

LEARNING TO LOVE: PHILOSOPHY
AND MORAL PROGRESS

by

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APPROVED:



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Philip Dean Smith for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Philosophy to be taken December 1991

Title: LEARNING TO LOVE: PHILOSOPHY AND MORAL PROGRESS

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Dr. William Davie

Love is a crucially important notion in morals. Moral philosophy, then, should give attention to this notion, and some of that attention should be concerned with how people might develop or improve as lovers. However, when the author tried to think through some rather obvious suggestions relating to love and becoming a lover, it became clear that much moral theory gives love short shrift. Assumptions inherent in rationalistic moral theory prevent most moral philosophers from letting love be the central concept in their work.

This dissertation has two aims: to suggest four things which may contribute to moral progress by helping individuals love better, and to defend such suggestions against standard moral theory. Positively, the study suggests: overcoming narcissism enables a person to love; the basic element of love, clear and compassionate attention to individuals, can be practiced; a vision of love, given through narrative, can direct the moral pilgrim; and healthy communities can help would-be lovers. Negatively, the study argues: some of these positive suggestions would be classed as a non-central adjunct to moral philosophy by most rationalistic moral philosophers; this (mis)classification of these suggestions reveals that standard moral philosophy is deficient; these deficiencies flow from the wrong use of the "myth of autonomous reason;" and rationalistic moral theories are rooted in an untenable picture of human nature as essentially rational. Further, questions surrounding the concepts of pluralism of goods and relativism are discussed in one chapter.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife
KAREN
and to our two sons
TIMOTHY and JAMES

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INTRODUCTION

I responded to the question from my barber, who insisted that I keep my answer extremely brief. The main idea of my dissertation is that people really can get better. He was satisfied, and said this improved his opinion of philosophy.

It may be hoped that this book will find some readers who ask for more detail. The body of the text, of course, conveys at least some of those details, as many as my thought, time, and energy allowed. Between these extremes--the sentence which pleased the barber and the whole book, which I hope pleases the reader--lies a shorter description, the introduction.

This study hopes to show that moral progress is possible, in particular, that progress in love is possible. Four theses are advanced to support this main idea. First, narcissism hinders love, therefore progress against narcissism is a means of growth in love. Second, the root of love is accurate and compassionate attention, which we can gain by practice, even though it is hard. Third, as moral pilgrims we pursue visions of love, so the stories by which we gain such visions are tools in learning to love. Fourth, healthy communities can help would-be lovers along the way. These themes are taken up, respectively, in chapters I, II, VI, and VIII.

The positive claims of the book do not fit well with much, perhaps most, ethical theory. Chapters III, IV and V examine this problem. Chapter III tries to recognize objections to the sort of moral philosophy exemplified in the first two chapters, trace those objections to basic assumptions of rationalistic moral theory, and call those assumptions into question. Chapter IV examines Immanuel Kant's moral theory, as a representative of rationalistic theory, shows that it is rooted in a myth (the "myth of autonomous reason") and a certain view of human nature, and rejects the myth (at least as applied to ethics) and the view of human nature. Chapter V examines a modern application of rationalistic theory in another field--Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development psychology--and shows how its rationalistic assumptions render it an example of "how not to think about moral progress."

Does my assertion, in chapter VI, that we need a vision of love to grow as lovers, entail that I disbelieve in the incommensurability of goods, a topic in some recent philosophic literature? This possibility is explored in chapter VII. (The answer is complicated. No, the views of chapter VI do not entail a rejection of incommensurability. On the other hand, I do not believe goods are ultimately incommensurable. On still another hand, the ultimate unity of good shows up only imperfectly in a penultimate world.)

Obviously, the book is not merely a philosophical exercise for the author. Progress in love is not just a mode of moral progress (though there are others); it is the most important one. The subtext

of importance--standard ethical theory gives its attention to things of lesser importance, while giving little attention to love--runs throughout the book. It is to be hoped, however, that the author has not substituted conviction for a substantive philosophical investigation.

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CHAPTER I

THE ABILITY TO SEE: TWO THESES OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Two theses:

1. Narcissism is morally deadly; it can so deaden the soul as to make moral progress impossible.
2. Thesis #1, and many other statements of its sort, ought to be considered proper expressions of ethical theory.

The neophyte philosopher in modern times who wishes to think and write about morality faces a daunting problem. Some things which need to be said seem unsayable from within the framework of ideas accepted by many philosophers. One can look long and far before finding an approach to ethics which allows certain things to be said philosophically.

What could be meant by such a charge? Philosophy is a notoriously many-sided discipline, in which basic assumptions are often challenged. How could any philosophical position, if well presented, fail to be heard? As will become clear, I am not suggesting that the positions argued in this book have not been aired at all; much of what is written here has antecedents in other

philosophers' work. Nevertheless, the main contentions of this study appear, when compared to much modern moral philosophy, to be "strange talk," i.e. not so much denying what others write, but talking about a different topic entirely.

Rather than defend this assertion, this chapter will instead offer an example of moral philosophy, saying something which needs to be said. I will discuss narcissism, saying what I mean by it, showing why it is morally deadly, asking how someone could become aware of it, and suggesting what might be done about it. If this chapter's project is successful, my claim will have been demonstrated, for the reader will be able to see how different the project is from much philosophical writing on moral topics. Later, I will address an opinion which some of my readers, especially those who are trained in philosophy, may have about my discussion of narcissism. Specifically, philosophers may object that it should be classed as a piece of moralism, not moral philosophy. I will suggest that this opinion is misguided and unnecessary.

Philosophy really ought to be more interested in the first thesis (and, of course, many others like it) than in the second. Given the state of modern ethical theory, thesis 2 must be made explicit so that thesis 1 might be granted philosophic respectability. Still, not many will accept thesis 2 unless the discussion of thesis 1 is convincing.

Narcissism and the Death of Love

"In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men. . ." Thus begins the succession narrative of Solomon, found in the Bible, begun in 2 Samuel (chapters 11-23) and concluded in 1 Kings (chapters 1,2). This magnificent piece of historiography tells how the hastily constructed Israelite empire, put together entirely within David's lifetime, passed not to his many older sons, but to Solomon. For the purposes of this chapter, we direct our attention to that most famous part of the narrative, the story of David and Bathsheba.

