral situations are a special sort of *agony* (in the etymological sense, a *contest*). Irwin nicely glosses the concept of akrasia: "The

---

[417] Hannah Arendt plausibly locates the discovery of the will in Paul. Vide Arendt, *Willing*, §II.8 (pp. 63-73) and Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," esp. §III (pp. 97-122). But it is in Aquinas's work that Paul's dualistic moral psychology is first systematized.

incontinent [*akratēs*] — as opposed to the continent, *enkratēs* — lacks 'control' or 'mastery' (*kratein*) over himself, and specifically over his nonrational desires ... The incontinent has the correct decision ... but acts on appetite instead."[418] In the enkratic person, the desiring component ultimately obeys reason; in the akratic person, it does not.

Aristotle introduces the concepts of enkrateia and akrasia in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book I, Chapter 13, recognition of these concepts is connected with a division in the psychological structure, between a desiring, semi-reasonable component of the soul, and a fully reasonable component. The enkratic and the akratic agents display this division in their own characters: "there is found in them also another natural element beside reason, which fights against and resists it."[419] Aristotle supports this claim with a bodily analogy: suppose that my leg has fallen asleep; when I decide to stand up, instead I stumble to the ground; in this example, whatever is deciding seems to be non-identical with whatever is moving. Aristotle is assuming a general principle — what Annas aptly calls "the Principle of Conflict"[420] — articulated by Plato in the course of his own psychological dialectic:[1] "the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time."[421] Indeed, Aristotle's discussion of enkrateia can be understood as an elaboration of Plato's suggestion that the notion of *self*-control is, strictly considered, absurd, unless it implies an internal complexity: "the expression is apparently trying to indicate that, in the soul of that very person, there is a better part and a worse one."[422] The conflict that characterizes enkrateia and akrasia is a conflict between the desiring component and practical reasoning component of the soul. Aristotle distinguishes enkrateia from the virtue of temperance or sophrosune: in the temperate person, the desiring component "listens still better to reason, since there it agrees with reason in everything."[423] (The virtue is pictured as a kind of harmony, by contrast to the dissonance experienced in enkrateia.) Enkrateia belongs to the same domain as the virtue of sophrosune — which is concerned with

---

[418] Irwin, "Glossary," NE, p. 335.
[419] Aristotle, NE, I.13.1102b15.
[420] Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* <u>Republic</u>, p. 137.
[421] Plato, *Republic*, IV.436b.
[422] Plato, *Republic*, IV.431a; cf. Annas, *Introduction*, p. 117.
[423] Aristotle (trans. Irwin), NE, I.13.1102b25.

pleasures and pains[424] (particularly the tactile pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex)[425] —
but enkrateia is not itself a virtue, nor is akrasia a vice. No, enkrateia and akrasia are
states in the scalar limbo between virtue and vice.

At the beginning of his investigation, according to his custom, Aristotle gathers
together some phenomena, appearances or common beliefs (ἔνδοξα), about enkrateia and
akrasia. He also gives a thumbnail sketch of his characteristic method of ethical
inquiry.[426] First, he gathers together the relevant phenomena; then he submits these
phenomena to critical questioning, inspecting the puzzles (ἀπορίαι) arising from them.
An ideal regulates the inquiry: to solve the puzzles while conserving the phenomena. (In
Aristotle's literalist metaphor, to solve a puzzle is *to loosen* some knots in thinking.)[427]
Here are some of the common beliefs: "the same man is thought to be continent and
ready to abide by the result of his calculations, or incontinent and ready to abandon them.
And the incontinent man, knowing that what he does is bad, does it as a result of passion,
while the continent man, knowing that his appetites are bad, refuses on account of his
rational principle to follow them."[428] Michael Pakaluk schematizes the differences in the
following chart, where an "O" indicates "that a person having the condition is as he
should be in the relevant respect":

---

[424] Aristotle, NE, II.7.1107b5.
[425] Aristotle, NE, III.10.1118a30.
[426] Aristotle, NE, VII.2.1145b5. It is a description of the "dialectical" reasoning (different from Platonic dialectic) defined, in contrast to the "demonstrative" reasoning, in *Topics* I.1.
[427] Aristotle, NE, VII.2.1146b7.
[428] Aristotle, NE, VII.1.10-15.

Table 1: PAKALUK'S CHART[429]

	arete	enkrateia	akrasia	kakia[430]
What the agent thinks she should do	O	O	O	X
What she desires to do	O	X	X	X
What she actually does	O	O	X	X

The schematization has advantages and disadvantages. One of its major disadvantages is that it oversimplifies things: the conflict appears too stark, as though it occurs between completely discrete compartments, each of which has a lever that can be in one of only two positions ("on" or "off"). One of its advantages is that it depicts something important about arete, imagined as an integrative perspective: when everything is harmoniously aligned, we do not characterize the act as *effortful*. The action issues spontaneously — like an arrow passing through the narrow sockets of twelve of axe-helves[431] — without the will needing to intervene in order to dispatch obstacles.

Aristotle's analysis ultimately claims to discover four distinct components. As I have noted, first he divides the soul into (1) non-reasoning and (2) reasoning components. Referring to these components, he canvasses two different kinds of distinction: "Whether these are separated as the parts of the body or of anything divisible are, or are distinct by definition but are by nature inseparable, like convex and concave in the circumference of a circle ..." Are the non-reasoning and reasoning components metaphysically separable *parts*, or are they distinct but inseparable (internally related) *aspects* (of a shared structure)? Aristotle says (frustratingly), "[it] does not affect the present question."[432] But

---

[429] Adapted from Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 234.
[430] κᾰκία is Greek for vice.
[431] The metaphor is from Homer, *Odyssey*, XXI.481-484.
[432] Aristotle, NE, I.13.1102a35.

it does matter, greatly, and the various points of intersection with *De Anima*[li] do not help to resolve the question. And it matters for present purposes because the initial division undergirds the division between virtues of character and those of thought (what are often called "moral" and "intellectual" virtues, respectively).[433] Since virtues of character pertain to the desiring component, and those of thought, to the reasoning component, the status of the distinction between components bears directly on the status of the distinction between virtues: are the virtues a unity, or not? And notice that the question has a special inflection: we are not asking, for example, Can someone be brave while lacking temperance (distinguishing between members of a single kind)? — but rather, Can someone be brave while lacking wisdom (distinguishing between members of two kinds)?

As denizens of the twenty-first century, having lived through the discontinuity and fragmentation of the modern and postmodern world, believing ourselves thoroughly experienced in the varieties of hard-boiled "realism," and well trained in the technique of unsentimental discrimination, we tend to think that the answers to these questions are obvious. Aren't there plenty of brave gluttons, smart cowards, music-loving Nazis, et cetera — plenty of specialists in one area who are inept in others? But our *readiness* to accept as normal what Aristotle and Plato regard as degenerate cases is not, by itself, evidence in favour of our paradigm; nor does it excuse us of the labour of holding the phenomena up to alternative paradigms and checking the fit. What is at stake, ultimately, is whether Aristotle's moral psychology is indifferently exchangeable with some sort of Humean moral psychology. I shall return to this difficult question when I consider the relation between sophrosune and phronesis. We shall see that the most apt metaphor for the relation among the psychological components (and thus among the virtues) is not anatomical dissection, but convexity/concavity. And that (pace Anscombe) Aristotle is not an antiquated Humean.

Aristotle subdivides his initial division, revealing: (1.1) a non-reasoning, *nutritive* component, shared by all living things, including plants (which component Aristotle dismisses as irrelevant to human ethics);[434] (1.2) a non-reasoning, *desiring* component,

---

[433] Cf. Aristotle, NE, I.13.1103a5-10.
[434] Aristotle, NE, I.13.1102b1-15.

which "shares in reason in a way," "by listening to reason as to a father";[435] (2.1) a calculative or *deliberative* reasoning component, whose function is practical action, or "truth in agreement with right desire";[436] and (2.2.) a *scientific* reasoning component, whose function is contemplative study of necessary truth.[437] Whereas the Principle of Conflict supported the initial division between (1) and (2), a different principle, which we may call the Principle of the Target (after the image at the beginning of Book VI, Chapter 1), serves to individuate (2.1) practical and (2.2) theoretical reason. Aristotle articulates the principle: "where objects differ in kind the part of the soul answering to each of the two is different in kind."[438] The principle is underwritten by a further claim — "it is in virtue of a certain likeness and kinship with their objects that they have the knowledge they have"[439] — which Pakaluk paraphrases: to grasp something "involves resemblance ... between that which does the grasping and that which is grasped."[440]

We might wonder both why grasping should involve resemblance, and, even conceding that first point, why a multiplicity of distinct objects should entail a corresponding multiplication of distinct intellectual faculties (since structural resemblance does not entail numerical resemblance). To address the first objection in detail would take me too far afield, and I will merely say that Aristotle just does rely upon a view that perceiving and understanding occur by resemblance (see *De Anima*, Book II, Chapter 5, and Book III, Chapter 4).[441] If we are to make any sense of this view, we will need to conceive of the resemblance *formally* (that is, structurally). And the metaphor of grasping, imagined physically, is not entirely unhelpful: to grasp the handle of the trowel, my hand does not need to be made out of wood; but it does need to take a shape which corresponds, in some rough sense, to the shape of the handle. The second

---

[435] Aristotle (trans. Irwin), NE, I.13.1102b15-1103a5.
[436] Aristotle, NE, VI.2.1139a30.
[437] Aristotle, NE, VI.1139a5-10, 1139a25-30.
[438] Aristotle, NE, VI.1.1139a9-11.
[439] Aristotle, NE, VI.1.1139a12.
[440] Pakaluk, *Aristotle's* <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>, p. 218.
[441] The account of perceiving and understanding is itself analogous to Aristotle's treatment of nutrition: as Ross nicely summarizes, "nutrition is assimilation, the making like of what was unlike" (Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 141; cf. Aristotle, DA, II.4.416b5). Furthermore, Aristotle's theory of perceiving and understanding by resemblance is prefigured by Empedokles: cf. DK 31A86 (31B107), 31B22, 31B105, 31B109.

objection also concerns fathomless depths, but is more directly relevant to the current discussion. It is not mere multiplicity of objects that motivates Aristotle's distinction between intellectual faculties, but metaphysical distinctness between "things whose originative causes are invariable, and ... variable things."[442] (Such distinctness has a long legacy, reflected, for example, in Hume's distinction between "Relations of Ideas" and "Matters of Fact,"[443] and adapted in the logical positivist distinction between the logical and the empirical.)

§8.3. Pakaluk writes, "We have a thinking-related virtue ... when there is a reliable connection between our being in some condition and our seeing or asserting some class of truths." But there is a problem: "How could there be a reliable connection ... between our asserting something when in a certain condition as regards *changeable* things, and its being so?"[444] Aristotle's answer, according to Pakaluk, "is to appeal to two sorts of kinship between the rational soul and the world. As regards things that cannot be otherwise, the soul cognizes and reliably attains truth by the soul's *becoming like them*; but as regards things that can be otherwise, the soul cognizes and reliably attains truth by making it so that *they become like the soul*. Take truth to be a correspondence between what the soul says and how the world is: one sort of truth results from the soul's coming into correspondence with the world; another kind of truth results from the world's coming into correspondence with the soul."[445] It is no accident that this gloss sounds like an echo of Anscombe's distinction between *observing* and *intending*.[446] Pakaluk explicitly references Anscombe's essay "Thought and Action in Aristotle,"[447] which is an elaboration of a view sketched in her book *Intention*.[448] As we know, Humean theorists have since found it useful to invoke Anscombe's distinction (sometimes under Platts's metaphor of "directions of fit") to bolster their distinction between belief and desire. Since Anscombe purports to be expounding a view found in Aristotle, it is worth asking

---

[442] Aristotle, NE, VI.1139a7-9.
[443] Cf. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, §IV, Part I.
[444] Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 219; emphasis added.
[445] Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 219.
[446] Anscombe, *Intention*, §32.
[447] Cf. Pakaluk, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 232.
[448] Cf. Anscombe, *Intention*, §§33 ff.

whether that view is, actually, found there; that is, whether Aristotle is some kind of Humean. To anticipate, I think that the answer to this question is "no," and that Anscombe is culpable of confusedly and anachronistically projecting a distinction back onto the Aristotle and then claiming to find it there. (Planting evidence at the scene of the crime.) Let me inspect things more closely.

We are familiar with Anscombe's allegory: a man is grocery shopping, and he has a list of groceries. A detective is following the man, and keeping a record of the groceries that the man places in the basket. The man's grocery list and the detective's record stand in different relations to the groceries in the basket: the groceries should match the man's list, and a discrepancy is a mistake in the man's performance; but the detective's record should match the groceries, and a discrepancy is a mistake in the record. The man with the grocery list is a kind of personification of *intention*, and the detective with the record, of *observation*.[449] Platts famously develops the metaphor in the following way (while simultaneously apologizing for its "picturesque idiom"):

> Anscombe, in her work on intention, has drawn a broad distinction between two *kinds* of mental state, factual belief being the prime exemplar of one kind and desire a prime exemplar of the other ... The distinction is in terms of the *direction of fit* of mental states with the world. Beliefs aim at the true, and their being true is their fitting the world; falsity is a decisive failing in a belief, and false beliefs should be discarded; beliefs should be changed to fit the world, not vice versa. Desires aim at realisation, and their realisation is the world fitting with them; the fact that the indicative content of a desire is not realised in the world is not yet a failing *in the desire*; the world, crudely, should be changed to fit our desires, not vice versa.[450]

Picturesque or not, the metaphor has stuck, and both Humeans and anti-Humeans have deferred to it and struggled with it.[451] (Platts adds, "I wish ... I were clearer as to whether there are *any* mental states for which the direction of fit is purely of the second kind;

---

[449] Anscombe, *Intention*, §32.
[450] Platts, *Ways of Meaning*, §X.3 (pp. 256-257).
[451] Vide, e.g., Smith, HTM, §§6 ff; McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, §7.1; Dancy, MR, §2.3.

desires seem not to be such a candidate, since all desires seem to involve elements of belief."[452] The addendum is significant, for it implies that desires are connected, somehow, with representation; and such an assumption seems to be shared by, for example, Smith and Dancy.)

Let me examine the stage-setting for Anscombe's distinction. She claims to be enveloped in philosophical "darkness,"[453] generated by reflecting on the following sort of case: "Say I go over to the window and open it. Someone who hears me moving calls out: What are you doing making that noise? I reply 'Opening the window.'"[454] Her reply is a knowledge claim about her intentional action; and she did not (does not normally) obtain that knowledge by observing her behaviours or bodily movements, although someone else could have obtained knowledge about what she is doing through such observation.[455] Here is the darkness: "Now if there are two *ways* of knowing here, one of which I call knowledge of one's intentional action and the other of which I call knowledge by observation of what takes place, then must there not be two *objects* of knowledge?"[456] To anticipate, Anscombe is going to argue (or suggest) that there are two kinds of truth, correlated to two kinds of knowledge, practical and theoretical. The second kind of knowledge reports facts, while the first kind *manipulates* them. (Furthermore, according to Anscombe's view, theoretical truth attaches to propositions, while practical truth attaches to actions: "if ... the idea of the *description under which* what is done is integral to the notion of action, then these predicates ['true' and 'false'] apply to actions strictly and properly."[457] While I have no objection to speaking of the truth or falsity of actions, I am not sure what, if anything, is achieved by the assimilation of action to language.[458] It seems to me that the relation [especially for a student of Wittgenstein] should be the other way around.) In the same section in which she draws a formal distinction between intending and observing, Anscombe reiterates her darkness in the form of a dilemma:

[452] Platts, *Ways of Meaning*, p. 257.
[453] Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 55.
[454] Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 28.
[455] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §246.
[456] Anscombe, *Intention*, §29.
[457] Anscombe, "Thought and Action," p. 158.
[458] Although it does seem to anticipate the sort of theory defended by Nussbaum, without reference to Anscombe, in *Upheavals of Thought* (cf. §I.1.iv).

> Can it be there is something that modern philosophy has blankly
> misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by
> *practical knowledge*? Certainly in modern philosophy we have an
> incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge. Knowledge must be
> something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts.
> The facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what is to be said, if it is
> knowledge. And this is the explanation of the utter darkness in which we
> found ourselves. For if there are two knowledges — one by observation,
> the other in intention — then it looks as if there must be two objects of
> knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly
> for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there
> were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the
> acting.[459]

Anscombe suggests that the detective, qua personification of observing (or believing, or theoretical or speculative knowing), can report what is happening, but cannot satisfactorily answer some questions that are answerable by the grocery-shopping man. For example, *Why* is the man turning down the aisle with pasta, rice, and canned vegetables?[460] (Because he is seeking a box of rotini. — I hasten to avert the further suggestion that it is conceptually impossible for an observer to know, in some ordinary sense, *why* the man is turning down the aisle. Thus I stress that the detective in Anscombe's allegory is a *personification* of observing. Still, there is something artificial about the segregation of this faculty, and that artificiality is not innocent.) If we assume (for the sake of argument) a correspondence theory of truth, as Anscombe seems to do, and maintain that a belief is true when it accurately represents some fact; and if we wish to avoid the postulation of privately introspectable mental objects; then there seems to be no work left over for practical knowledge. What would such knowledge cover, except the very same things that are already covered by observation?

---

[459] Ancombe, *Intention*, §32. Evidently Anscombe is not thinking of, e.g., coherence theories of knowledge.
[460] Cf. Anscombe, *Intention*, §§5, 26, 48.

Anscombe addresses this question by taking issue with one of the claims above: "The facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge." Richard Moran identifies the key distinction: "Unlike theoretical or speculative knowledge, practical knowledge will not be passive or receptive to the facts in question, but is rather a state of the person that plays a role in the constituting of such facts."[461] Practical knowledge, according to Anscombe, is *a skill at manufacturing facts* (and what it is knowledge *of* are other *possible worlds*). Admittedly, that formulation sounds strange (and I confess that it is my paraphrase, not exactly Anscombe's original thought). Nor do I wish to embark on possible-world metaphysics. But my formulation is simply a quaint way of inflecting what is essential about the Humean mental item called "desire": it is a *world-changer* or *-creator* (by contrast with belief, which is a *world-reflector*). Anscombe alleges to be rediscovering this conception of practical knowledge among the ancients — specifically Aristotle — but it is not thoughtful of her to lump ancient and medieval philosophy into a single category. Again, this conception of knowledge is really peculiarly modern, or at best Thomistic. Indeed, the conception of *action* which surrounds this knowledge is one that post-dates classical philosophy; it is a conception *which requires the Christian doctrine of the unconstrained freedom, the radical indeterminacy, of the will.* Such a conception is foreign both to Plato, who thinks that even the gods' actions are responsive to (and thus constrained by) factors independent of them,[462] and to Aristotle, who thinks that human decisions require and express character.[463]

I suggest that Anscombe's conception of practical knowledge may be Thomistic rather than Aristotelian, and that suggestion is not idle. At the resolution of her dilemma, Anscombe explicitly invokes Aquinas: "the account given by Aquinas of the nature of

---

[461] Moran, "Anscombe on 'Practical Knowledge,'" p. 47. I differ from Moran over what the relevant "facts" are in Anscombe's theory.

[462] Vide, e.g., Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10d; *Timaeus*, 28a-b. The modern conception of freedom would be equally foreign to Plato's predecessor Parmenides, who thinks that being itself is bound by necessity (ἀνάγκη [cf. DK 28B8]). The list of ancient witnesses could be continued indefinitely.

[463] Vide, e.g., Aristotle, NE, VI.2.1139a31-36. (Character, in turn, is a patterned history of similar decisions, shaped by an epistemic faculty which is reciprocally shaped by them.)

practical knowledge holds: Practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands', unlike 'speculative' knowledge, which 'is derived from the objects known.'"[464] I do not know how many contemporary moral psychologists have bothered to look up the original text from which Anscombe extracts her formulation; but if one visits the generally evacuated stacks of the Killam Library, one can find a duct-taped, burgundy-covered volume with yellowed pages: Part II, First Part, First Number of the *Summa Theologica*, "literally translated" by Fathers of the English Dominican Province,[465] and published in 1927 in Great Britain by Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, "Publishers to the Holy See." I suspect that Anscombe's translation is her own; but if we turn to Question III, Fifth Article, "Whether happiness is an operation of the speculative, or of the practical intellect?" — we find the fuller context for her quote:

> It would seem that happiness is an operation of the practical intellect. For the end of every creature consists in becoming like God. *But man is like God, by his practical intellect*, which is the cause of things understood, rather than by his speculative intellect, which derives its knowledge from things....[466][lii]

What is the meaning of this bizarre phrase, "the cause of things understood," or "the cause of what it understands"? For Anscombe, its meaning is twofold: on the one hand, practical knowledge is the condition of the possibility of some kinds of action, for example, marrying, contracting, offending.[467][liii] On the other hand, the phrase has a more occult meaning which is, for my purposes, more pertinent: practical knowledge is the *actualizing* (the *creating*), in action, of its objects, which are possible, counterfactual states of affairs. In this respect, it is *God-like*. (Contrast Moran's interpretation of Anscombe's Thomistic maxim. According to Moran, *what* practical knowledge understands, that of which it is the formal cause, is *action*; in this sense, intention is *constitutive* of "intentional action.")[468] Practical knowledge is partly a kind of representation of some possible counterfactual, but only insofar as it is exhibited in some

---

[464] Anscombe, *Intention*, §48.
[465] Actually solely Laurence Shapcote.
[466] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.i., Q3, Art. 5, Obj. 1; emphasis added.
[467] The examples are from Anscombe, *Intention*, §47.
[468] Vide Moran, "Anscombe," §3 (pp. 54-55).

goal-directed behaviour. (Anscombe asserts, "The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*"; and "there are two features present in wanting; movement towards a thing and knowledge (or at least opinion) that the thing is there.")[469] Practical knowledge, according to Anscombe's picture, is a representation of another world, characterized as desirable, combined with beliefs about the means to change this world into that one; it is an attempt *to make true* what is not yet true; and it counts as knowledge, we might say retroactively, to the extent that it succeeds. — Now let me say that I sympathize with anyone who finds this way of talking awkward.

§8.4. Aristotle suggests that there is a strong analogy between practical and demonstrative syllogisms. What happens in practical reasoning, he says, "would seem to be more or less the same as when one thinks and deduces about immobile things."[470] Consider this passage: "The one opinion is universal, the other is concerned with the particular facts, and here we come to something within the sphere of perception; where a single opinion results from the two, the soul must in one type of case affirm the conclusion, while in the case of opinions concerned with production it must immediately act."[471] That is, when major and minor premises are conjoined, a conclusion necessarily follows from them: in the case of theoretical reasoning, the conclusion is a further belief; and in the case of practical reasoning, "the conclusion is the action."[472] All of Anscombe, Wiggins, McDowell, and Davidson seem to agree that desire is *implicated somehow* in the major premise (whether it is retrospectively ascribed, or tacitly assumed, or explicitly articulated as some sort of general rule).[473] Wiggins's schematization is clear: "The first or major premiss mentions something of which there could be a desire (*orexis*) transmissible to some practical conclusion (*i.e.*, a desire convertible *via* some available

---

[469] Anscombe, *Intention*, §36. Anscombe's way of phrasing the relation is not entirely felicitous. Is trying to get only a sign, an indicator, of wanting?

[470] Aristotle, *De Motu Animalium*, 7.701a9-10.

[471] Aristotle, NE, VII.3.1147a25-30. Cf. Aristotle, *De Motu Animalium*, 7.701a10

[472] Aristotle, *De Motu Animalium*, 7.701a23.

[473] Cf. Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 34, 37; Anscombe, T&A, p. 153; Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," p. 40; Wiggins, "Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire," p. 259; McDowell, V&R, p. 343; Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?," p. 80.

minor premiss into an action). The second or minor premiss pertains to the feasibility in the particular situation to which the syllogism is applied of what must be done if the claim of the major premise is to be heeded."[474] Davidson and Wiggins suggest that akrasia threatens the sense of necessity (the demonstrative force) that animates the practical syllogism. If the conclusion of such a syllogism is an action, and if the conclusion is necessitated by the conjoining, by the agent, of the premises, then how could it be possible for an agent to engage in such reasoning and yet act otherwise than prescribed?

According to Anscombe, a practical syllogism (unlike a demonstrative syllogism) does not give reasons for us to believe that its conclusion *is* true — for, at the time of the reasoning, the conclusion is, in fact, *not* true. That is, the practical syllogism is *not* a demonstration of the necessary truth of its conclusion; it is a set of considerations, an argument, for *making* its conclusion become true. This suggestion is explicit in the essay "Thought and Action," where Anscombe claims that practical truth "is brought about — i.e. made true — by action (since the description of what he does is made true by his doing it)."[475] Again, as I keep suggesting, the source of this picture is later than Aristotle. I have already noted Anscombe's explicit invocation of Aquinas; and it is useful to compare Hume:

> Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained.... The one discovers objects, as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: The other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation.[476]

Whence the suggestion that taste (or desire or volition) is productive or creative?

> The standard of the other [viz., taste], arising from the internal frame and constitution of animals, is ultimately derived from that Supreme Will,

---

[474] Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," p. 40. The schematization is repeated virtually verbatim in Wiggins, "Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire," p. 259.
[475] Anscombe, T&A, p. 157.
[476] Hume, *Enquiry*, Appendix I.§V.¶21.

which bestowed on each being its peculiar nature, and arranged the several classes and orders of existence.[477]

It is well known that Hume is a religious skeptic, if not an atheist, and a "compatibilist" about the will; so it would be misguided to take his remarks, here, unsalted. But I do want to suggest, again, that the idea of human (or Humean) desire as a *freely creative* faculty is a post-classical idea, one that requires the advent, in the background, of the Christian doctrine of voluntarism. By voluntarism, I mean minimally the thesis that volition is independent of intellection (and thus that volition is independent of any intellectual norms, and can neither be constrained nor criticized by them).[liv] For contrast, consider, again, Plato's *demiourgos*: he is a world-creator, yes, but his acts are not "free"; he is constrained by, and must defer to, the forms. It is the same, on a human scale, with Aristotle's character of the artist, whose productive activity is constrained by four kinds of reason, at least three of which are independent of her. The picture of practical knowledge which Anscombe imputes to Aristotle cannot be his; it is a modern philosopher's wish-fulfilling dream.

§8.5. Anscombe's account of practical reasoning serves, inter alia, to adumbrate what we might call the "two-representation model" of motivation. The structure of this model is indicated in her allegory of the two lists (namely, the shopper's and the detective's), and made explicit in Platts's metaphor of directions of fit. In order to explicate the allegedly categorical difference between belief and desire, these theorists effectively lasso desire into the realm of representation. Earlier I noted that this model underlies both Dancy's early pure cognitivism and Smith's Humean theory of motivation; and it is worth noting further that the representational move is a departure from Hume: "A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and *contains not any representative quality*, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in *that emotion have no more a reference to any other object*, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high."[478] For Smith, motivating reasons are teleological, and their teleology is accounted for by

---

[477] Hume, *Enquiry*, Appendix I.§V.¶21.

[478] Hume, *Treatise*, II.III.§III.¶5; emphasis added.

analysing out a constituent, called a "desire" (or a "pro attitude").[479] Desires are "dispositions to act in certain ways under certain conditions."[480] The desire to φ is a "functional role," comprehending a set of dispositions: "the disposition to ψ in conditions C, the disposition to χ in conditions C′, and so on, where, in order for conditions C and C′ to obtain, the subject must have, *inter alia*, certain other desires, and also certain other means-ends beliefs, beliefs concerning φ-ing by ψ-ing, φ-ing by χ-ing and so on."[481] (The point of characterizing desires as functional rôles is to evade a suggestion that all desires must have a phenomenology, and thus to account for what Hume might call "calm passions," which "are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation.")[482] The epistemology of desire is, according to Smith, "the epistemology of ... counterfactuals."[483]

Dancy's pure cognitivism holds "that though desire is necessary for motivation, the occurrence of a desire is never what motivates. What motivates in the case of a purposive action is always the gap between two representations, and the occurrence of the desire is *the agent's being motivated* by that gap."[484] (Here I think that it is fair to complain that the gap is nevertheless an item in the analysis; and since it does the work of a Humean desire, it might as well be one.) The first representation represents the world as it actually is; the second representation represents "the world as it will be when and if the action is successfully completed," and its content is "the subjunctive conditional, 'If I were to act in such and such a way, this would be the result.'"[485] Both representations have a "mind-to-world" direction of fit — that is, they are beliefs. (Indeed, the second representation seems merely to be a belief about a *means* to an end.) — Whatever the merits of these analyses, not all action is teleological, as I have argued via the illustrations of listening (specifically), and attending (generally). There is at least one class of action — we might call it *reaction* or *responsive action* — which is not best explained by attributing a goal to the agent. Dancy at least acknowledges, in passing, this

---

[479] Cf. Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," p. 23.
[480] Smith, HTM, §6 (p. 53).
[481] Smith, *The Moral Problem*, §4.6 (p. 113); cf. Smith, HTM, §6 (p. 52).
[482] Hume, *Treatise*, II.III.§III. ¶8.
[483] Smith, HTM, §6 (p. 52).
[484] Dancy, MR, §2.1 (p. 19).
[485] Dancy, MR, §2.3 (p. 28).

class of action, but fails to appreciate its significance.[486] Smith insists that "reasons explanations are teleological."[487] This dogma is a probably a result of "an unbalanced diet": the thinking of these philosophers has been malnourished by only one kind of example.[488] — Why are you ψ-ing? — Because I desire φ, and I believe that ψ-ing is a means to φ. — Again, I do not deny that some cases can be correctly analysed according to this schema. These are cases of what I call disintegrative moral agency: the action has the form of enkratic or akratic action, as the case may be. Such action may be legitimately called into question, and the vista of competing reasons consulted for an explanation. But in cases of integrative ethical agency, there may be no need to go rooting around in the kitchen drawer of the agent's mind; instead, it can be sufficient to gesture toward some aspect of a situation; that aspect itself can constitute a complete reason, and the gesture, a complete explanation. In other words, where ψ-ing is *responding immediately to* Ω, the answer to the question, Why are you ψ-ing?, can be: Ω. Full-stop.

The preoccupation with teleological explanations seems to derive from a picture of the world as not only motivationally inert, but really *inert*. It is as though the agent is inserted into a world that offers him nothing — except information — and he must search inside himself for the hidden springs of action, starting, each time, from scratch. Other beings cannot *give* him reasons to act; he must construct those reasons himself, from his inner resources, relying especially on the batteries of potential energy called "desires." — It is a picture of the lonely deity in the lightless waste, before the creation of the world.

§8.6. One of Anscombe's errors is that she conflates acting (πρᾶξις) with producing (ποίησις), and consequently conflates technical knowledge (τέχνη) with phronesis, all of which are distinct, according to Aristotle.[489] Alternatively, one could say that she conflates Aristotelian practical knowledge with Thomistic "*knowledge of approbation*," which is the divine version of "the knowledge of the artificer." Aquinas's account of this

---

[486] Dancy, MR, §2.6.

[487] Smith, HTM, §1 (p. 37); cf. ibid., §4. Indeed, he takes this assumption to be shared between those who debate the question of whether or not reasons explanations are causal.

[488] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §593.

[489] Cf. Aristotle, NE, VI.3.1139b15-20, VI.4-5.

sort of knowledge is proto-Humean: "the intelligible form does not denote a principle of action in so far as it resides in the one who understands unless there is added to it the inclination to an effect, which inclination is through the will."[490] In more familiar Humean terms, belief alone is insufficient to motivate. Practical knowledge, divine or human, is *causally efficacious* (that is, world-changing); but its proper analysis will reveal at least two discrete constituents: a cognitive constituent (formal cause for Aquinas, belief for Hume) plus a volitional constituent (efficient and final cause for Aquinas, desire for Hume).

Returning to Anscombe's conflation, let me say that both acting and producing (unlike theoretical contemplation) are concerned with the domain of "what admits of being otherwise." But producing, for Aristotle, is intrinsically teleological or goal-directed, and the goal is the product; the point is that the product, for whose sake producing is initiated, is *external* to producing.[491] However, not all activities are like this one. It is tempting to draw the requisite distinction by claiming that some activities (for example, virtuous ones) are purely "for their own sake" — but as Winch astutely cautions, the trouble "with this locution is that it makes [the agent's] behaviour *too like* that in which a man does what he does for the sake of something else."[492] It is not obvious that Aristotle himself avoids this temptation. But the point can be put negatively, in such a way that it leaves room to resist the temptation: there is a genus of activity, properly governed by phronesis, which is not aimed at producing something (whether that thing is a handmade chair or a state of affairs). This genus of activity includes, as species, the responsive actions of listening and witnessing; and the name of the genus is attention.[lv]

§8.7. Protesting a normative distinction that Aristotle draws between desires, Anscombe writes, "The point that he is making here is, however, rather alien to us, since we [i.e., we moderns] do not make much distinction between one sort of desire and another, and we should say: isn't it desire in some sense — i.e. wanting — that prompts action in all the

---

[490] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 14, art. 8.
[491] Cf. Aristotle, NE, I.1094a1-5.
[492] Winch, "Moral Integrity," p. 183.

cases?"[493] In *Intention*, Anscombe is primarily concerned not with "normative" reasons but with "motivating" reasons.[lvi] (In "Thought and Action in Aristotle," she tries to nail on a normative dimension, citing Aristotle's tight connexion between decision and character; but the effort is misguided. If we are to appreciate what is distinctive about Aristotle's thought, we cannot start by *assuming* the correctness of a Humean base, and then try to *append* Aristotelian embellishments. More on this point shortly.) Desire enters the practical syllogism *not as a premise*, but as a *characterization* of the object or goal to be achieved, which characterization is what propels the reasoning into action. The desire is (retrospectively?) inferred or ascribed.[494][lvii] The practical syllogism is not some formula or operation that must come explicitly before the mind of the reasoner; what it describes is the general order of intentional action. McDowell articulates the thought: "the conceptual structure that is characteristic of deliberation figures in the proper explanation of the relevant actions, whether or not prior deliberation takes place."[495] For Anscombe, the structure is organized by the question "Why?,"[496] which terminates, ultimately, in the "desirability characterization,"[497] that is, a characterization of the goal as desirable (for example, suitable, pleasurable, et cetera, beyond which further questioning loses its sense, she thinks).[498] Anscombe insists that the practical syllogism is not simply a "proof" (demonstrative) syllogism, with a different subject-matter (that is, "what is capable of turning out variously," the contingent), or a proof syllogism applied to action. If the difference were merely a difference of subject-matter, she says, then "one might easily wonder why no one had ever pointed out the mince pie syllogism,"[499] et cetera. The practical syllogism must therefore be *formally* different from the demonstrative syllogism.[500] The form is not "I want a Jersey cow, they have good ones in the Hereford market, so I'll go there" but "They have Jersey cows in the Hereford

---

[493] Anscombe, *Intention*, §34.

[494] Anscombe, *Intention*, §35.

[495] McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," §1 (p. 24).

[496] Anscombe, *Intention*, §26.

[497] Anscombe, *Intention*, §37.

[498] On this point at least, all of Anscombe, Hume, and Aristotle agree. Cf. Hume, *Enquiry*, Appendix I.§V.¶ ¶18-19; and Aristotle, NE, I.1-2, 7.

[499] Anscombe, *Intention*, §33.

[500] Anscombe, *Intention*, §33. Cf. Anscombe, T&A, p. 154.

market, so I'll go there."[501] It remains unclear what Anscombe takes to be the allegedly formal difference between demonstrative and practical syllogisms, and she never really explicates this difference. She gives another example of practical syllogism: "Owning a Launderette would make me wealthy. // There is scope for opening a Launderette on such-and-such premises // and so on down to where I might get going."[502] Concerning such sequences of reasoning, Anscombe's implication seems to be that no action (considered as a conclusion) follows, necessarily or otherwise, from the conjunction of the premises (assuming that they are true), unless we *add in* (or ascribe) a desire of the reasoner for the end identified in the major premise. And the desire is intelligibly specifiable *independently* of the practical reasoning structure for which it is the engine (it is an "original existence"). The "same" reasoning structure can produce different outcomes depending on what desire we plug into it.[503]

But this view is Humean. Anscombe seems to have some tenuous textual basis for her view, and she occasionally alludes to "the *De Anima* formulation (of a doctrine also expressed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at 1040b16 [sic], though not so clearly) that the starting-point of the whole business is what you want."[504] Here is what Aristotle himself says: "These two at all events appear to be sources of movement: appetite and mind ... mind, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. mind practical ... while appetite is in every form of it relative to an end; for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of mind practical."[505] So, yes, for Aristotle, as for Hume, desire is crucially involved in intentional action. But what Anscombe wishes to entertain, along with Hume, is something that Aristotle does not even countenance, much less permit: the claim that

---

[501] Anscombe, *Intention*, §35. There seems to be some confusion here. For Anscombe later claims that the major premise, fully spelled out, would be: "(1) Any farmer with a farm like mine could do with a cow with such-and-such qualities (2) e.g. a Jersey" (§37).

[502] Anscombe, T&A, p. 154.

[503] Cf. Anscombe, T&A, p. 153.

[504] Anscombe, T&A, p. 153; cf. *Intention*, p. 63. The Bekker number cited by Anscombe (1040b16) cannot correspond to anything in the *Ethics* (which starts at 1094a). It is possible that she means VI.5.1140b16 ff., where Aristotle writes, "For the originating causes of the things that are done consist in the end at which they are aimed; but the man who has been ruined by pleasure or pain forthwith fails to see any such originating cause."

[505] Aristotle, DA, III.10.433a9-17.

desire, analytically pried apart from intellect, can stipulate goals, and that intellect is then relegated to identifying means of achieving those goals. For Aristotle, "the whole business" cannot count as an exercise of sound practical reasoning — as an exercise of the epistemic excellence called phronesis — unless "what you want" is in accordance with characterological virtue. Anscombe, along with Hume, has the idea that the structure of practical reasoning can be neutrally described: desire sets the target (or the object or content) and thus the problem; intellect, insensitive to the nature of the target, is an instrument for detecting solutions. The two faculties are independent, and can be variously and indifferently combined. But no other instrument in our experience is like this fantasy of dispassionate intellect. This picture of practical reason — as a kind of ethically agnostic mercenary that we employ to solve our problems, whatever those problems happen to be — is distinctively modern.[506][lviii]

§8.8. The mark of practical reasoning, claims Anscombe, is that the desired object is *at a distance* from the immediate action (or as McDowell says, "the end sought is *instrumentally* remote from the agent's immediate behavioural possibilities"),[507] and the recommended action is a *means* to that object.[508] "It must be admitted," claims Anscombe, "that Aristotle's account of deliberation (βούλευσις, or βουλή) often seems to fit deliberation about how to execute a decision, and in particular to fit technical deliberation, better than deliberation which is about the means here and now to 'living well in general.'"[509] (In McDowell's terms, the distinction is between "instrumental" and "specificatory" work that can be performed by deliberation: assuming an articulate, particular end, deliberation finds the means; or deliberation specifies the content of a general end [such as living well] relative to some particular situation.)[510]

Aristotle has a term for the technical skill that Anscombe is describing, but it isn't practical reason or deliberation; it is *cleverness*: "There is a faculty which is called

---

[506] Cf. Descartes, *Discourse*, V: "reason is a universal instrument that can be of help in all sorts of circumstances" (AT VI.57).
[507] McDowell, AMP, §2 (p. 24).
[508] Anscombe, *Intention*, §41.
[509] Anscombe, T&A, p. 146; cf. McDowell, V&R, p. 343.
[510] McDowell, AMP, §§2 & 4, respectively.

cleverness; and this is such as to be able to do the things that tend towards the mark we have set before ourselves, and to hit it."[511] This capacity, which seems to be a kind of *knack*, is necessary for practical wisdom, but can occur without it; and cleverness qua cleverness is, yes, indifferent to the nature of its goals. Anscombe verges on acknowledging this distinction when she explains that she uses "'technical' to cover practical cleverness in bringing particular situations about";[512] but it is inaccurate to suggest that such cleverness, insofar as it is indiscriminate, is a *kind of deliberation*. It is merely a functional device that takes ends as inputs and reliably spits out a list of means. Irwin notes that Aristotle "seems to have in mind nondeliberative facility in finding ways to carry out a decision already made. He never says that cleverness involves deliberation."[513] Indeed, Aristotle is emphatic that the *excellent functioning* of practical reason — the deliberating half of the epistemic component of the soul — is phronesis. Phronesis is not cleverness: "this eye of the soul [i.e., phronesis] acquires its formed state not without the aid of [characterological] virtue ... it is impossible to be practically wise without being good."[514]

Anscombe is well aware that cleverness is not sufficient to account for Aristotle's conception of practical reasoning. She notes, "there is no such thing as a choice which is *only* technical," because there is always, "on Aristotle's view, another 'choice' behind a technical or purely executive one."[515] Regarding this background or second-order decision, Anscombe seems to have in mind the agent's general conception of "doing well," which may structure deliberation regarding particular decisions here and now. Aristotle suggests that choice or decision (προαίρεσις) follows from deliberation[516] — or, more exactly, that decision is a "deliberative desire."[517] And decision requires character, virtuous or vicious (which character Anscombe understands [in a quasi-Wittgensteinian

---

[511] Aristotle, NE, VI.12.1144a25-26. Anscombe quotes a neighbouring passage concerning cleverness (cf. T&A, p. 145).
[512] Anscombe, T&A, p. 146.
[513] Irwin, "Notes," NE, p. 253.
[514] Aristotle, NE, VI.12.1144a29-31, 1144b1.
[515] Anscombe, T&A, p. 146.
[516] Aristotle, NE, III.2.112a16, III.3.113a5-6; cf. Anscombe, T&A, p. 143.
[517] Aristotle, NE, III.3.1113a13, VI.1139a22.

fashion] as the "habitual performance of typical acts.")[518] Aristotle is explicit about this requirement: "choice cannot exist either without reason and intellect or without a moral state; for good action and its opposite cannot exist without intellect and character."[519] Anscombe speculates that Aristotle's notion of decision may be "spurious,"[520] and sketches what appears to be a counter-example. Without itemizing the details, let me just say that her point is that Aristotle's requirement on decision makes sense only if we restrict decision to "those things which are done as a means of 'doing well.'"[521] — But isn't it *obvious* that we make plenty of decisions without regard for doing well, decisions which are independent of character?

  — Yet again, I wish to observe that Anscombe is helping herself to assumptions which are not shared by Aristotle. We (namely, we moderns) assume that there is an intelligible category of "non-moral" action, a category which, with respect to morality, is governed neither by obligations nor prohibitions, but which is permissive: this category constitutes a zone of individual freedom, in which my decisions are discretionary, and concern nobody except myself. Now, I want to say that this categorical distinction between "moral" and "non-moral" action is a caricature, and not even a standard liberal theorist such as Mill thinks that it can be adopted without qualification;[522] but more importantly for my purposes, the distinction cannot be coherently drawn by Aristotle, nor by any advocate of virtue ethics. "[M]oral virtue [ἦθος] comes about as result of habit [ἔθος]," says Aristotle; "whence also its name (*ēthikē*) is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit) ... Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities."[523] The decision of which action to perform can never be a matter of ethical indifference or neutrality, even when it *appears* temporarily cordoned off from direct impact on others, because of any action's potential contribution to the shaping of the agent's character. Doubtlessly this conception will seem claustrophobically fastidious to many of us. (Still, if one concedes that character is ethically significant for action, then

---

[518] Anscombe, T&A, p. 149.
[519] Aristotle, NE, VI.2.1139a35; translation altered.
[520] Anscombe, T&A, p. 150.
[521] Anscombe, T&A, p. 150.
[522] Cf. Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 11, 78-79.
[523] Aristotle, NE, II.1.1103a17-18, II.1.1103b21.

the only way out, as far as I can see, is to argue that there is a class of actions [or a quantity of repetitions] whose effect on character is negligible [as one might argue, for example, that there is a difference between soft and hard drugs, or between recreational and addictive use].)

Without debating this matter further, I wish to reiterate that Anscombe's account is radically wrong in a subtle way. And it is because most of us share Anscombe's (modern) assumptions that the wrongness will be lost on us. The Humean base of practical reasoning, with which she starts, seems unobjectionable to us. And when she tries to build Aristotelian refinements onto that base, and the fit seems skewed, we suspect that it must be due to a peculiarity of Aristotle. Character feels *added on as an artificial constraint*; it makes desires *appear* to have a rational, normative dimension, but we know that things aren't *really* like that. We want what we want; reason can tell us what's out there, and how to get it, and desires are criticizable only in relation to errors deriving from these two kinds of data-collecting — but strictly speaking, the errors properly belong to reason, not desire.[524] It is a brute fact that there are two different faculties, and they perform formally different work. Their forced combination will always feel manqué, and morality must be constructed some other way.

---

[524] Cf. Hume, *Treatise*, II.III.§III.¶6.

CHAPTER 9. Phronesis, and Two Dogmas of Metaethics

Summary

¶ *The separation of intellect and volition is especially acute in Aquinas's analysis of decision in Aristotle. Aquinas eliminates the crucial ambiguity of Aristotle's formulation, and concludes that decision is primarily an act of appetite. Moral theorists who inherit this picture are then faced with the problem of explaining how exactly intellect and appetite (conceived as functionally incommensurable) combine in action. Roger Shiner identifies what I call two "dogmas" of metaethics: (1) facts and values are radically distinct; and (2) reason and sentiment are radically distinct, and one must be subordinate to the other in moral judgement. The two dogmas, or two dualisms, are not the default for Aristotle; and his ethical psychology contextualizes the one articulated by Hume. The Humean belief/desire dualism finds its place in Aristotle's disintegrative cases of enkrateia and akrasia. That is, Hume's analysis can be locally correct; what I object to is its universalization. Furthermore, the Humean theory fails to save at least one phenomenon: the phronimos, that is, the human of practical wisdom. Here I introduce the Cortez Rule of Thumb (which counterbalances Ockham's Razor): when we are attempting to understand a polydimensional phenomenon, more than one form of study is needed. Since the phronimos acts differently and justifies her actions differently from the enkratic or akratic agent, it is not unreasonable to suppose that a different ethical psychology is required to understand her. McDowell distinguishes between two genera of interpreting Aristotle: the Humean one, according to which desire is primarily motivating; and a cognitivist one, according to which belief is primarily motivating. But both genera of interpretation assume that (what a Humean would call) "belief" and "desire" are separate parts of the soul. Following McDowell's reading of Aristotle, I suggest that "belief" and "desire" are two distinct but inseparable aspects of the soul; and it is only in disintegrative cases of moral agency that we can distinguish them. In rare, integrative cases, a virtue of character — sophrosune— is identical with a cardinal*

virtue of thought: phronesis. This claim belongs to a defence of the thesis that virtue is knowledge; and it also alters our conception of what knowledge is.

> George Eliot:
>
> *To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern, that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely-ordered variety on the chords of emotion — a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge.*[525]

§9.1. Anscombe's dualistic Thomistic interpretation of Aristotle is reflected in Irwin's infelicitous translation of a crucial and felicitous formulation in Book VI, Chapter 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "decision is either understanding *combined with* desire or desire *combined with* thought."[526] There is nothing in the Greek to correspond to Irwin's interpolated phrase "combined with." The wrongness of this reading is traceable at least as far back as Aquinas:

> *I answer that*, The proper act of free choice is election, for we say that we have a free choice because we can take one thing while refusing another; and this is to elect.... Now two things concur in the election: one on the part of the cognitive power, the other on the part of the appetitive power.... Aristotle leaves it in doubt whether election belongs principally to the appetitive or the cognitive power: since he says that election is either *an appetitive intellect or an intellectual appetite*. But he inclines to its being an intellectual appetite when he describes election as *a desire proceeding from counsel*. And the reason of this is because the proper object of election is the means to the end. Now the means, as such, has the nature of that good which is called *useful*; and since the good, as such, is the object

---

[525] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, II.xxii.235.
[526] Irwin translating Aristotle, NE, VI.2.1139b5; emphasis added. Cf. Rackham, NE, p. 331.

of the appetite, it follows that election is principally an act of an appetitive power.[527]

The view which Aquinas imputes to Aristotle is recognizable as a garbled prototype of the Humean theory of motivation: belief, by itself, is inert; it must combine with ("concur" with) desire, and it is "principally" desire which does the motivating work. The mistake consists in Aquinas's illicit decision to resolve Aristotle's nice ambiguity. Here is an alternative reading of Aristotle: he does *not* leave it in doubt "whether election belongs principally to the appetitive or the cognitive power." In his felicitously ambiguous phrasing, he deliberately resists the schematic ranking which Aquinas seeks. Aristotelian decision (what Aquinas calls "election") is neither principally an act of the appetitive power nor principally an act of the cognitive power.

This may seem trivial, but it is a travesty. What Aristotle himself actually says is:

ἢ ὀρεκτικὸς νοῦς ἡ προαίρεσις ἢ ὄρεξις διανοητική.[528]

In Ross's translation, this formulation is rendered "choice is either desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire,"[529] or, less idiomatically, "either desireful reason or reasonable desire."[530] Irwin's translation is wrong because it separates out two distinct faculties, which we must then attempt to recombine, and ultimately despair at their recalcitrance. (It is analogous to bisecting an organism, worrying about how to get the two pieces back together, and inferring — from the inevitable failure to reanimate the sutured corpse — that each piece is really a discrete and independent body.) If we approach Aristotle with this assumption (that is, this assumed separation of faculties), his ethics will look like a botched and clumsy attempt to solve a combinatory problem. But the problem is *our* problem, not his, and what is distinctive about his position, what we miss if we don't approach it on its own terms, is that our problem does not arise within its parameters. Roger Shiner diagnoses the issue here: "It has not occurred to them [i.e., three twentieth century scholars] that perhaps the categories of contemporary meta-ethics are not the only

---

[527] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 83, art. 3. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.i, q. 13, art. 1, and q. 14, art. 1.