David, no longer the young warrior of other Bible stories but the firmly established king of Israel, did not go out to war with his general Joab. Secure in his power, he remained in the capital, Jerusalem, to administer his growing dominions and (we may suppose) to enjoy a settled life. While there he saw a young woman bathing and desired her. Ancient despots usually had their way in such matters; though David discovered the beautiful Bathsheba was married, he took her anyway. She soon reported that she carried his child. To cover the matter David summoned her husband, a military man named Uriah, to Jerusalem. But Uriah would not take advantage of his "leave" for conjugal purposes as long as Joab and the army were in the field. So David sent Uriah back to the front carrying his death sentence, a secret command to Joab to expose Uriah to enemy attack. Uriah died and David married the grieving widow. Problem

solved; but as the succession historian briefly notes: "The thing David had done displeased the LORD." (2 Samuel 11:27)

Surely David knew that he had sinned. Or did he? Readers of the text, separated from the action, can list his crimes, including adultery, murder, abuse of governmental authority, conspiracy, duplicity, etc. But can you imagine David's mind on the day he married Bathsheba? I can suppose him to consider himself as acting wisely in a tight spot. Yes, the initial affair was a mistake and he knew better. The king in a theocratic state like Israel was supposed to be a moral exemplar; if his deed became known his moral authority would be lessened, though probably not enough to weaken his political power. So the matter had to be hushed up, either by Uriah thinking the child his own or--given Uriah's expression of military loyalty--by Uriah's death. David might well have thought he had done well enough to protect the honor of the throne and Uriah as a state hero.

"But what David had done displeased the LORD." In the second act of the drama, the prophet Nathan arrived in court to tell the king a story. It seemed that a wealthy man in Israel, blessed with ample flocks and herds, lived next to a poor man with only one sheep. A friend arrived to feast with the rich man. But instead of butchering from his own herd, the man had stolen his neighbor's lone sheep and offered that to his guest. Obviously, an injustice had occurred, but what should be done? What did the king say to the story? Nathan asked. Indignant at such misuse of power, David said that the man

really ought to die, that he would be required to restore to his neighbor four times what he had taken. And Nathan replied, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7) If, as I have supposed, David had rationalized his actions, the rationalization was now smashed. David said, "I have sinned against the LORD." (2 Samuel 12:13, cf. Psalm 51)

I have retold the story in this way, including my suppositions about David's state of mind, so that the story will illustrate the following point. In spite of his many crimes in this affair, David at least had the virtue that when confronted with his sins he was willing to see them as the evils they were. He was willing to admit to the world, but most importantly to himself, that his actions were just as unjust as those of the rich man in Nathan's story. He faced up to a difference between the way he was and the way he knew he ought to be.

Narcissism is marked by the unwillingness or inability to do as David. A narcissist rationalizes his behavior and being, both to other people and to himself. The narcissist values himself for "making it," for living up to his standards. So the narcissist cannot admit that he has not lived up to his standards without tearing at his self-esteem, even when (as is frequently the case) the narcissist's standards are unrealistic. Of course, most confrontations between what a person is and what he thinks he should be are not public affairs like the confrontation between Nathan and David. Most opportunities for

insight and self-evaluation are internal to a person's life, as are our narcissistic or non-narcissistic reactions to them.

Note that the upshot of this discussion is that our internal reactions to certain internal events are morally significant. A person may feel threatened by apparent conflicts between what she is and what she thinks she should be. Feeling threatened, she may not acknowledge that she has been anything less than perfect. Both the feeling of threat and the resulting repression may be unconscious.¹ They are, nevertheless, matters of morality.

¹ With this sentence I go from the realm of morality to that of psychological theory, a move which warrants extended side comment.

First, a leading interest of this book, which will resurface repeatedly, is the interplay of psychology and morality. For example, in chapter five I explore and criticize moral development research. I think that both the moral philosopher and the psychologist do well to pay attention to the other's work.

Second, ideas from theoretical psychology have so entered our everyday language that we need to make special efforts to be aware of them and the ways they shape our thinking about morality. "Both the feeling of threat and the resulting repression may be unconscious." Note that both 'repression' and 'unconscious' are stock items of psychological theory. Even if I suspect, as I do, that people repress many of their feelings and that much of their mental activity is unconscious, I should recognize that these ideas are hypothetical constructs.

Third, psychological theories often can be read as attempted explanations of *how* people come to think and feel the way they do. One can reject a proposed explanation or theory and still agree that people think and feel in the ways described. For instance, this chapter will present a psychoanalytic etiology of narcissism; the reader could regard the proposed etiology as unfounded and still accept the fact of narcissism. Specifically, some people are unable or unwilling to face their moral shortcomings. I do not, in fact, want to endorse psychoanalysis, though I suspect it gives insight (another theoretically tinged word) into how we produce narcissists.

Fourth, the usefulness of psychological theory for the moralist consists partially in its ability to let us admit things we might not like. Narcissism is ugly and unrealistic; I don't like the thought that I am narcissistic. But an explanatory theory which shows that my narcissism is part of the natural order of things allows me to admit its existence in me as something less than a totally arbitrary stroke of evil.

Ample psychological literature discusses the narcissistic personality disorder (Adler 430), with examples of extremely self-centered, deceptive, and manipulative characters providing the grist for the analytic mill. Perhaps the first and most important thing to do in regard to these people is to protect others from them. It is easy to see that the narcissistic personality disorder disrupts moral progress--except that one hesitates to call these people "immoral"; they are sick. I want to talk not about extreme cases but less virulent infections of this moral disease which are found readily in everyday life, in the lives of ordinary people. These people, living what Stephen M. Johnson calls the "narcissistic style," often cause as much pain to themselves as to others. (Johnson 3)

Johnson tells of "Martin," a client who had been severely abused as a very young child. (Johnson 201-203) Rejected by his parents at an age when parents seem almost godlike to a child, Martin felt he was worthless unless he could earn the approval and respect of other people. As an adult, Martin sought fulfillment through success and achievement in business. A driven and intelligent man, Martin "succeeded"; he had the career, the house, everything. He reached every goal he set--and was desperately unhappy. He had internalized the message of his abusive parents that he was worthless. No amount of achievement could heal the injury he had suffered. Martin is typical of the garden variety narcissists I am concerned with, people of whom Johnson says:

They are too busy proving their worth--or more properly, disproving their worthlessness--to feel the love, appreciation, and joy of human connectedness which their good works could potentially stimulate in themselves and others. These people are not character disordered. They are people tortured by narcissistic injury and crippled by developmental arrests in functioning which rob them of the richness of life they deserve. (Johnson 3)

Psychoanalytic theory traces various personality disorders to unresolved issues in early development of an individual. (Johnson 27-32) In the case of the narcissistic personality disorder, analytic theory looks at a period a few months after a person has learned to walk. M.S. Mahler has labeled this period the "rapprochement with reality," roughly the period from 15 to 24 months of age. The child has been through the manic, joyful stage of having acquired walking skills, when she explored everything and seemed invincible; no number of falls could keep her from bouncing back up and trying again. But now new, more challenging realities force their way into her world -- separateness, vulnerability, and limitation. The child must come to grips with the facts that mother is not just an extension of herself, that the world holds dangers as well as wonders, and that there are some things she cannot do no matter how many times or how hard she tries. In healthy development, a child learns these lessons bit by bit and gradually overcomes her natural defenses against these unpleasant truths. But if the child is not "optimally frustrated,"--repeatedly, gently, with gradually increasing severity

exposed to separateness, vulnerability, and limitation--she may get "stuck" in a pattern of infantile consciousness.