[528] Aristotle, NE, VI.2.1139b5; vide Rackham, NE, p. 330.

[529] Aristotle, NE, VI.2.1139b5.

[530] Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 207. (N.b. Ross's endnote 36, on page 240, is incorrect: it should be 1139b4.)

ones at hand for ethical theory; that Aristotle, so far from being confused, is in fact being quite clear, and simply has a radically different approach to the whole business."[531] McDowell has argued that Aristotle is "healthily innocent" of modern anxiety regarding morality's foundations (or lack thereof).[532] Analogously, I want to suggest that he is innocent of our anxiety regarding the moral coordination of reason and desire.

Shiner identifies two features which he finds characteristic of most contemporary meta-ethical theory: "Firstly, it is obsessed by moral epistemology. The great bogeyman is the moral sceptic, the man who denies the existence of moral knowledge. The sceptic effectively controls the course and aims of the game. He has laid down that values and facts are radically distinct, and that facts do not on the face of it entail values.... The second characteristic feature is the assumption of total incompatibility of Reason and Sentiment in moral judgement. Either Reason is the slave of the Passions, and moral judgement is essentially the work of the heart; or moral judgement is essentially cognitive, and feelings are but 'mists on the mental windscreen.'"[533] We may call these features "the two dogmas of meta-ethics" (which, upon reflection, can be seen to be simply *two more* dogmas of empiricism). Like Quine's two dogmas, they are at root identical. While they have gone through many sophisticated permutations and complications in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and while Shiner's gloss is relatively rudimentary, the fact/value and reason/sentiment dualisms are readily recognizable. They have their source in the faculty psychology of the eighteenth century,[534] and are given their definitive articulation, as we know, in Hume's *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section III ("Of the influencing motives of the will") and Book III, Part I, Section I ("Moral distinctions not deriv'd from reason"). But according to Shiner, Aristotle "is not playing *this* game at all.... He begins with what he sees when he looks around him, as indeed he would see were he to look around us, that men behave as if there is a distinction between right and wrong, and that they a great deal of the time can tell them apart.... Aristotle's concern is simply to expose the workings of this human moral behaviour, to *show* us the nature of practical wisdom and of moral virtue.... As part

---

[531] Shiner, "Ethical Perception in Aristotle," p. 83.
[532] Cf. McDowell, AMP, §10; "Two Sorts of Naturalism," §§4, 10-11.
[533] Shiner, "Ethical Perception," p. 83. Shiner credits the phrase about mist to R.S. Peters.
[534] Cf. Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, §6.

of this strategy, Aristotle expresses the fundamental insight that the distinction between Reason and Sentiment in moral judgement is an artificial one. If one looks at the φρόνιμος, what one sees is *both* a man whose reason is mature, acute and sensitive about moral matters, *and* a man whose feelings and emotions are *naturally* for good and wholesome things."[535]

If we subscribe to a progress ideology of philosophy, we might believe that Hume discovered something which Aristotle missed. But even if we are persuaded by Hume's arguments (or Ayer's, or Mackie's, et al.), we are not forced to choose between salvaging their prototypes from the *rigor mortis* of Aristotelian philosophy or consigning that philosophy to a daily-increasing heap of obsolete artefacts. Unsurprisingly, I do not think that there is any substitute for *looking at the texts themselves* to see whether they have anything to offer. And I do believe that there is room in Aristotelian moral psychology for the Humean view: that latter view is accommodated by the *disintegrative* phenomena of enkrateia and akrasia. Here I disagree with Dancy and sympathize with McDowell: I do wish to allow that Humeanism can be right some of the time.[536] Indeed, I maintain that the Humean analysis is indispensable for the exercise of what we might call *elenctic attention*,[537] that is, the work of ethical *criticism*. But a phenomenon which Humeanism fails to save is the integrative ethical agency of the *phronimos*, the human of practical wisdom. To paraphrase Wittgenstein:

> Hume, we might say, does describe a system of motivation; only not everything that we call action is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly

---

[535] Shiner, "Ethical Perception," pp. 83-84. To reconcile the last clause with Aristotle, one needs to understand "nature," here, in the sense of aretaic second nature, latently available but gradually activated by habituation, and concomitant with the emergence of reason (which is no less natural). Cf. Aristotle, NE, II.1; McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," §8 (esp. pp. 184-185), §10.

[536] Cf. Dancy, MR, §2.1 (p. 21).

[537] From the Greek ἔλεγχος: "argument of disproof or refutation ... generally, cross-examining, testing, scrutiny, esp. for purposes of refutation ..." In Plato's dialogues, Sokrates is a master of the method of *elenkhos*. Vide this thesis, §10.1.

circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe."[538]

The phenomenon of integrative agency is excluded a priori, on the basis of a conceptual analysis which purports to uncover these separate (structurally incompatible) propositional attitudes δ and o, where δ is a propositional attitude with "a mind-to-world direction of fit," and o is a propositional attitude with "a world-to-mind direction of fit." Again, I wish to observe that Platts's direction-of-fit metaphor cannot accurately capture Hume's own view. Both McDowell and McNaughton call Hume's theory "hydraulic,"[539] and that metaphor comes much closer to Hume's characterization of passion as a non-representational "impulse" and reason as an inert faculty for the "discovery" of truth and falsity. But notice that the hydraulic theory does not illuminate action: conceived according to this absolute partition, the coincidence of an impulse with a discovery must always be fortuitous, which is to say that the picture ultimately describes a random mechanism. — Why are these crocuses wet? — Because pressurized water coincided with rubber tubing aimed toward them. — Why has this car arrived at the Kitchener train station? — Because its motor coincided with a GPS which provided directions to this location. We can say such things; but in each case, there may be further questions. That is, one might want to know, for example, why these two things coincided; and to this question, the hydraulic theory can offer no answer that does not cite some antecedent coincidence.

§9.2. Let me repeat that I have no objection to the Humean analysis per se; in certain contexts, it can be useful. What I object to is the move from the possibility of deploying the analysis in *some* cases to the obligation to deploy it in *every* case; what I object to is the *reductionism* which requires all action to conform to a single (dualistic) model. Suppose I concede that it is always possible, strictly speaking, to analyse out these propositional attitudes; it is also possible for me to describe a printed image (for example, Ansel Adams's photograph of Mt Williamson) in terms of its pixels, or to switch to the

---

[538] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §3.

[539] McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," §4 (pp. 212-213); McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, §2.3 (p. 21).

dialect of subatomic particles. What is at stake here is not just the risk of talking oddly. What is at stake is the risk of sacrificing (our capacity to appreciate) some phenomena to excessive theoretical parsimony and inflexibility.

When Wittgenstein says, "The visual table is not composed of electrons,"[540] what does he mean? — Hymers suggests that we have "two different systems of representation—sense-data talk, which includes talk of visual tables, and physical-object talk, which is where the electrons come in."[541] Depending on the context, one system of representation might be more appropriate than the other. When a friend is asking where we have left her cup of coffee, it does not make much sense to direct her to the collection of electrons in the kitchen. But when we are conducting an experiment and looking through an electron microscope, the more finely grained "physical-object talk" might be exactly what we need. Wittgenstein's remark about the "visual table" is, inter alia, a critical reaction to his own early analytic theory of linguistic meaning, which posits "objects" (the referents of names) at the foundation of the system. When, despite solid appearances, we assume that something *must* be composite, *must* ultimately be constructed on simpler, more fundamental things — this compulsive "must" might be an occasion for some wariness. Why *must* it be so? Do we believe that we have grasped the *essence* of human moral psychology: the *general form* of motivation is (δ & o)? Why? And if an action does not appear to manifest these two propositional attitudes, what justifies our confidence that they must nevertheless be there, hidden under the surface (or buried in the tar sands of the mind)? The essentialist approach is anti-contextualist; a single theory — a single system of representation — is supposed to explain all phenomena (even at the expense of sacrificing some of them). By contrast, I want to suggest that we need more than one system. There is room for the Humean theory of motivation in our philosophy of action just as there is room for the specific gesture of referring in a more general view of meaning as use: it takes its place as one among many neighbourhoods in an ancient and maze-like city.[542]

---

[540] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, §III.36. Cf. Wittgenstein: "Does my visual image of this tree, of this chair, consist of parts?" (PI, §47).
[541] Hymers, Scholium, 21 September 2013.
[542] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §18.

Beside the Prejudice of the Broom (the fiction of a final analysis), I wish to set what might be called the Ricketts-Steinbeck Principle — or, more simply, the Cortez Rule of Thumb:

> ... the Mexican sierra has "XVII-15-IX" spines on the dorsal fin. These can easily be counted. But if the sierra strikes hard on the line so that our hands are burned, if the fish sounds and nearly escapes and finally comes in over the rail, his colors pulsing and his tail beating the air, a whole new relational externality has come into being—an entity which is more than the sum of the fish plus the fisherman. The only way to count the spines of the sierra unaffected by the second relational reality is to sit in a laboratory, open an evil-smelling jar, remove a stiff colorless fish from formalin solution, count the spines, and write the truth "D.XVII-15-IX."...
>
> It is good to know what you are doing. The man with his pickled fish has set down one truth and has recorded in his experience many lies. The fish is not that color, that texture, that dead, nor does he smell that way....
>
> We determined to go doubly open so that in the end we could, if we wished, describe the sierra thus: "D.XVII-15-IX; A.II-15-IX," but also we could see the fish alive and swimming, feel it plunge against the lines, drag it threshing over the rail, and even finally eat it. And there is no reason why either approach should be inaccurate. Spine-count description need not suffer because another approach is also used. Perhaps out of the two approaches, we thought, there might emerge a picture more complete and even more accurate than either alone could produce.[543]

Despite the heightened Romantic rhetoric in which these remarks are cast, I still find them insightful. We might remember that, before he began writing fiction, John Steinbeck was trained as a marine biologist at Stanford University. And he is making these remarks, not only as a novelist, but also as a student of biology. As Louis Groarke observes, the application of "Ockham's razor" is enshrined in the methodology of

---

[543] Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, pp. 2-4.

positivist science: "A plurality is not to be posited without necessity."[544] So we might tend toward parsimony, restricting ourselves to the Humean theory unless forced by the phenomena to have recourse to further theories. But Groarke reminds us that Ockham's principle is countered by the principle of another fourteenth-century Franciscan, Walter of Chatton: "In the economy of philosophy, the razor may be minted coin, but as Chatton points out, the verso of the medal bears an inscription too.... 'My rule is that if three things are not enough to verify an affirmative proposition about things, a fourth must be added, and so on.'"[545] The Cortez Rule of Thumb, like Chatton's "anti-razor," contextualizes the usefulness of unidimensional analyses. Such analyses may be appropriate for particular purposes — we may learn something by counting the spines of the sierra. But when the phenomenon is polydimensional, the unidimensional analysis will be insufficient; it will need to be complemented by more angles of study.

§9.3. If we focus on the possibility to which Shiner's remarks are pointing, we find an answer to the question dismissed by Aristotle near the beginning of his investigation: are the desiring and reasoning components of the soul "separated as the parts of the body or of anything divisible are, or are [they] distinct by definition but by nature inseparable, like convex and concave in the circumference of a circle"?[546] The components are not metaphysically separable *parts*, but inseparable (internally related) *aspects* of a shared structure. Aristotle's metaphor is key to understanding the subtlety of this latter possibility: the distinction between convexity and concavity is intelligible (if one is trying to catch a baseball, for example, it makes a difference); but one cannot draw a convex curve without also, simultaneously, drawing a concave one. If this metaphor is apt, as I think it is, then Aristotelian psychology is structured analogously to the familiar gestalt figures of the Necker cube or Jastrow's duck/rabbit.[547] McDowell remarks on this "double aspect of practical wisdom, as correctness of motivational orientation and as

---

[544] Ockham qtd in Groarke, "Following in the Footsteps of Aristotle," p. 195.
[545] Groake (quoting Chatton), "Following in the Footsteps of Aristotle," pp. 195-196. For the sources of Ockham's and Chatton's principles, vide Hyman and Walsh, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), pp. 431-432.
[546] Aristotle, NE, I.13.1102a35.
[547] Cf. Zwicky, "Lyric and Ecology," §7.3; W&M, L56-R56, L80-R80.

cognitive capacity." He compares "the orectic state and the doxastic state" (what Humeans would call the desire and the belief) to "interlocking elements in a mechanism, like the ball and socket of a joint." And, he claims, they "cannot be separated."[548] I am sympathetic to his general point, but his metaphor is inaccurate: *unlike* the two *curves* inscribed by each of the ball or the socket, *the ball and socket themselves* can, of course, be separated (when this happens, we sometimes speak of a "dislocated" limb). It is a small point, but I make it to show that our usage of philosophical imagery matters: here, it determines what kind of structure is under discussion. Suppose we imagine that the non-reasoning component (to which characterological virtues attach) is *separate* from the reasoning component (to which intellectual virtues attach); then we might imagine that "practical wisdom, the intellectual excellence operative in virtuous behaviour, serves merely as handmaiden to a separate motivational propensity, which exerts its influence from outside the intellect.... On this interpretation, Aristotle's view is quasi-Humean: the relevant intellectual excellence is the slave, not indeed of the passions, but at any rate of a non-intellectual motivational directedness."[549] Both the motivational and the intellectual items can be regulated (via their respective virtues), but the point is that the partition is absolute. (The principle of the division of labour, first articulated by Plato,[550] reaches its infernal apotheosis in the industrialized factory system.)[551]

Having assumed this partition, one is forced to choose between a Humean interpretation (like the one outlined above) or a cognitivist one: in this polar interpretation, "there is still a relation of subservience, but in an opposite direction. On this view, it is an exercise of intellect that determines a fully virtuous person's motivation orientation." The content of an action's end "is autonomously fixed by the intellectual element," and the non-intellectual, characterological element, virtuously calibrated, merely "ensures obedience" to this end.[552] This picture, in which the intellect operates

---

[548] McDowell, AMP, §6 (p. 30).
[549] McDowell, AMP, §6 (p. 31).
[550] Cf. Plato, *Republic*, II.369e ff.
[551] Cf. Diderot, entry on art, *Encyclopédie* (qtd in Zwicky, LP, R22): "A given worker makes and will make one thing and one thing only in his life; another worker, another thing — from this, it happens that each thing is executed well and promptly, and that the work that is best made can still be offered at the best price."
[552] McDowell, AMP, §11 (p. 39).

autonomously, looks, as McDowell says elsewhere, "like a supposed exercise of that bloodless or dispassionate Reason that stands opposed to Passion in a familiar and unprepossessing genre of moral psychology, one that Hume made it difficult to take seriously."[553] The choice is sufficiently stark to make one wonder whether the positions have been fairly reconstructed. But I am not concerned, here, with the niceties of the species and subspecies of Humeanism and cognitivism; I am concerned, instead, with the alternative envisioned by McDowell, who urges that we do not need to choose between these two genera of interpretation. "Aristotle does not attribute dominance in the genesis of virtuous behaviour either to the practical intellect, conceived as operating autonomously, or to a wholly non-intellectual desiderative state."[554] The key to understanding this alternative is the Aristotelian arete of phronesis, which is located exactly at the waist of the hourglass whose hemispheres are the reasoning and desiring components of the soul. "A virtue of character, strictly so-called," writes McDowell, "involves [an intimate] harmony of intellect and motivation ... Practical wisdom *is* the properly moulded state of the motivational propensities, in a reflectively adjusted form; the sense in which it is a state of the intellect does not interfere with its also being a state of the desiderative element."[555] To appreciate this claim — that, in some sense, a cardinal virtue of thought is *identical* with a virtue of character — we need to focus more closely on the Platonic (and Weilian and McDowellian) thesis that virtue is knowledge.

---

[553] McDowell, "External," §7 (p. 111).
[554] McDowell, AMP, §11 (p. 39).
[555] McDowell, AMP, §11 (p. 40).

CHAPTER 10. Virtue Is Knowledge, Character Is Fate

Summary

¶ *In this chapter, I investigate the claim that virtue is knowledge through close study of a Platonic dialogue. If virtue is knowledge, then it should be teachable. However, consideration of the empirical data would seem to suggest otherwise. In his* Meno*, Plato challenges presuppositions about both knowledge and teaching. The dialogue revolves around four questions: (1) Can virtue be taught? (2) What is virtue? (3) How can one learn what one doesn't already know? (4) What is teaching? — To the first question, Plato ostensibly delivers a negative answer; but if we look closely at the text, we see that this answer is the result of a wrong turn in the argument. Meno believes that he knows what virtue is, but Sokrates subjects him to the* elenkhos *(refutation by questioning) and brings him to* aporia *(a state of epistemic emptiness): he confesses that he does not know. From this state, Meno poses his paradox: if I don't know what something is, then how can I learn about it? (The paradox is mirrored by Aristotle: the non-virtuous agent is supposed to become virtuous by performing virtuous actions; but virtuous actions are those performed by a virtuous agent.) From Julia Annas's study of this paradox, I borrow her suggestion that the apprentice is held hostage by her own inexperience. Such an agent must take a risk; but she is not thereby excused from trying to learn virtue. As a way of dissolving the paralysis induced by the paradox, Plato redefines learning as recollection. He then offers the geometrical demonstration which is meant to illustrate his definition of learning. Meno fails to be inspired by any of these pedagogical strategies, and regresses back to asking whether teachability is a property of virtue. Methodologically, this question is secondary to the question about what virtue is, and Meno's disruption of the order of inquiry spoils the dialogue. There is a difference between (merely) true belief and knowledge; unlike the former, the latter is grounded by giving an "aitios logismos," which must not be anachronistically confused with what a 21st-century Anglophone philosopher would call "justification." I discuss two competing interpretations of the third and final section of the dialogue: according to the first interpretation (defended by Roslyn Weiss), Plato abandons the thesis that virtue is*

knowledge, and concedes that true belief is virtue; according to the second (defended by F.M. Cornford), the dialogue's conclusion (that virtue is unteachable inborn true belief) is ironic and consciously fallacious. Cornford argues that this conclusion fails to take into account the redefinition of learning as recollecting. But if we accept Cornford's interpretation, we must explain why the third section of the dialogue is not idle. Jan Zwicky's interpretation, which highlights the dramatic and characterological dimensions of the dialogue, offers a third way. The masking of the true conclusion is the fault of Meno's temperament: he assumes that teaching is transmitting information. The dialogue is not designed to transmit information to us, but to elicit questions from us. Zwicky divides the genus of things that can be known into two species: (1) transmissible information; and (2) recollectable truths. While a teacher might not be able to transmit virtue, nevertheless she might be able to assist someone in understanding what virtue is. To understand, on this account, is to see for oneself. And the crucial point is that such seeing does not happen independently of characterological formation. This point is connected with Aristotle's insight about the inter-relatedness of phronesis and sophrosune: how we are characterologically formed affects our perception of salience. And the inter-relatedness of intellect and character is displayed, dramatically, in the <u>*Meno*</u>*: it is because Meno's character is stunted and undisciplined that he cannot see (or hear) what Sokrates is offering.*

Herakleitos:

ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων.[556]

§10.1. Plato's dialogue *Meno* investigates the question, "Can virtue be taught?," and ostensibly (but incredibly) delivers a negative conclusion. Along the way, readers are introduced to a thesis that learning is recollection, and a demonstration of that thesis involving a geometrical problem, the doubling of a square. In this chapter, I review the dialogue, paying some attention to its dramatic form, and consider Jan Zwicky's suggestion that it offers resources for addressing its own unspoken, but central, question,

---

[556] Herakleitos, DK 22B119.

"What is teaching?" By way of introduction, let me say that the Meno revolves around four central questions: (1) "Can ethical virtue be taught?" (2) "What is virtue?" (3) "How can one learn what one doesn't already know?" The fourth question is masked, but crucially important: (4) "What is teaching?" The four questions are interconnected: Sokrates's failure to teach his interlocutor Meno is explained by the latter's *character*. Furthermore, the rôle of character here affects our conceptualization of what aretaic knowledge is: it is not the sort of thing that one can learn independently of one's character. Thus Plato's *Meno* anticipates the interdependence of Aristotle's characterological and epistemic virtues. In the dialogue, this interdependence is not stated discursively, but shown dramatically. And the drama begins abruptly, *in medias res*, with the first question.

— Can ethics be taught? On a visit to Athens, a young Thessalian aristocrat named Meno asks this question of one of the first philosophers, Sokrates. The question is older than the *Meno*, and that dialogue is roughly 2,400 years old. It is a question toward which some of us might feel some impatience. Can ethics be taught? — Of course ethics can be taught, we might think. — But Plato bore witness to the unjust execution of one of the best human beings of his time; and his dialogue *Meno* seems to conclude in despair at the prospect of teaching ethics. Sokrates, who was, arguably, a living paradigm of ethical virtue, was falsely accused, and sentenced to death. One of the accusers was a democratic politician named Anytos, who was also Meno's Athenian host, and who makes an important cameo in our dialogue. The politics surrounding the trial of Sokrates are complicated, and not without controversy, but the injustice of that trial is a recurring theme in Plato's work. Sokrates's crime is that he walks around Athens and questions people. But the questioning can be uncomfortable, even embarrassing, and it occurs in the open, and often in front of an audience, since many among the Athenian youth love Sokrates and follow him around. You might be a public figure in Athens; you might take pride in your knowledge of justice, for example; but along comes Sokrates, and he picks some questions from his quiver. His questions are difficult to answer, and suddenly you aren't certain that you know what justice is. When Sokrates questions you like this, it is called an ἔλεγχος (*elenkhos*). When his questions show you that you don't actually know what you believed you knew, that stunned new awareness is called an ἀπορία (*aporia*).

Imagine that you are a guide, confidently leading a group through the bush (maybe it is the bush around Shuswap Lake). You are unlucky (or lucky) enough to have Sokrates in your group; he starts asking his questions — "Haven't we already passed that Douglas-fir?" — and he's right to ask; suddenly, you stop in your tracks. You feel uncertain, disoriented: you no longer know where you are; it strikes you that you don't know the way forward. The *aporia* induced by a successful *elenkhos* is disintegrative: it identifies and sifts out our false beliefs, and thus allows us to scrutinize and eliminate them from our psychological economy.

That is what happens to Meno in the dialogue. He starts with some confident beliefs about virtue; but Sokrates subjects him to the questioning of the *elenkhos*, and, roughly one-third into the dialogue, brings him to an *aporia*. Meno is shocked, and says so: "Socrates,... you seem ... to be like [the stingray], for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb, and you now seem to have had that effect on me, for both my mind and my tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you. Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is."[557] Later in the dialogue, Sokrates manages to sting Anytos, too, who responds somewhat less politely than Meno. Thus Plato suggests one of the illicit motives for the accusers of Sokrates: they have been humiliated by Sokrates's exposure of their intellectual hypocrisy, and they retaliate by killing him. Notice that this understanding of the trial might offer a fresh angle on our original question, "Can virtue be taught?" Suppose for the sake of argument that the answer is "Yes, virtue can be taught." Sokrates is portrayed by Plato as consistently courageous, moderate, and just; he denies that he is wise, but, unlike his fellow citizens, he knows when he doesn't know, and that negative knowledge is a kind of wisdom. In short, by classical Greek standards, Sokrates is a virtuous human being. Why then is he unjustly executed? That is, if virtue can be taught, and if Sokrates is virtuous, why do his interlocutors turn out to be perpetrators of injustice? Anytos and Meno are two salient examples: I have already mentioned that the historical Anytos is one of Sokrates's accusers, and the historical Meno was allegedly a greedy and odious person, whose short

---

[557] Plato, *Meno*, 80a-b.

and tarnished career ended miserably.[558] These characteristics are crucial to understanding the outcome of the dialogue. If virtue can be taught, and if Sokrates is virtuous, then why isn't virtue taught to Anytos and Meno?[559]

At least one commentator argues that Meno improves ethically over the course of Plato's dialogue,[560] but the textual evidence for this argument is, in my view, very slim. Meno is recalcitrant material. His *aporia* is an achievement, but it is not secure. He lacks the intellectual courage to face the question which Sokrates insists is prior, namely, "What is virtue?" After the *aporia*, after the myth of recollection, after the geometrical demonstration, Meno is poised on the verge of the main investigation — and he regresses, reverting to his own precious question, "Can virtue be taught?"[561] This reversion is the turning point of the dialogue. I read Sokrates's response differently than Zwicky does: I hear a much colder and more ominous tone: "But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you—for what can I do? So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know."[562] The diction of ruling echoes Meno's second attempted definition of virtue — the ability to rule over people.[563] It also echoes Sokrates's character sketch: "[Y]ou are forever giving orders in a discussion, as spoiled people do, who behave like tyrants as long as they are young."[564] Sokrates's reproofs of Meno are indeed saturated with flirtatious, erotic innuendoes; but they are not only playful. The connexion between undisciplined eros and tyranny is also emphasized in *Republic*.[565] There, the tyrant is one in whom the rule of reason has been

---

[558] Day (referencing Xenophon), "Introduction," *Plato's Meno in Focus*, p. 15.
[559] Plato himself seems to allow room for this question with the conclusion of the *Meno*: Sokrates exhorts Meno to convince Anytos "of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you will also confer a benefit upon the Athenians" (100b). The "benefit" is Sokrates, the continuation of his life. The implication is that if the teaching of virtue could succeed, then Sokrates would be spared the trial and sentencing.
[560] Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 6, pp. 209-213.
[561] Plato, *Meno*, 86c-d.
[562] Plato, *Meno*, 86d-e.
[563] Plato, *Meno*, 73d.
[564] Plato, *Meno*, 76b. Scott, too, instructs us to take the reference to tyranny seriously, and to consider the sinister undertone (Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 63).
[565] Plato, *Republic*, IX.572e-573b.

utterly undermined, one who is shoved around recklessly by a feverish eros. The image of Meno as a tyrant who does not rule himself and yet tries to rule Sokrates — this image is, I suggest, disturbing. However, I do agree with Zwicky that, after the turning point, the tone of the dialogue shifts: "throughout the remainder, Socrates aims the discussion and a good deal of irony well over Meno's head. It is almost as though he has abandoned the project of converting Meno to the philosophic life."[566] Furthermore, through Meno's initiative, the dialogue reaches a conclusion which, according to the commitments of Platonic philosophy, can be regarded only as a travesty. To claim, with Dominic Scott, that the Socratic education of Meno is to some degree successful strains the text.

Can virtue be taught? — This question is one that I frequently ask. Or I ask myself a different inflection of the question: Can virtue be *learned*? And in my own mouth, this question means: Can I learn virtue? The question is not without urgency; but it is inseparable from a prior, Socratic question: What *is* virtue? Let us remember that the English word, "virtue," translates an ancient Greek word, ἀρετή (*aretē*). Recall Anscombe's point that the Greek word has a wider range than the English one; an alternative English translation, "excellence," suggests some of that range. To be virtuous is to excel at being whatever it is that you (really) are. Gerard Manley Hopkins's sonnet illustrates the Platonic thought:[567]

> As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
>
> As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
>
> Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
>
> Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
>
> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
>
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
>
> Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
>
> Crying *What I do is me: for that I came....*[568]

Graeme Nicholson once made the point with an analogy: a bell excels at ringing. One could say that ringing well realizes the virtue of the bell. The analogy between artefactual

---

[566] Zwicky, *Plato as Artist*, p. 58.

[567] As that thought finds expression in Plato, *Republic*, I.352d ff.

[568] Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire," *Poems and Prose*, p. 51.

and natural things may imply that the concept of arete is tangled up with troubling issues of teleology: is an aretaic human being one who realizes an alleged generic purpose of being human? But there is, arguably, no such purpose. — However, the objection misunderstands the nature of analogy. To suggest that the excellence of a human being is *like* the excellence of a bell, for example, is *not* to assimilate human beings to teleologically designed artefacts. (Not to mention that an artefact may be excellently used for purposes unanticipated by its designer.) One reason that the analogical-teleological argument for the existence of God fails is that it, too, misunderstands the nature of analogy: in some ways, the natural world is *like* a work of art; but from this analogy, *it does not follow* that the world is assimilable to the class of works of art, nor that there exists an artist of the world. To analogize is not to homogenize.

Returning to the question — "What is virtue?" — it seems to me that I am daily surrounded by decent examples of virtuous character: in my teachers, my students, my colleagues and friends and family, in strangers, I observe displays of courage and integrity, self-discipline and understanding, patience and kindness, and other, subtler virtues for which there aren't conventional names. I seem to be able to recognize (instances of) virtue, but what *is* it, *exactly*, that I am recognizing? — And what if I am mistaken? I myself am not yet virtuous; how then could I possibly recognize virtue in others? Take courage, for example: I myself am not very courageous; I don't know very much about courage. When a knife-fight breaks out on Elgin Street in Sudbury, and my friend intervenes and breaks up the fight, that seems courageous to me; but what if I am mistaken? What if my friend's act is simply reckless? How can I *tell*? We see how the questions transmit energy to one another, like boxcars banging along the tracks: the initial question, "Can I learn virtue?," unearths a deeper question, "What is virtue?," and, in its turn, that question quickly provokes a skeptical question, "If I don't know what something is, then how can I learn about it?" This last question, the skeptical one, is known as "Meno's paradox," and it is what Meno asks from out of the centre of his *aporia*.

§10.2. The question is more profound than it first appears. Some of us might feel some impatience with the question: if I don't know what something is, then I grope around

until I stumble upon it; or I have a hunch, and, luckily, the hunch turns out to be right. But if I don't know what something is, then how can I know *when* I've stumbled upon it; how can I know whether my hunch is actually *confirmed*? Okay, then I find someone who *does* know, and they teach me. But if I don't know what I'm looking for, then how can I know *whom to trust* to teach me? At first glance, there appear to be various ways of escaping from the skeptical question: trial and error, a lucky hunch, appeal to authority, et cetera, but the profound feature of the question is its *repeatability*,[569] its indefeasibility. It is not unlike your shadow: you can change the angle of your body, your relationship to the source of light, but your shadow inexorably copies whatever posture you have assumed. And, as it repeats itself, the skeptical question seems to scorch the very possibility of ever knowing anything.

Let us notice an analogy between Meno's paradox and a paradox about the acquisition of virtue from Book II of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[570] In that book, Aristotle says, "the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[571] The paradox is shortly acknowledged:[572] an action is just, for example, if it is the sort of action that would be produced by a just character. But if I am not yet just, how can I produce the appropriate action? And if I cannot produce the appropriate action, how can I ever become just? Of course, Aristotle's paradox deserves separate study, but we can see the close analogy with Meno's.[573] Julia Annas addresses a version of the paradox: if right action is defined as what a virtuous person would (characteristically) do, and if a virtuous person is supposed to be identifiable independently of right action, how do we identify a virtuous person?[574] But the virtuous person was supposed to serve as the

---

[569] My thanks to Steven Burns for helping me to see this feature.

[570] Contra Scott (*Plato's Meno*, pp. 17-18), Aristotle is clearly alluding to Meno's initial question ("Can virtue be taught?") when he contemplates a puzzle about the acquisition of happiness (NE, I.1099b5-10), as Irwin acknowledges (in his "Notes," NE, p. 188).

[571] Aristotle, NE, II.1.1103a30-1103b1.

[572] Aristotle, NE, II.4.1105a18 ff.

[573] Cf. Irwin, "Notes," NE, p. 195.

[574] Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," p. 67.

criterion for right action. If we cannot identify a virtuous person, how can we know which actions are right? — Annas proposes a "developmental account," which attempts to break the binary of virtuous person and right action by interposing a third term, the developmental process.[575] In this account, there is an apprentice, who is not yet expertly virtuous: thus, "right action" has at least two different connotations, relative to the apprentice and the expert.[576] According to Annas, we can supply independent characterizations of the virtuous person and right action only if we confine ourselves to the perspective of the apprentice: right action is what the virtuous person would do, and the virtuous person around here is, for example, *this* person. When I am an apprentice, I do the right thing iff I do what, for example, this virtuous person would do. But for an expert, virtue is not defined according to this criterion; the expert does not merely emulate a model. The expert does something else, which is impossible to formulate definitively and without seemingly circular reference to the expert.

Annas admits that the apprentice's identification of the virtuous person is not without risk: "How do we identify the virtuous people? We do so in the way that we identify good builders and pianists — that is, in a way which is initially hostage to our own lack of expertise."[577] Notice that there is an analogy between Annas's suggestion and McDowell's defence of external reasons. The relation between an agent and an external reason is not a rational relation; similarly, the relation between the unknowing, non-virtuous apprentice and virtue is not an epistemic or aretaic relation. I am not persuaded that Annas's interposition of the third term deflates the paradox (any more than Scott's interposition deflates Meno's paradox).[578] The apprentice appears to be a compromise between the dichotomy of the completely non-virtuous and the expertly virtuous; but the challenge of transitioning from the non-virtuous to the virtuous can be repeated: how can the non-virtuous become an apprentice? An apprentice is presumably someone who is emulating the actions of an expert; but if I am truly non-virtuous, how can I know if I am emulating an expert or a sophist? — The danger, I think, is real; but

---

[575] Annas, "Being Virtuous," p. 68.
[576] Annas, "Being Virtuous," p. 71.
[577] Annas, "Being Virtuous," p. 73.
[578] Vide below and Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 79.

the alternative appears to be paralysis. For Sokrates, the gap between the not-yet-aretaic apprentice and the expert is crossable through trust.

§10.3. Plato's *Meno* can be divided into three major movements in which Sokrates tries and fails to get Meno to concentrate on the question, "What is virtue?"[579] Just before the dialogue draws to a close, there is a final scene, which concerns a distinction between belief and knowledge. Sokrates and Meno consider the supposition that virtue might be belief, on the ground that belief might be just as beneficial as knowledge. The argument runs like this: suppose that you had never previously been to the Kamloops Art Gallery, but had heard, second-hand, and had believed, that it was on the corner of Fifth and Victoria in downtown Kamloops. Having this (true) belief, would you be a worse guide than someone who had knowledge, that is, someone who had actually been there? If not, then what is the difference between belief and knowledge? Sokrates suggests that the difference is not an instrumental one; he compares true beliefs to the fugitive statues of Daidalos, but we can run the argument in terms of the paintings of Jack Shadbolt: as long as the paintings remain, they are fine things. But this is a travelling exhibition, and the paintings are not liable to remain long. They are not worth much unless they are *secured* in the gallery of the mind. And true beliefs, concludes Sokrates, are securely rooted through the method of recollection, by ultimately giving "an account of the reason why" (αἴτιος λογισμός). On the surface, this may look like a theory of knowledge as justified true belief; but we should hesitate before ascribing anachronistic notions of justification to Plato.

Indeed, Gregory Vlastos attributes to Plato a quasi-Cartesian, rationalist foundationalist theory of knowledge, which involves both intuition (of primitive propositions) and deductive inference.[580] Vlastos is certainly not the only commentator to formulate a Platonic theory of knowledge as justified true belief; but notwithstanding the fact that Plato has been routinely caricatured as the first foundationalist,[581] the attribution

---

[579] For an overview of these movements, see Appendix A.1.

[580] Vlastos, "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*," pp. 96-97.

[581] Vide, e.g., Edmund L. Gettier. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *The Theory of Knowledge*. Second Edition. Ed. Louis P. Pojman. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999. 142-143.

of these analytic classifications seems (minimally) anachronistic. Irwin, too, interprets Plato in the terms of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy: he speculates that the method of recollection is a method for the interior recovery of (Socratic) definitions; such a definition *explains* why, for example, x is F; and furnishing that explanation *justifies* the epistemic agent's true belief that x is F. Furthermore, some kind of counterfactual reliability seems to be a necessary condition for the stability which distinguishes knowledge from true belief; perhaps rational explanation is what confers this reliability.[582] However, Zwicky's reading suggests that Plato's distinction between true belief and knowledge is not the distinction to which twentieth-century philosophers are habituated: that is, Plato doesn't think that *justification*, associated with "the provision of empirical evidence or argumentative reasoning,"[583] is what makes the difference between true belief and knowledge. Rather, knowledge involves "causal reasoning," which is a recollecting of the causes of the experiences of necessary truth, which causes are the Forms. I agree with Zwicky's insight that we can hear, in the phrase "*aitios logismos*," an echo of the vocabulary of *Phaedo*;[584] but I wonder if what Plato means by *aitios* can ever be elegantly translated into English. The English word "cause" does not even adequately translate Aristotle's so-called "four causes." Knowledge, for Plato, may require "the ability to *demonstrate* one's understanding through a dialectical, 'causal' account given in terms of Forms";[585] but we shouldn't assume that together (1) having the true belief that X is the only thing that always follows Y and (2) being able to *say* "X is the only thing that always follows Y" are *sufficient* for knowledge. Believing and being able to *say* (to "justify") one's belief are nothing without *understanding* (although saying, for example, might be one application of one's understanding).

§10.4. As I have mentioned, the dialogue concerns itself with these three questions: "Can virtue be taught? What is virtue? How can I learn what I don't already know?" The ostensible answers to the first two questions — virtue cannot be taught, and virtue is reducible to inborn true belief — seem to stand in some tension with the answer to the

---

[582] Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, pp. 141-145.
[583] Zwicky, PA, p. 84.
[584] Zwicky, PA, pp. 82-83; Plato, *Phaedo*, 97b-d.
[585] Zwicky, PA, p. 69.

third question: namely, we already know what virtue is, and need only recollect this knowledge. There has been some stress among the commentators on how to interpret the third section and conclusion of the dialogue. As one commentator, Jane M. Day, observes, these interpretations tend to fall into two kinds:

> (a) Plato is here abandoning the uncompromising Socratic view that virtue must always be knowledge, and while holding to the *ideal* that virtue should be knowledge he now recognizes a second legitimate form of virtue consisting in 'right opinion' (*orthē doxa*).
>
> (b) The true conclusion of the *Meno* is that virtue is knowledge and comes from teaching, as argued at 87-9, while the whole subsequent argument is ironical and consciously fallacious.[586]

In other words, the first kind of interpretation (a) accepts the ostensible conclusion of the *Meno*, while the second kind of interpretation (b) argues that the conclusion is ironic, and that it conceals a true conclusion sequestered earlier in the dialogue. One recent commentator, Roslyn Weiss, in her *Virtue in the Cave*,[587] adopts (a) the first kind of interpretation. She argues that the myth of recollection is a self-conscious fiction, deployed for merely pragmatic motives. Furthermore, she argues that the allegedly supporting demonstration is really a farce: contrary to his disavowals, Sokrates is straightforwardly *teaching* geometry to the slave. But this instance of teaching has no bearing on the question about the teachability of virtue, Weiss claims, because geometry and virtue are utterly dis-analogous. The myth and its alleged demo do respond to Meno's skeptical question, but the strategy of response is not argumentative. According to Weiss, the myth and the demo together are a sophisticated and deceptive piece of theatre, designed to trick Meno into continuing with the inquiry. Weiss thus endorses the ostensible conclusion of the dialogue: virtue cannot be taught. Unlike geometry, and horseback-riding, and javelin-throwing, et cetera, virtue is not a kind of knowledge.

---

[586] Day, "Introduction," *Plato's* <u>Meno</u> *in Focus*, p. 28.

[587] The "Cave" of her title is an allusion to the Allegory of the Cave from *Republic* VII. Drawing on Sokrates's assessment of himself and his fellow citizens in *Apology*, Weiss contends that humans are condemned to a "moral Cave, that is, to the realm of moral *opinion*" (Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, p. 4). Weiss's interpretation is audacious, very clever, scrupulously scholarly, and, in my view, flatly sophistical.

Other commentators[588] have suggested that the argument from the absence of teachers, which delivers the ostensible conclusion that virtue cannot be taught, is actually irrelevant, because it fails to attend to Sokrates's redefinition of learning as recollection. One of the first such commentators is F.M. Cornford, and his magnificent footnote is worth reproducing in full, because it condenses the issue so deftly:

> The ostensible conclusion of the *Meno* (98DE) disguises this result [i.e., the result that virtue cannot be 'taught' in the ordinary sense], by resuming the argument that virtue cannot be knowledge, because, if it were, it must be 'teachable' [*didakton*], and there are in fact no teachers of it (i.e., the Sophists who profess to teach virtue cannot do so). This argument deliberately ignored the distinction between 'teachable' [*didakton*] and 'recoverable by recollection' [*anamnêston*] which Socrates had just established (87BC). The fact that the Sophists cannot 'teach' virtue does not prove that virtue is not knowledge of the sort that is recollected under Socratic questioning. As in other early dialogues the true conclusion is masked.[589]

What is virtue? According to Sokrates, here and in the *Phaedrus*, it is, literally, the soul's recollecting of its pre-incarnate experience of the forms. But Sokrates does not *tell* us to believe this metaphysical doctrine; indeed, he suggests that the doctrine is less important than the Socratic method. The method is on display in the geometrical demonstration; what we need to trust is only that the method can be effective for ethical education, too; that, despite the failure of the sophists to transmit virtue, nevertheless, virtue can be elicited by apt questions and paradigms. However, the truth about what virtue is, and its "recollectability," is not itself explicitly transmitted by the dialogue. It is *there*; it is even explicitly articulated and considered. Near the beginning of the third and final section of the dialogue, Sokrates *says*: "Virtue ... is wisdom?" And Meno assents:

---

[588] For example, Wilkes, "Conclusions in the Meno," pp. 209-210, and Cornford, "Anamnesis," p. 110.

[589] Cornford, "Anamnesis," p. 126, n. 10. Cornford never published a monograph on the *Meno*, but he saw its central nervous system so clearly, and consigned his insight to a footnote.

"What you say ... seems to me quite right."[590] Zwicky asks, "Why isn't this the high point of the dialogue, then, its rhetorical peak? Because the *fact* is nothing if it is not *understood*, if we don't *see* it ..."[591] And it is clear that Meno does not understand. And so the lesson is retracted, and masked by the ironic conclusion.

But if we accept something like Cornford's interpretation (kind [b]), and resist Weiss's interpretation (kind [a]), we face a difficulty. For Weiss's interpretation has the advantage that it *explains* the third section of the dialogue. If the third section is ironic, as the second interpretation claims, then *why is it written*? If Plato means for us to accept the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge, and therefore teachable, why doesn't he end the dialogue there, instead of proceeding to the contradictory conclusion? If the true conclusion is masked, as Cornford claims, then *why is it masked*? In order to respond to these questions, and to appreciate the deep unity of the dialogue, we need to approach it as a philosophical work of art. This approach is developed by Zwicky. Central to her study of the dialogue is its dramatic form, and the importance of character (in this case, Meno's and Sokrates's characters) to philosophical investigation.[592] Her interpretation of the third section of the dialogue does not fit neatly into either of the two contrasting kinds of interpretation sketched by Day, but represents a third way. "Virtue is knowledge," writes Zwicky, "*and* it is not transmissible."[593] *That* virtue is not transmissible is the lesson of the third section of the dialogue. If we assume, with Meno, *that teaching reduces to transmission*,[594] then the absence of transmitters will be persuasive. But what if transmission is not the only *kind* of teaching? Virtue *is* knowledge, and while it cannot be transmitted, it can be *learned*, that is, recollected. However, this truth is, as Cornford observes, masked. And it is masked *for characterological reasons*. Meno is not the most promising student. His mistakes (two of several) are (1) that he lacks the *courage* required to engage in the project of dialectic (which centrally features Socratic definition); and (2) that he conflates all *teaching* with *transmission*. And, indeed,

---

[590] Plato, *Meno*, 89a.
[591] Zwicky, PA, p. 65. Cf. Zwicky, W&M, L90-L91.
[592] Zwicky, PA, p. 18.
[593] Zwicky, PA, p. 63.
[594] Scott agrees that Meno makes this assumption (*Plato's* <u>Meno</u>, p. 13); and Weiss argues a different but related point that Meno assimilates all learning to that which comes from teaching ("Learning without Teaching" pp. 5-6).

Sokrates has tried, and failed, to transmit virtue to Meno — thus contributing yet another empirical datum to the argument from the absence of teachers. But what if virtue isn't transmissible?

Zwicky employs allusive imagery, and that imagery is intended to show something important. Throughout her essay on the *Meno*, Zwicky's image for philosophical thinking is *fire*. Let me assemble four instances of this imagery, and we will hear the resonances: (1) "Meno is such damp wood there is no teasing him into even a flicker of interest in reality";[595] (2) "Socrates has sparked attention in a very unpromising subject";[596] (3) "Socrates senses that the flame is still lit, but wavering";[597] (4) "Meno is not ready. He has caught a glimpse, the flame has riffled along the edge of his intelligence; but it has not caught."[598] The selection of imagery is not coincidental; I suggest that it is designed to echo the imagery of the *Seventh Letter*.[599] The author of that letter, either Plato or a Platonist, writes, "There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, *like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled*, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself."[600] What is important about this image is its suggestion that philosophical insight, like fire, is not transmitted through a unidirectional lecture; rather, it is kindled though a collaboration, through minds "rubb[ing] against one another," conversing "in good will and without envy."[601] The privileging of live intercourse over written discourse reflects the sentiment of Plato's *Phaedrus*. Furthermore, the *material* matters: some things just will not burn — damp wood, for example.

---

[595] Zwicky, PA, p. 31.

[596] Zwicky, PA, p. 44.

[597] Zwicky, PA, p. 52.

[598] Zwicky, PA, p. 56.

[599] Zwicky twice refers to the so-called "epistemological digression" of the *Letter* (Zwicky, PA, pp. 30, 89), but she conspicuously refrains from quoting the relevant passage.

[600] Plato, *Letter VII*, 341c-d; emphasis added. The image of nourishment is also echoed by Zwicky (PA, p. 42), but discussing it would take me too far afield.

[601] Plato, *Letter VII*, 344b.

Scott nicely summarizes Meno's attitude to education: "The assumption that underlies Meno's abruptness in asking his [initial] question betrays an approach to education that will be opposed throughout the work: equipped with a collection of speeches, the teacher acts as informant; the learner in turn memorises whatever the teacher has to say. Education is a straightforward process of transmission. The other side of that contrast is the Socratic approach to education, where learning takes the form of a dialogue in which the 'teacher' asks questions, and the learner responds."[602] When Meno says, "Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught?" — he is saying, "Just tell me, Socrates. If you have a speech on the teachability of virtue, let's hear it. (Maybe I'll add it to my repertoire of impressive speeches.)" Furthermore, the characterological reasons for masking the true conclusion of the dialogue extend to include the character of the reader. Plato refuses to provide point-form handouts, to tell us precisely which answers to circle on the multiple-choice test. He expects us to work, and *to see for ourselves*. The dialogue is thus crafted to act as a Socratic interlocutor: it is, simultaneously, teacher and student. Teacher, because it asks genuine, open questions, which invite the reader to participate, to reflect, and to find the answers for herself. Student, because it contains latent ideas which can be elicited and sprung into focus by the reader's questions.

§10.5. Like Plato's *Phaedrus*, his *Meno* aspires to be a kind of living, or ensouled, philosophy, and this aspiration is realized to the degree that the dialogue manages to provoke us, its readers, to ask its unspoken but implicit questions.[603] In her study of the *Meno*, Zwicky continues to emphasize the importance of the dialogic form, its integral rôle in provoking us to philosophical reflection. She writes, "There is much that is unvoiced in the writing; but it is latent, as a conclusion is latent in its premises. When we regard Plato not only as a purveyor of arguments but as a consummate philosophical artist,... the work's essential unity begins to emerge. When we focus on how the dialogue is *made*, we are led to ask the right questions. When we ask the right questions, its

---

[602] Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 13.
[603] For Zwicky's study of the *Phaedrus*, vide Appendix A.2.

meaning springs to life."[604] As with the *Phaedrus*, the *Meno*'s vitality is a function of the synergistic relationship between reader and text.

One characteristic of great works of art is that they are capable of *showing* more than they *say*. I have emphasized that Plato's *Meno* explicitly asks three questions ("Can virtue be taught? What is virtue? How can I learn what I don't already know?"); the dialogue seems concerned primarily with ethics and epistemology. However, there is a fourth question; it is unspoken, but nevertheless very important, and, arguably, shown through the dramatic action. As Zwicky observes, "the question, 'What is teaching?', though philosophically central, is never explicitly asked."[605] The dialogue is *also* about *education*. Zwicky writes, "[W]e notice that in Meno's original question there are, of course, two undefined concepts: human excellence [or virtue] and teaching. And as soon as we notice that teaching is undefined, we realize that there is a difference between *imparting information* ('the Greek word for fish is spelled iota, chi, theta, upsilon, sigma') and *assisting someone towards understanding*."[606] The concept of teaching is indeed undefined in the dialogue, and Zwicky is proposing a dialectical division. Remember the hypothesis: if something is knowledge, then it can be taught. Zwicky is dividing the genus, *things that can be known*, into two species: (1) *transmissible information*, and (2) *recollectable truths*. And there is, she claims, a crucial distinction between knowledge that is transmissible and knowledge that is recollectable.[607] The two kinds of knowledge are not necessarily mutually exclusive: the transmission of some information might play a rôle, for example, in assisting someone toward understanding. But transmission is not *sufficient* to accomplish recollection, namely, understanding. Sokrates might *tell* me that virtue is knowledge; I might be able to parrot with approval the claim, "Virtue is knowledge"; but still I might not *understand* what I have been told and am parroting.[608]

It is worth comparing the first half of Zwicky's distinction, namely, transmissible information, with an image from another of Plato's works, the *Symposium*; there,

---

604 Zwicky, PA, p. 17.
605 Zwicky, PA, p. 17.
606 Zwicky, PA, pp. 45-46.
607 Zwicky, PA, p. 69; cf. ibid., pp. 70-71.
608 Cf. Zwicky, W&M, L24, L49, L90-91.

Sokrates suggests that, unlike water flowing along a twist of yarn, wisdom cannot be transmitted. Talking with the prize-winning tragedian Agathon, Sokrates says, "How wonderful it would be, dear Agathon, if the foolish were filled with wisdom simply by touching the wise. If only wisdom were like water, which always flows from a full cup into an empty one when we connect them with a piece of yarn — well, then I would consider it the greatest prize to have the chance to lie down next to you. I would soon be overflowing with your wonderful wisdom."[609] The passage is doubly ironic: Sokrates does not really envy Agathon, who is a clever rhetorician, but no sage. And, more importantly for my purposes, the analogy is self-consciously satirical: the wise are compared to full vessels, the ignorant, to empty ones, and wisdom is imagined as a substance which might be transmitted from the former to the latter. Notice that, strictly followed out, the analogy would entail that the wise person is emptied of her wisdom (and thus rendered ignorant) as a consequence of the transmission.[610] The dynamic is not dis-analogous to the transmission of digital information by fibre-optic cables, and perhaps that more recent analogy makes the point more forcefully: the copying of such information is something that could be done by a machine, passively, and without understanding. (In some science fiction novels, one can plug some software into a socket behind one's ear, and the software will transmit an entire library of information directly into one's brain.)

The image (or dis-analogy) instructs us that wisdom should not be imagined as a substantive *thing* that can be transmitted along yarn or a fibre-optic cable. An analogy is drawn in Plato's *Protagoras* that denies the substantiality of wisdom; there, Sokrates advises that food nourishes the body, while teachings nourish the soul. Food can be stored in a container and shown to an expert before being consumed, but "you cannot carry teachings away in a separate container. You put down your money and take the teaching away in your soul having learned it, and off you go, either helped or injured."[611] Unlike food or water, wisdom is not something that can be contained separately from its

---

[609] Plato, *Symposium* 175d-e. I am not the first reader to see this connexion between the *Meno* and the *Symposium*; cf. Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 143.

[610] Shades of one of the "Parmenidean" objections to the metaphysics of the Forms: how can one thing be in many places at once? Cf. Plato, *Parmenides*, 131a ff.

[611] Plato, *Protagoras*, 314b.

host. Meno's paradox also haunts this passage in *Protagoras*. Sokrates says, "So if you are a knowledgeable consumer, you can buy teachings safely from Protagoras or anyone else. But if you're not, please don't risk what is most dear to you on the roll of the dice ..."[612] If I am not a knowledgeable consumer, how can I ever become one? How can I know whom to trust to teach me? (Recall Annas's claim that the apprentice is held hostage by her own inexperience.)

To learn, to understand, to see — is to *do* something, *to change one's own soul*. This pedagogy is represented clearly in Plato's *Republic*: there, Sokrates says:

> Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes.... But our present discussion, on the other hand, shows that the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body.... [And] education is the craft concerned with... this turning around [of the soul], and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately.[613]

There is no clearer representation of the aspirations of Socratic (and Platonic) education. This representation, too, indirectly addresses Meno's skeptical question: if I cannot already see, how can sight be transmitted to me? Socratic education takes for granted — we might say that he "has faith" or "has hope" — that we *can* already see. Starting with this hope, it offers an altered conception of the nature of the task: the question is not "How *can* I learn?" but "*How* do I learn?" It is not a skeptical question about the very possibility of learning, but a fully, already committed question about methodology.

---

[612] Plato, *Protagoras*, 313e-314a.
[613] Plato, *Republic*, VII.518b-d.

§10.6. Zwicky connects Plato's epistemology with the epistemology of the Eleusinian Mysteries.[614] The evidence is circumstantial, but persuasive, and Sokrates's reverential tone for the Mysteries[615] does not sound ironic. What is not controversial is that Plato's epistemology, like that of the Mysteries, involves *seeing*. In the *Phaedrus*, the pre-incarnate soul sees the Forms;[616] and in *Republic*,[617] it is the soul's eye that is turned toward the good, and that is lifted out of the barbaric slime. In the *Meno*, too, the soul has seen (ἑωρακυῖα, from ὁράω, to see) all things in this world and in Hades.[618] Yes, these are metaphors. But they aptly point to a salient feature of the phenomenology of necessary truth: the perception of such truth is like seeing. Plato's proposal, according to Zwicky, is that "since it *feels* like seeing, it *is* a kind of seeing, with the mind's eye, of non-physical Forms."[619]

The dialogue's well known geometrical demonstration — in which Sokrates walks the slave through the doubling of the square — is set up as a demonstration of how learning, that is, recollecting, works.[620] The structure of the demonstration mirrors the structure of Meno and Sokrates's investigation into virtue (indeed, Sokrates underlines the parallel).[621] And like Meno with respect to virtue, the slave does not begin with conscious knowledge of the solution, a line with a length of square-root eight.[622] Furthermore, Sokrates repeatedly emphasizes that he is not teaching (that is, not transmitting), but only questioning; the slave is not being taught, but is only recollecting.[623] And the method of recollection, according to Sokrates, has a proper order:[624] it proceeds through the questioning of the *elenkhos* to the *aporia*, at which point one is emptied of one's false beliefs. From the *aporia*, one is in a position to recover true beliefs, and, eventually, knowledge. Perhaps most important for my purposes is the

---

[614] Vide esp. Zwicky, PA, p. 96.
[615] Plato, *Meno*, 76e, 81a.
[616] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247d & ff.
[617] Plato, *Republic*, VII.518c, VII.533d.
[618] Plato, *Meno*, 81c.
[619] Zwicky, PA, p. 48.
[620] For some discussion of this demonstration, vide Appendix A.3.
[621] Plato, *Meno*, 84b-c.
[622] An irrational number: 2.8284271247461900976033774484194 ...
[623] Plato, *Meno*, 82b, 82e, 84c-d, 85d.
[624] Plato, *Meno*, 82e.

following feature of the demonstration: during the *elenkhos*, the slave is led to recognize, *to see for himself*, when he is wrong; and after the *aporia*, when the diagonals are drawn, he understands, *he sees for himself*, the solution. (Traditional concepts of seeing and thinking cross here.)[625]

The method by which the slave is assisted in his understanding includes at least two kinds of prompt: visual examples (presumably scratched in the ground), and Sokrates's questions. After the slave has arrived at the solution, Sokrates says that "he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other knowledge."[626] The clear implication is that the method of recollection is entirely generalizable: geometrical understanding is analogous to ethical understanding: the same method that had helped the slave to solve the geometry problem should be able to assist the slave, and anyone else, including Meno, to understand what virtue is. If one is shown paradigms, and asked apt questions, one could become a more virtuous person. Apparently, the slave did not know what he was looking for: how, then, did he recognize when he made a mistake? How did he recognize the solution when it was shown to him?

If we think deeply about these questions, we may begin to appreciate the complexity of the relationship between Meno's skeptical question, and Sokrates's (and Plato's) hopeful response. Remember Meno's question, "How can I learn what I don't already know?" Now, let us ask: is the *solution* to this question supplied by the myth of recollection and the supporting geometrical demonstration? Scott argues that the answer is no: the materials for the actual solution are offered much later in the dialogue, in Sokrates's distinction between true belief and knowledge.[627] Scott has also been credited with making a very fine incision and thereby identifying two separate problems lumped together in Meno's question: a less troubling "problem of inquiry" and a more substantial "problem of discovery." For my purposes, we do not need to worry about this complicated analysis.[lix] We have seen that another commentator, Weiss, denies that the myth and its demo solve Meno's question. According to Weiss, Sokrates recommends the myth for pragmatic motives; in other words, it is a sophistical device deployed to trick

---

[625] Cf. Burns's suggestion that the phenomenon of seeing-as places pressure on the traditional dichotomy between seeing and thinking (Burns, "If a Lion Could Talk").
[626] Plato, *Meno*, 85e.
[627] Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 79.

Meno into continuing with the inquiry.[628] Furthermore, the geometrical demonstration is an example of straightforward teaching, namely, transmission, disguised to appear to be an example of recollection; that is, it, too, is a sophistical device. According to Weiss's interpretation, technical subjects, for which there are objective criteria of correctness, can be straightforwardly taught, that is, transmitted. Geometry, she claims, is one example of such a technical subject. However, geometry and virtue are utterly unlike one another in this crucial respect: virtue is not governed by objective criteria.[629] Weiss writes, "Socrates is able to teach the slave-boy because Socrates has the requisite knowledge; he has knowledge because someone has taught him; someone has been able to teach him because geometry is teachable; and geometry is teachable because the solutions to geometrical problems are objectively testable."[630] By contrast, definitions of virtue are not objectively testable, and therefore are not teachable, according to Weiss. So there is no analogy between the geometry and virtue, and the geometrical demonstration cannot model the learning of virtue. According to Weiss, the "one criterion" which determines whether or not one is teaching is whether or not one has knowledge. If one has knowledge, then one teaches, regardless of whether one leads by questions or uses declarative sentences; if one lacks knowledge, then one does not teach, regardless of whether one uses "elenchus or myth or speeches."[631]

This analysis, with its dismissal of the relevance of methodology, seems to me like a terrific oversimplification of the concept of teaching. Considering the conclusion of the geometrical demonstration, and Sokrates's assessment of it, Weiss asks, rhetorically, "Having witnessed and participated in a proof that he certainly understands... may he [the slave] not rightly be said now to *know*?"[632] The implication is that Sokrates has knowledge, and has successfully transmitted that knowledge to the slave. Again, this analysis of what has transpired seems to me like an oversimplification, regardless of whether we interpret the demonstration as an example of transmission or recollection. Minimally, it would be premature to ascribe *knowledge* to the slave. It is relevant to ask,

---

[628] Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, pp. 64-65.
[629] Cf. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, pp. 62, 80-81.
[630] Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, p. 84.
[631] Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, pp. 97-98.
[632] Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, p. 110.

Can he go on? Faced with this geometrical problem again, or a variation on this problem, can he produce the solution? Let's wait and see.

As I have mentioned, Weiss embraces the ostensible conclusion of the *Meno*: virtue is not knowledge, and cannot be taught; the best that we humans can do is foster beliefs. I find Weiss's interpretation very difficult to accept. However, there are two peculiar bits of text to which any interpretation should be reconciled, and Weiss's interpretation does seem to explain these bits of text: (1) at the conclusion of the myth of recollection, Sokrates says, "We must, therefore, not believe [Meno's eristical skepticism], for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas [my myth of recollection] makes them energetic and keen on the search."[633] (2) At the conclusion of the geometrical demonstration, Sokrates repeats, "I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it."[634] Weiss suggests that these two bits of text support her interpretation of the myth of recollection and its alleged demonstration: their truth-value is incidental; indeed, they are self-consciously fictional, and are motivated by exclusively pragmatic considerations.[635] But Zwicky's reading, I suggest, offers a better way of integrating these two bits of text into the dialogue as a whole.

Of the myth of recollection, and the first bit of text, Zwicky writes, "First, there is no irony or doubt: this is a profession of profound faith. Secondly, it is, overtly, a profession of faith, not a bad or weak argument. Thirdly, to the extent that justification is provided, it is phenomenological and aesthetic, and moral: the account, says Socrates, struck him as true and beautiful; and trusting it makes us better persons."[636] The myth,

---

[633] Plato, *Meno*, 81d-e.

[634] Plato, *Meno*, 86b-c.

[635] Cf. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, pp. 7, 64-65, 69. Although Scott does diverge from Weiss's interpretation on many other points, he seems to agree that belief in the possibility of inquiry is pragmatically "justified" (Scott, *Plato's* <u>Meno</u>, p. 122).

[636] Zwicky, PA, p. 41. On the question of moral justification, vide Zwicky, "Once Upon a Time in the West," pp. 195, 198. Vlastos agrees that reincarnation, at least, is a matter of faith (Vlastos, "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*," pp. 103-104).

then, is not an argumentative solution to Meno's skeptical question; indeed, the repeatability of that question may make us wonder whether it can be defeated by argument. The myth is instead an *alternative* to the enervating parasite of skepticism: if we remain in a constant cycle of doubt about the teachability of virtue, we may be unable to move; but if we choose, contra skepticism, to trust that learning is *possible*, then at least we can *attempt* to learn about virtue, and thus to become more virtuous. Of the geometrical demonstration, and the second bit of text, Zwicky writes, "We *become* virtuous by believing what the mathematical demonstration suggests but does not prove; we awaken excellence, actually produce it in ourselves, by rejecting skepticism about it."[637] What does the demonstration suggest? Occurring where it does in the context of the dialogue, the demonstration is clearly designed "to serve as a model for the investigation of virtue."[638] It suggests that our experience of necessary truth, exemplified here by geometrical truth, is explained by the myth of recollection (we recognize such truth because it is not unfamiliar to us). And the demonstration suggests that there is a "phenomenological *similarity* between our experience of necessary truth and our apprehension of moral beauty."[639] The demonstration does not prove that there is an analogy between geometrical and ethical understanding; nor does the method of recollection guarantee that the student will learn virtue. (Consider Meno.) But the demonstration does witness an instance of genuine recognition; and it invites the reader to compare that instance with her own experiences of recognizing paradigms of virtue.

Let me remember some of what has been discussed. I have suggested with Zwicky that reading Plato's *Meno* as a work of art is indispensable for appreciating its integrity, its deeper unity. Such an interpretative exercise requires attention to dramatic form and character. We started with three questions — "Can virtue be taught? What is virtue? How can I learn what I don't already know" — and, attending to Plato's artistry, we unearthed a fourth, "What is teaching?" Following Zwicky, I have further suggested that at least two factors are centrally relevant to education: (1) the *character* of the student; and (2) the kind or *method* of teaching — that is, transmitting information vs.

---

[637] Zwicky, PA, p. 53.
[638] Zwicky, PA, p. 48.
[639] Zwicky, PA, p. 50.

assisting understanding. Meno's character is partly responsible for his failure to discern that there is more than one kind of teaching, and this failure explains the apparently despairing conclusion of the dialogue. We have seen that there are at least three ways of interpreting the third section of the *Meno*: Weiss's interpretation accepts the ostensible conclusion that virtue is unteachable, while Cornford's interpretation insists that the true conclusion is masked. Zwicky's reading, I have suggested, offers a third way: it emphasizes Plato's resolute hope that virtue is learnable, via the method of recollection, and it also explains why we must see this hope for ourselves. Importantly for my purposes, Zwicky's study makes a preliminary case for the interdependence of character and thought, and invites us to re-imagine what knowledge is. I shall return to these issues in Chapter 13.

CHAPTER 11. Ecological Integrity

Summary

¶ I turn now to developing an alternative to Dancy's metaphysics. Desiderata for the alternative: on the one hand, it must avoid Dancy's combinatory atomism; but on the other hand, it must avoid the totalizing holism proposed by deep ecologists such as Arne Naess. I take a cue from the concept of integrity, and note that its uses are helpfully ambiguous. On the one hand, we use the concept to describe the integrity of individuals; and we mean something like their intactness and resistance to impingement by antagonistic forces — their continuing to be themselves in the face of such antagonism. On the other hand, we also use the concept to describe the integrity of collective structures, such as ecosystems; and we mean something about how the components hang together in a relatively stable way. I argue that Zwicky's work offers the needed concept of integrity: it is a kind of wholeness which is not fusion, but which preserves the distinctness and particularity of its component details. According to this vision, there is reciprocity between the micro-structural details and the macro-structural whole: the character of the whole does determine the character of the details, but it is also constituted by (and inseparable from) those details. Furthermore, there is an analogy (which Weil herself draws) between Weilian attention to details and Spinoza's third kind of knowledge: since the whole is constituted by its components, we can begin to know the whole by concentrating on a particular detail. Indeed, clear and accurate perception of a detail can stimulate re-gestalting of the whole. I illustrate this claim through a close reading of Manet's <u>Argenteuil, les canotiers</u>. I argue that we misinterpret the painting if we neglect certain details; in particular, the colour of the river in the background. Its indigo colour is unnatural: the paint's dye is produced by a factory, upriver from the painting, which pollutes the water. Manet is not painting the happy vacation of a married couple, but the emergence of a modern, industrialized form of life. I then turn to consideration of two examples from film: Kieślowski's <u>Blue </u>and De Sica's <u>Bicycle Thieves</u>. In both cases, the film-makers craft details with fastidious care: in the former

case, Kieślowski obsesses over a sugar cube; and in the latter case, there is a disagreement over whether a certain prop should be a sandwich or an apple. I address the objection that these artistic considerations are arbitrary and without epistemic interest; and I reply that, as a matter of empirical fact, working artists — understood as experts or connoisseurs — regularly appeal to such considerations and argue about them. I address a further dilemma: if the artists really disagree, at least one of them should be able to articulate the general principle which would justify her position; and if neither one can articulate such a principle, then the appearance of disagreement is illusory. I use McDowell's work to suggest that the apparent dilemma is the result of a rationalist prejudice: the assumption that a reason must be the sort of thing that is susceptible to articulation as a general principle: one which is abstractable from and intelligible independently of any particular form of life. McDowell suggests that not even those reasons which fit the rationalist paradigm satisfy this criterion. When we relinquish the prejudice, we become capable of recognizing a wider field of reasons — including the sorts of reasons which Wittgenstein suggests are given in aesthetic (and ethical) contexts.

Demokritos:

τῶι ἀνθρώπωι μικρῶι κόσμωι ὄντι.[640]

§11.1. Let me begin with some images. The jazz trumpeter and composer Wynton Marsalis says:

> In American life, you have all of these different agendas, you have conflict all the time, and we're attempting to achieve harmony through conflict. Which seems strange to say that, but it's like an argument that you have with the intent to work something out, not an argument that you have with the intent to argue. And that's what jazz music is. You have musicians, and they're all standing on the bandstand, and each one has their personality and their agenda. And invariably they're going to play something that you would not play. So, you have to learn when to say a

---

[640] Demokritos, DK 68B34.

little something, when to get out of the way. So you have that question of the integrity, the intent, the will to play together. That's what jazz music is. So you have yourself, your individual expression, and then you have how you negotiate that expression in the context of that group.

"And," he concludes, "it's exactly like democracy."[641] (— Is it? Is integrity like democracy? For the moment, I wish to remain agnostic on this last question. However, I note, in passing, that Richard Sennett draws a very similar analogy between music ensembles and cooperative politics.)[642][lx] I start with Marsalis's monologue because he uses the concept of "integrity" ambiguously, and the ambiguity is, I think, unsettling and helpful: is integrity an *individual* virtue, or a relational, *collective* one? The ambiguity is most concentrated here: "So you have that question of the integrity, the intent, the will to play together." On the one hand, there is the personal integrity of each individual musician: "each one has their personality and their agenda." And this integrity consists, inter alia but importantly, in non-interchangeability: "they're going to play something that you would not play."[lxi] On the other hand, the collective integrity of this group requires *both* the integrity of each individual musician *and* their negotiated expression. If the expression is not negotiated, then there is no cohesion: one ends up, perhaps, with a heap of random solos, but not jazz music. If the individual musicians are totally subordinated to and dissolved in a group agenda, then perhaps the product is homophony, but again, not jazz. The dynamic of influence is reciprocal: each solo contributes to the character of the group, while the context of the group characterizes each solo.[643] (As Marsalis says of Count Basie's piano solos, "one note can swing" — this is true, but the single note swings, not in isolation, but in a momentary silence *contextualized by other notes*.)

The analytic literature on integrity has generally assumed that integrity is a virtue *which attaches to individuals*. And there is something intuitively right about this idea; however, as usual, it is not the whole story. There is a familiar, ordinary sense in which virtue is a property of *individual* ethical agents; but there is also a sense in which virtue is

---

[641] Marsalis, in Ken Burns, dir., "A Masterpiece by Midnight."

[642] Sennett (with David Cayley), "Flesh and Stone."

[643] On the analogy between jazz and ethics, and respect for both complexity and individuality, cf. Hagberg, "Jazz Improvisation and Ethical Interaction."

an interaction between agent and context, and in this sense virtue is *relational*.^{lxii} Finally, there is a sense in which integrity is a virtue of *complex structures* or *collectives*. This usage of "integrity," no less familiar or ordinary than the individualistic usage, derives especially from aesthetic and ecological contexts. We may say of a work of art, for example, a painting or a novel, that "it has integrity." And Aldo Leopold's original talk of the "integrity" of biotic communities[644] has become normal in ecological discourse.[645] In these usages, we are saying something about the relation between components and whole, something about how the whole hangs together. Aiming to simplify investigation, it can be tempting to dismiss the aesthetic or ecological usages as uninteresting, irrelevant, or at best peripheral to the usage in an ethical context. I wish, however, to take a different tack, assuming that there are significant analogies among the ethical, aesthetic, and ecological connotations.

Consider Zwicky's remark, which can apply equally to aesthetic or ecological structures:

> Integrity is an ecological concept. It names a particular kind of wholeness: one in which every "detail" contributes to the stability of the whole, and to the well-being of every other component part. Integrity stands to the parts that it integrates as a gestalt stands to the elements it embraces: it is ontologically dependent on them and yet the full meanings of those elements are indiscernible, apart from the whole in which they live.[646]

The second clause of her first claim seems too strong: in an integrated whole, "every 'detail' contributes ... to the well-being of every other component part." From an ecosystem perspective, it may be correct to say that every part contributes (in some sense) to the *stability* of the larger whole, but it is arguably false to claim that every other part is benefited. (— Even to claim that every other part is benefited by the stability: for

---

[644] Leopold, *"The Land Ethic,"* pp. 210, 224.

[645] For example, cf. Canada National Parks Act 2.(1): "ecological integrity."

[646] Zwicky, "Integrity and Ornament," pp. 210-211. Cf. Roger Ames on the Chinese *keng* (millet broth) as a metaphor for aesthetic integrity: "The combination and blending of these particular ingredients — *this* cabbage and *this* piece of pork — is undertaken in such a manner as to integrate them in mutual benefit and enhancement without allowing them to lose their unique and particular identities" ("Taoism and the Nature of Nature," pp. 322-323).

sometimes general stability comes at the *price* of a part. [Indeed, it is this insight which consequentialism enshrines.]) A predator does contribute to the overall stability of a biotic community, and does also contribute to the well-being of *some* of the other participants (even some of the members — namely, some of the surviving ones — of the prey group); but it is difficult to accept the claim that every predator (for example, this wolf) contributes to the well-being of *every* other participant (including, for example, this caribou who was eaten). Indeed, it is the ineliminable possibility of *collective* integrity threatening individuals that motivates Bernard Williams's defence of *personal* integrity.

Furthermore, I am not sure that another of Zwicky's phrases is well formed: "Integrity stands to the parts that it integrates" — integrity integrates? — what could that mean? We would not say, for example, "Anatomy stands to the limbs that it anatomizes ..." This way of talking (that is, the "substantialization" of an emergent characteristic) risks making integrity sound like a further, metaphysical entity: something *additional* to the components and the structure which is their set of relations to each other. However, Zwicky's analogy between integrity and a gestalt suggests that this implication is infelicitous, since — as she claims — a gestalt is not separable from its components and their interrelations. Nevertheless, we sometimes speak of virtues in a similar way: the knife's *sharpness* enables it to cut well; and I have no objection to this way of talking, as long as we do not fantasize that sharpness is a thing, which we might set on the table beside the knife and the apple. ("— Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts.")[647]

Setting these scruples aside, I do think that Zwicky's characterization remains insightful. According to this characterization, integrity is not fusion;[648] it is a kind of "wholeness" that preserves the *distinctness* and *particularity* of its component details (unlike, for example, systematic consistency or homogeny).[649] Nevertheless, someone might object that Zwicky's valorization of detail amounts to hyperbole:

> ... we say Vermeer's paintings (or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*) are lyric
> because every detail counts. Every thing in them is resonant, like tones in

---

[647] Wittgenstein, PI, §79.
[648] Zwicky, LP, L181.
[649] Zwicky, LP, L67.

a chord. There is no real distinction between details and centres in such compositions; they are, we might say, radically coherent.[650]

— Oh, sure: in aesthetic contexts, we do sometimes exclaim that every comma or every brush-stroke counts. But that's just an exaggeration, meant to emphasize our assessment that the work is well crafted. I know that Shakespeare scholars have fretted anxiously for centuries, for example, over these minuscule lexical cruxes in *Henry IV*, but out here in the real world, who can take seriously the idea that moving around a couple of punctuation marks will destroy the play's integrity? (Furthermore, if we can't positively identify "the original" text, what can we even mean by its "integrity"?) And if this idea — that every detail counts — seems absurd in aesthetic contexts, its blurring into ecological contexts only serves to inspire those embarrassing clichés of a butterfly flapping its wings in Ecuador and causing a tornado in New Brunswick.

Rather than directly rebutting this objection — which is not trivial — I wish to call upon a witness from Zwicky's own practice. Most of her essay "Lyric and Ecology" is a close reading: a 37-page study of a 39-line poem. The ratio is nearly an entire page of scholarship for each line of poetry. What I want to notice is the intensity of the attention which she devotes to this poem. If we gave an equivalent proportion of attention to Donald Davidson's "What Metaphors Mean," for example — if we believed that the details mattered, and that the essay deserved a close, line-by-line reading — our analyses would need to be approximately 750 pages long, and our lectures to our students would last not two or three but twenty-four hours. (— But Davidson's essays *have* provoked such a proportion of scholarship. So why do we have difficulty taking seriously the idea that details matter? Or is it only details from "non-philosophical" disciplines which we find picayune? — *They* spent half an hour trying to explain that the Higgs Boson particle is not really a "particle," but an omnipresent "field" which we perceive only indirectly through perturbations (or: trying to explain that an "oracular" rhythm lurks inside the nominally iambic pentameter [but actually four-stress] line at the beginning of Claudio's "great speech" in *Measure for Measure*);[651] but that time is better spent doing what *we*

---

[650] Zwicky, "The Details," p. 93; cf. ibid., p. 94.
[651] Cf. Frye qtd in Zwicky, LP, R186.

do: trying to explain how the "peculiar crochets and contrivances" in [*p, ξ, N(ξ)*][652] indicate that all non-atomic propositions can be derived from the atomic ones.)

§11.2. Why does this intensity of attention matter? In her preface to "Lyric and Ecology," Zwicky writes,

> The argument is as lengthy as it is because of its insistence on detail — an insistence that stems from an attempt to take seriously the notion of an *ecology* of thought. My aim is indeed as it will frequently appear: to spend hours crawling around on my hands and knees in the linguistic undergrowth, rather than chartering a helicopter in hopes of a contest-winning wide-angle vista. Just as an ecologist attends not ... to the real-estate potential ... of a stretch of glittering sea and sand, but to the millions of organisms, microorganisms, and nonorganic beings and processes that make the beach the living entity that it is, so the serious reader of integrated thought must pay attention to the microcomponents that produce that thought's stability and integrity.[653]

So, too, my aim is as it will frequently appear: plenty of exegetical detail, magnifying glass in hand, in an apprenticeship to primary texts (Plato, Spinoza, and others), in an effort to take seriously the idea that there is wisdom in them. This investigation of integrity touches on some of the influential parties to the contemporary discussion, but spends more of its time dwelling in the history of philosophy. Thus, this investigation does not seek to make a contribution to the analysis of the concept; or rather does not attempt to fix or refine its extension. Instead, it seeks to expand our imaginative repertoire; to remind us that the concept's extension is both more elastic and more porous than some maintain.

Zwicky's analogy may be elaborated: ecological *thinking* is *like* an ecological *community* insofar as both are *integrated* polydimensional structures; in both cases, appreciation of integrity at the macro-structural scale requires attention to the *micro-components* — the *details* — which constitute the structure. These details are not logical

---

atoms with merely external relations: each detail might permit of internal complexification and relation with other details. Yet each one is distinct. Consider a less abstract example: consider someone you love. She is not a mere sum of her parts. Nevertheless, if you *know* her, then you also know *details* about her: the way she wears her hat, the way she sips her tea. The English word "detail" is related to the French for cutting or tailoring: your tailored shirt — the one that your grandmother made for you by hand — is one that *fits you, specifically*. Similarly, a detail is non-interchangeable. In Kantian terms, a detail is "priceless";[654] it cannot be replaced by anything else. In Marxist terms, a detail has no "exchange-value"; it cannot be commodified.[655]

If I may be permitted to make one further connexion: the philosophical skill of identifying details forms one half of Platonic dialectic: the method of collection and division: the practice of *specifying differences* and *gathering together similarities*. And this practice promotes and demonstrates understanding. One shows that one understands something by describing it so specifically that we could identify it in a crowd. Consider the difference between these two instructions: (1) "When you pick my friend up at the train station, look for somebody with a suitcase"; (2) "when you pick my friend up at the train station, look for a hazel-haired woman with a burgundy-coloured birthmark on her throat, et cetera." It is for this reason that vagueness is one of the worst vices of scholarly writing, and specificity is one of the cardinal virtues. Detailed illustration is a test of understanding.

But what, exactly, is a detail? Elsewhere, Zwicky offers a clue. Her imagined interlocutor asks (with some impatience), "What is meant by 'detail' here? Each syllable and punctuation mark? Each word?" And Zwicky responds, "Ideally, for verbal lyric, each phonic, rhythmic, and semantic counter, each idea, each image and the relations — including discontinuous relations — among them. (What the dog did in the night-time.)"[656] And in "Lyric and Ecology," Zwicky lists some of the *kinds* of details on which

---

[654] Cf. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 434-435.

[655] Cf. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. One, Ch. 1.

[656] Zwicky, LP, L112. — And what, one might ask, is a "discontinuous relation," and how could it be taken into account? — What did the dog do in the night-time? Nothing. And this silence (this discontinuous relation) itself becomes a salient detail when set in the larger context of this mystery story (which context includes, e.g., the clue that dogs

she focusses: "rhymes, partial rhymes, visual rhymes, stress, repetition, and alliterations ... [and] images, names, and concepts," all interconnected in "a complex web."[657] Here is what is crucial: these kinds of details — however esoteric they may seem to those of us who are untrained in this sort of reading — these kinds of details are not only relevant, they are *indispensable* to the meaning of the poem. ("*Even the dust has its place*.")[658] If we ignore them, we don't only miss something (as we miss something when we read Aquinas in English translation). We miss everything.

— "Another exaggeration. That last claim is straightforwardly false — even on your own terms it is false. Here's why: if neglect of 'lyric details' meant that we missed *everything*, we would never be able to learn how to read poetry. Because at first we don't know how to parse such details; we don't even know which features might be *called* 'details' in the relevant sense. You're telling me that the scoring of line-breaks and metre is significant for a poem (unlike the arbitrary rhythm and ragged right margin of prose, which we don't pay any attention to): this stuff is part of the overall meaning of a poem. But surely another part of that overall meaning is *content*. And content is something that I can get, even at the apprenticeship stage. When I read Hamlet's 'To be or not to be, et cetera,' maybe I can't name the metre; but I do grasp that he's contemplating suicide. So the details can't be 'indispensable' in any non-rhetorical sense, because I can dispense with them and still understand the poem. At best the details are a kind of 'enrichment'; but they are no more indispensable than ornaments are. Look, it's like whisky: maybe my appreciation is enhanced after I read the connoisseur's manual; but you can't persuade me that I previously failed *to taste* the whisky. All of this enthusing over details is a wasteful distraction. It is the same with your ecology analogy: if I am an ecosystem manager, I don't need to count the number of quills on the back of Ralph the porcupine. What I do need is a sort of statistical overview of macro-scale group relations; and at that level of analysis, the details over which you're rhapsodizing are irrelevant."

— The whisky example is helpful. Permit me to indulge in a minor anecdote. There is a single malt from Islay which I used to enjoy (and whose name I withhold to

---

bark at those they do not recognize). Cf. Zwicky, "Oracularity," p. 503.

[657] Zwicky, L&E, §3.1 (p. 80).

[658] Wittgenstein, qtd in Zwicky, W&M, R83.

protect those readers who may also enjoy it). But this Scotch was ruined for me by the following description of its nose: "light peats, the air of a room with a man sucking cough sweets."[659] I submit that the metaphor (for that is what it is) is accurate; and because it is accurate, it serves to refine the taster's palate: it specifies a definite shape in what appeared to be an amorphous (if nevertheless pleasant) field. In other words, understanding the metaphor made me more literate: it enabled me to perceive a detail that I had failed to perceive. And this detail, when perceived, makes all the difference: it changes the *whole character* of the Scotch. I submit that this last claim is not an exaggeration. The detail specified by the connoisseur's metaphor cannot be said, in any meaningful sense, to be *added on* to the taste profile. (Accident-and-substance metaphysics.) It is not the same old Scotch, *plus* this unpleasant aroma. If I suddenly detect a previously unnoticed twenty-seventh letter in the alphabet, I do not simply recalculate for the omission. (Compare Wittgenstein's numerous remarks, scattered throughout *On Certainty*, on the distinction between a local mistake and a global delusion; for example, "If my friend were to imagine one day that he had been living for a long time past in such an such a place, etc. etc., I should not call this a mistake, but rather a mental disturbance.") [660] The perceptual shift is rather more like waking up in a bed and gradually realizing that it is not your own. (Or: that your life is not your own.)

§11.3. Let me turn to a more momentous example: Edouard Manet's *Argenteuil, les canotiers*, 1874. I have always found Monet's work more beautiful than Manet's. To my layperson's eye, Manet's style of painting is too splotchy, too unclear — and not "impressionistically" so. The drab light feels smeared onto the canvas in irregular, inert chunks. By contrast, Monet's light actually deserves the adjective "dappled" (however trite that adjective is); on his canvas, the light dances. I cite my long-standing preferences only to explain that they are wrong. Consider Manet's *Canotiers*: it depicts a couple, disconcertingly off-centre, apparently holidaying in the suburbs, against the backdrop of a marina. The dun-coloured man, with a parasol tucked under his arm, is half-turned

---

[659] Murray, *Whisky Bible*, p. 57.
[660] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §71; cf. §674: "There is a difference between a mistake for which, as it were, a place is prepared in the game, and a complete irregularity that happens as an exception," etc.

toward the woman, who regards us from under a grotesque meringue-like hat. Their faces approximate featureless smudges, the wrinkled and blurred stripes on their clothing clash at right angles, and their combined bulk crowds out most of what passes for the landscape — except for the horizon, which is buttressed by a wall and sporadically broken by smokestacks. If one does not adopt the pretence of an art critic or the discourse of civility, one could call the painting "ugly." Or one could resort to the terms of Manet's contemporary: "Monsieur Manet is deliberately out to choose the flattest sites, the grossest types. He shows us a butcher's boy, with ruddy arms and pug nose, out boating on a river of indigo, and turning with the air of an amorous marine towards a trollop seated by his side, decked out in horrible finery, and looking horribly sullen."[661] (Setting aside these unkind words, we can say that the woman's status as a prostitute is confirmed by her ear: if we look closely, we can see that she has an attached ear-lobe; and according to French medical science at the time, such a physical detail was a sign of prostitution.)[662] Contrast this scene with Monet's pretty representations of the same region of Argenteuil: here one may find relief in the pure landscapes, uncluttered by tourists and unpolluted by industry.[663] The light rushes through them, unobstructed.

But if one suffers from this reaction (which was mine), then one needs to be taught *how* to look at Manet's painting. Clark acknowledges what I have been complaining about: the painting is awkward, dissonant, *flat*.[664] The woman's face, in particular, "is scarred and shadowed and abbreviated, hairless and doll-like, animate but opaque.... The woman resists the critics' descriptions: she is not quite vulgar, not quite 'ennuyé,' not quite even sullen."[665] And, not surprisingly, these difficulties belong to the artwork's meaning. Manet is painting "the look of a new form of life"[666] — a peculiarly modern one, coagulating in the environs of Paris in the late nineteenth century, where the

---

[661] Maurice Chaumelin, qtd in Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 168.

[662] Howard, "Sex, Alcohol, and Blood." My reading of Manet's *Argenteuil, les canotiers* is indebted to Howard's lecture. Thanks to Howard for directing my attention to Clark.

[663] Even in Manet's painting of Monet (*Claude Monet et sa femme*, 1874), the latter is "turned away from the evidence of industry" (Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 179).

[664] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, pp. 165-166.

[665] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 168.

[666] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 172.

middle class, something like a countryside, and industry converge uneasily.[667] This form of life is characterized by "dislocation and uncertainty, and the sense of the scene [is] suggested best by a kind of composition — perfected here [by Manet and Seurat, for example] — in which everything was left looking edgy, ill-fitting, or otherwise unfinished."[668] It is a painting of ostensible leisure which actually confronts the viewer with discomfort.

I want now to focus on a particular detail: the colour of the river. Let me quote from a longer passage by Clark:

> It has the look of an icon, this picture, does it not? ... Yet it is no icon: it is too casual, too uncomposed, too untidy. The river is full of the signs of *canotage*: rigging and bits of boats and rolled-up canvas, the whole thing patchy and provisional. It is the lack of order which must have been striking in 1875, for here was a subject which lent itself normally to simple rhythms and sharp effects ... Manet's regatta was not like this ... *Canotage* was a litter of ropes and masts and pennants, its casualness confirmed by the invading slab of blue which so perplexed the critics. The blue was the foil for this patchwork, this debris; it was the consistency of nature, they might have said, as opposed to the random signs of manufacture; it was what survived of landscape.[669]

The blue, one might be tempted to say, is the elemental purity reverenced by Monet, piercing vividly through Manet's jumble. — But things are not as they seem (or, more accurately, when we see them as they are, they will seem differently). The clue is given by a wood-engraved satire of Manet's *Canotiers* in *L'Eclipse* (30 May 1875). The cartoonist Paul Hadol "imagined the man's (now phallic) hat floating in the Seine beside its flowery partner, in front of a building labelled 'Fabrique d'Indigo.' He added the caption, 'The Seine at the Sewer of Saint-Denis.' And thus the blue of the river was explained — by the great chemical-dye factories a few miles upstream from Argenteuil,

---

[667] Cf. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 164.

[668] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 147. This description seems more accurate of Manet's painting than Clark's later (and contradictory) assertions that the painting is clear (164) and "massively finished ... orderly and flawless" (172).

[669] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 167.

pouring their indigo waste into the water."[670] The socio-historical facts can be fleshed out more graphically: "Government studies in 1874 estimated that 450,000 kilograms of waste was flushed into the river every day ... The Seine [at the points of flushing] was, according to these reports 'a cauldron of bacteria, infection and disease.'"[671] Furthermore, by the time "that the waste and indigo dye had passed downstream to Argenteuil, pleasure-seekers could both see and smell the effects of modernization. In the heat of the summer, and judging from the shadows in Manet's painting, it's at the height of such a day, a foetid stench rose from the fields at Gennevilliers, and from the stinking waters of the Seine (not to mention the solid waste [littering the banks of the river])."[672] — What I want to say is that it is possible not only to read this detail — namely, the indigo — wrongly (or to fail to read it), but, having done so, to read the entire painting wrongly. The river is not really (naturally) indigo-coloured; it is, however, contaminated with indigo dye. Manet's decision to use this pigment cannot be explained on straightforwardly "representational" grounds. The indigo pigment, for a literate audience, evokes the dye-factory and the pollution of the Seine. If one reads this detail ignorantly, as I did initially, the painting remains bolted closed. But read accurately, the detail works like a key, realigning the painting's other details like tumblers inside a lock. (— The rise of the middle class, the encroachment and expansion of the industrial factory system, the strangulation of the wild margins of cityscapes, the pervasive uneasiness and imperfection of the scene, et cetera.) The painting is not a bland and static scene of an urbane husband and wife vacationing in the countryside; it is, instead, a fierce act of witness to the emergence of modernity in a particular ecosystem.[lxiii]

§11.4. Let me call three more witnesses, one from music, two from film. Sennett tells Cayley that "one of the things he's retained from his years as a working musician is an image of the orchestra as ideal society, in which unequal parts are each indispensable to the whole. 'When an orchestra works together, there are inequalities not just of talent but of what people are actually doing. The triangle is, you know, not quite at the level of

---

[670] Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, pp. 169-170.
[671] Tucker, qtd in Frascina et al, *Modernity and Modernism*, p. 121.
[672] Frascina et al, *Modernity and Modernism*, p. 121. Nor are these facts esoteric: "All of this would have been known by many Parisians who flocked to the Salon" (ibid.).

complexity of the violin. But it doesn't matter: because you can't play a Mahler symphony without feeling like you're one collective whole.'"[673] — "More Romantic exaggeration! It's very generous of Sennett to recognize the humble triangle; but his indispensability claim is unsustainable. If you want to pursue the analogy with politics, the invigilator at the balloting station is just not indispensable to the machinery of the municipal collective in the way that the mayor is. And here's some evidence: knock out the first violin or the mayor and there will be a noticeable seizure in the whole; but the same cannot be said of the triangle or the invigilator." — But this objection does not touch the nerve of Sennett's suggestion: indeed, he acknowledges the agential inequality of some participants (for example, the triangle, or the invigilator) and *dismisses it as irrelevant*. Furthermore, the objection's apt analogy to the invigilator is self-undermining: for there is another sense in which the invigilator (like the triangle) *is* indispensable to the organism of municipal politics. If she calls in sick, the garbage trucks continue to run and the ribbons continue to get cut at new libraries; but in her absence, the electoral process *lacks integrity*. (And here we encounter one ordinary usage of the concept of integrity.)

Let me call my second witness: the Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski. Consider a single shot from the first film of his colours trilogy, *Bleu*: it is a close-up of a sugar cube, held between thumb and finger, slowly absorbing coffee, and then dropped into a cup. The shot lasts only 5 seconds. Discussing this shot, Kieślowski says, "For half a day, my assistant tested all kinds of sugar cubes to find one that would get soaked in exactly 5 seconds, and not 8 or 11, or even three seconds, like others."[674] We might worry that this exacting attention to a minutia is excessively fastidious — as Kieślowski himself asks, "What do we care about a stupid sugar cube sucking up some stupid coffee?" — But the sugar cube is, inter alia, an "objective correlative"[675] for the psychological state of the protagonist, Julie, a grieving composer:

---

[673] Sennett (with Cayley), "Flesh and Stone."

[674] Kieślowski, "Cinema Lesson," *Bleu*.

[675] The term is introduced by T.S. Eliot: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion" ("Hamlet and His Problems," *The Sacred Wood* [London: Faber and Faber, 1997], p. 85). Cf. "objective correlative," *Encyclopedia of Poetry*, pp. 581-582.

This is a sugar cube about to fall in the cup of coffee. What does this obsession with close-ups mean? Simply that we're trying to show the heroine's world from her point of view, to show that she sees these little things, things that are near her, by focusing on them in order to demonstrate that the rest doesn't matter to her. She's trying to contain, to put a lid on her world and on her immediate environment. There are a few details like this in the movie. We made a very tight shot of the sugar cube sucking up the coffee to show that nothing around her matters to her — not other people nor their business, nor the boy, the man who loves her and went through a great ordeal to find her. She just doesn't care. Only the sugar cube matters, and she intentionally focuses on it to shut out all the things she doesn't accept.

It seems easy to film a sugar cube soaking up coffee, sucking it up and turning brown.... We can start a stopwatch. It should take five and a half seconds, or five seconds, to be completely soaked. How to make sure that it only takes five seconds? Not so easy.... We had to prepare one that would be soaked in five seconds. We decided such a detail shouldn't last more than five seconds....[676]

— "Why? Why five seconds, exactly? Why *not* three seconds, or eleven? The decision (and Kieślowski acknowledges that it is a decision) seems entirely arbitrary. Furthermore, the pretence of exactitude is a farce: 'It should take five and a half, *or* five seconds,' he says; and when he times the cube, it *actually* takes four and a half seconds, and he doesn't protest. Once again we have artistic connoisseurship pretending to be a *technē* (that is, a cognitive, productive skill susceptible to articulation), when in fact it is nothing more than guesswork or instinct. (— 'A dash of salt,' the chef says. 'How many milligrams, exactly?' the apprentice asks. 'A dash,' the chef repeats firmly, with an arched eyebrow.) Well, Plato had a name for this kind of charlatanism: he called it 'knack.' It's what poets share with perfumers, and it doesn't deserve the name of knowledge. It's nothing more than a simulacrum. Look, even for the philosophical hicks of ancient Greece, it was obvious: if you can't give the *logos* — that is, articulate the

---

[676] Kieślowski, "Cinema Lesson," *Bleu*.

rational justification — then believe until you're blue in the face: it won't be knowledge (practical or otherwise). Plato, despite his theatrics, is clear on this point:

> SOKRATES: I call this flattery [*kolakeia*], and I say that such a thing is shameful, Polus — it's you I'm saying this to — because it guesses at what's pleasant with no consideration for what's best. And I say that it isn't a craft [*technē*], but a knack [*empeiria*], because it has no account [*logos*] of the nature [*phusis*] of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it's unable to state the cause [*aitia*] of each thing, and I refuse to call anything that lacks such an account [*alogon pragma*, lit. "irrational things"][677] a craft [*technē*].[678]

"What could be more straightforward than this distinction between 'craft' and 'knack' (however quaint the names)? Unlike a craft, a knack cannot provide a justification; and so its beliefs are *mere* beliefs, hunches, intuitions. The ecological manager has a science (which, like a craft, is a kind of knowledge): he has a binder full of data and graphs: when he exterminates the rampaging feral ungulates in a given region, or razes the dead underbrush, or whatever, he can, crucially, *explain why* this procedure is good for the region overall. By contrast, the whisky taster and the film-maker have nothing more than a knack (if they have anything at all). When the film-maker says that 'such a detail shouldn't last more than five seconds,' the rhetoric of normativity is exactly that: rhetorical bluff. Why *shouldn't* it last more (or less) than five seconds? The film-maker can explain neither the alleged 'rightness' of his decision nor the implied 'wrongness' of the alternatives. In this case there are no criteria of correctness: and so what seems right is right: and that means that *here we can't talk about 'right.'*[679] All of the foregoing is just grist to the mill: the analogy between 'ecological integrity' and 'aesthetic integrity' is completely useless, because the former domain belongs to science (that is, a knowledge-governed practice), and the latter domain, to art (that is, knack). And we do not strengthen our cellar of knowledge by diluting it with analogies to knack. As Sokrates

---

[677] Cf. Lamb's translation in the Loeb edition.
[678] Plato, *Gorgias*, 465a.
[679] Paraphrasing Wittgenstein, PI, §258.

says: 'If you have any quarrel with these claims, I'm willing to submit them for discussion.'"[680]

— Kieślowski's stopwatch *is* a bit of theatrics. The *kind* of precision which it imports into the discussion is inappropriate. But it is a bit of theatrics which makes a point: it says: here is a rigour which is *like* the quantitative analyses which govern familiar scientific disciplines. (And the scientific rigour — unlike the artistic one — is one which we are accustomed to recognizing and valorizing.)

§11.5. Let me call my final witness. The Italian film director Sergio Leone remembers when he was sixteen, volunteering as a gofer for Vittoria De Sica:

> Another thing I remember about *Bicycle Thieves* is one of the first script sessions; I was there almost by chance. Amidei and Zavattini were there, then of course later on the collaboration fell apart and Amidei left. But what really struck me in the twenty-some minutes I was with them was when Zavattini, with his Northern accent, said: "I think that the protagonist should come out with a mortadella sandwich wrapped in a Communist Party newspaper." There was a dead silence in the room. De Sica was at the window with his back turned to us, looking outside. Amidei and Zavattini were sitting at a desk, and I was in my little corner, ready to bring cigarettes to the first person who asked for them. After a moment, Amidei exploded and shouted, "Goddamn it, what the fuck does the Communist Party have to do with it? If anything, we can put just a glimpse of the newspaper!" After this there was another long silence, and then we heard De Sica's voice: "My good friends, in my opinion we need an apple, a red apple, one of those multicolored ones, half red and half shaded, and he leaves the house biting on this apple!" Well, I was shocked by this, and I started to wonder: "Oh my God, we're in trouble. If in writing a screenplay you have to deal with these kinds of details, it must be a crazy business!"[681]

---

[680] Plato, *Gorgias*, 465a.
[681] Leone, "The Smallest Detail," *Bicycle Thieves*, p. 63.

(In the film version, if I am thinking of the right scene, there are two sandwiches, egg sandwiches, wrapped in nondescript newspaper, and father and son leave the house with these sandwiches stuffed in the left breast pockets of their jumpsuits.) Leone's account is helpful, not only due to his respectful sense of humour, but due to his apprenticeship perspective. For the whole ceremony and controversy does seem esoteric (not to mention laughable) from the outside. — Kieślowski has an assistant spend half a day preparing a little prop for a five-second shot, and he spends seven and a half minutes commenting on this shot? — Zavattini, Amidei, and De Sica quarrel heatedly over another prop? — I quote from Kieślowski and Leone at length to make the point that working artists *do, as a matter of empirical fact, attend to details* — details which might seem utterly unremarkable to the rest of us. And Leone's account extends our understanding: for he testifies to the fact that it is possible to have serious, even explosive, *disagreement* over these details. Should the sandwich be wrapped in a Communist party newspaper, or not? Should it be a mortadella sandwich or an apple? The intensity of the disagreement points to a sense that the decision regarding this detail could affect the whole film. (Wittgenstein, quoting Longfellow: "In the elder days of art, / Builders wrought with greatest care / Each minute and unseen part, / For the gods are everywhere.")[682]

— "So what? The mere appearance of disagreement proves nothing. If Drinker #1 swears that he sees Monica Vitti's unclothed shoulder in the gradually melting ice-cube, and Drinker #2 declares that he's darn sure it's the shoulder of Claudia Cardinale, and they roll up their plaid sleeves and settle it with an arm-wrestling match, it does not follow, from any of this subjectivist-emotivist grunting, however vehement, that a disagreement has transpired. You're just begging the question: what you need to demonstrate is that it is possible to have a meaningful disagreement where no justification can be given for either position."