According to analytic theory, three defenses typically appear in the patterns of the narcissistic mind. The adult may retain the grandiosity of the new walker. "I am nothing unless I am perfect." Or he may idealize some mother-substitute, giving the substitute the godlike qualities mother used to have. "I can be nothing without the perfect other to direct and guide and make my life meaningful." Or, in a slightly more advanced stage, he may split himself and alternate between being the all-conquering walker and the worthless baby who cannot do anything right, a feeling internalized when the child experiences limitation in a crushing way.

Fixation in primitive defenses produces a "false self." Certainly, the false self is the narcissist; it is real in that sense. But a realistic sense of self can only be gained by gradual neutralization of a person's grandiosity and idealization. So long as the narcissist lives in the emotional world of a toddler, he is bound to hurt and be hurt. The adult narcissist has his normal intellectual and productive capacities; he can "get on" and contribute in the world fairly effectively. But his production is likely to be of the driven kind, like Martin's, and it will not repair the damage done to that inner child for whom separation, vulnerability and limitation are unfinished and frightening business.

How does the narcissistic style prevent moral progress?
Consider a case like "Phil," again given by Johnson. (Johnson 129-

131) Phil grew up in a home with an alcoholic, abusive father and a mother who failed to protect him from the father. He was humiliated and shamed repeatedly throughout his childhood. For Phil, the narcissistic dictum, "I am nothing unless I am perfect," meant that he was nothing. He came to therapy at thirty-eight suffering from severe depression, alcoholism, and chronic pain. Phil's alcoholism and feelings of worthlessness united in alcoholic binge episodes, during which he would disappear for days at a time. Like Martin's, Phil's false self was grandiose; unlike Martin, Phil generally felt the demands of the false self as a crushing, impossible burden. Johnson calls problems like those Phil presented when he entered therapy the "symptomatic self." Narcissists may alternate between the "successful" false self and the depressed, isolated symptomatic self for most of their lives. In spite of his depression and feelings of worthlessness and guilt, Phil had managed a long term marriage and employment.

Phil was, I suggest, a relatively ordinary person; though his life brought him little joy and much unhappiness, he met the minimal requirements of the social contract. It is important to see that unlike the full-blown narcissistic personality disorder or the cool, calm sociopath, Phil wanted to be a "good" person and regretted the pain he caused others. If anything, he was too self-recriminating, especially after binges. And yet, because of his narcissism, Phil caused heartache and pain for himself, his family, and others around

him. Phil could not get better in a moral sense unless he got better in a psychological sense.

Consider an imaginary case, which illustrates disturbing statistics, of a date rapist. Don's girlfriend, Sara, feels humiliated and furious. Attracted to him first by his good looks and sense of humor, Sara came to admire Don's political views and intelligence; she still does. They enjoyed mutual friends and some good times together. But last night, after seeing the latest Woody Allen film, she had invited him to her apartment for a drink and to talk. Don wanted to talk, but not about the movie, it seemed. He pressed Sara for physical intimacy; she said no. And he took her clothes off and raped her.

If we could ask Don, though, he would say that they made love. He had to push her a little bit, of course, but she wanted it. Women are like that sometimes. Rape? Don would deny it vehemently. He must; it would destroy his picture of himself to admit the label "rapist." He would insist that he does not hate or want to hurt his girlfriend--isn't that what rapists are like? Indeed, he feels closer to his girlfriend (now lover) than ever. He would not be surprised if they end up married.

If Don and Sara were not imaginary, I would not be surprised if they married either; it happens often. But I would fear for their relationship. As long as Don is unable to see the pain he caused her, he will continue to use Sara. He will not grow in love until he recognizes her as an autonomous person.

Don is imaginary but date rape is not. How can we understand the phenomenon, repeatedly confirmed in studies, in which significant percentages of university women report having been raped by close acquaintances while virtually no university males admit being rapists? The women perceive rape where the men imagine love-making. (Clearly, there is no attempt here to be neutral between the perceptions of the women and the misperceptions of the men. In this case, the women know what's going on while the men do not.) Sexism, deeply embedded in our culture, must be part of any explanation of date rape. I doubt, though, that this societal reality adequately explains the sincere responses from university men in date rape studies. In many cases the university men are living from a narcissistic false self. Like Don, they cannot admit that they have raped; their sense of self demands that they not be criminal. They rationalize not because they fear legal responsibility, but because they fear the internalized message of the parent to the toddler, "You are not good enough."² Like Don, if they do not overcome the pressure to rationalize they may continue to use women as objects without ever seeing that that is what they are doing.

Narcissism comes in milder forms than the examples I've mentioned might suggest. Johnson writes of "Chuck," a normally

² These remarks ignore the probability that sexism in our culture is massively interconnected with male narcissism. I would not argue against anyone who wanted to make that connection. I would insist, though, that an individual's narcissism is not the same thing as societal sexism. Date rape is not adequately explained by saying many university men are sexists.

high-functioning, capable person with a fairly realistic sense of self. (Johnson 173-189) Chuck grew up in a wealthy, upper-class family. His father and older brother, though nurturing and supportive in some ways, communicated a clear demand that Chuck live up to family standards of achievement, distinction and social grace. The youngest child in the family, Chuck was allowed a little more freedom than his siblings, but he still grew up worried whether he could live up to the family image. Chuck spent a number of years trying to prove his worth with successes in business or dating physically attractive but emotionally hard and financially independent women. Neither sort of success satisfied his need to feel worthwhile.

Johnson relates how, in a comparatively short course of therapy, Chuck gained insight into his narcissistic false self. He learned to feel fears which he had long suppressed, which Johnson connects, in accord with analytic theory, to Chuck's interior child, still stuck in defenses against vulnerability. Then Chuck took a vacation among family in the midwest in which his newly developed self-acceptance and openness to feelings contrasted sharply with the tight self-control of his brother and sister-in-law. Chuck was able to spend time with his nieces and nephews simply playing. He told his rigid brother that he loved him, but that he was no longer willing to devote his life to business success. He took a long drive with his 82-year-old grandmother; she reminisced and they talked about life and

death and reaffirmed their love for each other. He looked up old friends, talked and had fun.

We should say that by becoming aware of and to some degree emerging out of his narcissism, Chuck did more than make therapeutic progress. He made moral progress. By learning to accept himself, not for measuring up but for being himself, Chuck found it easier to be honest about his opinions and feelings when speaking with others. He was able to love them better.

Here is a summary of what has been said to this point. Narcissism prevents moral progress in a number of ways; especially, narcissism keeps us from learning to be lovers. Sometimes, as in the case of a date rapist, the grandiosity of the false self gets connected with some rule of morality, internalized as (for example), "If I am a rapist I am a really bad person." The resulting need to deny that one has broken the rule leads to rationalization and the ability repeatedly to break the rule while approving it. M. Scott Peck gives a grotesque example of this in "The Case of Bobby and His Parents" in *People of the Lie*. (Peck 47-59) Bobby's parents had two sons, the younger of whom, Bobby, was hospitalized for depression. The older son, Stuart, had committed suicide with a small gauge rifle. For Christmas, the parents made a present of that very rifle to Bobby. They did not see anything wrong with this.

'Did you think how that present might seem to Bobby?' I asked.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that giving him his brother's suicide weapon was like telling him to go out and kill himself too.'

'We didn't tell him anything of the sort.'

'Of course not. But did you think that it might possibly seem that way to Bobby?'

'No, we didn't think about that. We're not educated people like you. We haven't been to college and learn all kinds of fancy ways of thinking. We're just simple working people. We can't be expected to think of all these things.' (Peck 57)

To the extent that narcissism keeps me unconscious of the ways I hurt other people, it stops my moral progress.

For other narcissists, like Martin and Chuck's brother, the needs of the false self consume a person's time and energy. In our culture, these people often are materially rewarded for their drivenness, but they have little to give emotionally. Learning to love takes, and is worth, time and energy. Since learning to love takes time and energy, it will not do, as some of us are tempted to do, to make "Thou shalt love" into a rule which a rational person may simply fulfill at will. That just adds another requirement to the image of the false self.

To the extent that narcissism keeps me from learning to love, it stops my moral progress.

Sometimes, as for Johnson's "Phil," the grandiose false self is crushed repeatedly, leading to intense depression. We easily see, in his case, the moral implications of his suffering because his binges brought anguish to his wife and others. We should observe, though, that the pain he caused himself was a moral issue, leaving aside the

interests of others. "I, too, am a human being"; far too often, we take the virtue of self-love for granted.

To the extent that narcissism keeps me from loving and caring for myself, it stops my moral progress.

So far attention has been concentrated on individual examples of narcissism. The narcissistic style can also infect groups, from small ones like families and clubs to huge corporations and nation-states. I do not want to speculate about the etiology of group narcissism, questioning whether it originates in group processes or whether it comes from the joining of the narcissism of the individuals in the group. It seems clear, though, that many groups are marked by narcissistic qualities, especially denial of knowledge that would threaten the group self-image.

For example, Martha (not her real name) came to my office with great hesitation. Martha had not been to a church for a long time, not since her teens. She felt out of place, and wondered if a church could have any place in her spiritual pilgrimage.

Martha grew up in a traditional family in the Midwest with strong values of family love, community responsibility, church attendance, and conservative sexual mores. She had happy memories of her childhood, memories marred by what happened after. At fifteen, she became pregnant and her parents threw her out. With no one to turn to in her church or community, she drifted to a major city where she supported herself and her child through prostitution. Somehow Martha overcame all this. When she came to

me she had a husband, a house and a conventional lifestyle. Now that survival was no longer the primary issue in her life, Martha sensed a need for spiritual growth, thus her visit to a pastor's office. But memories of rejection filled her with apprehension. Religious people in her past had hurt and deserted her. How could they have done it? How could people who talked about love and loyalty prove so vindictive and judgmental?

Indeed, how could they? Were Martha's parents and the people in the church conscious hypocrites? Probably not. Having observed other, similar situations, I suggested that her parents acted out of a combination of embarrassment (what would they tell their friends?), anger (how could she do this to them?), and misguided righteousness (she had broken the rules and set a bad example). They rationalized forcing Martha from the house by thinking that she had chosen her course and they were only respecting her decision (she wanted to be an adult; let her live as one). The church folk did not press Martha's parents too closely for an explanation of Martha's "runaway" from home because they were embarrassed too.

Martha conceded all this; she had concluded long before that her parents actually thought they had treated her properly. Martha's parents and church were not conscious of the gap, which certainly seemed obvious to Martha, between the values they preached and their actions toward Martha. This group valued itself as being righteous; if Martha broke their rule-bound definition of righteousness, she broke the group's self-image. Within this group

self-image they could not tolerate her continued presence. They rationalized their behavior or simply repressed the acknowledgement that it was evil. The narcissistic group thinks and acts much like the narcissistic individual.

Group narcissism can be on a "small" scale, as in a single congregation, or on a massive, institutional scale, like that of many white South Africans. These people consider themselves democrats and defenders of freedom. How, then, can they deny political rights to the black majority? Once again, one may doubt that they are conscious hypocrites. Instead, they believe that blacks are inferior or that most blacks are happy with the status quo or that blacks can be given their due within the system of homelands citizenship. To admit that white rule is raw unjustifiable oppression would be intolerable, so they avoid the admission.

Group narcissism is marked by commitment to an unrealistic group identity, "the lie." The lie may be spoken publicly or assumed silently. Anyone in the group who exposes the lie or acts in violation of the group self-image may be ostracized by the group.

Consider the American experience of the Vietnam War in the 1960's. President Kennedy defined South Vietnam as a democracy, worthy of American support. Under the Johnson administration, hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers were committed to the war against North Vietnam and the "Vietcong," supposedly a small revolutionary communist faction in the South Vietnamese population. President Johnson's main political interests lay in the combination of

social programs he called the great society, programs under attack from his political opponents. In order to build the great society and prosecute the war at the same time in the face of this opposition, Johnson repeatedly denied the costs, human and material, which military people said the war required. Again and again administration spokesmen, sometimes even military officers, assured the public that "the corner has been turned" and "the end is in sight."

In the last two years of the Johnson administration the lies multiplied. People who questioned the lies--were we really defending a just government in South Vietnam? Was the communist insurgency really about to collapse? Was the weekly "body count" of enemy casualties at all realistic?--were attacked by administration spokesmen as being disloyal to "our boys in Vietnam."