Consider McDowell's discussion of this issue.[683] Suppose that Tom Tykwer (a German film-maker who directed one of Kieślowski's last scripts) is arguing with Kieślowski over the timing of the sugar-cube shot: he is insisting, against the senior director's expertise, that it should last eleven seconds. In exasperation, Kieślowski stands

---

[682] Longfellow qtd in Wittgenstein, C&V, p. 34e.
[683] McDowell, V&R, §4.

up, knocking over the card table on which they've been working, and complains, "But don't you see?" Here is the form of the dilemma which haunts this scene and others like it: in putative hard cases over normative matters (aesthetic, ethical, et cetera), either (1) one of the interlocutors can, ultimately, articulate the general principle which will resolve the disagreement (thus the case isn't really hard after all) — for example, another German film-maker, Margarethe von Trotta, might interject: "Listen, you inexperienced idiot, we've done hundreds of screen tests of shots of this kind, and we have always found, without exception, that if the shot lasts longer than five seconds, then the impatient audience burns down the cinema; and if you must know, our espoused objective is to entertain the audience, not to turn them into arsonists"; or (2) neither of the interlocutors can articulate a general principle (thus the appearance of disagreement is illusory).[684] But McDowell suggests that it is an underlying rationalist "prejudice" which forces the dilemma. The prejudice is the idea that, to explain or to justify an action (or an aesthetic decision), a reason must be the sort of thing that is susceptible to articulation as a general principle.[685] If the action is explicable, then there will be an articulable principle; and if there is no such principle, then the action is not explicable. QED.

McDowell's approach to this question is characteristically subtle. While he resists the demand for codifiability, he does not advocate for dogmatic obscurantism; for example, his approach "casts no doubt on the possibility of putting explanations of particular moves ... in a syllogistic form.... [In some cases] we can formulate the explanation so as to confer on the judgment explained the compellingness possessed by the conclusion of a proof."[686] The prejudice consists in assuming that *all* reasonable actions (qua reasonable) *must* conform to this rationalist paradigm, and, further, in assuming that "the explanation lays bare the inexorable workings of a machine: something whose operations, with our understanding of them, would not depend on the deliverances, in particular cases of (for instance, and centrally) that shared sense of what is similar to what else"[687] — a shared sensitivity which belongs to the "whirl of

---

[684] Cf. McDowell, V&R, §4 (p. 340).
[685] McDowell, V&R, §4 (p. 337).
[686] McDowell, V&R, §4 (p. 339).
[687] McDowell, V&R, §4 (p. 339).

organism" (the form of life) in which we are immersed.[688] McDowell does wish to suggest, however, that this sensitivity is inextricably implicated in both kinds of cases: both those which are straightforwardly assimilable to the rationalist paradigm, and those (the ones I am considering) which resist assimilation. If we are willing to countenance this suggestion, then we ought not to be alarmed by the resistant cases. For our acceptance of (that is, appreciation of) the conclusion of the former kind of case is not guaranteed exclusively by the machinery of rationality, either. "The cure for the vertigo" — vertigo induced by contemplating the precarious dependency of our capacity to appreciate reasons — "is to give up the idea that philosophical thought, about the sorts of practice in question, should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life."[689]

Suppose that we do give up the prejudice; where does it leave us? In Tykwer's quarrel with Kieślowski over the timing of the shot, it frees them from the dilemma: assuming that the disagreement is not illusory (the second horn), they are not forced to concede that there must be articulable general principles, lurking just out of the reach of their inarticulate minds and tongues (the first horn). But neither are they forced to default to dogmatism. A field of reasons becomes perceptible, which field may appear peripheral from the vantage point of the rationalist paradigm, but which does not ordinarily disappoint our confidence. In Chapters §3.6, §5.7, and §7.5, I have already discussed the sorts of reasons native to this field. To show Tykwer that the five-second shot is apt, Kieślowski might offer some of the following reasons: "Consider the rhythm of this shot: it counterbalances the preceding shot by a proportion of two to one." Or: "A longer shot would imply that our protagonist is obsessive; but we know, from other details of Binoche's performance and Preisner's script — details whose descriptions I could set beside this one — that she is not obsessive, but rather resolutely loyal." Or Kieślowski might set up some objects of comparison: "Recall that passage from the *Notebooks*, in which Wittgenstein is transfixed by the stove: *this* moment is *like* that one."[690] None of these reasons is helpfully formulable as a general principle (such as might be applied,

---

[688] McDowell borrows the phrase "whirl of organism" from Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say*? (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 52.
[689] McDowell, V&R, §4 (p. 341).
[690] Cf. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, p. 83e.

"mechanically," to other shots in other films);[691] but any one of them might be helpful to Tykwer or to us eavesdroppers.

§11.6. — What the heck does this discussion of details have to do with the concept of ecological integrity? — Echoing Wittgenstein, Zwicky writes: "We can imagine any given detail — any identifiable part of a lyric composition — as a set of possibilities of resonance, some of which are actuated by situating the detail in the context of the composition.... // The set of all sets of actuated possibilities is the resonant structure of the composition, its gestural architecture. // What is expressed by the purposive arrangement of possibilities of resonance is a lyric thought."[692] To compose — that is, purposively to arrange these details — is to think. And the structure is not given in advance. By situating multiple details in relation to each other, I actuate some of their possible resonances (that is, associative relations). Other possible resonances would be actuated by other situations. But it is important to recognize that a given detail does not fit, indifferently, with just any other detail. "In lyric, nothing is accidental: if a detail fits into a composition, the possibility of this fitting must be written into the detail itself."[693] Some relations will be more appropriate, within a particular context, than others. Here it is difficult to keep our heads above water: for we must also recognize that the context — the network of relations — is itself a function of the inter-related details. — But you're arguing that this composing is not governed by general principles; in the absence of such principles, how can there be any constraints on our aesthetic decisions? "'Anything — and nothing — is right.'"[694]

Much of this discussion is allusive and abstract, and it might be helpful to remember that a detail is a particular image, a particular sound, et cetera. For example, consider *Antigone*; in that play, Sophocles keeps presenting us with the image of a yoke. Creon introduces the image, complaining that some of his citizens "Pull out of the yoke of justice"; but later, after tragedy has struck, it is Creon himself who is yoked by a

---

[691] Cf. Zwicky, LP, §§203-204.

[692] Zwicky, LP, L114. Cf. Wittgenstein, TLP, #2.0123, #2.032, #2.15, #3.

[693] Zwicky, "What Is Lyric Philosophy?," §15; cf. Zwicky, LP, L114; Wittgenstein, TLP, #2.012.

[694] Wittgenstein, PI, §77.

god.[695] The image is most intense in the choral ode to humanity: "He has invented ways to take control / Of beasts that range mountain meadows: / Taken down the shaggy-necked horses, / The tireless mountain bulls, / And put them under the yoke."[696] Consider the yoke as a detail, a set of possibilities of resonance. By repeating that detail, with slight variations, Sophocles actuates one of its resonances. The introductory image of the yoke charges it with meaning, and that charge arcs across the spaces each time the image recurs.

— Again, what does any of this have to do with integrity, ecological or otherwise? I have been preoccupied with an account of lyric attention which focusses on details. Each of these details might be said, individually, to display integrity. Think back to the individual jazz musicians. In this usage of the concept of "integrity," we mean something like "distinct identity" or "intactness"; if such integrity were significantly damaged, the individual would cease to be recognizable or to exist. The task is to offer an account of *ecological* integrity which does not do conceptual violence to the recognizable integrity of *individuals*, and which nevertheless acknowledges their relational constitution; an account in which we are not alienated from our ground-level experiences of living as and relating to individuals, *as well as* functioning as participants in political and ecological communities; an account in which individuals do not vanish in holistic talk of "knots in the biospherical net,"[697] vortices in a stream of flowing water, or local perturbations "in an energy flux or 'field.'"[698] We need to imagine a macro-structural sort of integrity which can accommodate these individuals and their interrelations without effacing them. "Integration is not fusion."[699] At the same time, the account needs to reflect the intuition that each participant, each detail "is informed by the whole."[700] Think of how the jazz ensemble informs the performances of its members. Zwicky's conception of lyric makes an important contribution to ecological ethics because it asks us to re-think

---

[695] Sophocles, *Antigone*, ll. 292, 1273-1275.
[696] Sophocles, *Antigone*, ll. 348-352.
[697] Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep," §1.
[698] Callicott, "Metaphysical Implications of Ecology," §IV (pp. 309-310). Callicott claims to be borrowing his metaphors from biology and quantum theory; but his insistence that organisms are *reducible* to some function of energy deserves critical scrutiny.
[699] Zwicky, LP, L181.
[700] Zwicky, "What Is Lyric Philosophy?," §15.

the connexions between participants and complex wholes. In its insistence on the interrelations among participants, it avoids the desolate fiction of atomism; and in its cherishing of each distinct participant, it avoids the totalizing blur of holism. Her image of integrity asks us to attend to each detail, *and* to the resonances among them.[lxiv]

CHAPTER 12. Integrative and Disintegrative Perspectives

Summary

¶ *Turning to Peter Winch's work on integrity, I distinguish two perspectives: the disintegrative perspective (embodied in the Humean moral psychology), in which an agent is alienated from her immersion in the world, and needs articulable reasons to be lured back into action; and the integrative perspective, from which an agent may respond spontaneously to particular situations. Both perspectives are needed for a more complete ethical psychology. In the picture associated with the disintegrative perspective, the agent is primarily an actor, a world-changer, and a spectator on a world which includes her body; she is motivated by a goal (to change the world into the counterfactual represented by her desire); and in deliberating, she weighs competing goals against each other. Utilitarian principles or Kantian maxims are two instruments for concluding the deliberative exercise. To elucidate the integrative perspective, Winch considers some contrasting cases: on the one hand, the dutiful but resentful host Mrs. Solness; and on the other, Weil's example of the father joyously playing with his daughter. We might parse these cases as analogous to deontology and virtue ethics, respectively: Mrs. Solness's actions are mediated by reference to an obligation, while the daughter is sufficient to motivate the father. But Winch is careful to emphasize that he not nominating any sort of action as unconditionally good. However, exclusive adherence to deontology (or another moral theory, such as utilitarianism) would prevent us from recognizing the ethical value of the father's action. I consider Winch's study of Tolstoy's Sergius as a case study of a single agent vacillating between the integrative and disintegrative perspectives: when Sergius is sincerely committed to his religious life, considerations which would otherwise be temptations are silenced; but when his commitment wavers, his religious life is weighed against temptation. Again, these two perspectives map onto McDowell's distinction between Aristotelian arete and enkrateia/akrasia. The enkratic agent is the disintegrated perspective whose perception approximates that of the aretaic, integrative perspective. The crucial distinction is between (aretaic) silencing and (enkratic)*

overriding: a distinction between attending to a unified focus, and dispersing attention across a multiplicity of (potentially competing) foci. The disintegrative perspective remains indispensable even for the virtuous agent: it is only from this perspective that we can engage in moral critique and revision. I adapt an example from Lawrence Blum which illustrates that prejudice, no less than virtue, silences some aspects of a situation. In order to free our perception from prejudice, we need to have occasional recourse to the disintegrative perspective. By performing the Humean diaeresis or analysis on ourselves (or by submitting ourselves to such analysis by others), we may identify which of our beliefs are false, or which ones have been distorted by hatred or fear.

---

§12.1. As Simone Weil is responsible for having introduced the concept of attention to moral philosophy, so Bernard Williams is responsible for having initiated discussion of integrity. However, there is an investigation of the concept which pre-dates Williams's contribution, and it, too, is worth some study. In "Moral Integrity," Peter Winch's inaugural lecture as Chair of Philosophy at King's College, he warns that he will not be attempting an *analysis* of the concept of integrity;[701] his method, he implies, is closer to that of Kierkegaard, who "does not attempt to *say* what purity of heart is; he *shows* what it is by portraying various cases."[702] Winch's subject "is the relation of a man to his acts."[703] And in the course of his investigation, he offers a number of object lessons or case studies which illustrate two different kinds of relation. When we are trying to understand the moral character of an agent, says Winch, we must notice not only *what he decides to do*, but also "*what he considers the alternatives to be* and ... what are the reasons he considers it relevant to deploy in deciding between them."[704] These latter considerations, and the possibility of different descriptive framings of a situation, can be comprehended by the notion of *perspective*: "a situation, the issues which it raises and the kind of reason which is appropriate to a discussion of those issues, involve a certain

---

[701] Winch, "Moral Integrity," p. 171.

[702] Winch, MI, p. 180. (Winch alludes explicitly to Wittgenstein's distinction [i.e., from TLP, #4.1212].)

[703] Winch, MI, p. 171.

[704] Winch, MI, p. 178.

perspective"; and "the agent *is* this perspective."[705] To distinguish between the two kinds of relation investigated by Winch, I shall call them the *disintegrative perspective* and the *integrative perspective*. I mean nothing pejorative by the adjective "disintegrative"; as we shall see, I mean only to mark the gap that can open between an agent and her context, and the concomitantly felt need to articulate reasons to bridge the gap. Intermittent recourse to the disintegrative perspective is characteristic of an ethically responsible agent. The theoretical error consists in assuming that it is incumbent upon the agent *ceaselessly* to occupy that perspective, and in assuming that the integrative perspective is ethically and rationally deficient.

Winch begins with a sketch, which he admits is a "caricature," of the agent belonging to the disintegrative perspective. This agent is pictured primarily an actor, that is, a *world-changer*, and a *spectator* of "a world which includes his own body."[706] It is the agent's will which effects changes in the world, and the job of moral philosophy is to provide guidance for exercise of the will. (— However, to anticipate, let me say that Winch's dramatic conclusion is that "philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand.")[707] The preceding caricature involves a very specialized picture of agency and action. It is not unlike looking over a chessboard, with my hand hovering above my king, and deliberating about the relative merits of several available moves. Let me emphasize some features of this picture: I, the deliberating agent, am *separate* from the piece that I will (eventually) choose to move; and assuming that it even makes sense to speak this way, it is *not* the piece's own projects which motivate me, but the *independent goal* of checking my opponent's king; and it is in the light of *this* goal that I evaluate the merits of the available moves; and I might conduct this evaluation by comparing the moves, *weighing* one against another. This specialized picture of action "separates the agent from the world in which he acts, and to make action intelligible, this gap has first to be bridged."[708] And the gap is bridged — the agent is shoehorned back into the world — by the provisioning of reasons. These reasons serve *to mediate* the relation between the

---

[705] Winch, MI, p. 178.
[706] Winch, MI, pp. 171-172.
[707] Winch, MI, p. 191.
[708] Winch, MI, p. 174.

agent and his actions. This disintegrative perspective is not unfamiliar, and largely innocuous. If it is not already operative in a given situation, the slightest doubt can be sufficient to trigger its operation. And that is the risk of this perspective: unlike the integrative perspective, it is to this disintegrative perspective that the Glauconian question is addressed, and from this perspective that the question is intelligible, that is, "What advantage does morality bring? And the form of the question suggests that we must look *outside* morality for something on which morality can be based."[709] The question expresses a hankering for a foundationalist justification for morality, and the disintegrative perspective is vulnerable because it is capable of surveying (so-called) "moral" reasons as *some* reasons *among others*. With the possibility of conflict between "moral" and "non-moral" reasons comes the intelligibility of the question, Why should I act morally?

Winch canvasses some of the ways in which theorists might try to engineer the mediation, including, for example, the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number,[710] and the Kantian principle of acting for the sake of duty.[711] We can picture a disintegrated agent in a moral dilemma, asking himself how he should act, and consulting one of these general principles in order to settle the question. In dissidence, Winch contends that "there is *no* general kind of behaviour" — for example, not maximizing happiness nor acting for the sake of duty — "of which we have to say that it is good without qualification.... All we can do, I am arguing, is to look at particular examples and see what we *do* want to say about them; there are no general rules which can determine in advance what we *must* say about them."[712] I am inclined to think that these claims are true. However, they are strong claims, denying moral generalism and implying some species of particularism, and I am not concerned, here, to defend them. For the moment, I want to focus, as Winch does, on what is crowded out by the generalist thesis that one acts in a morally valuable way only if one's action is rationally mediated

---

[709] Winch, MI, p. 175. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, II.
[710] Winch, MI, pp. 173-174.
[711] Winch, MI, pp. 178-180.
[712] Winch, MI, p. 181. With respect to Kant specifically, Winch argues that "his attempt to give positive criteria of the good will in terms of maxims regarded as universally valid laws of conduct is incompatible" with Kant's initial contention that the good will is the only thing which is unconditionally good (p. 180).

by principles. The problem with the generalist position is not only that it "forces us to accept as 'good without qualification' kinds of behaviour which we may quite legitimately think are not," but that it also "prevents us from recognizing as 'good without qualification' kinds of behaviour which we may quite legitimately think are."[713] It is the range of actions whose value is invisible from the generalist position, but available to the alternative, integrative perspective, which interests me. The integrative perspective is thrown into relief by some contrasting cases.

§12.2. Winch asks us to consider his version of Mrs. Solness (from *The Master Builder*): she is "someone who is obsessed with the Kantian idea of 'acting for the sake of duty'. She does not appear, though, as a paragon of moral purity but rather as a paradigm of a certain sort of moral corruption. No doubt her constant appeal to duty is a defence against the dangerous and evil resentments she harbours within her."[714][lxv] Winch contrasts Mrs. Solness with Weil's example of a father playing with his child — "not out of a sense of duty but out of pure joy and pleasure."[715] It is this image of unmediated, spontaneous, joyous activity which exemplifies (but does not of course exhaust) the *integrative* perspective. The activity is also autonomous, in a way that would be recognizable to Spinoza.[716] (By contrast, Kant would seem obliged to diagnose this case as an instance of heteronomy of the will.)[717] Winch is careful to explain that he is not trying to replace (Kantian) acting *for the sake of duty* with acting *spontaneously*. The point is that if we are committed exclusively to the Kantian principle (or to some other generalist principle), we will fail to recognize the ethical value of instances of spontaneous activity. "We might speak of the father in this example," writes Winch, "as 'absorbed in' what he is doing and my suggestion is that we do not always need to think of a man's action as performed by him in accordance with some principle ('maxim') in order to think of it as unequivocally his act and to attach moral value to it."[718]

---

[713] Winch, MI, p. 181.
[714] Winch, MI, p. 180.
[715] Winch, MI, p. 181. For the source of this example, perhaps cf. Weil, *Notebooks*, I.46.
[716] Vide Spinoza, E, ID7, IIID2, IIIP11S, IIIP13S.
[717] Vide Kant, *Grounding*, Ak. 440-441.
[718] Winch, MI, p. 184.

Returning to the case of Mrs. Solness, Winch reiterates the distinction: "When Hilda Wangel arrives at the Solnesses' house as a guest, Mrs. Solness, in splendid Kantian tones, says, 'I'll do my best for you. That's no more than my duty.' How very different we should have regarded her if she had said: 'Do come and see your room. I hope you will be comfortable there and enjoy your stay.'"[719][lxvi] (The point is that there is, of course, a difference between the strictures of etiquette and unprompted generosity; and the difference can be felt.) By contrast, we can picture Winch's Mrs. Solness, in the former scenario, looking over the shoulder of her guest, at the moral law, and forcing her will into conformity with it, meanwhile gritting her teeth and curbing resentful inclinations to close the door in her guest's face. Similarly, we can picture a different father, or the same father overworked and worn out, "who finds himself unable to enjoy himself spontaneously with his child; though he goes out of his way to entertain the child out of a sense of his duty as a father."[720] Again, I do not wish to make any general, pejorative judgement about these cases of disintegrated agency. We might find much to commend in a host who dutifully provides shelter to an inconvenient guest, or a tired and temporarily disaffected father who remains mindful of his parenting responsibilities. And as a matter of fact agents just *do* occasionally come apart from their contexts in these ways. When this happens, there is dissonance between the situational demands and the affective, characterological state of the agent. And then moral principles can be invoked to motivate the agent. This thought is distilled in an aphorism that serves as one of Williams's epigraphs (to *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*):

> *Quand on n'a pas de caractère, il faut bien se donner une méthode.*[721][lxvii]

When the needed motivation does not follow from the interaction between character and context, a moral system can serve as a kind of abstracted and externalized character — a mechanism to which one submits oneself, and which then requires one to obey its directives. But a moral system cannot *replace* character, for it lacks the flexibility required for responsivity to context. The sensitivity of character to ethical predicaments is

---

[719] Winch, MI, p. 183. Winch's note 7 refers the reader to Act I of Ibsen's *Master Builder*; but we can be more precise: the quoted passage is from p. 143.
[720] Winch, MI, p. 181.
[721] Albert Camus, *La Chute*; cited in Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. xiii. Cf. Zwicky, LP, L184.

not something that can be systematized in advance of those particular predicaments. The mistake is to assume or insist that moral principles must always be operating — even where it appears otherwise — if action is to be ethical. (In some cases, one might think, I don't *want* to do this thing, but I *should* do it — and that second clause indicates a distinct component in one's motivation. Insofar as I succeed in acting as I should, I am enkratic. But there are other cases — and not all of them are morally worthless — in which one does want to do it, and in *these* cases the "should" is superfluous.)

Finally, compare the following cases:

(1) "If I don't repay this money I shall be sent to prison."

(2) "I must repay this money in order to fulfil my duty."

(3) "He lent me this money and I must repay it."[722]

Case (1) may coincide with duty, but the speaker is motivated by a mediate inclination (that is, a desire to avoid incarceration). Case (2) would seem to satisfy the Kantian criterion for moral worth: the repayment is done, not from any inclination (mediate or immediate), but from duty.[723] Case (3) is neither necessarily reducible to a kind like case (1), nor necessarily convertible (for example, through the explication of allegedly "tacit" premises), into a kind like case (2). What the Kantian analysis omits — indeed, precludes — is the possibility that case (3), if not converted into (2), could be morally valuable. And it is this possibility — that a father might be moved, spontaneously, and ethically, by his daughter; that a host might respond similarly to her guest — that Winch is concerned to defend. Aristotle, no less than Kant, suffers from this blind spot: he claims that the nutritive psychological faculty, due to its autonomic character, is irrelevant to ethics.[724] Another way to describe my project, then, is to say that I am recuperating and reintegrating the ethical relevance of the Aristotelian nutritive faculty — what I have earlier called a "photosynthetic ethical psychology." Photosynthesis, as we know, is the process by which green plants and some other organisms use sunlight to synthesize nutrients from carbon dioxide and water. A constructivist construal of the analogy might propose that imagination is the process by which agents synthesize motivation from facts

---

[722] Winch, MI, p. 183. Cf. Kant, *Grounding*, Ak. 397.

[723] Cf. Kant, *Grounding*, Ak. 398.

[724] Aristotle, NE, I.13.1102a30-1102b10.

and values — but that formulation would be misleading. I mean something deliberately vaguer: an agent's educable capacity autonomically to use that motivational energy which is available in the ecosystem.[725]

It is possible for an agent to act ethically (that is, in an ethically responsible way), without a deliberative, explanatory gap having first opened between the agent and her action, and without that gap having then been traversed by an articulable reason (where "articulable" is equivalent to susceptibility to Humean analysis). In each case, the presence of a daughter, a guest, a lender can be sufficient to motivate ethical action. And I regard the following sort of retrospective, reason-giving exchange as complete (that is, not requiring further analysis or supplementation): "— Why did you return the money? — He lent it to me." I am not contending that it is impossible, or unintelligible, to follow up this initial inquiry, to ask for further explanations, or to switch to an analytic strategy. We can imagine elaborating the context in various ways which would motivate explanatory sequels. (For example, "— But he doesn't remember having lent it to you, nor does he miss it"; or "— But for him it's petty cash, and for your family it's a month's worth of groceries"; et cetera.)[726] What I am suggesting is that it is misguided to regard the first explanation, the first reason, as mandatorily superficial or insufficient. And *to require*, a priori, that all explanations, all reasons, conform to a single paradigm is *to diminish* ethics.

§12.3. I want, now, to consider Winch's closing example, a brief study of Tolstoy's story "Father Sergius." Over the course of the story, Sergius vacillates between the integrative and disintegrative perspectives, and Winch's characterization of them is strikingly analogous to McDowell's characterization of (Aristotelian) arete and enkrateia/akrasia, respectively. The analogy makes a further case for thinking of integrity as a virtue, and also faintly suggests its niche in the psychological ecology. Winch introduces the story of Sergius to illustrate the claim that "one's own moral perfection is not a possible end of

---

[725] Cf. Weil's remarks on chlorophyll as a capacity for feeding on light (Weil, G&G, p. 3).
[726] Cf. the "default and challenge" model of justification, as developed by Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, Chapter 13.

one's conduct at all and, *a fortiori*, not a possible moral end."[727] I am not sure that I agree with the strength of the first clause in this formulation; however, it seems right to suggest that fully virtuous action is not motivated by a reflexive concern for the agent's own virtue.[lxviii] I do not mean that the apprentice cannot glance (out of the corner of his eye, so to speak), while acting, at his own characterological state to check its growth, asking himself whether he is having the right feelings at the right times about the right things, et cetera. (Much as an athlete, while training, for instance, might check her pulse or respiration.) But the point is that the virtue of the expert is "second nature";[728] insofar as it is the excellence of the integrative perspective out of which she acts, it is not available to disintegrative reflexivity.

Sergius is motivated, in his vocation as a monk, both by "sincere religious feeling" and by "desire for pre-eminence," that is, a desire to be regarded with admiration; and these motivations correspond, roughly, to integrative and disintegrative perspectives on the same life. The disintegrative perspective views this life from "sideways on."[729] That is, the religious life, regarded externally, seems to be an object of admiration. But if one does not already appreciate, internally, what is worthwhile or admirable about that life, one cannot provoke appreciation while regarding it as one object among rival objects, and demanding that it justify itself in that arena. (We see such rivalry, for example, in the Hebrew god's struggle to establish monotheism in the polytheistic context of ancient Egypt. When Moses tries to prove his patron's authenticity in competition with the Pharaoh's magicians,[730] the fatal concession has already been made — despite the triumphant final outcome. Contrast Christ's command to his disciple at the moment of arrest by armed men [ferociously dramatized in Pasolini's socialist redemption of the gospel story]: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the

---

[727] Winch, MI, p. 187.
[728] Cf. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
[729] Cf. McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," pp. 207, 214; cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 34. Thanks to Carolyn Richardson for drawing my attention to this metaphor.
[730] Exodus 7:8 ff.

sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?")[731]

Winch discusses two separate episodes in which Sergius faces sexual temptation: in the first episode, when "a young society woman" tries to seduce him, Sergius resists by chopping off one of his fingers. (I am not persuaded that a man who responds to temptation by amputating his finger is a man whose moral psychology hangs in untroubled equilibrium. The example seems to illustrate enkrateia more than the virtue of sophrosune. A better example of sophrosune would be a different Sergius, who acts as Sokrates does in his reportedly placid indifference to the advances of Alkibiades.[732] But for the moment I set this qualification aside.) In the second episode, "an intellectually feeble young girl," Marie, succeeds in seducing him, asking the Glauconian question, "What does it matter?"[733] In the first episode, Sergius has the power to resist because "the problem presented to him by his lust was understood by him from the perspective of genuine religious feeling. That is to say it was not then a case of setting the satisfaction of his desire alongside the demands of his religion and choosing between them."[734] From the integrative perspective, the religious demands present themselves as (what I have earlier called) a *silencing reason*. Sergius perceives these demands as salient, and other features of the situation (for example, the attractiveness of this person), which might otherwise serve as reasons, do not spark on the radar of consideration. There is, in a sense, no conflict, and no choice.

By contrast, when Sergius confronts Marie's question, he does so from a perspective that is disintegrated with respect to his religious duties. Her question "invited a judgment explaining why religious purity is more important than satisfaction of lust, a comparison, as it were, between two different objects. And no such judgment was possible. I do not mean that earlier, at the time of his strength, Sergius *could* have answered the question; the point is that, from that earlier perspective, the question did not arise for him."[735] These remarks return us to Winch's initial suggestion that our

---

[731] Matthew 26:52-53.
[732] Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 217a-219d.
[733] Winch, MI, p. 188.
[734] Winch, MI, p. 189.
[735] Winch, MI, p. 189. Cf. McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical

understanding of an agent's character must take into account "*what he considers the alternatives to be* and ... what are the reasons he considers it relevant to deploy in deciding between them."[736] What is intriguing is that a consideration's irrelevance, its inaudibility, from a certain perspective, can be a sign of that perspective's strength. (Grateful as we might be when our immune system valiantly attacks an infection, we might feel better served [healthier] if we were spared the infection altogether.)

§12.4. Winch's Sergius, appropriately qualified, is an apt illustration of McDowell's characterization of the distinction between Aristotelian arete and enkrateia/akrasia.[737] Aristotle's account of enkrateia and akrasia is an engagement with the Platonic thesis that virtue is knowledge. For the akratic agent looks like a counter-example to that thesis: someone who *knows* that he *shouldn't* do something, but *does* it anyway. We can try to save the thesis by explaining away the akratic agent, but that seems coercively to sacrifice recognizable phenomena for the sake of theory. Aristotle's innovation is to qualify the theory and the phenomenon in an effort to save both. McDowell's study nicely explicates the following set of distinctions: while both the aretaic state and the enkratic state can produce the same outcome, the two states are *formally different*; and while the enkratic state and the akratic state can produce different outcomes, they are *formally similar*.

These various formal distinctions are designed to address the puzzle: how can the perspective of a virtuous agent be matched, perfectly, by that of another agent; and yet that agent act unvirtuously? The formal distinctions suggest that the match is approximate, but not, in fact, perfect.[738] The imperfect fit, McDowell suggests along with Aristotle, is the result of the interference of inappropriate feeling in the perception of enkratic and akratic agents. Their perceptions are thus *composites* (of belief and desire) in a way that aretaic perception is not. (Here it might be helpful to consider the analogy of out-of-tune vs. perfectly tuned chords. There is a sense in which the out-of-tune chord

---

Imperatives?," p. 22; Weil, G&G, p. 77.

[736] Winch, MI, p. 178.

[737] Vide, esp., McDowell, AMP, §14; V&R, §3; "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," §§9-10.

[738] Cf. McDowell, AMP, p. 47.

breaks down into its component tones, while the perfectly tuned [that is, integrated] chord resonates as a whole.) Following Annas's suggestion (from §10.2), I suggest that we need the phenomenon of the enkratic agent to address the paradox of the learning of virtue:[739] if virtue is learned by the performance of virtuous actions; and if virtuous actions issue from a state of virtue; and if I lack this state — then it seems that I can never acquire it. There seems to be no way of transitioning from the (unknowing) apprentice to the (knowing) expert. The enkratic agent is the middle term — the scalar item — that gives us traction here: someone whose state of knowing approximates — without perfectly matching — the expert's, and who manages to rehearse the motions of "virtuous" action (and we use the term "virtuous" as an honorific here, to mark the aspiration rather than the achievement).

McDowell notes that, "for Aristotle, continence is distinct from virtue, and just as problematic as incontinence. If someone needs to overcome an inclination to act otherwise, in getting himself to act as, say, temperance or courage demand, then he shows not virtue but (mere) continence."[740] The crucial distinction is between *silencing* and *overriding*, and it is a distinction between attending to a unified focus, and dispersing attention across a multiplicity of (potentially competing) foci. According to McDowell, "the dictates of virtue, if properly appreciated, are not weighed with other reasons at all, not even on a scale which always tips on their side"; given the clear perception of a situational requirement, other considerations, which would have constituted reasons for acting otherwise, are not overridden but silenced.[741] By contrast, the enkratic agent, who also perceives the requirement, but less clearly, further perceives these other considerations as (competing) reasons, and ultimately succeeds in overriding them in favour of the requirement.

Since I am associating arete with the integrative perspective, and enkrateia and akrasia with the disintegrative perspective, it is important to remark at this juncture that periodic recourse to the disintegrative perspective remains indispensable *even for the virtuous agent*. The reason for this indispensability should be apparent: "the singleness of

---

[739] Recall the paradox from Plato's *Meno* (80d) and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (II.4.1105a15-20).
[740] McDowell, V&R, p. 334.
[741] McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," p. 26.

motivational focus"[742] characteristic of the integrative (virtuous) perspective is not good without qualification, in the same way that spontaneity is not good without qualification. Periodically shifting to the disintegrative perspective, which permits the comparison of a plurality of motivational foci, allows the agent to rehearse flexibility and to avoid bad habits of attention. McDowell makes a hint in this direction (in the context of a different argument) when he acknowledges the potential for conflict between the requirements of, for example, kindness and fairness.[743] If my sensitivity to others' feelings is developed to the exclusion of sensitivity to rights, and if I find myself in a situation whose "morally important fact ... is not that A will be upset by a projected action (though he will), but, say, that B has a right,"[744] then I will likely act gently with A while neglecting B. In a *different* context, my acting gently (kindly) would be acting rightly; but *here* that narrowness of motivational focus is blameworthy.

§12.5. Let me render what is at issue somewhat more vividly by borrowing and significantly adjusting an example from Lawrence Blum.[745] Timothy, a Caucasian man, is driving along Highway 401. He passes an African-Canadian woman and her daughter, who are trying to hitch-hike. Perhaps ten kilometres later, he notices another hitch-hiker, this time a Caucasian woman, and he pulls over and offers her a ride. Let us assume that he perceives this hitch-hiker's need, and responds kindly or generously; let us also assume that he is not especially afflicted with a conscious affect of racist hatred. Nevertheless, his virtue has been directed along an attentional groove, which groove has been established by habit.[746] That is, he is *used* to attending to other Caucasians, and to taking them as "patients" of kindness, et cetera. He autonomically perceives their needs as salient. In many contexts, such autonomic perception, such attentiveness, will be appropriate and praiseworthy. But its exclusivity, when generalized, is also a kind of negligence. And his settled state, inside his integrative perspective, from which he is

---

[742] McDowell, AMP, p. 47.

[743] McDowell, V&R, p. 333. The context is McDowell's argument for the unity of virtue.

[744] McDowell, V&R, p. 333.

[745] Cf. Blum, "Moral Perception and Particularity," pp. 706-707 (my example is adjusted from Blum's example 3 from §I).

[746] Thanks to Meredith Schwartz whose questions helped me to articulate this thought.

consistently, reflexively kind — but only to other Caucasians — is a sort of complacency, which is also a sort of participation in systems of oppression.^{lxix}

The agent who is responsibly committed to continuous ethical learning is under an obligation periodically to shift into the disintegrative perspective (or to take advantage of life's inevitable, involuntary shifts), and to turn what I have called *elenctic attention*, reflexively and critically, on her own agency.[747] The dynamic might be imagined like that which obtains in a standard automobile. For the vehicle to drive, the gearbox must be engaged with the engine (and this situation is analogous to the integrative perspective). But if one wishes to change gears (read: critique and revise one's moral psychology), then it is necessary to depress the clutch pedal (and this situation is analogous to the disintegrative perspective).^{lxx}

We might say that the disintegrative perspective opens up a splendid vista of reasons. Again, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such a vista; and occasionally opening it up will be requisite for self-reflexive moral critique. But the pervasive possibility of opening it is not accompanied by any mandate to do so. In many circumstances, its invocation will be illicit, and will constitute a kind of sabotage of the most spontaneously appropriate gesture. Consider the case of performance anxiety, analysed by Lipson and Lipson.[748] According to them, self-reflexivity — similar to so-called "spectator syndrome," in which one observes (and judges) oneself from a second-order remove — is a defining characteristic of performance anxiety, and such anxiety can be alleviated by shifting the focus off the performer and onto the audience. In my terms, this is a shift from the disintegrative to the integrative perspective. From the disintegrative perspective, the agent can survey herself as one among many, and her reasons as some among many. All deliberation is, in this sense, disintegrative. But action is the end of deliberation: the vista telescopes to a point.[749] Or consider the testimony of the man I heard years ago on CBC radio, who was so chronically affected with depression that he experienced the tying of his shoelaces as a problem to be solved, a problem of such magnitude that the solution was outside the boundary of his resources.

---

[747] Cf. Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," pp. 96-97.
[748] Lipson and Lipson, "Psychotherapy," pp. 20-21.
[749] I do not mean that deliberation is a private mental event, nor that it terminates, chronologically, in (publicly observable) behaviour.

That is, he experienced so many irrelevant considerations bearing down on this (for most of us, extremely basic) practical activity that he was paralysed. We recognize this as a case of mental illness. But what the case can help us see is that, while *we can and do distinguish*, in particular circumstances, irrelevant considerations from relevant ones (here and now, at this moment, when I am about to lace my shoes to go to the grocery store to replenish the empty cupboard, is not the time and place to become *preoccupied* with the sweatshops where the shoes were made),[lxxi] *there is no general, prefabricated delineation* of the irrelevant from the relevant.

CHAPTER 13. Discussion: Images of Integrity: Individual

Summary

¶ *In the concluding chapters of the thesis, I consider two images of integrity. The first image is individualistic, and it originates in the work of Bernard Williams. The second image, which should contextualize the first, is collective or ecological, and it is exemplified in the work of Spinoza. Together, these images offer an alternative to Dancy's metaphysics. I begin by sketching a contextualist and ecological vision of ethical responsibility. According to this vision, there are cases in which responsibility is not attributable exclusively to an individual; it is more accurately attributable to interactions between individuals and environment. I review examples of a bamboo forest in North-eastern India, the bluegrass of the Mississippi valley, and tuberculosis in nineteenth century industrialized Europe. A further desideratum on our metaphysics is that it should preserve these cases of interactivity. I begin my study of Williams by discussing Cheshire Calhoun's interpretation of his work on integrity. Calhoun distinguishes among three analytically distinct pictures of integrity: (1) the "integrated-self" picture, (2) the "identity" picture, and (3) the "clean-hands" picture. She makes two general criticisms: each picture reduces integrity to something else; and each one depicts integrity as a personal virtue, rather than a social one. I make two criticisms of Calhoun's paper: (1) in suggesting that integrity is a social virtue, Calhoun is pointing in the right direction; but her own positive theory of integrity re-inscribes the very individualism which she disparages. (2) The clean-hands picture is wrongly attributed by Calhoun to Williams. According to her positive theory, the agent with integrity "stands for something" before other co-deliberators; and it is this standing before others — this allegedly social dimension — that is supposed to be Calhoun's novel contribution. But the only necessary condition of integrity is that an agent should stand by her own best judgement. The concept of "best judgement" is expected to do much of the work; but unanalysed, it provides no significant illumination of the allegedly social dimension, and it confers little or no justification on the personal opinion of the agent. In her efforts to emphasize the importance of an agent's "best judgement," she stresses that an agent can offer only her*

own judgement. I draw an analogy between this claim and claims, investigated and criticized by Wittgenstein, concerning the alleged privacy of sensation. I conclude that Calhoun cannot conjure the social dimension of integrity by stressing the ineluctably personal dimension of the deliberative viewpoint. Returning to (2) my second criticism— the allegation that the clean-hands picture is wrongly attributed to Williams — I review Williams's inaugural discussion of integrity in the context of his critique of utilitarianism and deontology. His theory is indeed individualistic; in summary, his worry is that moral systems can require a moral agent to compromise his "non-moral" commitments, and thus to compromise his personal integrity (or identity). He criticizes the utilitarian principle of impartiality and its doctrine of negative responsibility. These features are illustrated in Williams's example of Jim the botanist, who stumbles upon a firing squad. If Jim refuses to kill one person, then (according to the utilitarian doctrine) he is responsible for the death of twenty. But if we imagine Jim's agency as a perspective on the world, we might see that perspective as one to which the option of killing does not occur. Utilitarianism would then require Jim to alienate himself from the perspective from which his life has meaning — to do the "unthinkable." Williams's complaint is not that utilitarian delivers the wrong verdict — indeed, he seems to think that Jim should kill one prisoner — but that it is the wrong way of looking at the situation. Williams may be defending Calhoun's identity picture of integrity, but he cannot accurately be said to defend the clean-hands picture. Insofar as utilitarianism might be a way of life, one that requires an agent regularly to alienate herself from her character and its partial attachments, I wish to suggest that it is unsustainably disintegrative. To this disintegrative perspective belongs what Williams calls an "extra-thought": the rational reconstruction of the spontaneous reflex to help those whom one loves. In other work, Williams argues that integrity lacks a characteristic thought and motivation; hence, it is not a virtue. Greg Scherkoske agrees with Williams's first claim, but draws a different inference: hence, integrity is not a moral virtue, but an epistemic one. I agree that integrity is an epistemic virtue, but not in the sense that would prevent it from also being a moral virtue. Post-Thomistic modern philosophy, which finds its apotheosis in Hume, wishes to draw a categorical distinction between epistemic and moral virtues. Following McDowell's reading of Aristotle, I have rejected the categorical tenor of this distinction.

Regarded as a phronetic capacity to perceive salience, the integrative perspective may be called "epistemic"; but regarded as sophrosune (moderation) of character which grounds and enables this capacity, integrity may be called "moral." That is, phronesis (attention) and sophrosune (integrity) are the same virtue, viewed from different angles. The integrated agent is one for whom attentiveness is second nature.

---

§13.1. What is the cause of war?

Once every fifty years, in Northeastern India, Bangladesh, and Burma, the bamboo forests flower, releasing eighty tonnes per hectare of pear-sized seeds. These seeds serve as food for the local rats, whose population consequently explodes. When that population inevitably outpaces the food supply, the rats turn, in hordes, to the neighbouring farmers' rice crops — which they decimate. The outcome is famine. In 1959, "the misery touched off a rebellion in what is now India's Mizoram State."[750]

This story might be set instructively beside Aldo Leopold's discussion of "an ecological interpretation of history":

> Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic *interactions* between people and land....
>
> Consider, for example, the settlement of the Mississippi valley. In the years following the Revolution, three groups were contending for its control: the native Indian, the French and English traders, and the American settlers. Historians wonder what would have happened if the English at Detroit had thrown a little more weight into the Indian side of those tipsy scales which decided the outcome of the colonial migration into the cane-lands of Kentucky. It is time now to ponder the fact that the cane-lands, when subjected to the particular mixture of forces represented by the cow, plow, fire, and axe of the pioneer, became bluegrass. What if the plant succession inherent in this dark and bloody ground had, under

---

[750] Normile, "Holding Back a Torrent of Rats," p. 806.

the impact of these forces, given us some worthless sedge, shrub, or weed?[751]

— "This is ridiculous: you aren't seriously suggesting that the bamboo forest was the cause of the 1959 rebellion, or that bluegrass decided the settlement of Kentucky? There is a straightforward distinction to be drawn between individual *agents* and the environmental *conditions* under which they act. (Even Dancy does not confuse his 'enabling conditions' with agents.) You would agree, wouldn't you, that Aristotle's 'material cause' is misnamed: the block of marble (the material) upon which Michelangelo imposes the efficient cause of his will is not itself a cause, but a condition (and a recalcitrant one). The conditions themselves cannot be said to be 'the cause' of *anything*! — they merely make things more or less practically difficult for the causal agent (where 'impossible' and 'necessary' are the limiting cases of the degree of difficulty). I cannot drive my car without gas, but gas does not drive my car; and refusal to recognize this straightforward distinction is obtuse."

— I do agree with Heidegger that Aristotle's theory of αἰτία was distorted by Aquinas and the scholastic tradition.[752] Indeed, the reduction, in our philosophical imagination, of all four *aitiai* to the *causa efficiens* is a travesty in the history of ideas. The primary sense of *aitia* is "responsibility": and Aristotle's theory, properly understood, is not a theory of causality (as we moderns are accustomed to thinking of it), but of *responsibility*; and some of the components of that theory would be better called "reasons." I am not suggesting that the bamboo forest was "the cause" of the rebellion; I am suggesting that the question — "What is *the* cause of war?" — is malformed. I am trying to unsettle the idea that it is normally useful to isolate an individually responsible agent. Our culture (including our culture of philosophy) prefers the tidier sort of history which singles out the lone gunman. However, in simplifying and managing the messy phenomena, we are prone to miss things.

What is the cause of tuberculosis?

---

[751] Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, p. 205; emphasis added.
[752] Vide Aristotle, *Physics,* II.3.194b20 ff; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.ii, q. 27, a. 3; and Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology," esp. pp. 313-318.

Any textbook of medicine will tell us that the cause of tuberculosis is the tubercle bacillus, which gives us the disease when it infects us....

It is certainly true that one cannot get tuberculosis without a tubercle bacillus ... But that is not the same as saying that *the* cause of tuberculosis is *the* tubercle bacillus ... Suppose we note that tuberculosis was a disease extremely common in the sweatshops and miserable factories of the nineteenth century, whereas tuberculosis rates were much lower among country people and in the upper classes. Then we might be justified in claiming that *the* cause of tuberculosis is unregulated industrial capitalism, and if we did away with that system of social organization, we would not need to worry about the tubercle bacillus.[753]

While it is true that the bacillus makes a necessary contribution to tuberculosis, R.C. Lewontin suggests that a less atomistic explanation — and a more contextualist conception of causality — is available if one widens the lens to include "environmental" and "social" factors. The social factors (which Lewontin calls "social causes") are one special form of the ecological agency to which I have alluded above. Lewontin is drawing on Marx's theory of the fetishism of the commodity when he claims that the "transfer of causal power from social relations" — in this case, those of industrial capitalism — "into inanimate agents" — in this case, the tubercle bacillus — "is one of the major mystifications of science and its ideologies."[754] Lewontin's suggestion is a helpful tonic for those of us who are habituated to identifying and fixating upon an individual scapegoat. However, again the question — "What is *the* cause ...?" — is malformed, and the emphasis in Lewontin's answer is misplaced; like many revolutionary critics, he overcompensates. We do not need to decide — or, minimally, we should not decide hastily — about where to place blame: that is, to assign it *either* to the tubercle bacillus *or* to unregulated industrial capitalism. What Lewontin's example — his widened lens — helps to illustrate is the insight that causality (or, again, responsibility) is

[753] Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology*, pp. 40-41.
[754] Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology*, p. 46. Cf. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. One, Chap. 1, §4: "The mysterious power of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves" (p. 232).

not a *simple* thing. Responsibility can occur, *simultaneously, on more than one "plane"* in a polydimensional world.

The account of attention which I have been developing implies a shift away from a more traditional conception of agency. In the shifted conception, agency is not the exclusive property of the attendant; it is rather a function of a larger, interactive context, which minimally includes the "attendant," the "object" or "patient" of attention, the relations between them, and their (relevant) relations to other things. (I place "attendant" and "object" in scare-quotes because those appellations sound inappropriate in the larger context. It would be better, I think, to call some of the components "co-responders." Furthermore, the question of which relations are "relevant" to a given situation cannot be settled in advance, and will need to be negotiated, by the co-responders, on a case-specific basis.) On the other hand, I wish to save the phenomena: among these are individuals.

The task, then, is to offer an account of ecological integrity which does not do conceptual violence to the integrity of individuals; an account in which we are not alienated from our street-level experiences of living as and relating to individuals (*as well as* functioning as participants in societies and ecologies); an account in which individuals do not vanish in holistic talk.[755] Such an alienated account is one example of what I have been calling a *disintegrative perspective* on one's own agency. Let me repeat that it can be correctional to have periodic recourse to this perspective, for example, to imagine oneself as nothing more than a function of social forces. But generalized as a metaphysical theory, the disintegrative perspective is not one that an individual agent, qua agent, can occupy. (In a series of laboratory studies designed to replicate, in a centrifuge, the high g-force that can knock out jet pilots, subjects reported "out-of-body" experiences — in one case, the study's senior researcher reported seeing his own body from the back while he was walking down the hall. Whatever the explanation of these

---

[755] Lewontin rightly criticizes such talk for its Romanticism. However, his "constructionist" theory (*Biology as Ideology*, pp. 86 ff), according to which environments just are the constructions of organisms, is not a viable alternative; indeed, it seems to be a strange variation on the atomism which he also criticizes (*Biology as Ideology*, pp. 12-14). Or it is a variation on Jakob von Uexküll's equally untenable, transcendental-idealist theory of environments.

reported experiences — the hypothesis is that it has something to do with depletion of blood to the brain — it is a feature of them that they are episodic and unsustainable.)[756]

The problem of finding an account of ecological integrity which preserves (and ideally explains) individual integrity is nothing more than the ancient problem of the one and the many. It is, inter alia, a coordination problem, one with political as well as epistemological and ontological dimensions. Perhaps its most familiar recent iteration, in political theory, is the one we have inherited via Hobbes. (Given a plurality of rational, self-interested agents, how can a legitimate social organization be constructed?) On either side of Hobbes, both Plato and Spinoza were thwarted in their endeavours to solve the problem; in different ways, each of these two succumbed to the temptation of holism. I do not suppose that the problem is solvable; nor is it my aim, in this work, to contribute to the project of trying to solve it. Nevertheless, I shall be looking for clues among the ruins of past attempts.

Let me begin to study some *images* of integrity. I have already indicated some of the distinct uses of the concept: sometimes we use it to indicate the uprightness or intactness of an individual ethical agent; at other times we use it to indicate the connectedness of components in a complex structure (such as an ecology or an artwork). Sometimes, the first use implies a *contrast* between an individual and the collective which threatens her and against which she takes a stand; whereas the second use can imply the *subordination* of components to the overarching structure. And so the two uses may seem to be at odds with each other. However, my working hypothesis, as I have stated, is that these two uses, while distinct, are not disjoint; and that we can learn something about each by juxtaposing them. Consider: a structure whose components are integrated is better able to resist antagonistic influence, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to act in a concerted way; in other words, a structure which has integrity in the second sense (above) is better able also to exhibit integrity in the first sense. The thought, to anticipate, is Spinoza's: individual integrity *derives from* ecological integrity. To phrase the thought in more Spinozistic terms: an individual is insofar as it is an integrated ecology of (i.e., "an unvarying relation of movement

---

[756] J. Abumrad & R. Krulwich, "Where Am I?," *Radiolab*, 20 April 2009.

among") other individuals.[757] But the derivation is not straightforward: at any given level of analysis, individuals will be circumscribed by complex structures; and what, at a given plateau of description, are individuals, will turn out, at another plateau, to be complex structures.

In what follows, I shall be setting up two distinct images of integrity (as these images are embedded, not always explicitly, in philosophical accounts) as objects of comparison; I shall be seeking a perspicuous representation of these distinct images, with the aim of seeing the connexions between them.[758] I start with Williams's discussion of individual integrity, and proceed to discuss Spinoza's image of ecological integrity in the *Ethics*. The ordering of the images is provisional, and it should not be taken to imply that ecological integrity *evolves* from individual integrity. Leopold seems to be, and Callicott is, confused on this issue.[759] Similarly, both Hobbes and Spinoza are prone to picturing society as a kind of super-individual. But I do not believe that we learn about the distinct character of ecological integrity by starting from the individual and inflating it. Here it is helpful to remember Wittgenstein's cautionary remark about his method of comparison: "one might illustrate an internal relation of a circle to an ellipse by gradually converting an ellipse into a circle; *but not in order to assert that a certain ellipse actually, historically, had originated from a circle* (evolutionary hypothesis), but only in order to sharpen our eye for a formal connection."[760] In this spirit, I am not suggesting that Spinoza's image is merely a macro-scale projection of Williams's image (if they were such projections, we should be on guard for distortion); I am only trying to sharpen our eye for the *formal* connexion between individual and ecological integrity. Perversely enough, I shall begin discussing Williams's account of integrity by discussing one of his commentators, who misreads him.

---

[757] Spinoza, E, IID7, IIP13L3A2.

[758] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §§122, 130, and "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" pp. 131-133.

[759] Cf. Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, pp. 202-203; and Callicott, "Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic," pp. 188-194.

[760] Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*," p. 133. I understand Plato to be looking for such a "formal connection" when he analogizes the *kallipolis* with the soul in *Republic*, II ff.

§13.2. I start with Cheshire Calhoun's essay "Standing for Something" because it drifts into the liminal space in which I am interested. She criticizes overly individualistic pictures of integrity, and purports to develop a theory of integrity as a social virtue. But her alleged positive contribution is unsuccessful, as I shall argue. Calhoun enumerates three analytically distinct pictures of integrity: (1) the "integrated-self" picture, (2) the "identity" picture, and (3) the "clean-hands" picture. She makes two general criticisms of these three pictures: each one, she claims, *reduces* integrity to something else; and each one depicts integrity as a *personal* virtue, rather than a social one.[761] According to Calhoun, the integrated-self picture reduces integrity to "volitional unity," but integrity can be manifest in *inconsistency* and *ambivalence*;[762] the identity picture reduces integrity to "merely psychologically deep identifications," but integrity requires fidelity not to identifications but to *endorsements*;[763] the clean-hands picture reduces integrity to the adherence to some deontological principles regardless of the consequences of so adhering, but integrity requires adherence not to (deontological) principles but to *one's own best judgement*.[764] The general criticism about reductionism is unclear: Calhoun seems to vacillate between maintaining on the one hand that the pictures specify conditions which are *not necessary* for integrity, and maintaining on the other hand that they specify conditions which are necessary but *not sufficient*.[765] This obscurity is a function, I think, of moving targets in Calhoun's analysis of each picture. Against the integrated-self picture, Calhoun argues from counter-examples (plausibly, I think) that integrity may sometimes be manifest in inconsistency and ambivalence: thus volitional unity is not a necessary condition of integrity.[766] On the other hand, the integrated-self picture "attaches value to autonomy," and such autonomy does seem to be a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for integrity.[767] A scholar concerned to defend Calhoun against the charge of obscurity could scrutinize her essay and minimize the blur around

---

[761] Calhoun, "Standing for Something," pp. 235-236.
[762] Calhoun, "Standing," §I, esp. p. 241.
[763] Calhoun, "Standing," §II, esp. p. 244.
[764] Calhoun, "Standing," §III, esp. p. 249.
[765] Cf. on the one hand, Calhoun, "Standing," pp. 238, 252; on the other hand, "Standing," pp. 241, 260.
[766] Calhoun, "Standing," pp. 236-241.
[767] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 255.

these targets. Since I am concerned to make different criticisms, I shall leave that work to others.

I wish to make two criticisms. (1) In suggesting that integrity is a social virtue, Calhoun is pointing us in the right direction; but her own positive sketch of integrity is insufficiently social, that is, it re-inscribes the very individualism which she disparages in the other three pictures. (2) The clean-hands picture is wrongly attributed by Calhoun to Williams; that picture is in fact concocted by Calhoun. Not only is it an exegetically inaccurate (and incomplete) reading of Williams, it is furthermore (to mix clichés) a red herring and a straw man. Let me introduce the first criticism by way of the second. If the clean-hands picture were merely a misreading of one twentieth-century philosopher by another, then it might deserve nothing more than a passing mention on a placard in the small museum of recent intellectual history. But it is more significant than that: as a skewed caricature of integrity specifically, it makes a farce of virtue generally; and it encapsulates a pervasive but misguided criticism of virtue ethics, namely, that concern for one's own virtue is self-indulgent. Williams is well aware of this criticism, and has an important response to it. At best, then, Calhoun's critique of the clean-hands picture is superfluous, and at worst it is obfuscating. Let me elaborate.

According to the clean-hands picture, Calhoun asserts, "integrity is a matter of endorsing and, should the occasion arise, standing on some bottom-line principles that define what the agent is willing to have done through her agency and thus the limits beyond which she will not cooperate with evil. A person has integrity when there are some things she will not do regardless of the consequences of this refusal. In bottom-line situations, she places the importance of principle and the purity of her own agency above consequentialist concerns. // Williams has also been a key advocate of this conception of integrity ..."[768] Calhoun complains that the clean-hands picture overemphasizes the agent's personal concern for her own agency: "she takes special responsibility for what gets done through it and governs herself by *at least some deontological principles*."[769] Calhoun assumes, inconsistently, that an integrity-based refusal to "cooperate with evil" both *requires* adherence to specifically deontological principles (as she suggests in the

---

[768] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 246.
[769] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 253; emphasis added.

preceding quote) and that it *does not require* such adherence.[770] Adherence to deontological principles is not sufficient for integrity, since deontology (no less than consequentialism) can threaten it;[771] and adherence to such principles is not necessary either, since consequentialists can (allegedly) act with integrity.[772] "The only necessary condition of moral integrity," claims Calhoun, "is that one do *what one takes oneself* to have most moral reason to do";[773] "integrity hinges on acting on *one's own views*, not the right views."[774]

I do not know what to say about these last claims. The most charitable suggestion that I can make is that they are, as they stand, under-formulated. A less charitable suggestion is that they reduce to a variation on the identity picture of integrity, with personal endorsement substituted for (merely psychological) identification. This notion sounds like one voiced by Williams in his most unfortunate subjectivist-existentialist moments — an echo that Calhoun surely wants to avoid. But while she insists, in her positive sketch, that integrity is both a personal and a social virtue, she neglects — and this is criticism (1) above — to explain the allegedly social import of these personal endorsements. The agent with integrity stands for something, and stands for it before other co-deliberators, according to Calhoun.[775] Although we might be misled by the emphasis in the title of the essay, standing *before others* — the social dimension — is supposed to be Calhoun's novel contribution to the analysis of the concept of integrity. But she says nothing persuasive about how the personal dimension should be connected with the social dimension. In addressing the question "What is worth doing?" — a question about what we should "stand for" — a deliberator's personal point of view is inescapable, Calhoun insists; and hence (*sic*?) "one's best judgment becomes important.... It is, after all, not *just* her judgment about what it would be wrong or not worthwhile to do. It is also her *best* judgment."[776]

---

[770] Cf. Calhoun, "Standing," p. 249.
[771] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 248.
[772] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 249.
[773] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 249; emphasis added.
[774] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 250; emphasis added.
[775] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 257.
[776] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 257.

— Reacting to Calhoun's added qualifier, the skeptic is tempted to ask, "So what?" And I think that the skeptical question is not unmotivated here. "Persons of integrity," Calhoun claims, "treat their own endorsements as ones that matter, or ought to matter, to fellow deliberators."[777] But *why* ought they to matter? Why should my endorsement alone, even assuming it is considered and sincere, be enough to give another deliberator a *reason* to consider accepting what I am endorsing (much less *oblige* her to consider it)? I might have some considered and sincere opinions about what kinds of contemporary music are worth composing, and yet be musically illiterate; supposing that I "stand for" these opinions "before others" (maybe I post a letter to an editor of a newspaper), it does not follow that composers (nor the larger artistic and political communities) should take them seriously. (And we can easily think of much less innocent examples of racist, sexist, homophobic [etc.] proselytizers who publish their own "best judgements.") As laudably democratic as Calhoun's suggestion may be, we do not, in deliberative practice, afford this sort of equal consideration to each and every endorsement that happens to be voiced in public space. The concept of "best judgement" is expected to do much of the work in Calhoun's account, but she does not fully explicate what it involves. Absenting such explication, that concept provides no significant illumination of the social dimension of integrity; confers little or no justification upon a personal opinion; and is, furthermore, vulnerable to the sorts of absurd exploitations that I have just indicated.

§13.3. The strength of Calhoun's account finally makes its appearance on the last page, where she returns to the themes of inconsistency and ambivalence, and explains that integrity is distinct from mere stubbornness and fanaticism. She writes, "Integrity calls us simultaneously to stand behind our convictions *and to take seriously others' doubts about them*."[778] The suggestion that integrity involves some externally motivated critical reflection on one's own views, and some epistemic flexibility and willingness to revise those views when appropriate, is, I think, a major insight.[779] But here, in Calhoun's essay,

---

[777] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 258.
[778] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 260; emphasis added.
[779] One that is elaborated in Greg Scherkoske's work in this area. Vide Scherkoske,

it is only promissory. She says nothing about *when* or *why* we should take seriously others' doubts; nor does she help us to distinguish measured *respect* for others' views from excessive, heteronomous *deference* to their views. (I am not asking for analytic criteria for separating suppleness from spinelessness; but I am asking for some acknowledgement of the possibility of making the distinction, and for some general hints about how we might try to discern the former character from the latter on a case-by-case basis.) Her insistence that an agent should consider the objections of others receives no more explication or justification in her essay than her insistence that others should consider an agent's endorsements.

Cox et al. agree: "What is not clear in Calhoun's account ... is what *proper* respect for other's [*sic*] views in the end amounts to." Furthermore, her account "places no material constraints on the kinds of commitments that a person of integrity may endorse." (Nor, I wish to add, does it place any substantial constraints on what counts as epistemically responsible endorsement.) "Although they have a special concern to understand what in life is worth doing, the person of integrity is not constrained to give moral, other-regarding answers to this question."[780] That Calhoun refrains from articulating moral constraints on integrity does not impugn her account, which has no such avowed aim; but her failure to articulate some other-regarding constraint is a flaw. On her account, an agent with integrity turns out to be someone who "stands for" her "best judgements," that is, her best personal endorsements. But, as I suggested earlier, absenting some explication of "best judgement," this account reduces to a hopeful variation on the identity picture. And the advertised social dimension of integrity reduces to an unsupported exhortation that we should respect the objections of others, and that they should respect our endorsements. But Calhoun offers no reason, for example (and as she might have done), to believe that the social dimension is *constitutive* of actions such as objecting or endorsing. No, her metaphysics of agency is traitorously *individualistic*. To make this crucial point clearer, let me review, in greater detail, the overture for her positive sketch of integrity as a social virtue:

"Could Integrity Be An Epistemic Virtue?," §III.
[780] Cox et al., "Integrity," §3.

> What then is the social virtue of integrity? I begin with this picture: *I am one person* among many persons, and we are all in the same boat. None of us can answer the question — 'What is worth doing?' — except from *within our own deliberative points of view*. This 'What is worth doing?' question can take many specific forms.... That they are answerable *only from within each person's deliberative viewpoint* means that all of our answers will have a peculiar character. As *one* among many deliberators, each can offer *only her own judgment*. Although each aims to do more than this — to render a judgment endorsable by all — nothing guarantees success. The thought, "It is *just my judgment* and it may be wrong," cannot be banished no matter how carefully deliberation proceeds. But given that *the only way* of answering the 'What is worth doing?' question is to plunge ahead using *one's own deliberative viewpoint*, one's best judgment becomes important. As *one* among many deliberators who may themselves go astray, *the individual's judgment* acquires gravity.[781]

I have quoted this passage at length because the repeated emphases accumulate into a "peculiar" picture of deliberative agency. Calhoun seems to think that stressing the epistemic isolation of the deliberative viewpoint confers some special significance upon it. On the contrary, if this rhetorical stress accomplishes anything, it should help us to reflect on the practical irrelevance of the alleged isolation. In this respect, the problematic is exactly analogous to that which Wittgenstein addresses when he investigates the "privacy" of sensation. To adapt an apposite remark from Wittgenstein:

> I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject strike [herself] on the breast and say: "But surely another person can't have THIS [deliberative viewpoint]!" — The answer to this is that one does not define a criterion of identity by emphatic stressing of the word "this". Rather, what the emphasis does is to suggest the case in which we are conversant with such a criterion of identity, but have to be reminded of it.[782]

---

[781] Calhoun, "Standing," p. 257; emphases added.
[782] Wittgenstein, PI, §253; I have adapted the first sentence.

Calhoun implies that the individual deliberator has some unique relationship to her own deliberative perspective, that *her* endorsements enter the agora *only* through *her own* perspective. This implication may be inoffensive, as far as it goes — but it should not be misconstrued as some information about the empirical limits of the deliberative perspective. (As though a deliberator might transcend her own perspective, if only she were superhuman.) Calhoun's effort, in Wittgensteinian terms, is a "grammatical" proposition; it tells us something about the grammar of deliberation.[783] The following remarks from Wittgenstein might, again, be equally addressed to Calhoun's discussion of the deliberative viewpoint.

> "But when I [deliberate] ... I have *got* something which my neighbour has not." — I understand this. You want to look about you and say: "At any rate only I have got THIS." — What are these words for? They serve no purpose. — May one not add: "there is here no question of a 'seeing' — and therefore none of a 'having' — nor of a subject, nor therefore of 'I' either"? Might I not ask: In what sense have you *got* what you are talking about and saying that only you have got it? Do you possess it? You do not even *see* it. Must you not really say that no one has got it? And this too is clear: if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it.[784]

My point is that Calhoun cannot manage to conjure the social dimension of integrity merely through emphatic stressing of the ineluctably personal dimension of the deliberative viewpoint. My judgement is *mine*, yes; but that tautological pronouncement tells me next to nothing about my epistemic responsibilities or the judgement's conditions of justification.

§13.4. I want to return now to criticism (2) above: my allegation that the clean-hands picture is wrongly attributed by Calhoun to Williams. In order to make my case, I shall first review Williams's inaugural discussion of integrity in the context of his critiques of utilitarianism and Kantianism; I shall then turn to Williams's own protestation against the

---

[783] Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §§251, 257
[784] Wittgenstein, PI, §398; I have adapted the first sentence.

clean-hands picture (in his "Utilitarianism and Moral Self-indulgence").[785] Let me begin by agreeing with Calhoun that Williams presupposes a strangely *anti*-ecological conception of integrity. His predominant concern is with the integrity of the ethical agent *as an autonomous individual* (whose autonomy is not relationally constituted), and with the preservation of that individual's integrity against the alleged threat of impartial and corporate moral institutions. For Williams, integrity is a property that attaches primarily (or perhaps exclusively) to individuals, and individuals are in principle *atomic*. That is, while an individual's integrity is not insusceptible to luck, his identity-conferring choices are conceived largely independently of, or in opposition to, socio-environmental context. This account neglects the sense in which integrity is, also, an *ecological* concept, as I have indicated. An ethical agent, however distinct and individual, is also a *micro-ecology* and her identity is (at least partially) constituted by her *relations* with other micro- and macro-ecologies. In summary, Williams's position is that moral systems (and he is especially worried about utilitarianism and Kantianism) can require an individual moral agent to compromise his "non-moral" commitments, and thus to compromise his personal integrity. The impersonal (or impartial) demands distinctive of these systems can jeopardize the personal identity of the agent, where these demands conflict with personal commitments which are identity-conferring.[786]

In Williams's conception, integrity is potentially opposed to morality, where the term "morality" is used to mean the set of moral *systems* (a species of what Williams wants to call "ethics").[787][lxxii] Williams is worried about two moral systems specifically, consequentialism and deontology, and he is especially contemptuous of the utilitarian species of consequentialism. In his "critique of utilitarianism," he claims that "utilitarianism, at least in its direct forms, makes integrity as a value more or less unintelligible."[788] He examines the connexion between the utilitarian principle of *impartiality* and its doctrine of *negative responsibility*. Williams claims that the latter doctrine follows from the utilitarian intrinsic valorization of states of affairs: if one is

---

[785] An essay recently addressed by Scherkoske ("Epistemic Virtue," §II), but curiously absent from Calhoun's references.

[786] Cf. Walker's concise account of Williams's complaint ("Picking Up Pieces," p. 108).

[787] Cf. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 6.

[788] Williams, "A critique of utilitarianism," p. 99.

responsible for maximizing happy states of affairs (and for minimizing unhappy ones), then "I must be just as much responsible for things that I allow or fail to prevent, as I am for things that I myself, in the more everyday restricted sense, bring about."[789] This doctrine represents a special application of the principle of impartiality by "abstract[ing] from the identity of the agent, leaving just a locus of causal intervention in the world."[790]

Consider the second of Williams's two examples: twenty protestors face unjust execution by a firing squad. The situation is extraordinarily rigged in such a way that Jim, a bystander (and a botanist), can rescue nineteen of the people by killing one of them; otherwise, another man (whom Williams calls "Pedro"),[791] will kill all twenty of them. Notice that the example involves the doctrine of negative responsibility: if Jim refuses to kill one person, then (according to the utilitarian analysis) he is responsible for the death of twenty people. One may assume that the utilitarian directive requires Jim to sacrifice one of his most basic commitments: a commitment not to harm others. Jim's aversion to killing one of the sentenced is not just some quantity of disutility; it is a natural expression of his character, the perspective which, in Winch's sense, constitutes his agency. Indeed, Williams's sketch of "the unthinkable" is consonant with both Winch's discussion of integrity and McDowell's discussion of virtue: "It could be a feature of man's moral outlook that he considered certain courses of action as unthinkable, in the sense that he would not entertain the idea of doing them; and the witness to that might, in many cases, be that they simply would not come into his head."[792] Recall that the absence of some kinds of thoughts — the absence of conflict among putative alternatives — is what distinguishes arete from enkrateia. But Williams's use of the term "unthinkable" is ambiguous, and it might be helpful to mark two senses: according to one sense, it names a "moral category"[793] of actions which are so despicable that seriously considering them is censurable. But according to another sense (that is, the sense which is operating in Williams's remark above), it does not name a moral *category* at all; what it names is a

---

[789] Williams, "Critique," p. 95.
[790] Williams, "Critique," p. 96.
[791] The racialization of the conflict — a stalwart British botanist confronting a squadron of nefarious South Americans — is redolent of pulp colonial adventure stories, and invites separate critical analysis.
[792] Williams, "Critique," p. 92.
[793] The suggestion is Williams's own.

particular perspective — it might be a kind of innocence — within which some potential choices do not occur. The difference between the two senses is a difference between integrity imagined as a rigid (enkratic) refusal to cooperate with evil (and such a stance may be vulnerable to the charge of self-indulgence), and integrity imagined as a perspective from which some situational features are motivationally salient while others are silent.

If Jim can manage to perceive his aversion as a quantity of disutility which must be overcome, he will have alienated himself from his own perspective and will have occupied that of utilitarianism. And, as Williams correctly observes, the argument will be over: from the perspective of utilitarianism, Jim's psychological disutility, however large a quantity, when placed in the equation, cannot counter the disutility of twenty deaths. But, Williams insists, the utilitarian perspective is the wrong way of looking at the situation. Jim's aversion to killing isn't accurately describable as a quantity of psychological disutility; it isn't an accidental property which attaches to his perspective. His characterological perspective, his identity, is (partially) constituted by this aversion. "Because our moral relation to the world is partly given by such [moral] feelings, and by a sense of what we can or cannot 'live with', to come to regard those feelings from a purely utilitarian point of view... is to lose a sense of one's moral identity; to lose, in the most literal way, one's integrity."[794] In this quote, one might be inclined to perceive a blurring of Calhoun's "identity" and "clean-hands" pictures of integrity. For Williams, an aversion to committing the unthinkable seems partially constitutive of the agent's identity. But Williams is inclined to conclude that Jim should kill[795] (in other words, he should get his hands dirty); his complaint is that the utilitarian *argument* for this conclusion is wrong and integrity-threatening. While it seems that Williams is defending an "identity" picture, there is no textual basis, here, for the ascription of the "clean hands" picture to Williams. Again, this point is not only exegetical (though it is that, too). The "clean hands" picture is difficult to take seriously; indeed, there seems to be little integrity in the idea of preserving one's own purity instead of preventing some harm to others. That idea might make the utilitarian argument seem comparatively plausible (it

---

[794] Williams, "Critique," pp. 103-104.
[795] Cf. Williams, "Critique," pp. 99, 117.

might even invite a utilitarian rebuttal). But Williams is not defending that idea. For him, the conflict is not between one agent's purity and the lives of twenty others (a conflict which, again, seems to invite utilitarian resolution); it is instead a conflict between a perspective from which certain outcomes are invisible, and a perspective which, in advance of all particular situations, is prepared to rationalize the outcome which is expected to maximize utility.

He seems to suggest that what threatens Jim's integrity is not (or not only) the act of killing, but the utilitarian temptation to quantify (and thereby to dis-affect) his aversion to that act. That is, it is an unrecognizable *re-description* of his aversion. The utilitarian offers Jim an outcome which would not otherwise occur to him as belonging among the alternatives, and invites him to recalculate; that is, the utilitarian invites him to shift from an integrative perspective (from which this outcome was silent) to a disintegrative perspective (in which this outcome is to be weighed beside its rivals). What is crucial to grasp is that the shift is *not merely additive*. There is an analogy here with some of Wittgenstein's remarks on Christian faith:

> I read: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." —
> And it is true: I cannot call him *Lord*; because that says nothing to me. I
> could call him 'the paragon', 'God' even — or rather, I can understand it
> when he is called thus; but I cannot utter the word "Lord" with meaning.
> *Because I do not believe that he will come to judge me*; because that says
> nothing to me. And it could say something to me, only if I lived [*quite*]
> differently.[796]

The unutterability of "Lord" for Wittgenstein is *like* the unthinkability of killing the innocent prisoner for Jim. Let me, quickly, set up some objects of comparison: (1) a pagan serf in a medieval feudal society is introduced to a strange man and told that he is the Son of God, and invited to call this man "Lord"; the serf knows how to use this name, in the context of her feudal society — but can she meaningfully apply it, then and there, to this stranger? (2) You halt at the edge of the bluffs, but, to your surprise, your

---

[796] Wittgenstein, C&V, p. 33e; the alternate translation is suggested by Steven Burns. Cf. Wittgenstein's remark on the world-view from which miracles could be intelligible (ibid., p. 45e): one would need to feel compelled to see the bowing of trees as a miraculous act of reverence.

companion keeps walking; suspended in mid-air, she turns to you and extends her hand, laughing at your trepidation — even assuming that you can temporarily reserve judgement regarding the credibility of what appears to be happening, can you manage to join her in finding your own trepidation amusing? (3) Jim, who is habituated to rescuing spiders stranded in his bathroom sink and delivering them, alive, onto the window-sill, is handed a gun and invited to kill an innocent man; and he is further invited to regard his aversion not only as irrational, but also as immoral. — Here is the resemblance that I wish to notice among these three scenarios: the protagonist is not asked merely to apply a familiar concept to a new case; nor is the protagonist asked merely to adjust her or his attitude to an extraordinary case which stands in an intelligible, degreed relation to ordinary cases. The problem is more like that which confronts the Wittgensteinian (or Quinean) fabric of belief in the face of an incredible event: "If I wanted to doubt the existence of the earth long before my birth, I should have to doubt all sorts of things which stand fast for me."[797]

§13.5. The utilitarian project transforms an agent into "a channel between the input of everyone's projects, including his own, and an output of optimific decision; but this is to neglect the extent to which his actions and his decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity."[798] In other words, the utilitarian project uses the agent, not as a characterologically specific decision-maker, but as a generic functional mechanism for running a decision procedure. One can appreciate how Williams's concern is a concern about the *impartiality* of this moral system, which requires not only that the agent should attend to dilemmas impartially with respect to the participants, but also that the agent's individuality, her identity *as an agent*, her *character*, should be considered irrelevant to her evaluation of the dilemma. And I am suggesting that this perspective on one's own agency, when it is prescribed as a way of life, is unsustainably disintegrative.[799]

---

[797] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §234.
[798] Williams, "Critique," p. 116; cf. Williams, "Persons," p. 4.
[799] One might object that rule utilitarianism takes care of this worry: the rule utilitarian

Williams further argues that the utilitarian willingness to dispense with the characterological perspective is incoherent.[800] His argument proceeds in the spirit of a reductio. He contends that the systematic commitment to maximizing happiness cannot exhaust agents' commitments, on pain of vacuity; happiness cannot intelligibly be pursued for its own sake, but is promoted only indirectly.[801] Utilitarianism is thus a second-order project which depends on the success of various other first-order projects. But utilitarianism can require any agent to violate her first-order projects, her most basic commitments, just in case her position in the mechanism renders those projects in conflict with the second-order project of utilitarianism. Any given agent is a candidate for this violation; one's election is simply a function of the alignment of billiard balls after the break, a question of whether one finds oneself in proximity to the relevant "causal levers." Williams's criticism here is a curious interiorized version of one serious criticism of utilitarianism's agglomerative disregard for the individual: one might be worried that utilitarianism requires the possibility of an agent's doing violence to *this* individual for the sake of *those* ones; but Williams is worried that utilitarianism requires the possibility of an agent's doing violence to her*self*. The reductio is not perfect — it does not deliver a contradiction — but it suggests that internal to the second-order project of utilitarianism is the possibility of violating those first-order projects on which it depends.

In subsequent work, Williams expands his critique to include deontology, and initiates some affirmative action on behalf of individual character. Williams's first major complaint against both Kantianism and utilitarianism is that their impartiality, and their strategies of abstraction, threaten personal integrity. Unlike utilitarianism, Kantianism "emphasizes something like the separateness of agents," but Williams questions its abstraction from character. According to Williams, character is (at least partially) constituted by a particular set of "desires, concerns or ... projects,"[802] and he is worried that Kantianism requires a moral agent's impartiality with respect both to her

---

acts, if you like, from the so-called "integrative perspective," while promoting rules which are expected to maximize aggregate happiness.

[800] Vide Williams, "Critique," §5.

[801] This premise would presumably be disputed by Aristotle, who regarded εὐδαιμονία as the final cause of all action (vide NE, I.1.)

[802] Williams, "Persons, character and morality," p. 5.

significance-giving projects (or "ground projects") and to her interpersonal commitments. He claims that impartial morality, when it conflicts with personal ground projects, will require the agent to sacrifice those projects, and complains that this requirement is unreasonable.[803] He seems to be suggesting that morality can require an agent to commit something like psychological suicide. But Williams does not evaluate, nor does he offer resources for the evaluation of, ground projects. He notes that nothing prevents these projects from being altruistic or moral, and he is explicit that they can conflict with moral systems, but he is silent on the possibility of their being unethical (in some non-systematic sense of "unethical"). Suppose there is an "artist" whose "ground project" is torture: he is so committed to the "aesthetic value" of inducing and recording another's suffering that his life would become meaningless if he were required to give it up. Kantianism has a clear explanation of why such a project is wrong (and one need not accept the legitimacy of the system, nor find the explanation satisfactory, to recognize it as an attempt at *an explanation*); but there appears to be no equivalent explanation forthcoming on Williams's account.

Williams's second major complaint is more sympathetic to me, and it concerns the character of those persons to whom the agent is related — indefinitely many, I think, and certainly many more than the proximate ones who interest Williams.[804] When Williams writes of the "present" and the "immediate," he seems to mean those persons who are spatially (and probably tribally) proximate to the agent. Indeed, Newtonian spatial metaphors of proximity and distance, and the concentric circles which are sometimes deployed to illustrate them, are troubling. And, as Sue Campbell has pointed out, even as these metaphors allege to overcome default egoism, they re-inscribe and reinforce it.[805] We need different metaphors, informed by a different paradigm of space. Williams insists that "individuals are not inter-substitutable" and elaborates by noticing that "it is a feature of our experience of persons that we can perceive and be conscious of an infinitely fine degree of difference in concrete detail."[806] I can agree with these observations without following Williams in the implication that partiality is a necessary

---

[803] Williams, "Persons," p. 14.
[804] Williams, "Critique," p. 118.
[805] Cf. Campbell, "Empathy and Egoism."
[806] Williams, "Persons," p. 15.

consequence of the principle of non-interchangeability of individuals. That partiality marks most interpersonal relations might be a contingent empirical fact, but it does not appear to be a conceptual truth. What I mean is that it seems possible to love someone or something without favouring it. On the other hand, I do not wish to oppose Williams's advocacy for love as an admissible ethical motive. The surgical removal of love, and the transplantation, in its place, of moral duty and (nomological) respect is, I think, disastrous for ethics, and transforms the agent into a grotesque mechanism. Anyway, I agree with Williams that the dominant moral systems do not appear to leave much space for the pull of the particular.

Williams considers the suggestion that some responses to ethical dilemmas "lie beyond justifications,"[807] and that in such dilemmas, partiality does not require legitimation. In his example, a man is faced with the choice of saving only one of two persons in equal peril, and one of them is his wife.[808] *Should* he save his wife? *May* he? To the second question, minimally, one is tempted to answer, "Of course." But Williams argues that the moral reasoning which concludes that an agent is *permitted* to be partial in dilemmas of this type has theoretically mis-constructed the situation: "But this construction provides the agent with one thought too many: it might have been hoped by some (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife and that in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife."[809] Williams's "extra thought" belongs to the disintegrative perspective: a gap has opened between the agent and various features of the situation. From this perspective, the drowning wife is not sufficient to motivate action;[810] one needs, additionally, to deliberate, to consult a general moral theory from which one can derive permission. Williams's insinuation, I think, is that the "extra" thought — the deliberative recoil — casts aspersions on the character of the agent: *shouldn't* one's love for one's partner be sufficient? Williams's own example is too schematic to address this

---

[807] Williams, "Persons," p. 18.
[808] Williams imports this unfortunately traditional "maiden-in-distress" example from Fried's *Anatomy of Values* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 227.
[809] Williams, "Persons," p. 18.
[810] Perhaps we picture her as drowning — but the nature of the "peril" is not specified.

question adequately; one wants the narrative context to be fleshed out with the sort of concrete detail which Williams endorses but fails to provide.[lxxiii]

The details matter because, as I have been suggesting, along with Winch, we cannot say of the disintegrative perspective that it is unconditionally bad (any more than we can say of the integrative perspective that it is unconditionally good). In any given situation, we need to look and see how the perspective fits. Williams's polemic crowds out the possibility that one might save one's partner, reflexively, and yet simultaneously experience remorse at having to restrict one's attention. The remorse (if one feels it) is directed not at what one did, but at what one couldn't do: it isn't that one regrets having acted to rescue one's partner, but that one regrets not having been able to rescue the other person. This seems to be one among several understandable responses to the dilemma.[811] (And since Williams recognizes the value of "agent-regret about the involuntary,"[812] it surprises me that he does not consider its rôle in this context.) Integrity is most tested in just these precarious situations in which no course of action seems susceptible to justification. Walker and Winch are more sensitive to this dimension of integrity.

§13.6. For Walker, integrity is a virtue of what she calls "impure agency," taking a cue from Williams.[813] She agrees with Williams that an agent is susceptible to luck, and claims that this susceptibility diffuses her responsibility to include some involuntary events: "The truth of moral luck which the rational, responsive agent is expected to grasp is that *responsibilities outrun control*."[814] Integrity is exhibited especially when an agent falls prey to bad ("moral") luck. Walker understands integrity as *dependability* or *reliability* in these challenging contexts.[815] The central idea, according her, is that

---

[811] McFall's analysis of the situation is more sensitive than Williams's to the possibility that an agent could be excruciated by the dilemma: "For most of us, both relations of personal affection and social moral commitments have great if not identity-conferring importance. If they did not, we would recognize no dilemma" (McFall, "Integrity," p. 18).

[812] Williams, "Moral Luck," p. 30, and cf. especially ibid., p. 31.

[813] Cf. Williams, "Moral Luck," p. 29; cited by Walker, "Moral Luck" p. 21. The adjective "impure" is unfortunate. Claiming that a human agent is impure is like claiming that she is not superhuman; for whom is this claim supposed to function as information?

[814] Walker, "Moral Luck," p. 26.

[815] Walker, "Moral Luck," p. 27; Walker, "Picking Up Pieces," pp. 106, 115.

"integrity is the capacity for reliably maintaining a coherent moral posture, and that this capacity is only proven under challenge."[816] I agree that bad luck can be a test of integrity, and would add that integrity is a reliable posture which asymptotically *approaches* coherence. Coherence is a normative (regulative) ideal of character, relative to which one's degree of integrity might be measured. Walker observes that "people are often said to have integrity when they've already muffed things, miscalled outcomes, left damage, and then take such responsibility as ensues.... A central use of 'integrity' then is to describe not only people who act well from, as it were, a standing position but also people who own up to and clean up messes, their own and others'."[817] An agent's integrity can manifest in her acceptance of responsibility for happenings for which it would be inappropriate to blame her. Walker's account of integrity is thus consonant with my suggestion, which opens this chapter, that responsibility is not simple, and that its assignment to individuals risks obscuring actual complexities.

Winch offers Oedipus as an example of an agent who exhibits integrity by accepting responsibility for acts of patricide and incest, which acts he would not have willed under those descriptions; that is, he did not intend them.[818] Winch also offers another example of integrity which addresses my sense that questions of justification are misplaced with respect to one's response to an authentic ethical dilemma. To defend a young girl from a homicidal gangster, a non-violent elder hurls a pitchfork into the gangster's back.[819] Winch insists that the elder did not abandon his commitment to a principle of non-violence, but continued to feel that his act was wrong; furthermore, Winch insists that "it is equally clear that the elder would think that in some sense he 'had no choice' in the situation."[820]

§13.7. I want to return to Williams's "extra thought," and my suggestion that it belongs to the disintegrative perspective, in which the agent has become dislodged from her context. Such an agent, for whom perception is insufficient to motivate, is susceptible to the

---

[816] Walker, "Moral Luck," pp. 33-34, n. 16.
[817] Walker, "Picking Up Pieces," p. 118.
[818] Winch, MI, pp. 184-185.
[819] Winch, MI, p. 185.
[820] Winch, MI, p. 186.

Humean analysis. On the other hand, while guarding against the implication that spontaneity might be unconditionally good, I have emphasized the sense in which the aretaic agent is capable of responding spontaneously. When asked why she acted as she did, such an agent might say something like "There was nothing else for it."[821] Williams seems to agree with this characterization. In his "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," Williams writes, "A particularly clear distinction between [first- and second-order motivation] is available where it is possible to be motivated in a certain moral way without possessing the relevant concept of that motivation at all.... with some virtues ... there is room for such a thing as intelligent innocence."[822] Such motivation is *non-reflexive*; and an agent so motivated does not require an "extra thought" to traverse the gap that has opened between her and the world. "[T]he characteristic and basic expression of a moral disposition in deliberation is not a premiss which refers to that disposition — it is not the basic characteristic of a generous man's deliberations that they use the premiss 'I am a generous man.'"[823] All of Williams, McDowell, and Zwicky seem to agree that unselfconsciousness is a defining feature of the aretaic agent.[824] By contrast, Williams considers the possibility that in the case of some virtues, "the presence of [second-order, reflexive] thought tend[s] to destroy first-order motivation."[825]

Williams makes these suggestions in the context of asking whether an agent with integrity, who refused to do some detestable action, might be charged with "moral self-indulgence." A defining feature of such self-indulgence would be a second-order "*reflexive* concern" with one's own agency.[826] The contrast between first- and second-order motivations can be illustrated by contrasting their objects: in Weil's example, one might be moved, immediately, by the thirsting man, to give him a glass of water. By contrast, one might be moved, by the image of oneself acting charitably, to give the man a glass of water. The latter sort of case would attract the charge of moral self-indulgence.

---

[821] Weil, G&G, p. 49.
[822] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 46.
[823] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 47.
[824] Cf. McDowell, V&R, §2 (p. 332); Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," p. 91.
[825] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 46. On the suggestion that (second-order) reflection can destroy (first-order) unreflective ethical knowledge, cf. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, pp. 140-152.
[826] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 45.

One attends, not to the man, but to oneself. "This sort of reflexivity," writes Williams, "involves a reversal at a line which I take to be fundamental to any morality or indeed sane life at all, between self-concern and other-concern; it involves a misdirection not just of attention, though that is true too, but genuinely of concern."[827] Williams proceeds to inquire whether the agent with integrity could be charged with self-indulgence: whether her agency could be susceptible to "reflexive deformation." This inquiry leads him to argue that integrity, "while it is an admirable human property, it is not related to motivation as the virtues are"; that is, unlike other virtues, it lacks both a characteristic motive and a characteristic thought.[828] (Integrity is, in this sense, contentless; its content is supplied by whatever the agent herself values.)[829] For these reasons, Williams concludes that integrity is not a virtue.

Scherkoske agrees with Williams that integrity lacks a characteristic thought and motive,[830] but draws a different inference: integrity, he claims, is not a moral virtue but an epistemic one. That is, he assumes that a virtue cannot be both an epistemic and moral virtue. Inspired by Williams, he argues that the following thesis is false: "Integrity is a moral virtue: it centrally concerns right action: lacking integrity (or compromising it) is a distinctively moral failing."[831] And he argues that the following thesis is true: "Integrity is an epistemic virtue: that is, it is a stable disposition that reliably places its possessor in good epistemic position and leads to cognitive success."[832] One advantage of the latter thesis is that it theorizes integrity such that it avoids "vicious steadfastness"; instead — and here Scherkoske elaborates a point made by Calhoun — integrity "requires that one's convictions be responsive to relevant reasons bearing on the justifiability of those convictions."[833]

---

[827] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 47.

[828] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 49.

[829] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 49. "[O]ne who displays integrity acts from those dispositions and motives which are most deeply his" (ibid.) Here Williams's account seems to lend itself to what Calhoun calls the "identity" picture of integrity.

[830] Scherkoske, "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?," §II (p. 190).

[831] Scherkoske, "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?," §I (p. 187).

[832] Scherkoske, "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?," §III (p. 196).

[833] Scherkoske, "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?," §I (p. 186).

I wish to agree with Scherkoske that integrity is an epistemic virtue — but not in the sense that would prevent it from also being a moral virtue. Post-Thomistic modern philosophy, which finds its apotheosis in Hume, insists on drawing a categorical distinction between epistemic and moral virtues. But following McDowell's reading of Aristotle, I have rejected the categorical tenor of this distinction. I wish to elaborate a couple of possibilities considered but rejected by Williams and Scherkoske. Williams denies that integrity is "a virtue of that type, sometimes called 'executive' virtues, which do not themselves yield a characteristic motive, but are necessary for the relation to oneself and the world which enables one to act from desirable motives in desirable ways — the type that includes courage and self-control."[834] — But why not identify integrity as an "executive" virtue? Indeed, assuming that "self-control" mistranslates σωφροσύνη, why not identify integrity with this virtue? Scherkoske considers and rejects two similar proposals: the claim that integrity is an "enabling" virtue, and the claim that it is a "capstone" virtue. According to the first claim, integrity is a second-order virtue: it "just is being reliably disposed to exhibit other virtues on the relevant occasion; there is no distinct thought of its own, nor any distinctive motivation to exhibit."[835] According to the second claim, integrity might be "structurally similar to Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* or practical wisdom — the fullest culmination of practical wisdom and the guarantor of right action.... [T]he relation [between integrity and the other virtues] is rather a strict unity, such that what appear to be discrete virtues are in fact just facets of a single virtue or 'sensitivity.'"[836] Scherkoske rejects the first claim on grounds of "*descriptive redundancy*," and the second on grounds of anachronistic naïvety (nowadays we recognize that it is possible both to have integrity and to be vicious).

I wish to take my cue from the leads considered but rejected by Williams and Scherkoske. What if integrity could be identified with sophrosune or phronesis? I am particularly interested in one suggestive remark by Aristotle: phronesis, he says,

> is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that
> are good or bad for man.... This is why we call temperance (*sōphrosunē*)

---

[834] Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence," p. 49.
[835] Scherkoske, "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?," §II.a. (p. 192).
[836] Scherkoske, "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?," §II.b. (p. 193).

by this name, because we think that it preserves one's practical wisdom (*sōzousa tēn phronēsin*).[837]

As Irwin notes, the etymology is "fanciful," but it "indicates the special connection of [*phronēsis*] — as opposed to some other virtues of thought — to character."[838] To articulate that special connection in the analytic dialect, we can say that phronesis "is both necessary and sufficient for complete virtue of character."[839] In Aristotle's own words, "it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, or practically wise without moral virtue";[840] "Practical wisdom, too, is linked to virtue of character, and this to practical wisdom, since the principles of practical wisdom are in accordance with the moral virtues and rightness in morals is in accordance with practical wisdom."[841]

I have already dissented from Anscombe's interpretation, which traces the Humean distinction between belief and desire back to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Plato associates particular virtues with particular components of the soul,[842] but is ultimately committed to a unity of virtues and a psychological unity. Adapting the Platonic psychology, Aristotle *seems* to drive the wedge deeper, to insist on a more categorical distinction between virtues of thought and virtues of character (or what are often called epistemic and moral virtues), corresponding to different parts of the soul. However, I have resolutely resisted this interpretation, and Irwin is right to insist that Aristotle "does not commit himself to a Humean view of the relation between reason and desire."[843] Phronesis is, in fact, included in the early, general definition of the virtues of character: "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of

---

[837] Aristotle, NE, VI.5.1140b5-15. Cf. Plato: "Moderation (*sōphrosunē*) is the saviour (*sōteria*) of the wisdom (*phronēsis*) we just looked at" (*Cratylus*, 411e).

[838] Irwin, "Notes," NE, p. 242. Irwin writes that "a more probable etymology than Aristotle's derives the term [*sōphrosunē*] from 'sound (*sōs*) mind (*phronein*)'" (p. 350).

[839] Irwin, "Notes," NE, p. 345. Cf. Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 226.

[840] Aristotle, NE, VI.13.1144b30-35.

[841] Aristotle, NE, X.8.1178a15-20.

[842] Vide Plato, *Republic*, IV.

[843] Irwin, "Notes," NE, p. 240.

practical wisdom would determine it."[844] The suggestion which I am now considering is that if one comes at it from the other side, one will appreciate not only that phronesis is necessary to virtues of character, but also that sophrosune is necessary to virtues of thought.

Sophrosune, according to Aristotle, is the mean "with regard to pleasures," between the excess of self-indulgence on the one hand, and the deficiency of insensibility on the other.[845] More specifically, it is concerned with "the kind of pleasures that the other animals share in, which therefore appear slavish and brutish; these are touch and taste."[846] But especially enjoyment through touch, "both in the case of food and in that of drink and in that of sexual intercourse. This is why a certain gourmand prayed that his throat might become longer than a crane's, implying that it was the contact that he took pleasure in."[847] But we should not imagine that sophrosune is puritanical. Compare McDowell's characterization of the temperate person (that is, the person with the virtue of sophrosune): "The temperate person need be no less prone to enjoy physical pleasure than anyone else. In suitable circumstances it would be true that he would enjoy some intemperate action that is available to him. In the absence of a requirement, the prospective enjoyment would constitute a reason for going ahead. But his clear perception of the requirement insulates the prospective enjoyment—of which, for a satisfying conception of the virtue, we should want him to have a vivid appreciation—from engaging his inclinations at all. Here and now, it does not count for him as any reason for acting in that way."[848] The temperate person must be distinguished from the insensible person, the (merely) enkratic (or continent), and the self-indulgent. The enkratic is tempted by an intemperate action, but forces herself to obey a contrary requirement; the insensible person is simply left cold by intemperate actions; and the self-indulgent — indulges.

---

[844] Aristotle, NE, II.6.1107a1-4.
[845] Aristotle, NE, III.10. 1117b20-25. Insensibility is so rare, says Aristotle, that it lacks a name (NE, III.11.1119a10).
[846] Aristotle, NE, III.10.1118a20-25.
[847] Aristotle, NE, III.10.1118a30.
[848] McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," §10.

— "But what does any of this have to do with integrity? Surely temperance is a minor virtue — refraining from gobbling too many grapes? And even supposing that we take Aristotle's pun seriously, what could it mean to say that sophrosune preserves phronesis?" — Just as phronesis determines the mean with which virtues of character are concerned, so sophrosune regulates that mean. Virtue, says Aristotle, "is concerned with pleasures and pains."[849] The capacity to experience pleasure is something we share with the other animals.[850] The human "who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights [or takes pleasure] in this very fact is temperate."[851] The idea here is that truly virtuous action is well oiled with pleasure; that is, it is freed from characterological friction or resistance. The agent is able clearly to perceive the appropriate action because it is not obscured by prospective pain. In other words, when one's character is moderated by sophrosune, it attains an untroubled equilibrium. Here I agree with Zwicky's suggestion that the agent with integrity is free to experience her feelings: she does not need to fear that they will shove her around.[852] But I think that she makes a mistake in her decision to call this freedom *enkrateia*.[853] Aryeh Kosman is eloquent concerning the contrast between enkrateia and sophrosune:

> The form of σωφροσύνη that interests Plato and Aristotle alike as an ideal virtue is the virtue that transcends this mode of strong-willed containment [viz., enkrateia] and is linked to the wisdom by which the sophron is freed from the need for restraint. This is the theme in many so-called wisdom traditions, but I think that we all know the distinction from very homely contexts. Think of the difference between the kind of 'journeyman' skill by which an artisan achieves control and mastery as the result of intense effort, and the ease with which the master craftsman works, or think of the difference between the equestrian skill of a novice who successfully controls the horse, but with effort and struggle, and the apparent

---

[849] Aristotle, NE, II.3.1104b5-10.
[850] Aristotle, NE, II.3.1104b30-35.
[851] Aristotle, NE, II. 3.1104b5.
[852] Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," p. 94.
[853] Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," pp. 87, 91.

> effortlessness of the experienced rider. It doesn't even look like control, but to hold the reins that lightly is a consummate achievement.[854]

Recall Aristotle's analysis: unlike arete, enkrateia is marked by internal conflict. It implies that the soul is in a state of disintegration: there is a civil war among its parts. By contrast, in integrity (understood as sophrosune), "our useful bits and pieces ... settle naturally into place — the result of a kind of chiropractic of the soul."[855]

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the interrelation that Aristotle notes between phronesis and sophrosune. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that integrity might be helpfully understood as the characterological virtue of sophrosune; how would this hypothesis sit with Scherkoske's analysis? As an executive virtue which enables or unifies the other virtues, sophrosune would lack a distinctive content; and our hypothesis would further be vulnerable to the charge of naïvety. But I am happy to concede these points. Recall that attention lacks a distinctive content; and recall McDowell's observation that Aristotle's innocence — his naïvety — is not a flaw. Recall further McDowell's claim that a virtue of character, "strictly so called, involves a harmony of intellect and motivation ... Practical wisdom *is* the properly moulded state of the motivational propensities, in a reflectively adjusted form; the sense in which it is a state of the intellect does not interfere with its also being a state of the desiderative element."[856] There are some things we cannot perceive without our characters having been appropriately shaped. Phronesis and sophrosune converge at the waist of the soul's hourglass where thought pours into character and character effloresces as thought. Regarded as a phronetic capacity to perceive salience, the integrative perspective may be called "epistemic"; but regarded as sophrosune (moderation) of character which grounds and enables this capacity, integrity may be called "characterological." That is, phronesis (attention) and sophrosune (integrity) are the same virtue, viewed from different angles. The integrated agent is one for whom attentiveness is second nature.

---

[854] Kosman, "Self-Knowledge and Self-Control," §4 (p. 16).
[855] Zwicky, "Alcibiades' Love," p. 92.
[856] McDowell, AMP, §11 (p. 40).