If the false group self-image had been confined to the White House, Vietnam would not have caused the painful divisions in American society that it did. Many Americans--in the beginning, nearly all Americans--thought of their country as democratic and just, a supporter of justice and freedom all over the world. We were in Vietnam for good reasons; we were defending a democratic ally against the threat of international communism. Later, when millions came to question the administration line, society was disrupted at a basic level. Ostracism of the dissidents was expressed in the familiar bumper-sticker slogan: "America, love it or leave it." These slowly healing divisions are still present in our society, despite many political calls to "put Vietnam behind us."

If narcissism, both in individual and group life, is morally deadly, what can be done about it?

Individually, how can I become aware of the places in my life where narcissistic rationalization prevents me from seeing the changes I need to make? I may see clearly in one matter and yet be self-deceived in another. How do I discover my moral blind spots? Corporately, how can we identify the places where our group self-image moves us to repress knowledge which would undermine it?

One dare not claim a definitive answer to this problem. But a suggestion may be found in the David story. Change became possible for him in the comparison between a clear matter (Nathan's story) and his own. Of course, David had the advantage on us; a prophet came to confront him. But "prophets" of other sorts come to us and give us opportunities to see the world differently. Think of the picture (virtually all my readers have seen it), a black and white news photograph, which helped end US involvement in the Vietnam war. A naked little girl runs, screaming at the camera, others fleeing the napalm with her, terror on their faces. For many Americans that photograph, and other images like it seen on television, served as a prophetic confrontation. The official rationalization, that we were defending democracy in South Vietnam, was confronted by the vision of a little girl with her back on fire and the rationalization lost. (General Westmoreland complained that the picture was a fake, that

the girl probably had been burned in a hibachi accident. The need to avoid/repress/not see can be overwhelming.)

The world probably provides us with such confrontations quite often; at least, that is my guess. But if our need not to know is great enough, like General Westmoreland we will cling to the flimsiest rationalizations--and believe them. If, like Martin, we are high achievers, we can live in our false selves for long periods. For most of us, though, our false selves crack at least some of the time; like Phil, we then feel the awful weight of our worthlessness. Either way, the energy put into protecting our unrealistic self-image robs us of joy and keeps us from learning to love.

We need to somehow reduce our need not to know. Thus it is that therapists must often help narcissistic patients to accept and believe in themselves for nothing more than the persons they are. Behind the false self is the lie we have internalized, "I am nothing unless . . ." No matter how someone finishes the sentence, it is not true.

"I am somebody, but I can get better." Moral progress is possible when an individual values herself and yet also has ideals to admire and be stretched by. The person "on the way" is free to see the gap between her goal and her performance and let that knowledge motivate her.

An interesting debate can occur at this point. Someone could suggest that narcissistic denial stems from pain the individual feels when the false self is threatened. If people felt no pain--call it

shame or guilt--they would not have to repress knowledge.³ Perhaps narcissism would disappear if we could banish self-destructive emotions like shame and guilt. This is a utopian proposal, since it would require that all children be parented in radically different ways than they are. But utopian proposals have their value not in practicality but in their vision. We could at least work toward the abolition of guilt and shame.

Another voice could respond that it is just that discomfort which we feel when we see our moral failure which motivates us to change. This side could agree that people often suffer from neurotic guilt or destructive shame and still hold that guilt or shame felt for the right reasons is a good thing. The shameless person may be none other than the sociopath.

In this debate I tend to side with those who argue that some guilt is good guilt, that we ought to be ashamed of some things. I think, though, that guilt has value only if it motivates change; guilt has no value of its own, as if somehow feeling bad were a payment for wrongdoing. Whichever side is right, often the way forward lies in strengthening a person's sense of worth in face of the threat posed by the pain of shame or guilt.

³ Cf. John Kekes, "Shame and Moral Progress." Kekes calls the pain someone feels when she sees the gap between what she is and what she thinks she should be "shame" and sees it as destructive of self image. He agrees that moral progress requires self examination and the willingness to see that we fall short of our ideals. But he thinks that we can react to this failure in positive ways, i.e. without shame. (Kekes 291-295)

Prevention is better than cure. We ought to let our children know that they can feel the feelings they have and express them and we will still accept them. They don't have to be perfect. They don't have to fix life for mother and father. Most of all, they are worth being loved just the way they are.

At the time in my life when I first wrote this chapter, I had the privilege of spending many mornings at home with my five-year-old adopted son. I managed to get some study done because he watched "Sesame Street" and "Mr. Rogers" almost every day. I developed admiring gratitude for the ministry of Fred Rogers to children. When I heard a certain song start, I stopped what I was doing, picked up Jamie and mouthed the words:

"It's you I like;
It's not the things you wear.
It's not the way you do your hair
But it's you I like.

It's you I like;
Every part of you. . ."

I don't know the whole song. We always collapsed in laughter before it ended.

Undoubtedly, other clues or cues could be given to the would-be lover, showing how to become aware of and overcome narcissistic blindness. But for now, enough has been said. Since moral growth is both possible and worthwhile, I want to do away with my

unwillingness to see, for it prevents growth. There may be pain involved in seeing my failure, but I need not flee it.

Ethical Theory and Real Life

Put bluntly, the issue is this: who are moral philosophers and what do they do? What should we expect something written by a philosopher about ethical matters to be like? I want to say that the first part of this paper is an example of moral philosophy, even though it is unlike and has different ambitions than many things written by ethical theorists. I say this even if, against my strong hope, my work in the first half of this paper turns out to be bad philosophy, that is, bad in the sense that in it I am plainly wrong about narcissism.

What should moral philosophy do? Three broad responses to this query can be discerned in modern philosophy. First, in the standard theory approach, the philosopher searches for a normative or justificatory theory which a) gives a sympathetic explanation and confirmation of widely held moral judgements and b) can be used to decide current problem cases, where serious persons disagree about the right thing to do. The main living varieties of normative ethical theories are utilitarianism and (modified) Kantianism, though college ethics classes also acquaint students with hedonism, the theory of natural law, divine command theory, and others.

The constructors and repairers of standard ethical theories often think of themselves as scientists in the field of ethics. They are laying bare the underlying theory which makes sense of billions of fundamentally sound, but theoretically inchoate, moral judgements made by everyday people. Correct theory is then able to help everyday people in their quandaries. But it does not work that way; everyday people do not seem to get much help from theories. And why should they? Why should someone who, it is admitted, almost always "gets it right" without a theory suddenly turn to the theorist for help in the pinch? By analogy, we go to doctors when we are sick, but also when we are well so that we won't get sick. Do normative theorists even imagine that they have something to offer the ordinary person who is not in a quandary situation?

Second, in the meta-ethics answer (to the question, what should moral philosophy do?), the moral philosopher steps back from various projects of moralizing and moral theorizing and philosophizes about them. What are the common assumptions of normative theories? What happens when people argue rationally about ethical dilemmas? How do moral concept words like good or just function in comparison to other kinds of speech, e.g. scientific speech? These, and other like questions, define the field for the meta-ethics philosopher.

Historically, perhaps the most important meta-ethical approach to moral philosophy has been emotivism, the doctrine that normative ethical speech is not about anything; it just fulfills an expressive

function. This and other forms of non-cognitive⁴ meta-ethical theories have been sufficiently promulgated in places of higher education that one can find the basic ideas expressed by non-philosophers.

(I am not suggesting that college ethics classes, in which students read Ayer, Stevenson or some other non-cognitivist philosopher, produce a society enamored with non-cognitive meta-ethical theory. Rather, it is the other way around. I imagine that the ethical relativism of our society powerfully predisposes us to such philosophy.)

The standard ethical theorist and the meta-ethics theorist probably would have in common that both would label the first part of this paper as "moralism." In it the author unabashedly says "we need" and "we ought"; he makes a moral appeal.

Standard theorists will object that the author makes his appeal without grounding it in any normative theory. Peter Singer and Tom Regan make moral appeals, but at least they do the necessary theoretical work to back it up. A non-cognitivist meta-ethical theorist will object that the author ought to show some awareness that the judgements he makes are culturally derived. As written, they sound like honest-to-God facts.

⁴ A big question in meta-ethics concerns claims to moral knowledge. "Non-cognitivism" holds that moral "knowledge" is of a radically different sort than scientific knowledge. We use fact stating language to say something about the world which may be true or false. We use moral language to say something about a separate area of inquiry, where questions of truth or falsity don't apply.

Well, narcissism *is* morally deadly. We don't need a moral theory to know that, and any good moral theory ought to make sense of it. And if (I cannot imagine how) this chapter were wrong about narcissism, it would be wrong because some other position was right. There are moral facts after all.

The third response (to the question, what should moral philosophy do?) is more a hodgepodge than an identifiable position.⁵ Some thinkers have become dissatisfied with the state of moral philosophy, especially standard rationalistic theory, in recent years. They are united in being anti-theorists, but little else. Some write simply to question the helpfulness of current standard theories. Some question the value or possibility of any ethical theory. Some say moral philosophy can be done without theory. Some want to reframe the field of ethical theory by re-examining virtues.

In questioning the moves made by standard theory, some of these philosophers have made attractive suggestions. Here are three. 1) Rather than devise a theory for a nonspecific rational person, a theory which necessarily must address the minimum requirements of morality since it applies to everyone, moral philosophy ought to pay attention to real people in real situations. 2) Rather than engage in discussions of abstract words like "good" and "just" (discussions which inevitably degenerate into debates over non-cognitivism), moral philosophy ought to ask about concrete moral terms like

⁵ For a short survey of literature, see Stanley Clarke and Evan Simpson, "Rationalistic Moral Theory Pro and Con: A Guide to Recent Literature."

"generous" and "considerate," an inquiry which may reveal that we do have knowledge of morals. 3) Rather than define ethics by reference to action, moral philosophy ought to include motivations (conscious and unconscious), desires, hopes, and ideals--in short, all matters of character and virtue--as its field of inquiry.

These suggestions stem from one basic assumption, that there really is a world of morality about which the moral philosopher ought to be concerned. Compare: when philosophers of science discuss their theories, a trenchant critique is sometimes made against a position, that it has nothing to do with the way real scientists work. Supposedly, it is the practice of real scientists which provokes the questions and theories of philosophers of science. Philosophy does not assume the task of directing science; rather, the goal is to understand science. I do not suggest that moral philosophy will parallel philosophy of science in all respects (I still have not completely given up the dream that the ethical theorist might make helpful comments to ordinary people), but at least they are alike in that the first task is to understand a human activity which goes on independently of philosophy.

Of course, the "human activity" we call morality cannot be sharply differentiated from other activities. We make a category mistake if we try to add morality to a list of activities like sleeping,

dieting, working, or philosophizing.⁶ Moral concerns spread themselves through all of life.

Socrates is often quoted approvingly as giving a definition of morality: ". . .and on what subject should even a man of slight intelligence be more serious? --namely, what kind of life one should live . . ." (Gorgias 500c). It's a good definition, but we should remember that we are talking about real people with real options; Socrates and Callicles argued over whether one should be a rhetorician or a philosopher. Socrates, of course, wanted to apply the question in an abstract way to any rational person anywhere, but this just shows that wrong moves have a long lineage.

If ethical theorists pay attention to the real ground of moral life they will find ample material for wonderment and careful thought. For example, I think that psychological matters and questions of ideals play enormous roles in morality. Thus, I have written about narcissism, interested in how it plays out in the idealistic question, "How can I be a lover?"

⁶ Speculation: this category mistake makes much mischief in moral philosophy. Specifically, it may account for philosophers' attraction to "acting" as the prime category for ethical reflection. "Acting" fits into list of activities better than "morality" does.

Theological Afterword

Historically, religious ethical theorists have asked the same questions as unbelieving theorists. In the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas spoke for most Christian moral philosophers when he taught the theory of natural law, according to which the right thing is the reasonable thing. Christian philosophers in modern times have looked for a rationalistic justificatory theory like everyone else, but with the added intention of justifying certain moral judgements (e.g. the highest duty is to love God) in which unbelieving philosophers had no interest.

I see no reason why Christian thinkers should be tied to the goal of standard theory. (I do not think a Christian could consistently be a non-cognitivist, so I will not address that possibility.) Why should we think that the search for rational moral rules constitutes the only approach to moral philosophy? Christianity is not, as some Church Fathers taught, a new law. Modern studies of New Testament theology make it clear that for most of the early Christian movement ethical matters were pneumatological; believers were guided by the Spirit and the fellowship, not by formal rules.⁷

Pastoral experience suggests that treating ethics as rules can have disastrous results in congregational life. Think again of Martha's home church. Group narcissism is undoubtedly a

⁷ Of course, this statement oversimplifies matters. Cf. Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, especially the sections entitled, "The New Life" and "The New Obedience." (Ridderbos 205-325)

complicated affair, but preaching morality as law can only compound the problem.

Instead of thinking that Christian dogma sets us the theoretical task of rationally justifying the great commandments (Love God; love your neighbor.), we ought to think of the commandments as the ideal for which we strive. Instead of a law, dogma presents us with affirmations on which to build an understanding of the moral life; every person has divinely given, irremovable worth; there is a Hero who modeled a good life; and there is a Spirit present to aid in the never-finished process of character transformation.