CHAPTER 14. Discussion: Images of Integrity: Ecological

Summary

¶ I argue that the relational constitution of the Spinozistic individual, its trans-individual or ecological integrity, gives us some reason to imagine Spinoza's ontology as ecological. I further suggest that Spinoza's central concepts of conatus, joy, and love offer a way out of a scholarly disagreement concerning the alleged anthropocentrism of his ethics. However, that way out, with its ontological egalitarianism, seems to imply the danger of the interchangeability of individuals. This danger is one of the reasons that Williams's defence of individual integrity remains necessary. Genevieve Lloyd and Arne Naess disagree over whether Spinoza's ethics are anthropocentric. Spinoza distinguishes between two plateaus of ontological description: at the macro-ecological scale, there is infinite substance; and at the micro-ecological scale (at the scale of Zwicky's detail and Williams's individual) are the finite modes. Any individual, human or non-human, is endeavouring to express itself — to persist in its individuality. Ethics will emerge out of the (quasi-Hobbesian) recognition that an individual's self-preservation is better facilitated if it cooperates with others. It is in Spinoza's "physics" ("a brief preface concerning the nature of bodies") that he provides his account of individuality. Any moderately complex body is differentiated through a dynamic ordering of its components: what a body is, is how it moves. An individual body qua individual is the perseverance of a local configuration of extended substance. But since that configuration is caused and preserved by other individuals, each and every individual is dependent. Thus an individual body exhibits two fundamental characteristics: on the one hand, its distinctive dynamic ordering, the tendency of that ordering to preserve itself; and on the other hand, its relations of interdependence with other bodies. Both deep ecologists such as Naess and feminist philosophers such as Lloyd have emphasized the relational constitution of the Spinozistic individual. I use the term "integrity" to indicate the degree to which an individual succeeds in sustaining the dynamic ordering of its components; in my usage, this term is synonymous with Spinoza's term "virtue": that is, power, or capability, to

persevere in one's own being. By contrast with William's individualistic conception of integrity, the conception which I find in Spinoza is trans-individual: the emphasis falls on complex wholes. Even the "individual" finite modes turn out to be internally complex. Integration, according to Spinoza's imagery, is not a property that attaches exclusively to an individual, but one that obtains across individuals; the power of one individual is enhanced insofar as she cooperates with others. Having glossed Spinoza's ontology, I address the debate among Lloyd, Naess, and Karen Houle. Lloyd interprets Spinoza's ethics anthropocentrically, and denies that they can serve as a ground for environmental ethics. She reads Spinoza's human individuals as Hobbesian, self-preserving rational contractors; what is most advantageous to such an individual is to enter into agreements with other contractors. Lloyd is right to identify Spinoza's indebtedness to Hobbes, but she fails to acknowledge their very different metaphysics. For Spinoza, a finite mode is a modification of the infinite substance (God or Nature); and Spinoza's politics is a special case that does not exhaust his ethics. At the centre of his ethics is the suggestion that an individual can enjoy the joy of a beloved individual (where "joy" is defined as the transition to a state of greater perfection). Or, in my terminology, an individual can become more integrated by experiencing the integration of a beloved. An individual who understands this possibility has a motive to enhance or protect the integration of others. Nothing prevents such relations from obtaining between members of different species. But there is a further problem: from the perspective of a collective, such as an ecosystem or a political community, the individuals who are the components are interchangeable with components of the same type. In other words, the stability of the collective can involve the sacrifice of its component individuals. I conclude with Houle's suggestion that there are resources in Spinoza's work for circumventing this danger; in particular, I avail myself of Spinoza's intuition. This "third kind" of knowledge is attention to particulars. We shall search in vain for general ethical prescriptions in Spinoza. But since any given particular is an expression of the infinite substance, any one may be a site for love, enjoyment, and enhanced understanding.

Simone Weil:

Car l'amitié est pour moi un bienfait incomparable, sans mesure, une source de vie ... Ainsi littéralement l'amitié donne à ma pensée toute la part de sa vie ...[857]

§14.1. In this chapter, I shall argue that the relational constitution of the Spinozistic individual, its trans-individual or ecological integrity, gives us some reason to imagine Spinoza's ontology as ecological. I further suggest that Spinoza's central concepts of conatus, joy, and love offer a way out of a scholarly disagreement concerning the alleged anthropocentrism of his ethics. However, that way out, with its ontological egalitarianism, seems to imply the danger of the interchangeability of individuals. This danger is one of the reasons that Williams's defence of individual integrity remains necessary. Regarding the question whether Spinoza's ontology is ecological, there is a scholarly disagreement, notably among Genevieve Lloyd, Arne Naess, and Karen Houle, and it concerns non-negligible tensions in Spinoza's text. Lloyd concisely articulates one nerve of that disagreement: she claims that "Spinoza manages to combine a strong rejection of *anthropocentric perception* with an equally strong affirmation of a man-centred *morality*."[858] If I may rephrase the point slightly, there seems to be, minimally, an inconsistency between Spinoza's avowedly non-anthropocentric ontology, and several of his explicitly anthropocentric remarks about ethics. On the other hand, Naess concludes his response to Lloyd by insisting that "Spinoza was personally what we today call a speciesist, but his system was not speciesist."[859] In other words, Naess suggests that the inconsistency should be resolved in favour of the fundamental ontological system; that system certainly permits, and even encourages, human-specific cooperation, but it offers no grounds for *restricting* ethics to inter-human relations.

A cursory glance at Spinoza's ethics will show that it is composed to flow from his epistemology and ontology. According to that ontology, all individuals are expressions of one whole which Spinoza calls "God or Nature." And insofar as a given

---

[857] Simone Weil to Joë Bousquet, 12 May 1942 (*Pensées sans ordre*, p. 82).
[858] Lloyd, "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics," p. 295.
[859] Naess, "Environmental Ethics and Spinoza's Ethics," p. 323.

individual can truly (or adequately) understand what it is, to that degree it becomes capable of expressing itself, and thus the whole, more adequately. But an individual is a partial expression, which is (necessarily) dependent on, and assisted by, other partial expressions. The upshot, for ethics, is that an individual's need to express itself, properly understood, propels it to assist the expressive needs of others. Whatever distinction might obtain between humans and non-humans, that distinction is not sufficiently ontologically deep to license the exploitation of the non-human world. On the contrary: considered ontologically, any individual, human or non-human, is a potential site for the exercise of Spinozistic nobility or generosity.[860] However, while I am inclined to read Spinoza's ontology as ecological, such a reading presents its own ethical difficulty: an individual, insofar as it can be conceived in its relational context, appears unique; but insofar as it can be conceived under one of the attributes of Nature, it appears (substantially) indistinguishable from all other individuals. In other words, Spinoza's ontological monism implies an ethically promising egalitarianism, but that egalitarianism may turn out to be so total that it renders individuals interchangeable.

That such an egalitarianism could arguably extend to, for example, the HI virus, has been taken by some critics to reduce the position to absurdity.[861] The objection must be taken seriously. However, Spinoza does not claim that I must promote the conatus of something which threatens to destroy me; what he does suggest is that I should endeavour not to be determined by hatred.[862] Naess's distinction between the hunter who shoots a fox for fun (or, I might add, out of hatred), and another hunter who shoots a fox as part of a plan to exterminate rabies,[863] seems apt here; one might also contrast a trophy-hunter with a hunter in a subsistence economy. (Of course, at another level, the destruction of rabies could reopen the social ecologist's reductio objection. But the point remains that Spinoza is not arguing that everything whatever must be preserved.)

---

[860] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIP59S: "the desire whereby every individual, according to the dictates of reason alone, endeavors to assist others."

[861] Vide Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology"; and also Norma's objection in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 165.

[862] Cf. Spinoza, E, IIIP47, IVP45.

[863] Naess, "Environmental Ethics and Spinoza's Ethics," p. 317.

My interest in Spinoza is connected especially with his account of what it means to be an individual or particular thing. We may recall that Spinoza's *Ethics* opens with his ontology;[864] then, in the second part, it turns to his epistemology; and the remaining three parts concern his ethical psychology. Toward the end of the first part, Spinoza claims that an individual is a finite modification of the holistically inclusive substance; that is, an individual is a *part* of Nature. "Particular things," he says, "are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way."[865] In what follows, it will be important to remember that Spinoza's ontology divides into two kinds of things: those that are absolutely self-sufficient (the one substance, expressed through its attributes) and those that are dependent (the modes of that substance).[866] And finite modes are dependent in a fourfold sense: they are both ontologically and epistemologically dependent, and they are dependent both on substance and on each other. That is, a finite mode is caused by things other than itself, and it cannot be adequately understood independently of its causes.[867] It seems to follow that a finite mode, qua finite mode, can never be *adequately* understood, because the causal nexus in which it is contextualized ramifies to infinity. It will also be important to remember Spinoza's insistence that mind and body are one and the same thing, expressed in different ways;[868] and to remember that he defines the mind as the idea of the body.[869]

An implication of these claims is that the mind, like the body, is relationally constituted, and that its boundaries are no more closed or stable than those of the body. This implication would seem to speak to an important aspect of experience: that my mind is shaped by the ideas of others. However, this implication is not widely discussed in the commentaries.[870] Remarks about the body's ontology should be applicable, mutatis mutandis, to the ontology of the mind. But Spinoza does not explicitly tell us *how* a mind is distinguished from other minds. We cannot simply *derive* that differentiation from the

---

[864] For some background, vide Appendix B.1.
[865] Spinoza, E, IP25C. Cf. Spinoza, IIDef7.
[866] Spinoza, E, IA1.
[867] Spinoza, E, IA4.
[868] Spinoza, E, IIP21S.
[869] Spinoza, E, IIP13. Vide Winch, "Mind, Body & Ethics in Spinoza," §1 (pp. 216-219).
[870] For an exception, vide Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, p. 17.

differentiation of the corresponding body without prioritizing the attribute of extension, and thus violating Spinoza's insistence on the co-equivalence of the attributes. (Some, like Edwin Curley, interpret Spinoza as a materialist, but I think that this interpretation cannot be accurate, for the reason just cited. Spinoza's originality could instead suggest to us that our binary categories — materialism/idealism — are inadequate.) However, by *analogy* with the criterion for distinguishing bodies, it is not implausible to suggest that a mind is distinguished from other minds in respect of the "absolutely infinite intellect" (the parallel, under the attribute of thought, for motion-and-rest).[871] A definite proportion of motion-and-rest is a way of ordering bodily components (namely, less complex bodies) to form an individual body; analogously, ideas would be ordered proportionately to form an individual mind.

§14.2. In Part II of the Ethics, the part concerning epistemology, one finds a section which is sometimes referred to as Spinoza's "physics," and which he refers to as "a brief preface concerning the nature of bodies."[872] It is here, in this section, that Spinoza offers his account of individuality, and he develops this account by focussing on the individual body.[873] An individual body is a finite modification, under the attribute of extension, of the same substance which is modified, under the attribute of thought, to form an individual mind. Let me discuss some of Spinoza's conditions for individuating a body. Spinoza tells us that bodies are not substantially distinguishable, but that one body is distinguished from another through a definite proportion of motion-and-rest.[874] That is, any moderately complex body is differentiated through a *dynamic ordering* of its components, which ordering is distinctive relative to the ordering of other bodies.[875] In some abstract sense, *what* a body is, is *how* it moves, and it is worth observing that the

---

[871] Vide Spinoza, Letter 64.

[872] Spinoza, E, II13S ff.

[873] The individuation of the mind is left implicitly structurally analogous. That is, one is expected to remember that the ordering of ideas is the same as the ordering of bodies (Spinoza, E, IIP7).

[874] Spinoza, E, IIP13L1. What does Spinoza mean by "motion-and-rest"? That question is too complicated to address here. But I can say that motion-and-rest is an example of an immediate infinite mode under the attribute of extension (Letter 64), that it is common to all bodies (IIP13L2), and can therefore be conceived only adequately (IIP38).

[875] Vide Spinoza, E, IIP13Def.

motion need not be singular or homogeneous. I may perhaps illustrate this thesis with a slightly exotic anecdote reported by Norman Malcolm, concerning an exercise with his wife Leonida Malcolm and his friend Wittgenstein:

> Once after supper, Wittgenstein, my wife and I went for a walk on Midsummer Common. We talked about the movements of the bodies of the solar system. It occurred to Wittgenstein that the three of us should represent the movements of the sun, earth, and moon, relative to one another. My wife was the sun and maintained a steady pace across the meadow; I was the earth and circled her at a trot. Wittgenstein took the most strenuous part of all, the moon, and ran around me while I circled my wife.[876]

Although Wittgenstein and the Malcolms are moving differently from each other, they are preserving a proportion of motion among themselves which is relatively different from that of the surrounding landscape; and insofar as they do preserve that proportion of motion, Spinoza would say that they form one body, a sort of human solar system.[877] As Hans Jonas has emphasized, this criterion for individuating a body is formal or structural: considered solely in terms of its content, or substance, any given body is indistinguishable from the body of Nature. An individual body qua individual is the continuation, or perseverance, of a local configuration of extended substance.[878] I might make the point metaphorically by suggesting that a body is the performed choreography of its components.

But it is not only that choreography. A body is constantly interacting with other bodies, and it can neither exist nor be understood independently of them. On the contrary, Spinoza asserts that "[t]he human body *needs* for its preservation a great many other bodies."[879] A body depends on others not only for its preservation, but also for its

---

[876] Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, pp. 51-52.

[877] Cf. Spinoza, E, IIP13Def: "... if they ... preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies ... all together form one body."

[878] Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism," p. 265.

[879] Spinoza, E, IIPost4; emphasis added. In order to persevere as itself, a body must be exchanging components with its environment (cf. IIP13L4). He further asserts that full independence is an ontological impossibility: "we can never bring it about that we should need nothing outside ourselves to preserve our own being and that we should live a life

individuated existence. The proportion of motion-and-rest, the performed choreography that *individuates* a given body, is, for Spinoza, the effect *of some other body*; in general, any individual is determined "to exist and to act" by another individual;[880] and a specific body "in motion or rest must have been determined to motion or rest by another body."[881] From these claims, Spinoza infers his principle of inertia: "a body in motion will continue to move until it is determined to rest by another body, and a body at rest continues to be at rest until it is determined to move by another body."[882] And it is on analogy with this principle of inertia, as Curley has observed,[883] that Spinoza develops his crucial principle of conatus: "Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being. The conatus with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself."[884] The essence of an individual body, its conatus, is the continuation of the dynamic ordering, or form, of its components.[885]

Spinoza is suggesting that an individual body exhibits two ontologically fundamental characteristics: on the one hand, its distinctive dynamic ordering, the tendency of that ordering to preserve itself; and on the other hand, its relations of interdependence with other bodies, which have originally determined the dynamic ordering, and which continue to affect it.[886] The second characteristic is especially important for my purposes, because it is one that both ecological ethicists, such as Naess, and feminist philosophers, such as Lloyd, have been concerned to emphasize: *a*

---

quite unrelated to things outside ourselves" (E, IVP18S).

[880] Spinoza, E, IP28. In order to be a particular, it must be determined by another particular, viz., another finite mode. For if it were determined by an infinite attribute or mode it would be itself infinite (cf. IPP21-23). Of course, it is mysterious how any finite mode has managed to exist, since the possibility of its existence seems foreclosed by the conjunction of the claim that only the infinite can follow from the infinite, and the claim that infinite substance is absolutely the first cause (IP16C3).

[881] Spinoza, E, IIP13L3.

[882] Spinoza, E, IIP13L3C. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II.1-2.

[883] Curley, "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy," p. 368.

[884] Spinoza, E, IIIPP6-7. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, VI.1.

[885] Lloyd is right to state that "the conatus of [an extended] thing consists in the maintenance of a certain ratio of motion and rest" (Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, p. 15). Again, the essence of a body is not its content, which is identical with that of other bodies and which may be exchanged with them, but its form, the dynamic ordering of its content. Of course, this claim presupposes that a distinction between form and content is intelligible.

[886] Cf. Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism," p. 273.

Spinozistic individual is relationally constituted. Furthermore, an understanding of a given individual's being and well-being must involve some understanding of the individuals who have affected and continue to affect it. In fact, the issue of relational constitution is an issue on which Naess and Lloyd *agree*, although I do not know if they are aware that they do, because that issue is not featured prominently in their disagreement (which I shall discuss shortly). In other work, Naess has stressed the relational constitution of organisms,[887] and Lloyd has written on the relational constitution of the Spinozistic individual body.[888]

§14.3. I shall introduce a term which is not indigenous to Spinoza's system, but which I find nevertheless useful for understanding a feature of that system: I shall use the term *integrity* to indicate the degree to which an individual succeeds in sustaining the dynamic ordering of its components. Another way of phrasing my point is to say that individuation is integration; that is, an individual exists insofar as its components are integrated. But we have seen, I hope, that an individual's ability to sustain itself depends, to a large extent, on others. An individual exists as a mixture of actions and passions, affecting others and being affected by them. To the degree that this mixture is integrated, it is distinguishable as an individuated whole. Thus my use of the concept of integrity is synonymous with that of *virtue* in Spinoza: power, or capability, to persevere in one's own being.[889] And my use of the concept is also close to its use in the work of Aldo Leopold.[890] This use of integrity is different from its use in contemporary moral theory since Williams inaugurated discussion of the concept. As I have complained, in the hands of Williams, integrity is primarily conceptualized as an agent-centred virtue: the emphasis falls on the integrity or autonomy of the individual agent in opposition to larger moral and social institutions which pose potential threats to that integrity. This opposition is criticized by Aurelia Armstrong in her study of Spinozistic relationality: according to one conservative view of autonomy, social influence is (wrongly) conceived as

---

[887] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 56.

[888] Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, especially Chapter 1 ("Substance and Selfhood"), pp. 11, 28-29.

[889] Spinoza, E, IIIP55C2D, IVDef8, IVP24.

[890] Cf. Leopold, "The Land Ethic," pp. 210, 224.

something that "must be resisted or overcome if authenticity is to be realized and autonomous selfhood achieved."[891] Even Cheshire Calhoun, who is critical of Williams, and who insists that she conceives integrity as a social virtue, ends up sounding individualistic when she gets down to her formula, in which the agent stands for something before other deliberators. The gesture occurs in ostensible reference to others, but it is the individual agent who takes the autonomous stand.

By contrast with this agent-centred conception of integrity, the conception which I find in Leopold and Spinoza is trans-individual. The emphasis falls, not on the individualized agent, but on complex wholes or collectives; and one becomes concerned with how well these collectives hang together, where their hanging together conduces to the perfection of their components. And the components, what Williams would understand as individual agents, are not themselves simple. In other work, both on Spinoza and on relationality, Lloyd has encouraged philosophers to re-imagine what it means to be an individual: she thinks about "what it might mean for the philosophical imagination to move from the collectivity down to the individual rather than in the other direction: the self takes on an inner multiplicity which mirrors the complex affective interaction of bodies. The complexity and multiplicity of collectivities is internalised into individual identity."[892] Rather than strategizing a way for an individualized agent to defend herself against super-individual institutions, Lloyd is proposing that we might helpfully imagine the individual as a micro-complex (what I call a *micro-ecology*) who is engaged in reciprocal adjustments with other micro- and macro-complexes.

I might try to focus the foregoing by suggesting that we are faced with two contrasting images of individuality, and correspondingly contrasting images of integrity. Despite his best intentions, Williams seems to be held captive by a picture: he seems to be picturing the individual as encircled in a sort of ethico-metaphysical epidermis, and integrity then consists in keeping that epidermis inviolate, unhurt. This picture is compelling because, as I have acknowledged, it is sometimes accurate: unquestionably, individuals are susceptible to the threat of external violence against which they are forced to defend themselves. However, I want to suggest that self-defence is not the only way in

---

[891] Armstrong, "Autonomy and the Relational Individual: Spinoza and Feminism," p. 48.
[892] Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, p. 77.

which individuality and integrity may be expressed. Because we also have available to us the Spinozistic image of the individual as a dance of psychophysical energy constantly exchanging with other dances; and integrity then consists in integration, the co-adaptation of the dancers in their dance. If that seems too picturesque, I invite us to consider something more familiar, such as the fact that we gather at conferences to exchange ideas. Nor is such exchange always enhanced by guarding against intruders from other departments; on the contrary, the philosophical exchange can be enhanced by the occasional lateral gene transfer from the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, or some nonconformist echolocation from the culture of sperm whales. (Nor are we hurt by the infrequent murmur of metaphorical imagination.) Integration, according to this image, is less a property of an individual than it is a relation that obtains across individuals; and the integration of a collective is compatible with a variety of changes and exchanges. These contrasting images of integrity correspond to two ordinary uses of the word: as I have indicated, sometimes we use "integrity" to mean uprightness of character, especially in contexts of duress; and sometimes we use "integrity" to mean the degree of coherence exhibited by a complex structure, such as a work of art or an ecology. I do not think that there is anything wrong with either image, or either use. I am simply advocating that the latter image and use should not be forgotten, as it has been largely forgotten by contemporary moral philosophy.

§14.4. The ecological implications of Spinoza's ontology, as I understand it, are expansive. What constitutes an individual body, or integrated whole, at one stratum of description may be a component of a more complex body at another stratum, as illustrated by Spinoza's well-known image of the worm immersed in the blood, who regards each particle of blood as an individuated whole, while, at another descriptive stratum, it is the blood which is the individuated whole, and which subsumes both the worm and the particles.[893] And so on. "If we thus continue to infinity," writes Spinoza, "we shall readily conceive the whole of Nature as one individual whose parts — that is, all the constituent bodies — vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as

---

[893] Spinoza, Letter 32.

a whole."[894] I wish to emphasize that the integrity of an individual body at any given stratum does not depend upon homogenization or simplification. An individual may be extremely complex; it may incorporate many different component bodies, or component proportions of motion-and-rest, and — this is an important point — those components may even be exchanged with the environment, provided that some dynamic ordering is sustained across the various components. Even Lloyd, who is very suspicious of Spinoza's potential for ecological ethics, admits that his ontological overview of nested complexes is close to "our modern concept of an ecosystem—an interconnected totality of organisms and their environment."[895]

Having sketched some of Spinoza's ontology, let me discuss the disagreement to which Lloyd is party.[896] According to Lloyd, there are at least two major obstacles to enlisting Spinoza as a progenitor for ecological ethics. (1) Spinoza explicitly claims that there is "no individual thing in the universe more advantageous to [humanity] than a [human] who lives by the guidance of reason."[897] And (2) in a now notorious scholium, he denies that there can be grounds for proscribing the human exploitation of non-humans.[898] Both obstacles presuppose the conjunction of two further theses: first, that ethical relations are conditional upon the sharing of a common or similar nature among the relata; and second, that humans and non-humans have radically different natures. Since Spinoza is not really in the business of legislating moral proscriptions, I consider the first obstacle to be more substantial than the second. Lloyd writes, "What environmental philosophers seem to be looking for ... is a basis for the judgment that some activities that are regarded as good for human beings should be curtailed *because*

---

[894] Spinoza, E, IIP13S2.

[895] Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, p. 12. Curiously, in the same breath, Lloyd denies that Spinoza sees the world "as a unified body." On the contrary, that is exactly (one of the ways) he sees it: conceived as extended substance, the world is absolutely, infinitely unified (non-partite). Vide Spinoza, E, IP13C & IP15S.

[896] Lloyd has emerged as one of the authorities on Spinoza, and Naess has receded from view, but their disagreement occurred at the time of Lloyd's first published paper on Spinoza (1980). In her first book on Spinoza, published fourteen years later (1994), Lloyd's position on Spinoza and ecology remains unchanged (vide Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, Chapter 5 ["Dominance and Difference"], especially pp. 154-160).

[897] Spinoza, E IVP35C1.

[898] Spinoza, E IVP37S1.

they are bad for other parts of nature."[899] And she claims that there is "no way for Spinoza to even express the view that our goods ought to be curtailed for the sake of the goods of other animals."[900] The thought seems to be that if exploiting non-humans is good for humans — that is, if diminishing the perfection of non-humans conduces to increasing the perfection of humans — then Spinoza offers no resources for proscribing that exploitation. I wish to make two points concerning this matter: first, it seems that we have serious reason to doubt the truth of that antecedent; that is, we have reason to doubt the claim that it is good for us to exploit the non-human world. Second, I concede that Lloyd is right to suggest that Spinoza does not offer resources for justifying the desired proscription. But I question her assumption that ecological ethics is, or ought to be, preoccupied with justifying such proscriptions, and I question the implication that a failure to supply such a justification is a failure for ethics.

Let me then focus on the first obstacle, which amounts to the suggestion that ethical relations, whatever those are, are properly relations among humans. Spinoza's ethics is rooted in his ontological principle of conatus, the principle that an individual endeavours to persevere in its essence. Lloyd claims that Spinoza grounds his "morality in a Hobbesian drive towards self-preservation,"[901] and she thus elaborates Spinozist morality as an institution constructed by self-interested rational contractors. This claim, and its elaboration, cannot be exegetically accurate. Spinoza's conatus is not without Hobbesian associations, as various commentators have pointed out,[902] but the Spinozist conatus is not identifiable with the Hobbesian egocentric drive,[903] because the former is contextualized in a strongly un-Hobbesian ontology. For Spinoza, an individual's conatus is its endeavouring to persevere in its own being, but what an individual *is*, ontologically, is a partial expression of God or Nature. Spinoza insists that "[t]he principle that guides me and shapes my attitude to life is this: no deity, nor anyone but the envious, [rejoices] in my weakness and my misfortune ... On the contrary, the more we are affected with

---

[899] Lloyd "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics," p. 302.
[900] Lloyd "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics," p. 301.
[901] Lloyd, "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics," 296.
[902] Cf. Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 107.
[903] The egocentric drive is not as foregrounded by Hobbes as its reputation might lead one to expect. But vide Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII.3.

[joy], the more we pass to a state of greater perfection; that is, the more we necessarily participate in the divine nature."[904] Always, the Spinozistic conatus toward self-perfection must be understood in its ontological context.

Anyway, in her paper, Lloyd does interpret Spinoza's ethics as a variation on Hobbesian contractarian morality. My worry about this interpretation is simply that it seems to conflate Spinoza's ethics with his politics. Spinoza's politics, at least as it is explicated in the *Ethics*, does sound Hobbesian.[905] Spinoza draws a distinction between the state of nature and the political state, and a corresponding distinction between the natural right of anything to exercise its power, and the protection extended by the state to its citizens. And the political apparatus is supposed to evolve, eventually, from the human conatus. In a state of nature, individuals are pushed around by passive emotions, and consequently they are dangerous to each other. Human individuals, like all other individuals, endeavour to persevere in their essence. Furthermore, humans can rationally contract into a political state, and thus surrender, to the state, their natural right to retribution; thus empowered, the state should frighten its citizens to refrain from destroying each other, and so compensate the suspension of natural right by providing protection. The human conatus is enhanced by contracting into the political state.

But I fear that Lloyd conflates the political state with what she calls the "moral community," and conflates the state's protections with what she calls "moral rights." She then concludes that there is no basis, within Spinoza's ethics, for extending moral rights to non-humans, because non-humans cannot rationally contract into the moral community. I think that Lloyd is entitled to draw this conclusion: for Spinoza, non-humans are excluded from citizenry; and if one is lobbying for something like animal rights, then Spinoza is not the place to look for help. But Naess suggests that Lloyd's prior identification of Spinoza's political state with the so-called "moral community" is illicit. The political state is indeed an effective instrument for enhancing the human conatus; it is definitely useful for humans to collaborate politically. But the political state does not exhaust Spinoza's ethics. For Spinoza, ethical relations are more fundamental and extend further than political contracts.

---

[904] Spinoza, E, IVP45S.
[905] Cf. Spinoza, E, IVP37S2.

I have said that Spinoza's ethics is rooted in his principle of conatus. And I agree with Curley that this principle applies to anything whatever.[906] Spinoza's ethics is also rooted in emotions of joy and love. According to his abstract definitions, joy is a "transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection,"[907] and love is "[joy] accompanied by the idea of an external cause."[908] An individual's conatus is its endeavouring to persevere in its own essence, to express itself more adequately, to become more active, more perfect, more integrated (these are all roughly synonymous). What is good for an individual is what assists its conatus, what perfects it or affects it with joy. The mind endeavours to think about those ideas whose corresponding bodies assist the conatus of its own body.[909] In other words, we love those things that affect our bodies with joy, and we experience joy by thinking about what we love. We become more perfect, according to Spinoza, by thinking about what we love. Furthermore, Spinoza proposes that one "who imagines that what he loves is affected with [joy or sadness] will likewise be affected with [joy or sadness]."[910] It seems to me that Spinoza's entire ethics is nascent in this proposition. Let me attempt to paraphrase what he seems to be proposing; but I should say that I find it very difficult to paraphrase.

My body's integrity is sustained and enhanced by what I love, and my mind is integrated and clarified by thinking about what I love. That is, in thinking about what I love, I feel joy, I become more perfect. Since I naturally endeavour to become more perfect, I endeavour to think about what I love. And here is the crucial move in Spinoza's demonstration: the more joyful or perfect a thing is, the easier it is to think about. (I might try to phrase this point slightly differently by suggesting that the more clearly something is expressed, the easier it is to understand.) Spinoza attempts to make this point in terms of degrees of reality ("[joy] posits the existence of that which feels [joy]"),[911] but I find those terms difficult to accept, and expect that others will find them

---

[906] Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 107.
[907] Spinoza, E, IIIDefAff2; cf. IIIP11S.
[908] Spinoza, E, IIIDefAff6; cf. IIIP13S. The square brackets indicate that I am replacing Shirley's "pleasure" with Curley's "joy." The Latin is *laetitia*. Cf. Shirley, "Preface," *Ethics*, p. 29.
[909] Spinoza, E, IIIP12.
[910] Spinoza, E, IIIP21.
[911] Spinoza, E, IIIP21D.

similarly difficult, and so I have rephrased his point. So the joy of what I love is conducive to its thinkability, which is conducive to my feeling joy. I enjoy the joy of what I love, I am perfected through its perfection. From my conatus to perfect myself flows the desire to perfect those whom I love. What is lacking, it seems, is something like a moral prescription to love as many things as one can. But it is questionable whether any such prescription can be supplied, and whether it would even be appropriate to supply one. What I would especially like to avoid is the image of concentrically expanding circles of concern, with the self at the centre. It seems to me that the self is rather placed in variously overlapping networks of association, and it is not at the centre of any of them, although it is sometimes a sphere of intersection.

The upshot of the foregoing discussion is that Spinoza's ethics centres around concepts of conatus, joy, and love; and such an ethics can be only arbitrarily restricted to inter-human relations. The debate, in the commentaries, about whether human and non-human natures are sufficiently similar to license political collaboration is an idle debate. And I regard Spinoza's own campaign to establish a radical difference between human and non-human natures to be unsupported by his ontology. According to that ontology, all individuals endeavour to persevere in their own essences, and the joy, the increase of perfection, of any individual is potentially enjoyable by another. If a human can experience joy in the presence of a non-human, then that human can relate ethically with that non-human. And, as a matter of fact, humans do experience such joy; that is, the human conatus toward self-preservation is assisted through the preservation of the non-human world.[912] I conclude that Spinoza's ontology is ecological. However, I hinted earlier that a different ethical difficulty dogs his ontology, and I would like to say a few words about that difficulty.

§14.5. As I have suggested, according to Spinoza, an individual is ontologically dependent. Recall that an individual body needs other bodies, and one of the reasons that it needs them is that it is participating in an exchange with its environment, an exchange of parts. The individual is capable of sustaining its integrity throughout this exchange: the

---

[912] There is a risk of equivocating between our "ordinary" usages of words such as love and joy, and Spinoza's technical definitions of these same words.

condition of that integrity is not the irreplaceable specificity of this part, but rather the part's conformity to a generic nature: that is, a part of kind X may be exchanged indifferently with other parts of the same kind. For example, my body needs protein, but that need does not refer to this specific chick pea, or to that specific salmon. In an important lemma in his preface concerning the nature of bodies, Spinoza writes, "If from a body, or an individual thing composed of a number of bodies, certain bodies are separated, and at the same time a like number of other bodies of the same nature take their place, the individual thing will retain its nature as before, without any change in its form."[913] Now, at one stratum of description, an ecology can be understood as an individual body. And Spinoza's point is that the ecology can sustain its integrity despite the interchange of its component bodies; what we, at our stratum of experience, would regard as individuals: the rosemary growing in my window-box, the Cooper's hawk that perched on my neighbour's fence. Let me attempt to illustrate this point with another exotic passage, this time from J.M. Coetzee's Tanner Lecture on Human Values. Through the mask of his character Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee speaks cautiously about what he calls a kind of Platonic ecology-management:

> In the ecological vision, the salmon and the river-weeds and the water-insects interact in a great, complex dance with the earth and the weather. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. In the dance, each organism has a role: it is these multiple roles, rather than the particular beings who play them, that participate in the dance. As for the actual role-players, as long as they are self-renewing, as long as they keep coming forward, we need pay them no heed.
>
> I call this Platonic and I do so again. Our eye is on the creature itself but our mind is on the system of interactions of which it is the earthly, material embodiment.[914]

Coetzee is right, I think, to call this vision Platonic. Without digressing into an exegesis of Plato, I might suggest that both Plato and Spinoza face a similar difficulty, concerning the ethically precarious status of the individual in their ontologies.[lxxiv] That difficulty, as I

---

[913] Spinoza, E, IIP13L4.
[914] Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 150.

see it, may be focussed by stating that, insofar as one is concerned with sustaining the integrity of the whole, participating individuals may be fully interchangeable. Any given individual may be destroyed (its body may be dissolved) provided its office is reoccupied by another individual of the same species. This interchangeability is obviously an ethical difficulty, and I wish to focus on two interrelated features of that difficulty: first, it does violence to the experience of love: the experience of loving an individual is, among other things, the experience of the non-interchangeability, the uniqueness, of that individual. Second, the integrity of an ecology seems to afford extremely meagre grounds for ethical relations among the participants in that ecology. Suppose that I realize that I depend, for my existence and well-being, upon a holistic, relational network, and that I am then motivated to attempt to sustain the integrity of that network. But that motivation seems completely compatible with my behaving reprehensibly toward any given individual within the network.[915] Spinoza's ontology thus seems to offer less support than hoped for ecological ethics.[lxxv]

These difficulties are ultimately traceable back to Spinoza's holism or monism, his insistence that there is only one substance.[916] Remember Bayle, and his revulsion at Spinoza's "monstrous hypothesis." Bayle's most pressing complaint is that Spinoza's monism reduces to absurdity because it is incompatible with the ambitions of theodicy, the justification of God to humanity. He writes, "in Spinoza's system all those who say, 'The Germans have killed ten thousand Turks,' speak incorrectly and falsely unless they mean, 'God modified into Germans has killed God modified into ten thousand Turks,' and the same with all the phrases by which what men do to one another are expressed. These have no other true sense than this, 'God hates himself, he asks favors of himself and refuses them, he persecutes himself, he kills himself, he eats himself, he slanders himself, he executes himself; and so on.'"[917] Bayle's moral horror does not find much traction with Spinoza, who rejects any attempt at theodicy as hubristically anthropocentric.[918] But Bayle does have a point: it is not clear that the so-called "problem

---

[915] I owe this objection to Duncan MacIntosh.

[916] Spinoza, E, IP14C1.

[917] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 312.

[918] Spinoza, E, IApp: Objection: "If everything has followed from the necessity of God's most perfect nature, why does Nature display so many imperfections, such as rottenness

of evil" can even be coherently articulated within monism, much less explained there. If all individuals, including the ones who kill and eat each other, are modifications of one substance, and if these modifications, and their affects, follow necessarily from the nature of that substance, as Spinoza claims,[919] then it becomes very difficult to explain evaluative discriminations between modifications. Lloyd argues that we might welcome some aspect of this consequence, since it shifts preoccupations away from the praise and blame of individuals, and opens a space for thinking about collective responsibility.[920] I do not disagree with Lloyd on this point; but Bayle's complaint is not irrelevant at the level of the collectivity.[921]

For my purposes, there is another figure in the history of philosophy whose criticism is even more relevant, and that is Hegel. Hegel's major criticism focusses on the relationship between the infinite and the finite, or the one substance and its many modifications, and claims that this relationship does not afford any reality to the finite modifications. He compares Spinoza's philosophy to that of the ancient Greek Eleatic school.[922] The comparison is not inappropriate, but in fairness, I wish to note that, unlike Spinoza, Parmenides, the founder of the Eleatic school, insists that strictly speaking one cannot even manage to *think* about a multiplicity of individuals. By contrast, Spinoza fully accepts that individuals are thinkable, and devotes most of his book to discussing the epistemological and ethical rôle of the individual in his monistic ontology. But Hegel's complaint is worth considering. He writes,

> Spinoza maintains that there is no such thing as what is known as the
> world; it is merely a form of God, and in and for itself it is nothing. The

---

to the point of putridity, nauseating ugliness, confusion, evil, sin, and so on?" Response: "[T]he perfection of things should be measured solely from their own nature and power; nor are things more or less perfect to the extent that they please or offend human senses, serve or oppose human interests."

[919] Spinoza, E, IP16.

[920] Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, p. 74.

[921] Lloyd seems to suggest that it is misguided to think of a collectivity as an individual (*Collective Imaginings*, p. 74); but Spinoza would disagree: cf. E, IIDef7, Def following IIP13A2, IVP18S. I think however that Lloyd's point is rather directed at shifting emphasis, and insisting on the appropriateness also of thinking of individuals as collectivities.

[922] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 257.

world has no true reality, and all this that we know as the world has been cast into the abyss of the one identity. There is therefore no such thing as finite reality, it has no truth whatever; according to Spinoza what is, is God, and God alone. Therefore the allegations of those [like Bayle] who accuse Spinoza of atheism are the direct opposite of the truth; with him there is too much God.[923]

He continues, "As all differences and determinations of things and of consciousness simply go back to the One substance, one may say that in the system of Spinoza all things are merely cast down into this abyss of annihilation."[924] I might summarize Hegel's complaint by suggesting that if one starts with ontological monism, one cannot coherently save the phenomena of the multifarious individuals who are so familiar to us. How, exactly, *could* the many individuals be derivable from the absolutely unified substance? I must confess that I find Spinoza's text inscrutable on this question,[925] nor have I found a satisfactory explanation in the commentaries. One might show, contrary to Hegel, that Spinoza's ontology does afford coherent support for differentiated individuals. Indeed, both Lloyd[926] and Richard Keshen[927] have suggested that one might respond to Hegel by emphasizing what might be described as the horizontal axis of Spinoza's causal nexus. Along the vertical axis, which runs from substance down to modes, all individual modes are simply an effulgence of the immanent first cause, the one substance. But along the horizontal axis, which runs across the finite modifications, there is a field of inter-determination; and an individual in that field is *uniquely* determined by a convergence of certain other individuals. This reading affords ontological differentiation through the relational constitution of individuals. But the major objection would still obtain, for such an ontology could nevertheless be ethically neutral on the relations among individuals.

---

[923] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp. 281-282.
[924] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 288.
[925] Spinoza, E, IP21 and IP28.
[926] Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, p. 71.
[927] In conversation.

§14.6. There may be resources within Spinoza's philosophy for responding to the interchangeability objection. Spinoza claims that the mind's proper activity is thinking clearly, or understanding,[928] that the mind's highest virtue is to know Nature,[929] and that "[t]he highest conatus of the mind and its highest virtue is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge."[930] Spinoza distinguishes among three kinds of knowledge: imagination, reason, and intuition.[931] In an important scholium, he emphasizes "the superiority of that knowledge of particular things which I have called 'intuitive' or 'of the third kind,' and its preferability to that abstract knowledge which I have called 'knowledge of the second kind.'"[932] He further claims that "[t]he more we understand particular things, the more we understand God."[933] Particular or individual things are finite modes, and finite modes are ontologically and epistemologically dependent on infinite substance, that is, God or Nature.[934] In short, insofar as one understands something about a particular expression, one understands something about the expresser. Furthermore, for an individual mind, individuals are indispensable for the understanding of Nature. However, this consideration does not really address the worries: the indispensability of individuals in general does not guarantee that any given individual will be regarded as indispensable. Infinite substance or Nature is impartial with respect to the finite modes or individuals, and this impartiality implies an ambiguous egalitarianism: on the one hand, every individual is a potential site for the exercise of careful attention; and, on the other hand, the exercise of that attention toward any given individual looks completely arbitrary.

Stressing the epistemological and ethical importance of particulars is Karen Houle's distinctive contribution to the discussion of Spinoza and ecological ethics. Houle claims that "[t]he particulars which cram our lives" — and she offers as examples "a brown oak leaf, a spotted mule deer, or Mount Yoho" — "are, in principle, conducive to

---

[928] Spinoza, E, IIIP1, IIIP3.
[929] Spinoza, E, IVP28.
[930] Spinoza, E, VP25.
[931] Spinoza, E, IIP40S2.
[932] Spinoza, E, VP36S.
[933] Spinoza, E, VP24.
[934] Vide Spinoza, E, IP25C, IDef3, IDef5, IA1 and IA4.

our perfection."[935] Insofar as one can recognize an individual as an expression of Nature, one may love that individual; which is to say, one may enjoy its joy; which is to say, an enhancement of its activity may constitute an enhancement of one's own. To phrase the point slightly differently, one can think more clearly about something which is more clearly expressed. The ecological upshot, for Houle, is that "the particulars in nonhuman nature are potential sites of our empowerment."[936] The human mind, out of a desire to understand Nature, may be motivated to assist in the preservation of non-human expressions of that Nature. Houle further acknowledges an aspect of Spinoza's ontology which Naess denies, and that is the truly radical extent of its egalitarianism. All things, insofar as they are individuated, exhibit a conatus, nor can this conatus be denied to what we are inclined to call inanimate things: for example, and contra Naess, members of the mineral kingdom;[937] and Houle goes further and adds "varieties of garbage, mutant bacteria, and hideous architecture, to name a few."[938] Thus she faces and accepts, very forthrightly, an objection that has been taken by some critics to reduce Naess's position to absurdity: there seems to be no principled way, within Spinoza's ontology, for discriminating against certain kinds of things whose conatus one might participate in preserving. I do not propose to resolve this controversy here. Houle writes, "In Spinoza, I understand the overriding virtuous stance as a human being to be one of respect ... This respect is the conviction behind Spinoza's refusal to set down his system of universal norms; rather, he suggests the cultivation of a particular attitude which is conducive to loving everything, loving God.... It does not require any one concrete action, nor forbid any."[939] Houle is, I think, right about this matter: Spinoza is no moralist, and what he offers us is not a *prescriptive* moral system. He proposes instead to educate us about certain ontological truths, and this education is a kind of therapy. I am therefore surprised that Houle concludes her discussion by re-inscribing anthropocentrism as a normative ideal. She writes,

---

[935] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," p. 429.

[936] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," p. 429.

[937] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," p. 424.

[938] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," p. 429, n. 42. Cf. Bennett, "The Force of Things."

[939] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," pp. 430-431.

> One arrives at [a] state [of perfection] through the love of particulars, in the most common case, through the active respect for each human being. Living among human beings teaches one, unlike living among oak leaves, the precariousness of constantly arriving at judgment in the face of indeterminacy.... Individual human beings present to other individual human beings a limitless moral challenge, a very tangible limitless understanding which resists closure the way a snippet of *Monarda augustifolia* does not.[940]

In other words, Houle is making an effort to explain what I took to be the first obstacle to a Spinozistic ecological ethics, and to resolve the inconsistency between the egalitarian ontology and the anthropocentric politics: she is suggesting that the reason that nothing is more useful to humanity than a human, is that a human provides an allegedly special opportunity for the exercise of the third kind of knowledge, intuition of particularity. The exercise of this knowledge perfects the human mind, and thus increases its capacity to be attentive. Non-human particulars are supposed to be somehow more obscure or resistant to intuition, more susceptible to abstraction and generic classification, and therefore to require a more perfected mind to appreciate them. And ecological ethics is supposed to be derivable eventually from a circumscribed humanism. But I confess that I find these suggestions puzzling. Houle's own testimony seems to stand in some tension with her explanatory apparatus: in a footnote, she writes, "Having had what I might characterize as an affectionate relationship with the *Basilicum opulata* plants in my garden last summer, hearing or writing that name evokes a definite fondness, especially in mid-December."[941]

I regard Houle's explanation of such affectionate relations as gratuitous. That is, the explanation seems theoretically motivated by an interest in resolving an inconsistency in Spinoza; but I don't believe that lived relations of affection between humans and non-humans require the sort of explanation that Houle offers. It is no less natural, nor does it require any more explanation, for a human to care about a garden, or a Golden Retriever, or a deer, than for a human to care about another human. I am content to accept that we

---

[940] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," p. 431.
[941] Houle, "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited," p. 430, n. 44.

just do care about such things. But I remain grateful to Houle for reorienting my attention toward the important rôle of intuitive attention in Spinoza.

I have tried to do a few things in this chapter. I have suggested that the relational constitution of the Spinozist individual, its trans-individual or ecological integrity, gives us some reason to imagine Spinoza's ontology as ecological. I have further suggested that Spinoza's central concepts of conatus, joy, and love offer a way out of the disagreement concerning the apparent anthropocentrism of his ethics. However, that way out, with its ontological egalitarianism, carries with it the threat of the interchangeability of individuals. Perhaps Spinoza's intuition of particulars is a resource, internal to his philosophy, for responding to this objection.

§14.7. In this long exegesis of Spinoza's philosophy, it might seem that we have strayed far from the central topic of attention. But we have actually circled back to the beginning. Weil's friend and biographer Simone Pétrement writes:

> Finally, she unquestionably owed something to Spinoza: his definition of the "third kind of knowledge," the knowledge at once intuitive and rational that was in her opinion the perfect knowledge.... She endeavored as much as possible through the mind alone to perceive each thing by apprehending all the rational relationships that form it and could be called its essence. She speaks later on in her *Notebooks* of this "ultra-Spinozist form of meditation" that she practiced while at Henry IV and that consisted of "contemplating an object fixedly with the mind, asking myself, 'What is it?' without thinking of any other object or relating it to anything else, for hours on end."[942]

I have tried to trace the genealogy of an ethical psychology which originates with Plato's thesis that virtue is knowledge. That thesis is tempered by Aristotle, who draws the distinction among phronesis, enkrateia, and akrasia. Aristotle's distinction transforms Plato's unconditional conviction into a more gradual spectrum: virtue *is* knowledge, but there are *degrees* of knowing, and the shape of one's character affects the relative clarity

---

[942] Pétrement, *Simone Weil: A Life*, pp. 39-40. Pétrement is quoting Weil, *Notebooks*, II.446.

of one's perception. Spinoza's third kind of knowledge is a descendent of Aristotelian phronesis. For Aristotle, virtues of character and thought — and especially sophrosune and phronesis — are interdependent. And for Spinoza, the third kind of knowledge is dependent on the first kind: imagination.[943] Similarly with Aristotle: all thinking depends ultimately on the imagination.[944] The proper focus of phronesis and the third kind of knowledge is the particular. In Spinoza, the particular is contextualized within a relational nexus: to understand *this* thing requires us to understand how it is related to *other* things. For Weil, too, the imagination is fundamental: she characterizes it as "this point of intersection between matter and a mind," "this bond of action and reaction between the world and my thought in myself alone."[945] To meditate on a particular image is to meditate on the point of intersection between the attender and everything else. "Let all the aspects of a situation be brought to mind, let the latter ponder them all equally, with an equal attention, equal as the light of the sun; then let a balance be struck; and then let the attention be directed towards that chosen aspect, so that the action may be carried out."[946]

---

[943] Cf. James, et al., "The Power of Spinoza," p. 53.

[944] Cf. Aristotle, DA, III.3-8; Ross, *Aristotle*, pp. 147-153.

[945] Weil, "Science and Perception," p. 69. Cf. Zwicky: "Primary process thought is the point at which the mind emerges from the body, 'like a mushroom out of its mycelium' as Freud puts it; and the point at which the body coalesces out of mind" ("Dream Logic," p. 143; Zwicky does not specify the source for Freud's metaphor, but it is *The Interpretation of Dreams* §VII.A [p. 672]).

[946] Weil, *Notebooks*, I.30.

i [*Excessively scholarly asides will be confined to endnotes. The reader should feel free to ignore them.*] It is true that Aristotle distinguishes between the "voluntary" and "involuntary"; but what Aristotle means by ἑκούσιος is different from what modern philosophy means by "voluntary." For Aristotle, "the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action" (NE, III.1.1111a20-25). Such a conception is entirely compatible with a deterministic cosmos — as it is, for example, for Spinoza. A cause is "internal" to the agent when it is one which she understands.

ii What is "new" with Weil? Not the perceptual metaphor; not the suggestion that geometry can be an apprenticeship in virtue; not the trust that the ultimate "object" of attention is the good; not the respect for the impersonal in the other person; but perhaps the worry that the good person *can* be harmed, that the affliction of the body can also be a psychic affliction, which deforms the soul. And so in Weil there is more respect for bodily needs, and for the possibility of humane manual labour and physical exercise as methods of learning virtue. Weil also shows more appreciation than Plato for the losability of the particular individual. (I do not mean that Plato has no such appreciation; but in his work it is counterbalanced, and to some extent compensated, by the metaphysics of the Forms.)

iii Plato, too, is able to acknowledge the existence of the amoralist: witness Kallikles, Thrasymakhos, and Glaukon (the more sophisticated [and arguably more frightening] advocate of Thrasymakhos's objection). Thrasymakhos is not unintelligent, and may turn out to be redeemable: after his shaming, he does stick around, and listens (*Republic*, 450a, 498c). On the other hand, Kallikles seems to be irredeemable. But notice that Plato does not adjust his philosophy to make Kallikles comfortable: his implicit verdict is that Kallikles will be strung up at a crossroads in Hades (*Gorgias*, 525c; cf. *Republic*, 615c-616a). And Plato maintains that, despite the ingenuity of their arguments and the formidableness of their intelligence, these objectors cannot really have understood what justice is. Nor can they really have wanted what they claim to have wanted (viz., their own advantage, absolutely disconnected from the needs of others). They fail, according to Plato, to understand the nature of justice and the nature of their own souls.