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CHAPTER II

LEARNING TO SEE: TENDING

THE SEEDS OF LOVE

1. Can people learn to love?
2. If so, how?

This chapter is written in the conviction that people can learn (if that is the right word) to love each other. I will presume to suggest how we might go about it. More precisely, I will agree with certain philosophers that a large part of love is accurate vision, try to give examples of what accurate vision involves, and suggest ways we can achieve it.

Consider as a way to jump into our topic, reasons why people might think that we do *not* learn love. Here are three which introduce points I want to make. First, someone might object that learning to love implies that lovers (at least some of them) make progress; they become better lovers as time goes on. But this contradicts experience, our objector says. Lovers love best at the beginning, when first under the spell of the beloved. Later, the harsh realities--or harsh banalities--of life sap the strength of love and leave the lovers in an exhausted or bored routine.

How naive and unphilosophical! The reader may smile; surely we do not need to answer an objector who confuses romance with all love. But this objection helpfully raises the issue of the various kinds of love. If I propose to talk of love, and how it is learned, what is my subject? Erotic love, friendship, love of God, or something else? I will return to this subject, and try to make clear the target of this book, in the section below, "Love and Loves."

Second, some philosophers might object that a claim that one can learn love requires an account of how. They would say such a claim stands or falls with the explanation. But a satisfying account might be hard to find.

Take, for example, Plato's doctrine in the *Symposium*. There, Socrates relates how Diotoma taught him the course of the candidate lover. First, she said, the would-be lover ought to fall in love with the beauty of one body. Then he "mounts the heavenly ladder" by learning to love the beauty of two, then multiple, bodies. From bodily beauty the lover moves to loving the beauty of institutions and laws; from institutions he rises to the beauty of learning; from learning in general to the special knowledge which pertains to "the beautiful itself"; and finally the lover comes to know what beauty really is.

This story carries enormous philosophical baggage, the whole of Platonic idealism. Plato thought that love was basically desire, desire for something the lover did not have and yet admired: beauty. Since beauty is a form in which things participate to a greater or lesser

degree, progress in love consists in learning to admire and desire the beauty of higher and better things. "And if, my dear Socrates, Diotima went on, man's life is ever worth the living, it is when he has attained this vision of the very soul of beauty." (*Symposium*, 211d)

Will Plato's story do as a justifying explanation for the claim that we can learn love? Not for anyone who does not accept his metaphysical and epistemological doctrines. To non-idealists, the idea of climbing the ladder of love sounds ridiculous, a fairy tale unconnected to real life.

Other courses of education for would-be lovers might fall victim to similar critiques. (I suspect that any explanation of how to learn love will be shot through with metaphysical assumptions. If you reject the metaphysics, you can attack the explanation. This is certainly true of what will be said in this chapter.) Perhaps we will find no satisfying explanation to justify the claim that we can learn love. Does this second objection then defeat the contention that we can?

It does not. The objection, if we take it as a refutation of the proposition "Human beings learn to love," argues in this fashion. "We have no explanation of how people learn to love, therefore they do not learn to love." The conclusion of this argument simply does not follow from the premise. We might as well argue that since we have no explanation of how immaterial minds can affect material bodies, Cartesian dualism is false. Each argument needs an extra premise, something like "No proposition can be true if we do not have an

explanation of how it is true." No one would want to defend such a premise.

But this logical point does not reckon with the power of curiosity. Cartesian dualism has not been proved false, but few if any philosophers believe it. At a very deep level, we *want* explanations for beliefs. If we cannot get them, even after serious search, we tend to reject the beliefs. (Of course, this tendency is not absolute.) So, though the contention that we can learn love does not strictly depend on explaining how, this chapter will give most of its attention to such an explanation. In a sense, the present chapter is yet another footnote to Plato, this time an attempt to give a better account of the school of love.

Later, in the sixth chapter, we will examine admiration for and pursuit of good; Diotima's doctrine does have something right, though we need not adopt Platonic idealism as our vision of the good. Plato was right, too, that desire is part of love. But love is not at bottom desire; its basic component is accurate vision.

In order to love well--really, to love at all--I must see myself and others with some degree of accuracy. If narcissistic defenses cloud my vision, so that I see myself as worthy only if I am perfect or as unworthy without the perfect other to guide me, then my false self comes between me and anyone I might love. False selves can only offer ersatz love. Further, if I don't see others accurately, I can hardly love *them*. Instead, I love fantasy objects, a love which is just as artificial as the love offered by false selves.

A third kind of objector to the thesis that we can learn love speaks up at this point. This objector could agree with virtually everything said in chapter one about narcissism. The wounded child in us and the narcissistic defenses we throw up to cover our wounds hinder or prevent us from loving. We can try, through therapy or preventive parenting, to remove these boulders in the road of love. But that is a different thing, this objector claims, from learning to love.

Do we *learn* to be narcissists? Of course not, the objector says. The wounds of childhood happen to us; they come from without like forces of nature. According to psychoanalytic theory, narcissistic defenses are simply natural, though dysfunctional, responses to our wounds. Narcissism is an *inability* to love, similar to some people's inability to sing on key or others' inability to recognize spatial relationships in two-dimensional drawings.

This third objector might agree that love is basically accurate perception. But, he claims, the ability to see well in this moral sense is as much a natural gift as the ability to see drawings or flowers or spinning baseballs well. Put another way, this objection says that moral vision can only be understood as part of a complex, mysterious something called "character." We do not learn our character. External events, unconscious needs and fears, chance meetings, forgotten words from authority figures, and countless factors produce a person's character. Moral vision, the objector concludes, is

more like a given--by happenstance one can see better, another less well--than like a skill which might be learned.

On the whole, I agree with this objector. I accept the picture of the human soul given us by modern psychology, in which the conscious and rational activities of our minds lie like a sheet of water on a bog; on the surface are waves and much else that interest us, but far more complicated structures exist in the mirky mud which the wind sometimes stirs to the top. However, this does not contradict the claim that people can learn to see themselves and others accurately and thus gain the basic component of love. The objection only shows that learning to see is hard, and harder for some of us than for others, not that it does not happen. However complicated and various the forces which make up my character, my practice of life must be included among them. (By "practice of life" understand the things a person does, both externally in the public world and internally in her mental world; implicit is a rejection of behaviorist definitions of action.) I have no easy control over what I see morally or other aspects of my character, but by my practice of life I have some control, and that is reason enough to launch into the work of learning to love. Put no premium here on the word "learn"; another verb might be better. It is important to recognize, though, that some verb--an action word--will describe my target, the activity of gaining the ability to love.

Seeing Otherness

An example first.