To many of us, it looks as though Plato is simply explaining away the counter-examples by assuming the truth of his theory; and to many of us, his explanation looks stupidly naïve: *of course* there are vicious people who *know* that what they are doing is wrong, and do it anyway, or do it *because* it is wrong. But, as Jan Zwicky has noticed, Plato's hope was not a function of his having failed to be acquainted with perpetrators of injustice. We know that he was acquainted with, and that he recognized, a diverse range of such perpetrators because he displayed their characters so vividly and convincingly in his dialogues. Cf. Zwicky: "Plato was not a naïf; and he had an extraordinary ability to perceive and represent human character. Depravity, turpitude, culpable innocence, untempered idealism, recklessness, banality—all these spring to life in his pages. The notion that mathematical truth and moral insight were connected was not itself the result

of immature idealism nor of geeky tinkering in the workshop of nutty ideas. Plato must have seen and experienced the connexion in a way that could not be gainsaid by his acute observation of the human pageant" (*Plato as Artist*, p. 51). What I want to stress is that Plato regards the amoralist *seriously* — as seriously as any twentieth or twenty-first century philosopher does. And that, while regarding the amoralist seriously, Plato remains committed to the thesis that virtue is knowledge.

[iv] In both Sinclair's and Weil's examples, attention is expressed as a question; but linguistic articulation is not a necessary feature. What the question indicates is openness or receptivity to the interlocutor, and such receptivity could also be expressed through other (extralinguistic) resources.

[v] Lipson and Lipson, while confusingly conservative of the rhetoric of "objects," nevertheless indicate one of the ways in which the focus is not static: "Moral agents ... maintain a progressively looser grip on the protean object of their regard. The suppleness of object-oriented attention allows the object itself the freedom to change" (Lipson and Lipson, "Psychotherapy and the Ethics of Attention," p. 18).

[vi] To say that the "object" of attention cannot be substituted for is to say, *inter alia*, that the "object" is not anything like a linguistic placeholder or variable in an argumentative equation; it is to say, inter alia, that the "object," unlike the patients of utilitarian analyses, is non-interchangeable with other "objects." Furthermore: one might say of two atomic items that they are interchangeable insofar as each is qualitatively indistinguishable; or that they are non-interchangeable, because each is qualitatively irreducible to the other. But this way of carving up the metaphysical landscape provokes various peculiarities. Zwicky's "objects" of attention are *not* atomic; the reason that *this* porch is non-interchangeable with some other porch (or with anything else) is *not* because it possesses some singular and occult property. — What, then, *is* the reason for the claim of non-interchangeability? — *If* the question is asked, I would be inclined to respond that I cannot offer a reason. But the question does perform the service of exposing the feebleness of attempts to justify the claim (of non-interchangeability) in terms of a *property* (or *properties*) allegedly possessed by the object (including the property of "inherent value," whatever that is). — *Why* do you love this person? — No single property (e.g., the way his smile just beams) nor list of conjoined properties (e.g., the way his smile just beams & the way he sings off-key &c.) seems able satisfactorily to do the work of explaining. At best, the pointed-to "properties" are a sort of shorthand way of pointing to the "bearer" of the properties, who is not reducible to any (or any conjunction) of them. What we are faced with here is a dilemma: either your love is connected with your loved one in some importantly mysterious way, or your love is to be explained extrinsically, without any internal relation to its "object" (e.g., explanations that are behavioural, chemical, etc.). I hazard that at least some of us will find the extrinsic explanations frustratingly reductive. And what I want to say is that it is *possible* to see a being or thing as a *this*; and seeing it as a *this* implies, inter alia, that one sees that it is non-interchangeable.

[vii] Weil is drawing on Plato here. He says: the soul is like the body. Just as there is a health of the body, there is a health of the soul. The health of the soul is called "justice" — and as your body becomes stronger through exercise in the gymnasium, so your soul becomes stronger by practising music and mathematics.

[viii] Incidentally, the French moral philosopher Emmanual Lévinas, who wrote a wrathful (and, if I may say so, not very perceptive) essay excoriating Weil, shared exactly the same thought. He is said to have said that holding the door open for someone else — a small and commonplace gesture — is one of the most fundamentally ethical things you could do. — Why? — Because you are acknowledging that the other person is *there*, and such acknowledgement, for both Lévinas and Weil, is at the foundation of any further acts of ethical responsibility.

[ix] Murdoch writes, "Wittgenstein of course discusses in this context mental as well as physical concepts. But his discussion is marked by a peculiar reticence. He does not make any moral or psychological generalizations. He limits himself to observing that a mental concept verb used in the first person is not a report about something private, since in the absence of any checking procedure it makes no sense to speak of oneself being either right or mistaken. Wittgenstein is not claiming that inner data are 'incommunicable', nor that anything special about human personality follows from their 'absence', he is merely saying that no sense can be attached to the idea of an 'inner object'. There are no 'private ostensive definitions'.... But ... while Wittgenstein remains sphinx-like in the background, others have hastened to draw further and more dubious moral and psychological conclusions" (Murdoch, SG, pp. 12, 15). Charles Barbour levels the criticism directly at Wittgenstein: "... nothing seems less convincing about Wittgenstein's later work than his effort to show that pain has no meaning independent of its external, social semiotics— that pain exists, not in the inner world of the individual self, or even in the silent tomb of the body, but in the networks of exchange and the games of discourse that make up our public lives with others. For surely no one who has experienced pain could believe such a thing. And, by all accounts, very few experienced more pain than Wittgenstein himself" (Barbour, "Echoes of the Ardent Voice," *Lyric Ecology*, p. 252). I do not wish to take a stand on these readings, but I shall note that at one point in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's interlocutor explicitly accuses him of behaviourism; and he responds that he is not denying mental processes (cf. PI, §§304-308).

[x] Indeed, a not-dissimilar incoherence is in evidence in Sartre's frequently photocopied essay, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in which he attempts to argue from the Cartesian *cogito* to the Kantian categorical imperative. However well-intentioned Sartre's attempt, I am not persuaded that an existentialist agent, whose primary certainty is his own existence (which existence, in the slogan, precedes essence), has any demonstrable obligation to will in consistency with a universal law. (The unexplained law is something of a *deus ex machina* in Sartre's argument.)

[xi] The terminology — "inner," "interior," etc. — is misleading, since it seems to conjure up the picture of nocturnally dark boxes, enclosing unshowable beetles. But there is nothing necessarily *private* about the psychology that Murdoch is defending. *Such*

psychology can be shared, but its sharing occurs in a different space than the space of, e.g., behaviourism and logical positivism. Cf. Spinoza: one agent's ideas affect, and are affected by, the ideas of other agents; but the dimension in which they are interacting is not *reducible* to physical space. (Physical space and mental space are, in a sense, identical for Spinoza; but their identity is not piecemeal, it is holistic.)

[xii] Zwicky makes a different, but not entirely dissimilar, suggestion that Wittgenstein's attack on metaphysical hypostatization risks the elimination of those (real) experiences which underlie, but need not lead to, hypostatization (W&M, L111).

[xiii] Here, the suggestion is that the *accurate* perception just is the *just* and *careful* one. That is, the affects are not synthetically added to the accurate perception (i.e., the accurate perception cannot be analytically decomposed into the separate constituents of affect and accuracy, which decomposition would imply that one could perceive the same thing *dispassionately*). But earlier, Murdoch confusingly suggests that accuracy and affect *are* different: "What M is ... attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her justly and lovingly" (Murdoch, SG, p. 23); the implication is that one could at least attempt in this case to see accurately, without seeing justly or carefully. This implication seems wrong to me, and inconsistent with Murdoch's larger argument. *Ethical clarity requires emotional resonance.* The proposal that one could have accurate perceptual access, to another being, completely unmediated by emotion — this proposal (a kind of arch-rationalism) is as unrealistic as the competing proposal that moral perception can be reduced, without remainder, to emotion (emotivism). The fiction of absolutely dispassionate perception is deserving of something like Berkeley's critique of Locke's abstract ideas: just try to imagine it. I don't believe that we have any experience of it; nor any reason to recommend it as an a priori ideal.

[xiv] I do not know whether attending needs to be assimilated to acting, nor whether such assimilation would be consistent with Weil's insistence that attention is in some sense passive. I suppose that much depends on whether one accepts the terms of the active/passive dichotomy, and whether one valorizes activity as Murdoch seems to do. I think that it would be fair to say that M has been doing ethical contemplative *work*, but to distinguish *this* work from the *muscular* work of willing. (Is all work activity? — But you see that I am trying to re-frame the taxonomy of concepts.)

[xv] And in this image, the water running underground can be loosely understood as an explanation for the water that is exposed. One sees the analogy with the Freudian theory of the unconscious, which seems to have influenced Murdoch.

[xvi] It is important to note that an agent's capacity to attend can also be cultivated in ways over which she has no personal control; and, further, that some kinds of cultivation can result in vices of inattention. (For example, someone who has habituated himself to judging bluntly and critically might have difficulty appreciating all sorts of real subtleties.) Weil is acutely sensitive to these possibilities, which sensitivity is manifest in her discussions of what she calls "affliction" ("*malheur*"). Agents living under conditions of sustained socio-political affliction, including those agents who benefit from these

conditions (e.g., those advantaged by systemic oppression), can be susceptible to distortions of attention. Correcting for these distortions requires, among other things, the sort of deference and willingness to listen advocated by Laurence Thomas (in his "Moral Deference").

xvii Here, in one context, attention is manifested by sitting quietly with one's interlocutor; but there, in another context, one's interlocutor needs to be left alone. And of course one's interlocutor manifests attention differently, too. Each agent is, simultaneously, one who is attending and one who is attended to.

xviii Since the set, at its highest plateau, is not a random heap of separable constituents, but rather an organization of inter-connected components, the term "part" (i.e., "part of the soul") is misleading. With the controversial exception of the thinking part, the Aristotelian soul is not separable from the body (DA, II.1.413a5). Furthermore, relative to each other, the parts are organized according to a systematic hierarchy: the set that is defined by the thinking part (or faculty) includes the other two parts. While I reject Aristotle's systematic hierarchy (which has been instrumental in rationalizing the doctrine of the "Great Chain of Being"), I am sympathetic to his insistence on the non-random organization of psychic faculties. But I would suggest that not all non-random organizations are systematic hierarchies; i.e., there are organizations which are neither systematic nor hierarchical. A coherent work of lyric art is one example: the details are integrated into a pattern, but each detail makes an equal contribution to that pattern (so the pattern is not hierarchical), and the details are not connected by singular or linear relations (so the pattern is not systematic). Another example of such organization is an organism.

xix Second potentiality is synonymous with first actuality; hence the correlation between this definition and Aristotle's earlier one: the soul is "the first grade of actuality of a natural organized body" (DA, II.1.412b5). According to Aristotle, the *body* is the *organ* of the soul (DA, II.4.415b20); or, in pseudo-Aristotelian jargon, the body is the material cause, the soul, the formal, efficient, and final cause, of a living thing.

xx Aristotle introduces this subdivision by an analogy: in art specifically (and, Aristotle claims, in nature generally), we can always distinguish at least two causes, the "material" and the "efficient." For example, the writing-tablet and the stylus (material cause), and the poet (efficient cause, insofar as the poet is a practitioner of the art of poetry, and not only the mover of the stylus). Analogously, we should be able to make a similar division in the thinking faculty of the soul. Cf. DA, III.5.430a10.

xxi Weil is especially impressed by Archimedes's hydrostatics, which she understands as depicting a physical equilibrium analogous to the one required by the virtue of justice. For some examples of the recurring image of water in Weil's work (sometimes with Daoist overtones), vide *First and Last Notebooks*, p. 84; *Intimations of Christianity*, pp. 115, 179, 195, 207; *On Science*, pp. 14, 20; WG, p. 76; *Notebooks*, Vol. 1, pp. 117, 330.

xxii I have discussed the topic of decreation at some length elsewhere, and will refrain from repeating that discussion here, except to stress the following: while Weil's asceticism will seem alarming to many of us, and while her assumption of default egoism is certainly criticizable, her technique of *decreation* needs to be judiciously distinguished from a campaign of self-*destruction*. The work of distinguishing them is made especially difficult by Weil's own not-infrequent inclination to conflate them. However, decreation and destruction are distinct and distinguishable concepts, and there are resources internal to her work to aid with distinguishing them. In brief, destruction may be characterized as a *wilful violence* inflicted on the self, which wilful violence would preclude decreation; while decreation, properly understood, should be characterized as the *loosening up* of self, which can be practised only under conditions of psychological relaxation.

xxiii The passage continues: "Understandably, it may be difficult to earn the trust of those who have been downwardly constituted by society. And it may not, in fact, be possible for some outside the social category in question actually to do so. But what has to be false is that, as a matter of principle, it is *impossible* for anyone outside that social category to do so" (Thomas, "Moral Deference," p. 379). I am sympathetic to Thomas's argument. However, I need to note that his acceptance and application of Thomas Nagel's bat-thesis (ibid., p. 360) is problematic. Thomas seems to be suggesting that human members of different social categories are phenomenologically *opaque* to each other, due to the differing emotional configurations connected with differences in social categories. *For this reason*, a member of a "privileged social category" owes moral deference to a member of a "diminished social category"; that is, the former should be prepared to defer to the latter's account of *what it is like* to be a member of the diminished social category, even if that account is not immediately graspable by the former. This argument provides for the possibility of earning trust across social categories; but it does not justify that trust in a growth of shared understanding. According to Thomas's starting premises, it looks as though the only way to enable shared understanding would be to eliminate social categories altogether — and not only hierarchical ones. (Thomas himself seems to acknowledge this: "In the ideal moral world there would be only one category of emotional configuration, namely the human one" [ibid., p. 375]. I think that I may reasonably question the homogeneity of this ideal.) What Thomas should claim, I think, is not that members of different social categories are (originally, by default) phenomenologically *opaque* to each other, but that they are *sometimes* (contingently, historically) phenomenologically *unrecognized* — and that moral deference is a method for fostering recognition, and thus shared understanding. Perhaps Thomas does want to make this claim — at one point he suggests that one's sensibilities can be reconstituted through listening to another (ibid., p. 377) — but he cannot consistently do so while adhering to his application of Nagel's thesis.

xxiv Shanker has been working with autistic children, and his hypothesis is that many of these children are not suffering from a clinical "illness," but that they have not been adequately educated in self-regulation. (Of course, the hypothesis is not that simple: Shanker acknowledges that the factors are not monadic, and may include, e.g., hypersensitivity caused by exposure to neurotoxins.) As a result of such inadequate education, the children's attentional capacities are prone to being overwhelmed by

sensory and emotional stimuli. An anecdote may be illustrative: "Shanker remembers a child at a school in New Zealand where he was doing research who was considered uncontrollable. Did she have a disorder, the teachers wondered. Should she be on drugs? // Shanker talked with her in her classroom. He wasn't getting anywhere. So he asked: 'What's going on?' She said: 'I can't pay attention to you when the fan's going.' // He looked around the room, trying to find the fan. Straining his ears, he could hear a faint whirr in a ceiling vent. He turned it off and the child calmed immediately" (Mitchell, "How a marshmallow can predict your future"). The point of the anecdote is that, while the child was being overwhelmed by environmental stimuli, she can learn to manage these stimuli; "and if we resort to medication to control the child's behaviour," writes Shanker, "we will have done nothing to address these underlying causes" ("Self-Regulation," p. 6).

[xxv] Shanker proceeds to trace the conflation of self-regulation and self-control to Plato. It is true that Plato uses overly violent imagery to portray the controlling of the so-called "bad" horse (appetite) by the charioteer (the philosophical component of the soul): the charioteer "violently yanks the bit back out of the teeth of the insolent horse, only harder this time, so that he bloodies its foul-speaking tongue and jaws, sets its legs and haunches firmly on the ground, and 'gives it over to pain'" (*Phaedrus*, 254e). Weil herself unfortunately resorts to similar imagery when she discusses a circumscribed rôle for the will, which may be used for "training the animal within us" (whatever that is): "Of course if this violence we do ourselves is really to be of use in our training it must only be a means. When a man trains a dog to perform tricks he does not beat it for the sake of beating it, but in order to train it, and with this in view he only hits it when it fails to carry out a trick" (G&G, pp. 124-125).

But compare Livingston, who is writing from experience: "Until I learned better from a good instructor, I would push a puppy's rump down to the floor and portentously intone '*SIT*.' Now I wait until the puppy sits of its own accord, and brightly and conversationally remark 'Sit.' It takes half the time for the dog to learn, costs nothing in frustration for either of us, and allows the dog to do precisely what it wants to do — participate and cooperate. Judiciously administered treats help" (*Rogue Primate*, p. 212, n. 22). These are not idle speculations, but pedagogical insights: contra Plato and Weil, Shanker and Livingston are suggesting that violent training, or wilful control, is in fact *inefficacious*. (Shanker writes that "we know from abundant data that the overuse of punitive measures to elicit compliance is a predictor of externalizing problems" ["Self-Regulation," p. 6].) Furthermore, Plato's and Weil's interest in wilful control is *inconsistent* with more prominent emphases in their thinking. When Plato defines the virtue of moderation in the *Republic*, he stresses that it is an *agreement* between the components of the soul (431e-432a). The implication is that a *non-consensual subordination* of the appetitive to the philosophical component (as in the abused horse) would *not* exemplify the virtue. And Weil repeatedly insists, as I will discuss in the main text, that the interference of the will is counter-productive to the discipline and the exercise of the attention.

^{xxvi} I do not mean that insights, in general, are conceptually independent of imagery and rhetoric. I mean only that, in this case, Weil has employed the wrong image; and that, sometimes, she employs misleading rhetoric. In other cases, she employs more accurate images.

^{xxvii} Regarding the third insight: I do not mean that genuine attention obliges one's interlocutor to disclose herself. But I suggest that reticence, refusal, self-defensiveness, shyness, etc., are communicative gestures, and that an attentive agent is by definition sensitive to such gestures, among others.

^{xxviii} Lindemann (formerly Nelson) claims that attention is necessary but not sufficient for morality (Nelson, "Against Caring," p. 13); in this suggestion, she is in agreement with Nussbaum ("'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible,'" p. 524; vide also "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory," pp. 227-255). Meanwhile, Lipson and Lipson claim that "the capacity to attend can be exercised in the service of all the major theories of ethics as they currently exist"; and "an interest in attentional style may be held in common by adherents of otherwise divergent systems (consequentialist or deontological ...)" (Lipson and Lipson, "Psychotherapy and the Ethics of Attention," pp. 17, 21). For the moment, I wish to remain agnostic regarding these questions. However, I suspect that attention is incompatible with moral systems such as consequentialism and deontology — although I hope that an ethics of attention would save the pre-theoretical insights that underlie these systems.

^{xxix} No sooner have I made these claims than I see that I may need to weaken them. Since I agree with Weil that attention is the root of virtue, my claims would commit me to denying that beings who are forced to live under accelerated and distracted conditions cannot become virtuous. So what I need to say is that accelerated and distracted conditions make it very difficult to cultivate attention; one needs to rely on heroic psychological resources or talents to accomplish it.

^{xxx} As I have noted, what becomes disclosed or visible may be, e.g., reticence. Attention cannot force the focus to divulge itself.

^{xxxi} Cf. Stohr, "Moral Cacophony." Instead of acknowledging that virtuous action is not achievable in such "morally cacophonous" contexts, Stohr promotes enkrateia to the status of virtue, and thus obliterates the distinction between arete and enkrateia. But we need that distinction to explain the agony of enkrateia.

^{xxxii} On the one hand, she says, Skylla is a monster with twelve feet and six necks, "and upon her serpent necks / are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity, / with triple serried rows of fangs and deep / gullets of black death" (Homer, *Odyssey*, XII.108-111). On the other hand, Kharybdis is a kind of enormous orifice who lives under a fig tree, vomiting up water and vacuuming it back down three times each day. If you steer close to Skylla, you will sacrifice six sailors, one for each of her heads; but if you steer close to Kharybdis, the entire ship will perish. So described, the dilemma seems to invite a

consequentialist solution; and Odysseus's refusal to listen to Kirke could be understood as a refusal of consequentialist reasoning.

xxxiii For Zwicky, meaning and understanding are both gestural. To mean is to make a gesture (LP, L241), and understanding is the experience of meaning; to understand is to extend one's hand, to gesture in response to a gesture (ibid., L250). That is, meaning and understanding stand to one another in the structure of call and response, or, more appropriately, response and co-response (ibid., L181). Humans, like many other things in the world, are resonance bodies; and a thing that is capable of receiving resonance is also capable of transmitting it.

xxxiv I say "ironically" because one of Descartes's aims was to extricate himself (and philosophy and science) from the scholastic ("Aristotelian") tradition. Of course, Descartes's quantitative, mechanistic programme is not Aristotle's, and I do not mean to dismiss their very significant differences. I am simply repeating the point that revolutionaries are not entirely free of the pervasive spirit against which they revolt.

xxxv The passage continues: "... It retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was collected. Its color, shape, and size are manifest. It is hard and cold; it is easy to touch. If you rap on it with your knuckle, it will emit a sound.... But notice that, as I am speaking, I am bringing it close to the fire. The remaining traces of the honey flavor are disappearing; the scent is vanishing; the color is changing; the original shape is disappearing.... [Etc.] Does the same wax still remain? I must confess that it does ... So what was there in the wax that was so distinctly grasped? Certainly none of the aspects that I reached by means of the senses. For whatever came under the senses of taste, smell, sight, touch, or hearing has now changed; and yet the wax remains" (Descartes, *Meditations,* AT VII.30).

xxxvi That Descartes's (neo-scholastic) theory of substance is not the only way to account for identity through change is demonstrated by Spinoza's alternative theory of organism — beautifully imagined by Jonas through the analogy of a flame: "As, in a burning candle, the permanence of the flame is a permanence, not of substance, but of process in which at each moment the 'body' with its 'structure' of inner and outer layers is reconstituted of materials different from the previous and following ones, so the living organism exists as a constant exchange of its own constituents, and has its permanence and identity only in the continuity of this process, not in any persistence of its material parts.... Definiteness of arrangement (configuration) will then, jointly with continuity of process, provide the principle of identity which 'substance' as such no longer provides" (Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism," p. 265).

xxxvii Walker seems to be making a quasi-existentialist argument (which diluted strain of existentialism she seems to be getting from Bernard Williams): moral judgements are non-universalizable; they are made by particular agents in particular contexts, and the agent is in some sense legislating for herself what she will value. This self-legislation does not entitle her to prescribe the same judgement for different agents, however apparently similarly situated. However, Walker re-inscribes a second-order generalism

when she suggests that a moral judgement is intelligible qua moral judgement because it selects among prior categories of general goods. A particular agent's ordering of these goods, for herself, is non-universalizable; but the goods themselves are generically recognizable (i.e., recognizable as goods by others). Vide Walker, "Moral Particularity."

[xxxviii] Dancy suggests that ultimately a supervenience base will not be local (i.e., it will not be restricted to features of the action under analysis); it will also include "Cambridge features" of the action. Instead of thinking of the indefinitely expansive supervenience base for the moral property of *this particular action*, writes Dancy, "[i]t is better just to think of supervenience as a syncategorematic relation between moral and non-moral properties in *general*, expressed in the *fully general* claim that if we start from a wrong action and move out to the entire non-moral nature of the world in which it is situated, and then replicate that in a new world, we are certain to have a wrong action in the replicating world" (EWP, p. 87; emphasis added).

[xxxix] This way of phrasing the point might be regarded as infelicitous, since "appearing redly" might be regarded not only as defeasible evidence of a thing's property, but alternatively of its external existence. (Suppose that I am appeared to redly, but I am asleep. Etc.) But those are different hares, which I am not chasing at the moment, and so I shall not be too strict in my phrasing.

[xl] It must be noted that Aristotle's own analysis of the virtue of bravery is narrower than our ordinary usage of the concept might lead us to expect. Aristotle's paradigm case, and the focus of his analysis, is bravery in a militaristic context: i.e., when facing the possibility of death in war. It would not be inappropriate to call this focus masculinist, and indeed Zwicky suggests that we could translate the Greek word ἀνδρεία (usually translated as "courage" or "bravery"), which is cognate with ἀνήρ (man), as "manly spirit" (at least in the context of her discussion of *Meno*; vide Zwicky, PA, pp. 63-64). There is a question, on Aristotle's account, about whether, e.g., someone facing a terminal illness can be brave. At least some of my students found their pre-Aristotelian (pre-theoretical) intuitions resistant to the narrowness of Aristotle's analysis; and I would be inclined to agree with these students. There are many contexts, very remote from war, in which it is possible to be brave.

[xli] For Aristotle, the vice of rashness is a failure to achieve the mean on the axis of confidence; while the rash person might be appropriately fearful, she is excessively confident. It is important to note that bravery, for Aristotle, is a particularly complex virtue, with two axes of feeling (fear and confidence) — hence it is a mean between four extremes (i.e., four vices). Vide Ross's perspicuous list, *Aristotle*, p. 210.

[xlii] As McDowell writes, "Here and now the risk to life and limb is not seen as any reason for removing himself" (V&R, p. 335). However, it would be a "misconception" to suppose "that the genuinely courageous person simply does not care about his own survival" (V&R, p. 335). McDowell refers the reader to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III, Chapter 9. There, Aristotle insists that "the brave person will find death and wounds painful, and suffer them unwillingly ... For this sort of person [i.e., the virtuous one],

more than anyone, finds it worthwhile to be alive, and knows that he is being deprived of the greatest goods, and this is painful" (NE, III.9.1117b81-4). The brave person, in other words, is not a berserk, suicidal person; no, the brave person values life as much as (Aristotle claims more than) anyone. Compare McDowell's characterization of the temperate person, i.e., the person with the virtue of temperance, or moderation — sophrosune ("Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," §10).

[xliii] Aside: results and properties — in Dancy's usage, these concepts are metaphysical. Perhaps the concept of a property is irredeemably inclined to metaphysical slippage, but the concept of a result needn't be (at least, it needn't be metaphysical outside of technical philosophical usage). The concept of a result is connotatively related to the concept of an effect or more generally a consequence. If I light the fuse of this firecracker, then an explosion will result, etc. Dancy seems to be reasoning in the following analogical way: If I assemble, e.g., three 60° angles in the right configuration, then bingo! — I get a triangle. So if I assemble these thick moral properties in this pattern, then I get this thin moral property, viz., this shape. — But I want to say: it is, minimally, not obvious that resultance is the best way to describe the relation between a shape and what is shaped. Notice: if three 60° angles, etc., then a triangle; but also: if a triangle, then three 60° angles. But the non-technical concept of a result does not happily tolerate this sort of reversal. Cf. "If I strike this billiard ball with my cue, then it will move" ≠ "If this ball moves, then I will strike it with my cue." — What I mean to say is that Dancy seems to be imagining resultance as an alchemical change (one combines lead with these other ingredients, and the result is gold). Importantly, this relation is tensed, i.e., temporally inflected — there is a "before" and an "after," and these two moments are unidirectionally sequenced. But I repeat, that is not the best way to describe the relation between shape and what is shaped. Shape and what is shaped stand to each other as a (certain kind of) whole stands to its parts. Sometimes we can say that a whole does *result* from its parts (when I stir this flour, water, sugar, and yeast, I get dough, which, kneaded and baked, results in bread). But sometimes — in the case of a gestalt structure — the whole is *not* a result of its component aspects.

[xliv] But cf. "Ramsey's Maxim" (which, it has been suggested, is just a Hegelian maxim): "Evidently, however, none of these arguments are really decisive, and the position is extremely unsatisfactory to any with real curiosity about such a fundamental question. In such cases it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both disputants" (qtd. in Bambrough, "Universals and Family Resemblances," p. 217).

[xlv] Miller argues that, absenting some substantial characterization of "practically rational" (i.e., more substantial than Smith's typical characterization of it as freedom from "weakness of will, apathy, despair, or the like"), Smith's revision risks collapse into the following trivial thesis: "If an agent judges that it is right for her to G in circumstances C and she is free of any condition which is such as to frustrate the connection between moral judgement and motivation, then she is motivated to G in C" (Miller, *Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, §9.9 [p. 221]). However, in his discussion of Smith's

argument, Miller imagines "that this worry has been adequately dealt with, and that Smith has provided some suitably non-trivializing account of practical rationality" (ibid.).

xlvi Cf. David Wood, *Everything Sings: Maps for a Narrative Atlas* (2nd edition, Siglio Press, 2013). The book contains unconventional maps that Wood has made of his neighbourhood, Boylan Heights in Raleigh, North Carolina. They include "a map of all the sewer and power lines under the earth's surface, a map of how light falls on the ground through the leaves of trees, a map of where all the Halloween pumpkins are each year, and a map of all the graffiti in the neighborhood" ("Mapping," *This American Life*, 4 September 1998).

xlvii Hal Whitehead has made some very suggestive remarks about contrasts between the spaces experienced, respectively, by terrestrial and marine animals ("Ocean Mind: Part One," *Ideas*, CBC Radio, 5 January 2009). The terrestrial environment, he notices, is primarily two-dimensional, replete with hiding places, and costly to move around in. By contrast, the marine environment is three-dimensional, bereft of hiding places, and relatively cheap to move around in. Territoriality, Whitehead claims, is a vital shaper of social life; but territorial boundaries in the ocean are less definite than those on land. In defining a terrestrial society, emphasis might fall on some parcel of land; in defining a marine society, emphasis might fall on relations among its members. (Notice, incidentally, that nomadism, both terrestrial and marine, would also affect territoriality.) — But what on earth is the significance of any of these remarks for theories of rationality? — Simply the following suggestion: different kinds of relations are possible in different kinds of space. If one imagines that one is inhabiting a basically two-dimensional space, then one kind of relation will be prominent (a linear relation between points). However, if one imagines that one is inhabiting a polydimensional space, then that linear relation takes its place in a context in which various other relations are possible.

xlviii Notice, incidentally, that both Williams's account and McDowell's response assume motivational internalism. I shall not say much about that shared assumption, since I have already discussed motivational internalism in the main text, above, and it is not my present focus. However, I do wish to note that there is more than one angle of entry into the debate between Williams and McDowell. For example, a proponent of motivational externalism might find Williams's trap unexciting: on such an account, an agent can believe a reason statement without being motivated by it, and so external reason statements could be truly made about an agent, independently of that agent's subjective motivational set.

xlix For the sake of neatness, I omit from this account the ethical psychology of Herakleitos and the Stoics. The story is further complicated when one considers the fact that Weil, like Spinoza, is not only a Stoic, but also a rogue Cartesian.

l The term "dialectic" should not be confused with its Hegelian usage. For Plato, dialectic is the art of collection and division (cf. *Phaedrus*, 265d-266c), i.e., the discernment of

single forms encompassing many particulars, which is at the core of philosophical practice.

^{li} Irwin correctly cross-references DA, 413b13-32, 432a15-b8, 433a31-b13. Inexplicably, he stops just short of mentioning DA, III.10.433b20-25, where the convex/concave metaphor is used to explain the (instrumental) relationship of the body to the animal soul in the production of movement. I set aside a further, complicated question regarding the correlation, of psychological anatomy, between the different accounts in *De Anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.

^{lii} This passage is, of course, an objection, to which Aquinas has a reply. Aquinas qua objector asserts that happiness is an operation of the practical intellect, while Aquinas qua replier asserts that it is an operation of the speculative intellect. This dispute, however, turns out to be irrelevant to the point that concerns me: the idea that a human agent is like God in respect of its practical intellect. Both objection and reply accept some version of this idea.

^{liii} Offending, of course, can be unintentional (we might say that it can be committed in "practical ignorance"). But the possibility of unintentionally offending is derivative of the prior, default case of intentionally offending — or, simply, offending. (There is an analogy here to Wittgenstein's treatment, in *On Certainty*, of the priority of some certainty to the possibility of the language-game of doubting.)

^{liv} Descartes articulates one form of (theological) voluntarism in a series of letters to Mersenne (15 April, 6 May, and 27 May 1630), AT I.143-153. On the other hand, in Meditation Four, he advocates a neo-Stoic theory of freedom: "the indifference that I experience when there is no reason moving me more in one direction than in another is the lowest grade of freedom" (*Meditations*, AT VII.58). Hume articulates a form of (human) voluntarism in the *Treatise* II.III.§III.¶6. At its limit, in the hands of existentialists such as Sartre, the thesis reduces to absurdity.

^{lv} There may be a tension between my claim that, in a limiting case, the attentive (practically wise) agent witnesses what she cannot change, and Aristotle's claim that practical wisdom concerns the domain of variable things.

^{lvi} Smith deploys these terms (borrowed from Nagel's *Possibility of Altruism* [Princeton UP, 1970]) in HTM, §2. "The distinctive feature of a motivating reason to φ," writes Smith, "is that in virtue of having such a reason an agent is in a state that is potentially explanatory of his φ-ing.... However, to say that someone has a normative reason to φ is to say ... that there is some normative requirement that he φ's" (pp. 38-39). Dancy (whose view is that the distinction should be drawn not between sorts of reason but between contexts in which we use the notion of reason) traces the history of the distinction in *Practical Reality*, §1.Appendix (pp. 20-25).

^{lvii} Such an ascription theory of desire is hinted at by McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?," p. 20 (where he suggests that the desire is

ascribed in a "purely consequential way" and is "not independently intelligible"); and fully articulated and rejected by Dancy, MR. §1.3. What I find sympathetic in Anscombe's account is the intimation that the agent's desire need not be explicitly stated, either in his own reasoning process or in our explanation of his action, in order for that action to be reasonable.

[lviii] The most insightful critique (with which I am familiar) of the alleged neutrality of instruments is Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technology." We moderns have an idea that desire is antecedent to the instrument, and guides its devising and its use ("desire is the mother of invention," to adapt an old saw). Heidegger makes the point that some ends are made possible by the invention of new technologies, and only then do we find ourselves desiring these ends. — "Perhaps he was beaten to the point by Marx and Engels?" (Hymers, Scholium, 21 September 2013). — What is "enframing," understood as the defining characteristic of modern technology? To say that a tool enframes its objects is to say that it makes possible an implicit way of seeing, and thus treating, those objects. Heidegger has in mind more sinister things, but consider something as apparently innocuous as "call display" on telephones: this technology (a kind of digital peephole in an oral door) makes possible the categorizing of identifiable callers under the description "ignorable" (in Heidegger's terms, call display thusly *enframes* the caller). We might think that such a possibility is without ethical significance. But assuming the normalization of the technology, every phone call now presents us with a new choice.

[lix] Let me gloss Scott's analysis. He divides "Meno's paradox" into two separate parts, and subdivides one of those parts. The "paradox" consists of (1) "Meno's challenge" and (2) the "eristic dilemma"; and Meno's challenge further consists of two questions: (1.1) one question which is reformulated by Sokrates into (2) the eristic dilemma, and which forms Scott's "problem of inquiry"; and (1.2) another question which forms Scott's "problem of discovery" (Scott, *Plato's Meno*, pp. 75 ff.). The problem of inquiry is formulated schematically: "If you know the object already you cannot genuinely inquire into it"; and "If you do not know it you cannot inquire, because you do not even know what you are inquiring into" (Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 78). Scott claims that the myth (or theory) of recollection is not the solution to this dilemma; rather, the dilemma can be solved by denying the dichotomy between complete knowledge and complete ignorance, and this denial can be accomplished by recourse to the distinction between true belief and knowledge (Scott, *Plato's Meno*, p. 79). But the problem of discovery — the second part of Meno's challenge (1.2) — is slightly different: "Or even if you really stumble upon it, how will you know that this is the thing you didn't know before?" (Scott, *Plato's Meno*, pp. 76, 83). This problem is supposed to be more substantial, and cannot be solved by recourse to the belief/knowledge distinction. Guided by a true belief, one might successfully initiate an inquiry; but how can one *know* whether what one discovers *confirms* the truth of one's belief? Scott's book-length commentary is unquestionably competent, and not without considerable insight and sensitivity. However, I fear that his analysis of "Meno's paradox" betrays a scholarly *hyper*sensitivity which is not invited by this passage in Plato's text; the fineness of the analysis is not rewarded with a deepened understanding. — In my view, the point is not that Plato presents the reader with Scott's two separate problems, but that the skeptical question is repeatable.

[lx] Amartya Sen argues that the West, historically, has no monopoly on democracy, and that democracy is only contingently connected with the Western preoccupation with balloting. In its global context, he argues, democracy should be understood as more characteristically and radically associated with free public *discussion* (Sen, "Democracy and Its Global Roots"). We may retain some healthy skepticism about whether such discussion is sufficient for democracy; still, Sen's historical and global study is a useful tonic for Eurocentric biases (or anxieties) about the provenance of democracy.

[lxi] How strong is the non-interchangeability? Can't the saxophonist be replaced by a trumpeter? Don't jazz ensembles replace members all the time? Yes. But then the ensemble must re-integrate itself with the new member. And it can make sense, then, to say, without wistfulness, that the ensemble is "not the same" (recognizing, with this phrase, the respective integrity of the ensemble's past and present incarnations). Cf. Wittgenstein, PI, §531.

[lxii] Consider some of the reasons that an agent may give to explain her virtuous action: if she is an apprentice, she might point to an expert, an exemplar whose virtue she is trying to emulate; if she is an expert, she might point to some salient feature of the situation in which she acted. In both cases she remains an agent, responsible for her action, but her reasons include sources of motivational energy which are not reducible to her agency. (It may seem strange to say, but someone who needs your help collaborates with you when you provide it.)

[lxiii] The foregoing is an example of the sort of ecological literacy endorsed by Leopold in his discussion of marshland habitat of the sandhill cranes "Marshland Elegy," *A Sand County Almanac*, pp. 95-101; and more programmatically by Callicott in his theorization of the "Land Aesthetic." If one is accustomed to being impressed by sublime landscapes, then one might find the marshlands ugly; but some education about this particular biocoenosis changes one's vantage point. And it is important that it does not just infect one with a subjective flavour. No, the information helps one to perceive what is really there.

[lxiv] Cf. Zwicky: "If we think of nature as ecology, its 'individuals' are really nothing more than nodes in a huge network—imagine the mathematical points of intersection that define a geodesic dome. Remove any one of these nodes, or pull it out of place, and everything else in the system shifts to accommodate the change. A remarkable interdependence. // But the odd thing is, as the analogy with mathematical points makes clear, it leaves the individuals—the mountains, the rivers, the swallows and frogs— ontologically dimensionless. Once again, they turn out to be nothing more than *sets of relata*. But what we love when we love a mountain, or a river, or an animal, is nothing so abstract, much less is it the whole system that, in a sense, expresses itself as the series of relations that define a given node. What we *love*, what love reveals and is disciplined by, is a *this*—a particular and *irreplaceable* entity, that stands out, haloed, against the chaotic backdrop of 'everything else.' And surely, on another view, nature just is the collection of these distinct—loved or feared, rafter-skimming or pond-delving—*things*. Or, rather, it is this also" ("Lyric Realism," pp. 90-91).

[lxv] Winch's characterization of Aline Solness does not seem entirely fair. It is true that she appeals to duty whenever she is on stage: cf. Ibsen, *The Master Builder*, pp. 143, 163, 169, 183, 190, 202. On the other hand, her resentments are arguably justified: she has lost two of her children as a result of a house fire, and her guest has arrived under questionable pretences having to do with her husband. Thus I refer not to Ibsen's but to Winch's version of the character. Thanks to Laura Zebuhr and Letitia Meynell for exhorting me to consult the primary text.

[lxvi] While Winch does not mention it, we might set the latter scenario of hospitality beside one favoured by Wittgenstein: "He had taken lodgings in the home of a preacher. The first time that Wittgenstein presented himself at this house the lady of the house had inquired of Wittgenstein whether he would like some tea, and whether he would also like this and that other thing. Her husband called to her from another room: 'Do not ask; *give!*'" (Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 61). I wish to mark the unjust, gendered dynamic of a husband (we can imagine him comfortably sunk in an armchair) bellowing corrections and edicts to a wife who is doing the actual work of serving the lodger.

[lxvii] Williams does not offer any bibliographic information, but the context conveys a sinister overtone: "I live in the Jewish quarter or what was called so until our Hitlerian brethren made room. What a cleanup! Seventy-five thousand Jews deported or assassinated; that's real vacuum-cleaning. I admire that diligence, that methodical patience. When you don't have character, you'd better give yourself a method. Here it did wonders incontrovertibly, and I am living on the site of one of the greatest crimes in history" (Camus, *The Fall*, trans. J. O'Brien [New York: Vintage Books, 1956], p. 11; translation altered).

[lxviii] Cf. Williams, "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence." We can see the rightness of this suggestion by comparing someone who acts temperately out of a vain desire to test or flaunt his own temperance with someone else who acts temperately by recognizing that partaking of these pleasures would be excessive and refraining painlessly from them. Assuming that both actions produce the same consequences, we might then discount the deliberative or characterological differences. But such discounting simply decides in favour of behaviourism and consequentialism against deontology or virtue ethics.

[lxix] Ceteris paribus, and especially with plenty of drivers like Timothy on the road, the African-Canadian mother and daughter are arguably in greater need of a ride than the Caucasian woman. We have been instructed in conceiving how choices like Timothy's — unconscious or not —accumulate and interact to exacerbate disadvantage and reinforce privilege.

[lxx] And just as one can reflect while acting, so one can move while changing gears — but the nature of this motion (action) is different: it is coasting. Furthermore, downshifting gears can be a method of braking; similarly, triggering the disintegrative perspective can be a way of inhibiting spontaneous activity.

lxxi I construct the example warily. The sweatshops are a potentially relevant consideration (and actually relevant in a context of deliberation about social justice, for example). And it is not as though issues of social justice go away while we are grocery shopping. It is just that this consideration is not directly relevant to the current practical problem of obtaining ibuprofen to treat my child's fever. In practice, we do manage to sift through this "welter of stimuli." The depressive in the example is someone for whom the indefinitely multiple welter of potential relevancies has become, simultaneously, actualized.

lxxii This distinction — between "morality" and "ethics," or between systematic moral theories since Kant and non-codified concerns about particular character — seems clear enough, but its application is elusive. For example, when Williams discusses "non-moral" commitments, I cannot tell if he would classify such commitments as "ethical." He seems willing to countenance an entire class of commitments and considerations which are neither moral nor ethical, but simply discretionary (Williams, "Moral Luck," p. 31). Given Williams's virtue-ethical emphasis on character, this allowance is, minimally, confusing.

lxxiii There is a distinction between the Romantic individual and the lyric detail. When Williams writes of "an infinitely fine degree of difference in concrete detail," he is, I think, writing of lyric attention. Such detail, while specific, is not disconnected from its context. But when he begins to write about the agent as an individual, the conceptualization shifts toward isolating that individual from its context and defending it from the interference of society. In Williams, I sometimes detect an almost Kierkegaardian worry that the individual must protect his projects against the antagonistic levelling forces of society at large.

lxxiv I do believe that there are resources, within Plato's philosophy, for addressing the difficulty. For example, the speech of Alkibiades, in the *Symposium*, represents Plato's (philosophical and psychological) acknowledgement of the truth of the objection that individuals are non-interchangeable. Cf. Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades," *The Fragility of Goodness*.

lxxv In a kind effort to help me with this objection, Nathan Brett suggested that perhaps I could salvage a conservationist ethics in Spinoza. If Spinozist individuals are interchangeable, and hence in some sense dispensable, one might nevertheless find grounds, in his ontology, for the conservation of species. (But note that there is immediately an exegetical difficulty to accommodating the reality of "species" within Spinoza's ontology. Unlike his predecessor Aristotle, Spinoza seems to deny that species have any reality. The notion of a species is what Spinoza would call a "universal notion" (E, IIP40S1), and such notions are the unreliable, relativistic results of the overloading of the imaginal capacities of individual perceivers.) Furthermore, a Spinozistic conservation ethics would generalize to include inter-human relations. And the major objection would obtain, as it would obtain for any variety of act-consequentialism which is primarily concerned with the management and maximization of expected aggregate good. Some of us object to such a moral system, as Williams, for example, did object, precisely because

it regards individuals as interchangeable. And it would be disappointing if I could discover nothing more generous than a conservationist ethics in Spinoza.

APPENDICES

Appendix A.

§A.1. Zwicky calls Plato's *Meno* "a philosophical jewel":[947] "a complex ecology of argumentation, a survey of Plato's central views in a very small compass, an exquisitely nuanced report of both his idealism and his despair."[948] Let me say a few words about its dramatic structure and plot. Meno is visiting Athens, and staying with Anytos. The dialogue begins abruptly with Meno's question, "Can virtue be taught?" Sokrates seems perplexed by the abruptness of the question: how should I know if virtue can be taught, he responds; I don't even know what virtue itself is. Thus we are introduced almost immediately to the second question, "What is virtue?" And Sokrates implies that this second question is really prior to Meno's question: before we can determine what properties a thing has, we need to define that thing. Sokrates and Meno then embark, in the first section of the dialogue, on the project of defining virtue. At Meno's pleading, Sokrates offers three, progressively worse, examples of definition; and Meno offers three, progressively better, definitions of virtue, all of which ultimately fail. They fail because Meno is not the most acute student, and he has failed to attend carefully to Sokrates's examples. Meno believes that he knows what virtue is; but Sokrates gradually helps him to appreciate that he can't define it. Meno is brought to an *aporia*: thanks to that stingray, Sokrates, he realizes that he doesn't really know what virtue is. We are transitioning to the second section of the dialogue.

Now Meno is in a very precarious place: he has been emptied of his false beliefs, but he is bewildered, and asks his skeptical question: "How can I learn what I don't already know?" Sokrates sees the deep implications of Meno's question, and takes it seriously. He responds with two gestures, which together address Meno's question and

---

[947] Zwicky, PA, p. 13; intentionally echoing J.S. Mill? "It [the famous doctrine of Reminiscence] is shown to us in the *Menon*, in which more that is characteristic of Plato is brought together in a smaller space than in any other dialogues: if the *Phaedon* and the *Gorgias* are noble statues, the *Menon* is a gem" (Mill, *Essays on Philosophy and the Classics* (Toronto: U of T Press, 1978), p. 422).

[948] Zwicky, PA, p. 13.

form the famous centrepiece of the dialogue: the myth of recollection, and the geometrical demonstration of doubling the square. Sokrates suggests that *learning is (really) recollection*. We only *seem* to be ignorant of many things; but in truth, according to Sokrates, we do know those things, and have merely forgotten them. Learning is not the acquisition of new information, but the recovery of forgotten knowledge. This bold thesis is backed by a Pythagorean or Orphic myth concerning the immortality of the soul: before we were born, our souls saw and knew the whole of reality; at the moment of embodiment — a kind of concussive blow to the soul — we forgot what we saw. Meno demands some proof, and Sokrates performs a demonstration involving one of Meno's uneducated slaves. Sokrates draws in the sand a square, two feet by two feet, and asks the slave to find the line on which to construct a square double in area. The structure of the lesson mirrors Sokrates's earlier conversation with Meno: just as Meno attempted three times to define virtue, the slave attempts three times to find the line, prompted by Sokrates's questioning. After his second attempt, the slave, like Meno, reaches an *aporia*. But on his third attempt, the slave succeeds in recognizing the necessary line, the diagonal. This success is taken by Sokrates to demonstrate the thesis that learning is recollection: the slave had previously received no lessons in geometry; if he did not already have some innate knowledge, how could he have *understood* the solution to the problem? The slave seems to be an example of someone who searched for, and learned, what he did not already (consciously) know; and the thesis that learning is really recollection would be an explanation of this phenomenon. We are now poised to investigate Sokrates's question, "What is virtue?" — but Meno regresses to his initial question, "Can virtue be taught?" His regression is a pedagogical disaster, and the turning point into the third and final section of the dialogue.

Sokrates is evidently disappointed in Meno, and proceeds briefly and tantalizingly to consider the hypothesis that if virtue is knowledge, then it can be taught. But the hypothesis is (surprisingly) yanked back, and the dialogue tumbles to a despairing and negative conclusion: virtue *cannot* be taught;[949] and virtue is *not* knowledge, but merely inborn true belief. The whole project of becoming virtuous begins to look like a lottery. An argument is deployed to undergird the dialogue's conclusion: (1) if virtue is

---

[949] Plato, *Meno*, 94e, repeated at 96c and 98e.

knowledge, then it is teachable; (2) if it is teachable, then there must be teachers; (3) but there are no teachers; (4) therefore, it is not teachable; (5) and therefore, it is not knowledge.[950] One of the first things that one might notice about this argument is that it is not very persuasive: why should one believe the second premise, for example? It is, at least, not logically impossible that a subject could be teachable while nevertheless lacking teachers. (Consider cursive handwriting: one might imagine a science fictional time in the [near] future when there are no longer teachers of cursive handwriting; it would not follow that cursive handwriting had become unteachable — or unlearnable.) Anytos has joined the conversation, and Sokrates coaches him through this argument, which involves a survey of the empirical data: in Athens, there are plenty of virtuous parents with vicious children. They have managed to teach their children horseback-riding, javelin-throwing, arts, gymnastics, wrestling, and many other matters of skill, but they have been unable to transmit their virtue. (The implication is that this failure is not due to lack of effort or resource.) And we might set this argument beside the implicit but charged thought that Sokrates does not transmit virtue to Meno or Anytos. It seems as though the most promising candidates are unable to transmit virtue; and it is a short but treacherous step from that observation to the conclusion that virtue cannot be taught. (— "On the face of it this is obviously completely false; and its falsehood is the central problem confronted by parenthood.")[951]

§A.2. I wish to set Zwicky's book-length essay on Plato's *Meno* beside her 1997 essay on Plato's *Phaedrus* beside. Both essays read Plato's dialogues as works of philosophical and literary art. To read them as works of *art* is to read them not only for what they *say*, but also for what they *show*. Furthermore, fully to appreciate the coherence of these works of art requires attending to those aspects which are *shown* but *not said*. In the case of the *Phaedrus*, readers are witness to a deftly choreographed interaction between content and form. That interaction is an instance of resonance — not the pleasant chime that we might hear, for example, in a rhyming couplet, but resonance through "difference

---

[950] The argument is summarized at *Meno*, 98d-e.
[951] MacIntosh, Scholium, 15 September 2009.

or reactivity."[952] In short, the dialogue's *form* is a *response* to certain arguments articulated in its *content*. On a cursory reading, the *Phaedrus* may appear to lack coherence: the first half appears to be about eros, the second, about rhetoric, and the dialogue thus appears disintegrated, "broken-backed"[953] across these two halves. And recall that the dialogue concludes with a (written) critique of writing. That critique consists in a number of distinct objections (Zwicky enumerates six).[954] But for my purposes I shall concentrate these objections into one: according to Sokrates, philosophy occurs (exclusively) through *live conversation*, which is characterized by thoughtful questioning and responding. By contrast, writing cannot act as an interlocutor: it cannot respond to questions, it cannot defend what it says. It is, in other words, unphilosophically dogmatic, stupidly repetitive. Sokrates's complaint compares writing to painting: "The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever."[955] We may hear an echo of a similar complaint made in Plato's *Protagoras*, where Sokrates compares orators, or speech-makers, to books, and to ringing bronze bowls: "But try asking one of [these orators] something, and they will be as unable to answer your question or to ask one of their own as a book would be. Question the least little thing in their speeches and they will go on like bronze bowls that keep ringing for a long time after they have been struck and prolong the sound indefinitely unless you dampen them. That's how these orators are: Ask them one little question and they're off on another long-distance speech."[956] The comparison of these

---

[952] Zwicky cites Kahn's reading of Herakleitos as a touchstone (perhaps a progenitor) for her notion of resonance (cf. LP, R23), but indicates that her notion is somewhat broader: in her sense, resonance "characterizes not only different expressions of similar ideas or themes but also similar (or overtly contrasting) expressions of different ideas or themes" ("Oracularity," p. 500, n. 23). In Plato's account in the *Phaedo*, recollection is not unlike a kind of resonance, which can be occasioned both by similarity and by dissimilarity (*Phaedo*, 74a).

[953] Zwicky borrows the description from Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, p. 230.

[954] Zwicky, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," pp. 24-27.

[955] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275d-e.

[956] Plato, *Protagoras*, 329a-b. Zwicky claims that, in the *Protagoras*, "Socrates does not

metaphors from the *Phaedrus* and the *Protagoras* is, I hope, illuminating: what is allegedly unphilosophical about both writing and speech-making is that they are *unresponsive*: they behave like pre-recorded monologues; like inanimate matter.[957]

      The complaint sets up a test which any candidate for Socratic (or Platonic) philosophy must face: it should be able *to respond*, like a living thing. Can a piece of writing ever satisfy this test? The question is worth asking, and it is one that the *Phaedrus* invites us to ask. "[T]he test of the integrity of a philosophical encounter," Zwicky suggests, "is its livingness: the degree to which it provokes, in us, *erōs* — a movement toward meaning. A philosophical being's livingness is, [Plato] suggests, reflected in its ability to respond to questions ... and this may be understood as a written text's ability to make *us* respond, to provoke us to questions worth trying to answer."[958] What about that movement toward meaning? (To communicate is, inter alia, to move and to be moved.) Throughout Zwicky's essay, the image of a living thing, an ensouled thing, is the image of something *moving*. She writes, "[T]he dialogue ... does not *come to rest* with the notion that writing is simply the meek Epicurean handmaid of dialectic. Nor does it *come to rest* with its own writerly 'undoing' of arguments against the legitimacy of writing. That is: it does not come to rest."[959] Although Zwicky never explicitly refers to it, if we reflect, we can see that she is clearly alluding to the well-known argument from motion for the immortality of the soul, the argument that occurs near the beginning of Sokrates's palinode for eros, after his diaeresis of the four kinds of divine madness.[960] As T.M. Robinson correctly observes, the argument is of course historically important, as "the direct ancestor of the cosmological argument *ex motu* first outlined by Aristotle and followed by Aquinas."[961] But I am more interested in the rôle of the argument in the

---

explicitly tackle the subject of rhetoric ... Except for a brief skirmish at 334c-5d, the subject of rhetoric is not an explicit topic of conversation" (Zwicky, "Plato's *Phaedrus*" p. 24, n. 7). I am not sure about this claim; in addition to the two passages just cited, vide, e.g., 343b-c, 347c-348a.

[957] The last contrast is, perhaps, contentious, and could be disputed, for example, by a Spinozist or a Herakleitean. Indeed, it may be disputed by the author of the *Timaeus*. What, exactly, is *inanimate* matter?

[958] Zwicky, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," p. 46.

[959] Zwicky, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," p. 39; cf. the images of motion at p. 44.

[960] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245c-e.

[961] Robinson, *Plato's Psychology*, p. 116.

structure Plato's *Phaedrus*, its resonance in the context of a dialogue about eros and rhetoric. Why is it *here*, at the cusp of a discussion of the logic of desire, and the transcendental preconditions of the possibility of the phenomenology of beauty, which phenomenology is located at the *centre* of a philosophical life? And what does any of *that* have to do with rhetoric?

The argument maintains that soul is always moving, that what is always moving *moves itself*.[962] What Zwicky has seen, and what she shows but does not say, is something that Plato has shown but not said: that here, nascent in the argument from motion, is a sketch of the test that philosophical writing must face. Indeed, when Plato describes true philosophical intercourse, he echoes the imagery from the argument for the immortality of the soul: it is a word (λόγον) written with knowledge *in the soul* of the learner (ἐν τῇ τοῦ μανθάνοντος ψυχῇ); it is able *to defend itself* (δυνατὸς μὲν ἀμῦναι ἑαυτῷ); it is *living* and *ensouled* (ζῶντα καὶ ἔμψυχον).[963] *A living thing moves itself* — this feature is key. For writing and speech-making, like paintings and ringing bowls, appear to be in a sort of perpetual motion: they repeat themselves, over and over. But what distinguishes philosophical rhetoric from the unphilosophical kind — like profound paintings from shallow ones — is its ability to move spontaneously, and thus to move us, to stir us into restless thinking. (A dead thing can receive motion, through efficient causation — it can be shoved around. But *it* cannot really surprise us, cannot do anything spontaneously.)

Zwicky makes a couple of, I think warranted, assumptions, and these allow her to appreciate the coherence of the *Phaedrus*. She assumes that the critique of writing "accurately represent[s] the historical Socrates's views" and that Sokrates "was someone Plato had loved and conversed with."[964] The dialogue of the *Phaedrus*, then, may be seen to be Plato's response to Sokrates's critique — an *erotic* response, one that records the force of the senior interlocutor's critique in respectful and loving detail. (And so we see how the themes of eros and rhetoric cohere.) But Plato records Sokrates's critique in the

---

[962] When the argument from motion is extended (vicariously) to a certain kind of literary creation, one may hear an echo of Diotima's claim that those who are pregnant in soul give birth to immortal children, such as poetry and laws (Plato, *Symposium*, 208e-209e).
[963] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276a.
[964] Zwicky, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," p. 21.

very medium which is the object of scrutiny, namely, writing, and he crafts that medium according to the form that Sokrates prefers, namely, conversation, dialogue. Plato *states* the objections, but he *shows* an alternative. Zwicky writes, "The momentum of the arguments [against the legitimacy of writing] is countered at every point by the brilliance of their written execution: this wrought counterplay of content and form is itself the *physis* of the work, content and form are themselves in dialogic relation, and their tension, instead of blowing the dialogue apart, is its torqued unity, the breathless updraft at its centre that pulls the questions from us."[965]

And that tension, between Sokrates's objections and the Platonic dialogue that encompasses them — that tension is crucial. If we think that Plato emerges triumphant, we have missed the point. A Platonic dialogue is *not like* the Cartesian Objections and Replies, which are far more antiphonal than polyphonic: Descartes's detractors take their turn, and then he takes his, and tries to knock them out. If Descartes succeeds, then his detractors are defeated. But if Plato succeeds, then concepts such as triumph and defeat are without application. If Plato succeeds, then his characters, and their questions, continue to provoke us. Plato does have philosophical commitments, and he does argue for some of them, but the point is not that we should be persuaded of them, but that we should *think* about them. One important feature of the dialogic form is that it *preserves disagreements*; and it preserves them not as a museum preserves artefacts, but as stories are preserved in an oral culture. The analogy is intended to be exact: one of the ways in which an oral culture (that is, an individual storyteller within that culture) preserves a traditional story is precisely to innovate. (Theme and variation.) To preserve, in this sense, is not to petrify. — The Platonic dialogue's *integrity* is measured by its ability to keep these disagreements *alive*.

§A.3. Assuming that Socratic education involves the facilitation of understanding, and that understanding is analogous to seeing, let me consider the geometrical demonstration. What exactly is the rôle of the demonstration, and what is its connexion to the learning of virtue? As I have already mentioned, Weiss interprets the demonstration as a farce. An older interpretation, by Gregory Vlastos, claims that the demonstration is evidence for the

---

[965] Zwicky, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," p. 40.

theory of recollection, and that recollection may be defined as "*any advance in understanding which results from the perception of logical* [non-empirical] *relationships.*"[966] Such an advance in understanding is to be contrasted with the deliverances of sense experience. The geometrical demonstration is supposed to support this specified theory of recollection: it is supposed to be an example of an epistemic agent recovering knowledge from inside himself, without any reliance on the empirical world. (But we might be suspicious of Julius Moravcsik's interpretive claim that the slave is a learning device, whose observable "output" [his verbal reply] is explained by a prior unobservable output [a private mental entity, which is recollected].[967] But what criterion of understanding is manifest other than the slave's gesture, his exclamation, "Most certainly, Socrates"?[968] Why should the slave's understanding be something more "private" than his seeing and exclaiming? — Moravcsik also assumes an archival model of remembering, which has been recently challenged.)[969] Vlastos's interpretation faces its own difficulties: if recollection is purely logical and non-empirical, then why does Plato's demonstration employ diagrams, that is, visual proofs? Vlastos argues that the diagrams are strictly speaking *dispensable*.[970] He conducts what he calls "a scissors-and-paste experiment" which replaces the geometrical demonstration with an arithmetical one carried out exclusively through verbal reasoning, and then, assuming that his reader might remain unpersuaded, further proposes that the arithmetic could simply be replaced with a riddle: "Let Socrates recite in suitably metrical Greek," writes Vlastos, "the familiar conundrum by which a man replies when asked what is his relation to the subject of a portrait: Brothers and sisters have I none; / But this man's father is my father's son."[971] Vlastos insists that the solution to the riddle requires "no recourse to anything other than the logical relations of the concepts *father*, *brother*, and *son*, and the use of the

---

[966] Vlastos, "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*," p. 97.

[967] Moravcsik, "Learning as Recollection," pp. 124-125.

[968] Plato, *Meno*, 85b.

[969] For an insightful discussion of the archival and reconstructive models of remembering, as well as the dangers of uncritically accepting the alleged shift from the former to the latter, vide Sue Campbell, "Models of Minds and Memory Activities" (Eds. Peggy DesAutels and Margaret Urban Walker. *Moral Psychology*. [Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004], pp. 119-137).

[970] Vlastos, "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*," p. 90.

[971] Vlastos, "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*," p. 91-92.

rules of inference. Here there is no occasion for consulting the evidence of the senses or for recalling previous use of such evidence."[972]

Perhaps. But a diagram can assist one in solving this riddle, too. These logical relations, like those involved in the doubling of the square, can be represented visually. Of course, that they *can* be so represented does not prove that visual representation is *indispensable* to their understanding. Anyway, Vlastos is trying to establish that the point of the geometrical demonstration is reducible to the point that *could* be made by the logical riddle: the slave is being assisted in the exercise of purely logical, non-empirical reasoning. Vlastos does have the strength of tradition on his side: traditionally, Plato's metaphysics and epistemology are understood as rationalist rather than empiricist; that is, arguably, for Plato, reality is ultimately non-empirical and knowable by reason. Traditionally, Plato's metaphysics is read as a two-tiered metaphysics, which draws a distinction between reality and appearance: reality consists in transcendental, non-empirical, unchanging, unitary "Forms," and the empirical, changing, diverse world of our more familiar experience somehow "participates" in, or "instantiates" this transcendental realm. — However, the metaphysics of the *Meno* is not uncontested. Day, for example, is able to write, "A reader of the *Meno* who had not also read or heard about the *Republic* would I think be hardly likely to attribute a two-world theory of reality to Plato."[973] However, I follow Zwicky,[974] et al., in understanding the metaphysics of the *Meno* to be continuous with the metaphysics of the *Parmenides*, *Phaedo*, etc. — In order to make his point, Vlastos needs to rewrite the diagrams out of the dialogue. But this is to ignore Plato's artistry. According to Zwicky's method of reading, the apparent dispensability of some passage is a sure sign that we need to pay it the closest attention.[975] Why then does Plato have Sokrates elicit the slave's understanding via diagrams rather than purely verbal cues? The answer has to do with the centrality of *seeing* to Plato's epistemology.

Let me walk through the demonstration with the slave. (I should say that I am no geometer. My verbal directions are guaranteed to be inelegant, and it will probably be

---

[972] Vlastos, "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*," p. 92.
[973] Day, "Introduction," *Plato's Meno in Focus*, p. 13.
[974] Zwicky, PA, p. 23.
[975] Zwicky, PA, p. 25.

clearer simply to follow Day's diagrams.)[976] Sokrates sets the problem: he draws in the sand a square, two feet long by two feet wide, with an area of four square feet. (I shall call this the "given square.")[977] The slave is to construct a second square, twice the size of the given square, with an area of eight square feet. (I shall call this the "desired square.") And the question is: how long is the line on which the desired square is constructed? Remember that the slave makes three attempts. On his first two attempts, based on a four-foot and a three-foot line respectively,[978] the slave is brought to see that the results have the wrong area. And now the slave has reached his *aporia*. He realizes that he doesn't know how long the desired line is. Sokrates redirects the slave's attention to his first attempt, the square based on the four-foot line, with an area of sixteen square-feet, the square that is four times the size of the given square. And he draws the diagonals of the four squares, constructing yet another square, poised on its corner inside the largest one.[979] Eureka. Suddenly, the slave *sees*. The desired square, the square that is double the size of the given square, is constructed on the diagonal of the given square.

---

[976] Vide Day, *Plato's Meno in Focus*, figures 1-4, pp. 49-54.
[977] Vide Day's Figure 1.
[978] Vide Day's Figures 2 and 3.
[979] Vide Day's Figure 4.

Appendix B.

§B.1. We do not need to be reminded that Spinoza was responding to Descartes, but it is worth listening to some of Spinoza's own words on the notorious Cartesian doctrine that the mind is united to the body through the medium of the pineal gland:

> Such is the view of this illustrious person (as far as I can gather from his own words), a view which I could scarcely have believed to have been put forward by such a great man, had it been less ingenious. Indeed, I am lost in wonder that a philosopher who had strictly resolved to deduce nothing except from self-evident bases and to affirm nothing that he did not clearly and distinctly perceive, who had so often censured the Scholastics for seeking to explain obscurities through occult qualities, should adopt a theory more occult than any occult quality. What, I ask, does he understand by the union of mind and body?[980]

Of course, Descartes's friend, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, had anticipated Spinoza by asking the very same question. Indeed, Lisa Shapiro argues that Elisabeth defended an intermediate metaphysical position which was neither reductionist materialism nor substance dualism.[981] It is a shame, I think, that Spinoza and Elisabeth did not have a greater influence on the subsequent history of Western philosophy, and that they are not more widely read these days. The Cartesian problems which obsessed twentieth-century philosophy — such as skepticism about other minds and about the external world, and the mind-body problem — are dissolved by Spinoza, as a number of my students have reminded me. Many of us may remain unpersuaded by the way in which Spinoza proposes to dissolve Cartesian problems; but I do not think that the originality of his proposals can be denied.

In a letter to Elisabeth, Descartes writes one of his most compelling statements on the mind-body problem: "[I]t does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of conceiving very distinctly, and at the same time, both the distinction between the soul and

---

[980] Spinoza, E, VPref.
[981] Shapiro, "Princess Elizabeth and Descartes," p. 505.

the body, and also their union; because to do so it is necessary to conceive them as one thing alone, and at the same time to conceive them as two, which is the contrary."[982] According to Descartes, to conceive, simultaneously, the distinctness and the unity of mind and body would be to experience a paradox. Spinoza's respect for this paradox, and his attempt to embrace it, are at the heart of his original and radical response to Descartes. In an entry in his *Dictionary*, Pierre Bayle makes the following remarks about Spinoza's "most monstrous hypothesis": Bayle claims that it "surpasses all the heap of all the extravagances that can be said,"[983] "all the monstrosities and chimerical disorders of the craziest people who were ever put away in lunatic asylums,"[984] and that a man "of good sense would prefer to break the ground with his teeth and his nails than to cultivate as shocking and absurd a hypothesis as this."[985] Now that is a high recommendation if I have ever heard one. Spinoza insists that Cartesian substance dualism, rigorously followed out, must lead to substance monism. Excavating Descartes's basement, Spinoza claims to have found a sub-basement, where the two supporting columns — mind and body —converge. He claims that "mind and body ... are one and the same individual thing";[986] that thing is substance; and furthermore, "there is only one substance,"[987] "[t]here can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God."[988] The argument leading to this conclusion is both tortuous and elegant, and it relies both on controversial claims and on claims that would have seemed innocuous to a Cartesian.

Spinoza borrows three metaphysical concepts from Descartes — substance, attribute, and mode — but he turns them to his own distinctive use. In his *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes explains that substance is that which is ontologically self-subsistent: "a thing which so exists that it needs no other thing in order to exist."[989] Although he adamantly includes mind and body under the category of substance, he concedes that, strictly speaking, only one substance satisfies the condition of ontological

---

[982] Descartes, Letter to Elisabeth, 28 June 1643.
[983] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 301.
[984] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 311.
[985] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 312.
[986] Spinoza, E, IIP21S. Cf. IIP7S.
[987] Spinoza, E, IP14C1.
[988] Spinoza, E, IP14.
[989] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Art. 51.

self-subsistence, namely God; and Spinoza will exploit this concession. Descartes further explains that both attributes and modes are properties of substance, but that an attribute constitutes the nature of its substance, and is thus essential to understanding that substance, while modes are inessential. He claims that "extension in length, breadth, and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance."[990] Spinoza accepts these general terms, and offers definitions of substance, attribute, and mode which are not significantly different from those of Descartes.[991] But Spinoza focusses on the substance called God, and he finds that its infinite nature effectively crowds out the possibility of any other substance.

Edwin Curley writes that the idea is "beautifully simple: if there must be a substance which has infinite attributes (where having infinite attributes implies having all possible attributes), and if there can't be two substances which have the same attribute, then the existence of the substance with infinite attributes (God) excludes the possibility of there being any other substance."[992] The contentious argumentative manoeuvre, from the Cartesian perspective, is Spinoza's proposition that "[i]n the universe there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute."[993] I cannot here discuss all of the details of the arduous argument for this proposition.[994] Let me say that the Spinozistic God or Nature, by definition a substance with infinite attributes, must engulf the distinct attributes of thought and extension, which allegedly belong to the two created Cartesian substances. Since the Cartesian corporeal substance, for example, shares the attribute of extension with the Spinozistic God, and since attributes express the essences of their substances, there is no basis for distinguishing the corporeal substance from the divine one,[995] and corporeality is absorbed as one of the essential aspects of Spinoza's God. It is

---

[990] Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Art. 53 and 56.
[991] Spinoza, E, IDefs3-5.
[992] Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 10.
[993] Spinoza, E, IP5.
[994] Spinoza argues that substances must be distinguished on the basis of their attributes. Suppose for the sake of argument that there are two substances with the same attribute, and that I am trying to distinguish them. According to Spinoza, I must distinguish them on the basis of their attributes; but by hypothesis they have the same attribute, and are thus indistinguishable.
[995] At this point, the argument turns on a *version* of what would later become Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles. But it should be remembered that Leibniz

worth remembering that this suggestion was a scandal in Spinoza's own time, and that it not only contributed to his excommunication from the Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam, but also, according to one legend, resulted in an assassination attempt, with a dagger, on the steps of the synagogue.

---

articulated a serious objection to this point of Spinoza's argument: two substances, sharing an attribute of, e.g., extension, might nevertheless be distinguishable, provided each substance had a further, unshared attribute.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

Alain. *The Gods*. Trans. Richard Pevear. New York: New Directions, 1974.

Alford, Lucy Maddux. "Problems in Post-Foundational Ethics: Contingency, Responsibility, Attention." University of Aberdeen, 2011.

Altham, J.E.J. and Ross Harrison. *World, Mind, and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Ames, Roger T. "Taoism and the Nature of Nature." *Environmental Ethics* 8 (Winter 1986): 317-350.

Annas, Julia. "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78.2 (Nov., 2004): 61-75.

Annas, Julia. "Moral Knowledge as Practical Knowledge." Ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, et al. *Moral Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 236-256.

Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.

Anscombe, G.E.M. "Modern Moral Philosophy." *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* XXXIII.124 (January 1958): 1-19. **MMP**

Anscombe, G.E.M. "Thought and Action in Aristotle: What Is 'Practical Truth'?" Ed. Renford Bambrough. *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965. 143-158. **T&A**

Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Basic Writings*. 2 vols. Ed. Anton C. Pegis. New York: Random House, 1945.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Part II (First Part), First Number. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1927.

Arendt, Hannah. "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy." *Responsibility and Judgment*. New York: Schocken Books, 2003. 49-146.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind: Willing*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Aristotle. *De Anima*. Trans. J.A. Smith. *The Basic Works*, pp. 535-603. **DA**

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Trans. W.D. Ross. *The Basic Works*, pp. 681-926.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 2nd edition. Trans. Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. David Ross, rev. Lesley Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. **NE**

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Aristotle. *On the Soul*. Trans. W.S. Hett. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.

Aristotle. *Selections*. Trans. Terence Irwin and Gail Fine. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995.

Aristotle. *The Basic Works*. Ed. Richard McKeon. New York: The Modern Library, 2001.

Armstrong, Aurelia. "Autonomy and the Relational Individual: Spinoza and Feminism." Ed. M. Gatens. *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. 43-63.

Austin, J.L. *Sense and Sensibilia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Aylesworth, Gary. "Postmodernism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/postmodernism/>.

Babbitt, Susan E. "Integrity, Stability and the Self." *Artless Integrity: Moral Imagination, Agency, and Stories*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001. 61-97.

Bambrough, Renford. "Universals and Family Resemblances." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 61 (1960-1961): 207-222.

Barnes, Jonathan. *Aristotle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Bayle, Pierre. *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Trans. Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991.

Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?* Volume II. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

Bennett, Jane. "The Force of Things." *Political Theory* 32.3 (June 2004): 347-372.

Blum, Lawrence. "Compassion." Ed. A.O. Rorty. *Explaining Emotions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. 507-517.

Blum, Lawrence. "Moral Perception and Particularity." *Ethics* 101.4 (Jul. 1991): 701-725.

Bookchin, Murray. "Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology." Eds. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott. *Environmental Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. 126-136.

Bowden, Peta. "Ethical Attention: Accumulating Understandings." *European Journal of Philosophy* 6.1 (1998): 59-77.

Brink, David. "Externalist Moral Realism." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXIV, Supplement (1986): 23-41.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Burgmann, Tamsyn. "B.C. plumber intercepts 'vicious' knife attack." *The Canadian Press*, 18 January 2011.

Burns, Steven and Alice MacLachlan. "Getting It: on jokes and art." *Canadian Aesthetics Journal* 10 (Fall 2004). Web. <www.uqtr.uquebec.ca/AE/Vol_10/wittgenstein/burns.htm>.

Burns, Steven. "If a Lion Could Talk." *Wittgenstein Studien* 1.1 (1994). Web. <http://sammelpunkt.philo.at:8080/396/1/09-1-94.TXT>.

Burns, Steven. "Justice and Impersonality: Simone Weil on Rights and Obligations." *Laval théologique et philosophique* 49.3 (October 1993): 477-486.

Burns, Steven. "Virtue and Necessity." *Laval théologique et philosophique* XXXII (1976): 261-275.

Calhoun, Cheshire. "Standing for Something." *The Journal of Philosophy* 92.5 (1995): 235-260.

Callicott, J. Baird. "Leopold's Land Aesthetic." Eds. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott. *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 105-118.

Callicott, J. Baird. "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic." *Companion to a Sand County Almanac*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. 186-217.

Callicott, J. Baird. "The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology." *Environmental Ethics* 8 (1986): 301-316.

Campbell, Richmond. "What Is Moral Judgment?" *The Journal of Philosophy* CIV.7 (July 2007): 321-349.

Campbell, Sue. "Empathy and Egoism." Eds. S. Sherwin and P. Schotch. *Engaged Philosophy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. 221-247.

Campbell, Sue. "Our Faithfulness to the Past: Reconstructing Memory Value." *Philosophical Psychology* 19.3 (June 2006): 361-380.

Campbell, Sue. *Interpreting the Personal*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Cardone, Erin. "Saanich samaritan helps save VicPD cop's life." *Saanich News*, 19 January 2011.

Chenavier, Robert. *Simone Weil: Attention to the Real*. Trans. Bernard E. Doering. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life*. Revised edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Clarke, Brennan. "Passersby race to aid policewoman 'fighting for her life.'" *The Globe and Mail*, 17 January 2011.

Code, Lorraine. "*Father and Son*: A Case Study in Epistemic Responsibility." *Monist* 66.2 (1983): 268-282.

Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Collins, Arthur W. "The Psychological Reality of Reasons." *Ratio* (new series) X.2 (September 1997): 108-123.

Corbí, Josep E. "First-Person Authority and Self-Knowledge as an Achievement." *European Journal of Philosophy* 18.3 (2009): 325-362.

Cornford, F.M. "Anamnesis." Ed. Malcolm Brown. *Plato's Meno*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971. 108-127.

Cox, Damian, Marguerite La Caze, and Michael Levine. "Integrity." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (12 Dec. 2011), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/integrity/>.

Curley, Edwin. "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy." Ed. M. Grene. *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. 354-376.

Curley, Edwin. *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Dancy, Jonathan. "Acting for a Good Reason." Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 265-280.

Dancy, Jonathan. "Moral Particularism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/moral-particularism>.

Dancy, Jonathan. "The Particularist's Progress." Hooker and Little, *Moral Particularism*, pp. 130-156.

Dancy, Jonathan. *Ethics Without Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. **EWP**

Dancy, Jonathan. *Moral Reasons*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. **MR**

Dancy, Jonathan. *Practical Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Davidson, Donald. "Actions, Reasons, Causes." *The Essential Davidson*, pp. 23-36.

Davidson, Donald. "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" *The Essential Davidson*, pp. 72-89.

Davidson, Donald. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* Vol. 47 (1973-1974): 5-20.

Davidson, Donald. *The Essential Davidson*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Day, Jane M., ed. *Plato's <u>Meno </u>in Focus*. London: Routledge, 1994.

De Sica, Vittorio, dir. *Bicycle Thieves / Ladri di biciclette*. 1948. The Criterion Collection, 2007. DVD.

De Sica, Vittorio, dir. *Umberto D*. 1952. The Criterion Collection, 2003. DVD.

de Sousa, Ronald. "Emotional Truth." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 76.1 (2002): 247-263.

de Sousa, Ronald. "Moral Emotions." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4 (2001): 109-126.

de Sousa, Ronald. "Really, what else is there? Emotions, value and morality." *Critical Quarterly* 50.4 (2008): 12-23.

DeRosa, Katie. "Citizen saves Victoria police officer." *Times Colonist*, 17 January 2011.

DesAutels, Peggy and Margaret Urban Walker, eds. *Moral Psychology: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.

Descartes, René. *Meditations*. Third Edition. Trans. D.A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

Descartes, René. *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*. Ed. R. Ariew. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

Domanski, Don. *Poetry and the Sacred*. Nanaimo: Institute for Coastal Research, 2006.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground*. Trans. Ronald Wilks. London: Penguin Books, 2009.

Dworkin, Gerald. "Unprincipled Ethics." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XX (1995): 224-239.

Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. London: Vintage Books, 2007.

Euripides. *Bakkhai*. Trans. Reginald Gibbons and Charles Segal. *The Complete Euripides*, Volume IV. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 201-346.

Foot, Philippa. "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives." *Virtues and Vices*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978. 157-173.

Frascina, Francis et al. *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Ginzburg, Carlo. "Family Resemblances and Family Trees: Two Cognitive Metaphors." *Critical Inquiry* 30.3 (Spring 2004): 537-556.

Groarke, Louis. "Following in the Footsteps of Aristotle: The Chicago School, the Glue-Stick, and the Razor." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* VI.3 (1992): 190-205.

Hagberg, Garry L. "Jazz Improvisations and Ethical Interaction: A Sketch of the Connections." Ed. Garry L. Hagberg. *Art and Ethical Criticism*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. 259-285.

Hallowell, A. Irving. "Ojibwa ontology, behavior, and world view." Ed. G. Harvey. *Readings in Indigenous Religions*. London: Continuum, 2002. 17-49.

Harman, Gilbert. "Ethics and Observation." Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory*, pp. 36-40.

Hegel, G.F.W. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Vol. Three. Trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983.

Heidegger, Martin. "The *Mitda-sein* of the Others" and "Da-sein and Discourse." *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996. 110-118, 150-159.

Heidegger, Martin. "Truth as Justice" and "Justice." *Nietzsche, Vol. III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*. Trans. J. Stambaugh et al. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987. 137-149, 235-251.

Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Ed. A.P. Martinich and Brian Battiste. Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2011.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Richmond Lattimore. New York: HarperPerennial, 1999.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

Hooker, Brad and Margaret Olivia Little, eds. *Moral Particularism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems and Prose*. Ed. W.H. Gardner. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963.

Houle, Karen. "Spinoza and Ecology Revisited." *Environmental Ethics* 18 (Winter 1997): 417-431.

Howard, David. "Sex, Alcohol, and Blood: Impressionism, Prostitution, and the Paris Commune of 1871." Halifax: University of King's College, 2013.

Hume, David. *Moral Philosophy*. Ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006.

Hymers, Michael. Scholium on Heiti, "An Ethics of Attention," 21 September 2013.

Hymers, Michael. Scholium on Heiti, "An Ethics of Attention," 22 August 2011.

Hymers, Michael. *Wittgenstein and the Practice of Philosophy*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2010.

Ibsen, Henrik. *The Master Builder*. Trans. Una Ellis-Fermor. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958.

Ignatenko, Lyudmilla. "A Solitary Human Voice." Ed. Svetlana Alexievich; trans. Keith Gessen. *Voices from Chernobyl*. London: Dalkey Archives Press, 2005. 5-23.

Irwin, T.H. "Ethics as an Inexact Science: Aristotle's Ambitions for Moral Theory." Hooker and Little, *Moral Particularism*, pp. 100-129.

Irwin, Terence. "Notes" and "Glossary." Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999. 172-354.

Irwin, Terence. *Plato's Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

James, Susan with Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens. "The Power of Spinoza: Feminist Conjunctions." *Hypatia* 15.2 (Spring 2000): 40-58.

Jonas, Hans. "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism." Ed. M. Grene. *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. 259-278.

Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. 3rd edition. Trans. James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

Keats, John. *Selected Letters of John Keats*. Rev. edition. Ed. Grant F. Scott. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Kieślowski, Krzysztof, dir. *Bleu*. Miramax, 1993.

Kosman, Aryeh. "Self-Knowledge and Self-Control in the *Charmides*." Typescript, 16 February 2012.

Lawlor, Leonard. "Jacques Derrida." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/derrida/>.

Leibniz, G.W. *Philosophical Essays.* Trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.

Leone, Sergio. "The Smallest Detail." *Bicycle Thieves*. The Criterion Collection, 2007. 62-63.

Leopold, Aldo. "The Land Ethic." *A Sand County Almanac*, pp. 201-226.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.

Lewontin, R.C. *Biology as Ideology*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1991.

Liezi. *The Book of Lieh-tzŭ*. Trans. A.C. Graham. London: John Murray, 1960.

Lilburn, Tim. "Sorrow; The River." *Living In The World As If It Were Home*. Dunvegan: Cormorant Books, 1999. 53-67.

Lipson, Michael and Abigail Lipson. "Psychotherapy and the Ethics of Attention." *The Hastings Center Report* 26.1 (Jan.-Feb. 1996): 17-22.

Little, Margaret Olivia. "Moral Generalities Revisited." Hooker and Little, *Moral Particularism*, pp. 276-304.

Little, Margaret Olivia. "On Knowing the 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory." Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory*, pp. 775-784.

Little, Margaret Olivia. "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology." *Hypatia* 10.3 (Summer 1995): 117-137.

Little, Margaret Olivia. "Virtue as Knowledge: Objections from the Philosophy of Mind." *Noûs* 31.1 (Mar. 1997): 59-79.

Livingston, John A. *Rogue Primate*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1994.

Lloyd, Genevieve and Moira Gatens. *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Lloyd, Genevieve. "Individuals, Responsibility, and the Philosophical Imagination." Eds. Mackenzie & Stoljar. *Relational Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 112-123.

Lloyd, Genevieve. "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics." *Inquiry* 23.3 (September 1980): 293-311.

Lloyd, Genevieve. *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's <u>Ethics</u>*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Lloyd, Genevieve. *Spinoza and the <u>Ethics</u>*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Lovibond, Sabina. *Ethical Formation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Lovibond, Sabina. *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983.

Luckhardt, C.G., ed. *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

MacIntosh, Duncan. Scholium on Heiti, "An Ethics of Attention," 21 August 2011.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Second Edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

Mackie, J.L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth: Penguins Books, 1977.

Malcolm, Norman. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Manet, Edouard. *Argenteuil, les canotiers*. 1874. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tournai.

Mark, Thomas Carson. "The Spinozistic Attributes." *Philosophia* 7.1 (March 1977): 55-82.

Marsalis, Wynton. "A Masterpiece by Midnight." Ken Burns, dir. *Jazz*. Episode Ten. PBS Home Video, 2000.

Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Lawrence H. Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994.

McDowell, John. "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World." Ed. Schaper. *Pleasure, Preference and Value*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. 1-16.

McDowell, John. "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* Supplementary Vol. 52 (1978): 13-29.

McDowell, John. "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics." *The Engaged Intellect*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009. 23-40.

McDowell, John. "Might There Be External Reasons?" *Mind, Value, & Reality*, pp. 95-111.

McDowell, John. "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following." *Mind, Value, & Reality*, pp. 198-218.

McDowell, John. "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology." *Mind, Value, & Reality*, pp. 23-49. **AMP**

McDowell, John. "Two Sorts of Naturalism." *Mind, Value, & Reality*, pp. 167-197.

McDowell, John. "Virtue and Reason." *Monist* 62.3 (July 1979): 331-350. **V&R**

McDowell, John. *Mind, Value, & Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

McDowell, John. *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011.

McFall, Lynn. "Integrity." *Ethics* 98 (1987): 5-20.

McNaughton, David. *Moral Vision*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Merçon, Juliana. "Relationality and Individuality in Spinoza." *Revista Conatus – Filosofia de Spinoza* 1.2 (Dec. 2007): 51-59.

Mill, J.S. *On Liberty*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978.

Miller, Alexander. *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.

Mitchell, Alanna. "How a marshmallow can predict your future." *The Toronto Star*, 2 November 2009.

Mongoven, Anne. "Integrity vs. Impartiality: Healing a False Dichotomy." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24.2 (2004): 39-54.

Moore, G. E. "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33." *Mind* LXIV.253 (1955): 1-27. (Rpt. in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions*, pp. 87-114.)

Moran, Richard. "Anscombe on 'Practical Knowledge.'" *Royal Institute of Philosophy* Supplement (2004): 43-68.

Moran, Richard. *Authority and Estrangement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Moravcsik, Julius. "Learning as Recollection." Rpt. in Day, *Plato's <u>Meno</u>*, pp. 112-128.

Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge, 1970. **SG**

Murray, Jim. *Whisky Bible 2011*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Dram Good Books, 2010.

Naess, Arne. "Environmental Ethics and Spinoza's Ethics: Comments on Genevieve Lloyd's Article." *Inquiry* 23.3 (September 1980): 313-325.

Naess, Arne. "Spinoza and Ecology." *Philosophia* 7.1 (March 1977): 45-54.

Naess, Arne. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement." Eds. Harold Glasser and Alan R. Drengson. *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*. Vol. 10. Dordrecht: Springer, c2005. 7-12.

Naess, Arne. "The World of Concrete Contents." *Inquiry* 28: 417-428.

Naess, Arne. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Trans. D. Rothenberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Nedelsky, Jennifer. "Reconceiving Rights as Relationship." Ed. C.M. Koggel. *Moral Issues in Global Perspective,* Volume I. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006. 95-106.

Nelson, Hilde. "Against Caring." *The Journal of Clinical Ethics* 3.1 (Spring 1992): 8-15.

Neruda, Pablo. *Selected Odes*. Trans. M.S. Peden. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Thomas Common. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2006.

Normile, Dennis. "Holding Back a Torrent of Rats." *Science* 327 (12 February 2010): 806-807.

North, Helen. *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.

Nussbaum, Martha. "The Discernment of Perception." *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1985): 151-201.

Nussbaum, Martha. "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature." *The Journal of Philosophy* 82.10 (Oct. 1985): 516-529.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory: Particularism, Principle, and Bad Behaviour." Hooker and Little, *Moral Particularism*, pp. 227-255.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness*. Revised edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Nye, Andrea. *Philosophia: The Thought of Rosa Luxenburg, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

O'Connor, Peg. *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life. Feminist Wittgensteinian Metaethics*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.

Pakaluk, Michael. *Aristotle's <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Pasternak, Boris. *Doctor Zhivago*. Trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harari. New York: Pantheon Books, 1991.

Pétrement, Simone. *Simone Weil: A Life*. Trans. Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.

Plato. *Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Plato. *Gorgias*. Trans. Donald J. Zeyl. *Complete Works*, pp. 791-869.

Plato. *Laches, Protagoras, Meno*, et al. Trans. W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Plato. *Letter VII*. Trans. Glenn R. Morrow. *Complete Works*, pp. 1646-1667.

Plato. *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. Trans. W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.

Plato. *Meno*. Trans. G.M.A. Grube. *Complete Works*, pp. 870-897.

Plato. *Phaedrus*. Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. *Complete Works*, pp. 506-556.

Plato. *Protagoras*. Trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell. *Complete Works*, pp. 746-790.

Plato. *Republic*. Trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve. *Complete Works*, pp. 971-1223.

Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. *Complete Works*, pp. 457-505.

Plato. *The Republic*. 2 vols. Trans. Paul Shorey. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Platts, Mark. *Ways of Meaning*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997.

Pleasants, Nigel. "Wittgenstein, Ethics and Basic Moral Certainty." *Inquiry* 51.3 (June 2008): 241-267.

Plumwood, Val. "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism." *Hypatia* 6.1 (Spring 1991): 3-27.

Preminger, Alex, ed. *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Radcliffe, Elizabeth S. "The Humean Theory of Motivation and Its Critics." *A Companion to Hume*. Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2008. 477-492.

Rhees, Rush. "Some Developments in Wittgenstein's View of Ethics." *The Philosophical Review* 74.1 (Jan., 1965): 17-26.

Richardson, Carolyn. "Sharp Edges, False Comfort." *Common Knowledge* 19.2 (2013): 237-256.

Richardson, Carolyn. "Talk About Talk." *Lyric Ecology*. Eds. M. Dickinson & C. Goulet. Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2010. 40-49.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *New Poems*. Trans. E. Snow. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

Robinson, T.M. *Plato's Psychology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.

Ross, Sir David. *Aristotle*. 6th edition. London: Routledge, 1995.

Scheman, Naomi. "Forms of Life: Mapping the Rough Ground." Eds. H. Sluga and D. Stern. *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 383-410.

Scherkoske, Greg. "Could Integrity Be an Epistemic Virtue?" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 20.2 (2012): 185-215.

Scott, Dominic. *Plato's Meno*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Sen, Amartya. "Democracy and Its Global Roots." *Moral Issues in Global Perspective*. Ed. Christine M. Koggel. Vol. I. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006. 208-218.

Sennett, Richard (with David Cayley). "Flesh and Stone." *Ideas*, CBC Radio, 14 December 2009.

Shafer-Landau, Russ and Terence Cuneo, eds. *Foundations of Ethics*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Shafer-Landau, Russ, ed. *Ethical Theory*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Shanker, Stuart. "Self-Regulation: Calm, Alert, and Learning." *Education Canada* 50.3 (Summer 2010): 4-7.

Shapiro, Lisa. "Princess Elizabeth and Descartes: The Union of Soul and Body and the Practice of Philosophy." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7.3 (1999): 503-520.

Sherman, Nancy. "Empathy and Imagination." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXII (1998): 82-119.

Shiner, Roger. "Ethical Perception in Aristotle." *Apeiron* 13.2 (Dec. 1979): 79-85.

Sinclair, Sue. "Wisdom." *Lyric Ecology*. Eds. Mark Dickinson and Clare Goulet. Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2010. 157-165.

Smith, Michael. "The Externalist Challenge." Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, eds., *Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 231-242.

Smith, Michael. "The Humean Theory of Motivation." *Mind*, New Series 96.381 (Jan., 1987): 36-61. **HTM**

Smith, Michael. *The Moral Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Smith, Zadie. "Some Notes on Attunement." *The New Yorker*, 17 December 2012. Web.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Trans. Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001.

Spelman, Elizabeth. "The Heady Political Life of Compassion." *Fruits of Sorrow*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. 59-89.

Spinoza, Benedict. *Ethics*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.

Steinbeck, John. *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Stohr, Karen E. "Moral Cacophony: When Continence Is a Virtue." *The Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003): 339-363.

Taylor, Gabriele and Raymond Gaita. "Integrity." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement* 55 (1971): 143-176.

Thomas, Laurence. "Moral Deference." Ed. C. Willet. *Theorizing Multiculturalism*. Blackwell Publishers, 1998. 359-381.

Vlastos, Gregory. "*Anamnesis* in the *Meno*." Rpt in Day, *Plato's <u>Meno</u>*, pp. 88-111.

Waismann, Friedrich. "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein." *The Philosophical Review* 74.1 (Jan., 1965): 12-16.

Walker, Margaret Urban. "Feminism, Ethics, and the Question of Theory." *Hypatia* 7.3 (Summer, 1992): 23-38.

Walker, Margaret Urban. "Moral Particularity." *Moral Contexts*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. 3-19.

Walker, Margaret Urban. "Moral Psychology." Eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay. *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. 102-115.

Walker, Margaret Urban. "Picking Up Pieces." *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 1998. 103-129.

Walker, Margaret Urban. *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Weber, Max. "Science as a Vocation." *The Vocation Lectures*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004. 1-31.

Weil, Simone. "Essay on the Notion of Reading." Trans. Rebecca Fine Rose and Timothy Tessin. *Philosophical Investigations* 13.4 (October 1990): 297-303.

Weil, Simone. "Science and Perception in Descartes." Ed. and trans. Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina Van Ness. *Formative Writings: 1929-1941*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. 31-88.

Weil, Simone. *Attente de Dieu*. Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1966.

Weil, Simone. *First and Last Notebooks*. Trans. Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. Trans. Emma Craufurd and Mario von der Ruhr. London: Routledge Classics, 2002. **G&G**

Weil, Simone. *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*. Trans. Elisabeth Chase Geissbuhler. London: Routledge, 1957.

Weil, Simone. *La Pesanteur et la grace*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1948.

Weil, Simone. *Lectures on Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Price. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Weil, Simone. *Œuvres complètes*. Tome VI, vols. 1-4: *Cahiers*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994-2006.

Weil, Simone. *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*. Trans. Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Weil, Simone. *Pensées sans ordre concernant l'amour de Dieu.* Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1962.

Weil, Simone. *Selected Essays: 1934-1943*. Trans. Richard Rees. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Weil, Simone. *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*. Trans. Arthur Wills. London: Routledge, 2004.

Weil, Simone. *Waiting for God*. Trans. Emma Craufurd. New York: Perennial-Harper, 2001. **WG**

Weiss, Roslyn. "Learning without Teaching." *Interpretation* 34.1 (2006): 3-21.

Weiss, Roslyn. *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Westra, Laura. "From Aldo Leopold to the Wildlands Project: The Ethics of Integrity." *Environmental Ethics* 23 (Fall 2001): 261-274.

White, Alan R. *Attention*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964.

Wiggins, David. "Deliberation and Practical Reason." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 76 (1975 - 1976): 29-51.

Wiggins, David. "Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 79 (1978 - 1979): 251-277.

Wilkes, Kathleen V. "Conclusions in the *Meno*." Rpt in Day, *Plato's Meno*, pp. 208-220.

Williams, Bernard. "A critique of utilitarianism." *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge at the University Press, 1973. 77-150.

Williams, Bernard. "Internal and external reasons." *Moral Luck*, pp. 101-113.

Williams, Bernard. "Moral Luck." *Moral Luck*, pp. 20-39.

Williams, Bernard. "Persons, character and morality." *Moral Luck*, pp. 1-19.

Williams, Bernard. "Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence." *Moral Luck*, pp. 40-53.

Williams, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Williams, Bernard. *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Williams, Michael. *Problems of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Winch, "Mind, Body & Ethics in Spinoza." *Philosophical Investigations* 18.3 (July 1995): 216-234.

Winch, Peter. "Moral Integrity." *Ethics and Action*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972. 171-192. **MI**

Winch, Peter. "Particularity and Morals." *Trying to Make Sense*. Basil Blackwell, 1987. 167-180.

Winch, Peter. *Ethics and Action*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

Winch, Peter. *Simone Weil: "The Just Balance."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "A Lecture on Ethics." *The Philosophical Review* 74.1 (Jan., 1965): 3-12.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness." *Philosophical Occasions*, pp. 368-405.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*." *Philosophical Occasions*, pp. 115-155.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Ed. G.H. von Wright; trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. **C&V**

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Notebooks 1914-1916*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. 3rd edition. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. **PI**

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Occasions: 1912-1951*. Eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Remarks*. Ed. R. Rhees, trans R. Hargreaves and R. White. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness. London: Routledge Classics, 2004. **TLP**

Wollheim, Richard. *Painting as an Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Zavattini, Cesare. "Some Ideas on the Cinema." Eds. Howard Curle and Stephen Snyder. *Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. 50-61.

Zwicky, Jan (with Jay Ruzesky). "The Details: An Interview with Jan Zwicky." *The Malahat Review: The Green Imagination* 165 (2008): 92-97.

Zwicky, Jan and Tim Lilburn. *Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*. LaRonge, SK: JackPine Press, 2003.

Zwicky, Jan. "Alcibiades' Love." Ed. Michael Chase et al. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013. 84-98.

Zwicky, Jan. "Bringhurst's Presocratics: Lyric and Ecology." Ed. T. Lilburn. *Poetry and Knowing: Speculative Essays & Interviews*. Kingston: Quarry Press, 1995. 65-117. **L&E**

Zwicky, Jan. "Bringhurst's Presocratics: Lyric and Ecology." *Terra Nova: Nature and Culture* 1.1 (1995): 42–58 and 1.2 (1996): 77–98.

Zwicky, Jan. "Dream Logic and the Politics of Interpretation." Ed. Tim Lilburn. *Thinking and Singing*. Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2002. 121-151.

Zwicky, Jan. "Imagination & the Good Life." *Common Knowledge* 20.1 (Winter 2014): 28-45.

Zwicky, Jan. "Integrity and Ornament." Eds. B. Miller & M. Ward. *Crime and Ornament: The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*. Toronto: YYZ Books, 2002. 205-216.

Zwicky, Jan. "Just the World." Ed. D. Ward. *Bush Dweller*. Muenster, SK: St. Peter's, 2010. 35-37.

Zwicky, Jan. "Lyric Realism: Nature Poetry, Silence, and Ontology." *The Malahat Review* 165 (Winter 2008): 85-91.

Zwicky, Jan. "Lyric, Narrative, Memory." *A Ragged Pen*. Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2006. 87-105.

Zwicky, Jan. "Mathematical Analogy and Metaphorical Insight." *The Mathematical Intelligencer* 28.2 (2006): 4-9.

Zwicky, Jan. "Once Upon a Time in the West: Heidegger and the Poets." Ed. Tim Lilburn. *Thinking and Singing*. Toronto: Cormorant, 2002. 187-199.

Zwicky, Jan. "Oracularity." *Metaphilosophy* 34.4 (July 2003): 488-509.

Zwicky, Jan. "Plato's *Phaedrus*: Philosophy as Dialogue with the Dead." *Apeiron* 30.1 (1997): 19-48.

Zwicky, Jan. "What Is Ineffable?" *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 26.2 (June 2012): 197-217.

Zwicky, Jan. *Lyric Philosophy*. 2nd edition. Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2011. **LP**

Zwicky, Jan. *Lyric Philosophy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

Zwicky, Jan. *Plato as Artist*. Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2009. **PA**

Zwicky, Jan. *Wisdom & Metaphor*. 2nd edition. Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2008. **W&M**

Zwicky, Jan. *Wisdom & Metaphor*. Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2003.