The principle character in Alexei Panshin's science fiction novel *Rite of Passage*, Mia Haverro, an intelligent thirteen year old girl, lives in a huge spaceship made in a hollowed out asteroid. On a dare, Mia agreed to join some friends on an "adventure," to go through one of the airlocks to the outside of the ship. To do this, Mia and a friend, Jimmy Dentremont, kept a technician named Mitchell busy with a project (firing ceramic name pins) while the other conspirators took unauthorized possession of three space suits.

Once outside the ship, Mia and a third friend were quickly overcome by vertigo; only with difficulty did Mia and Jimmy pull the retching Riggy back through the airlock. Disaster was averted, but Mia and Jimmy were apprehended while returning the suits.

The aftermath I don't care to go into detail about. Mr. Mitchell was quite genuinely hurt to think he had been used. I could tell that he was hurt when he handed each of us our pins, both of which turned out very nicely indeed.

That was at a meeting in Daddy's office. . .

I could see that Mr. Mitchell had been hurt, but I didn't really understand why. It was spelled out for us. I had been looking at it from my point of view, that he was in our way and might have stopped us if we had just tried to ask for the suits. I hadn't seen things from his angle at all. That we had used him the way you use a handkerchief. I've always thought more in terms of things than of people, and I'm sometimes slow to put myself in somebody's else's shoes. When I did, I wasn't happy about what I'd done--which I think was Daddy's intention.

(Panshin 142-143)

Later, in accordance with the Ship's rigid policy, Mia undergoes "trial." This rite of passage requires all children to spend a month on their own on a colony planet shortly after their fourteenth birthday. Some die or otherwise fail to signal for pick up at the end of thirty days, thus weeding out stupid or unlucky candidates for Ship citizenship as well as providing a check against population growth on the Ship. (Memories of overpopulation and scarcity wars on 21st century Earth, which eventually destroyed the planet, dominate the utilitarian and democratic Ship political ethos.) Those who survive are returned to the Ship as adults. In the course of their trial, Mia and Jimmy encounter various perils which include people being shot.

I've always wondered what it would be like to be a spear carrier in somebody else's story. A spear carrier is somebody who stands in the hall when Caesar passes, comes to attention and thumps his spear. A spear carrier is the anonymous character cut down by the hero as he advances to save the menaced heroine. A spear carrier is a character put in a story to be used like a piece of disposable tissue. In a story, spear carriers never suddenly assert themselves by throwing their spears aside and saying, 'I resign. I don't want to be used.' They are there to be used, either for atmosphere or as minor obstacles in the path of the hero. The trouble is that each of us is his own hero, existing in a world of spear carriers. We take no joy in being used and discarded. I was finding then, that wet, chilly, unhappy night, that I took no joy in seeing other people used and discarded.'

(Panshin 222)

Mia's coming of age story records her moral development. Told in the first person by an ingenuous teenager, the morals of the story (a phrase with two senses, both intended) lie on its surface. Her experiences enable her to include more and more outsiders in her world of people who matter. In the end she fiercely announces her conclusion, "If you want to accept life, you have to accept the whole bloody universe. The universe is filled with *people*, and there is not a single solitary spear carrier among them." (Panshin 252)

Mia learned. . . what? Did she learn a Kantian proposition, "Every person is an end in himself," or a folk platitude, "Walk a mile in my shoes before you judge me"? No. Even this fairly straightforward story shows more than it tells. Mia learned to see differently. At one point she saw Mr. Mitchell as an obstacle; later, as a person with feelings. Before trial, in her eyes colonists were "Mudeaters": smelly, backward, provincial free birthers. Afterward, she saw them as individuals; some as sensitive and generous, others as loutish thugs.

Love requires that we see people as they are. As long as we see people as things--spear carriers, pieces of tissue, mudeaters--we cannot love them. Things are objects in my world. But every person is the subject in his own world. In order to love, I must come to see this, that what appears to be an object in my world is really a center of subjectivity on her own. Love requires that I see the otherness of others.

Here is another example, set forth by Diogenes Allen to illustrate what he calls "the experience of perfect love." He finds it in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner." (Allen 8-11)

In Coleridge's poem, an old man practically forces himself on a party of wedding guests; he must make a confession to them. Eventually one stays behind to hear his tale.

The ancient mariner confesses a strange crime. While surrounded by fog and ice in the South Atlantic, he and his crewmates were cheered by the emergence from the fog of an albatross, which seemed to join itself to the crew. A break in the weather and clear sailing followed the bird's appearance. In spite of this, the mariner shot the albatross with a crossbow. After some quibbling, his shipmates praised his deed.

Then the ship was becalmed while sailing north into the Pacific. Now the mariner's shipmates cursed him for killing the albatross and bringing them bad luck. They hung the dead carcass around his neck as punishment.

The waters around the ship teemed with sea creatures, "slimy things" and "water snakes," objects of disgust and horror. "The very deep did rot: O Christ!/That ever this should be!/Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs/Upon the slimy sea." (Coleridge 242, lines 123-126)

Thirst and strange evils visited the becalmed ship. A ghost ship sailed by, and all the crew died except the ancient mariner.

Alone on a still ship with dead bodies about, bedecked with the albatross, the mariner tried to pray but could not. "My heart as dry as dust."

After seven days enduring the stares of dead men, a night came in which the mariner observed the sea creatures by moon light. Something in him changed.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

(Coleridge 246, lines 277-288)

With this change, the mariner's deliverance began. The albatross fell from his neck and he could pray. He continued to do penance, though, in the form of periodic depressions, which he could only overcome by telling his story to someone else.

Allen uses the mariner's change of heart to illustrate the "experience of perfect love."

However strange this tale may be and however trivial the act of killing a bird may seem, Coleridge has shown us what enables us to have an experience of perfect love. Fundamental

to the experience of perfect love is the loss of self-concern. It is to stop worrying about how useful things may be to us, and instead to pay attention to them as separate centers of reality. Usually we are aware only of ourselves as centers of reality and forget that each of us is but one reality among billions and billions of others. We experience others not as centers of value in themselves, but as beings in orbit around ourselves. . . . When the ancient mariner suddenly felt grateful for the slimy things in the sea, even though they were of no particular use to him, the dead albatross fell from his neck of its own accord. The ship suddenly left the becalmed waters and was transported to safety. The mariner had found his redemption by finding his way out of a self-defined world into a world of other realities. (Allen 10-11)

But this is a commonplace, someone might say. Of course we ought to pay attention to other people and even, as Allen suggests, to animals. Why all these words? What is the point?

The point is that Coleridge's mariner is everyman and everywoman. Even more clearly than in Mia Haverø's story, the old sailor's moral progress consists in coming to see differently rather than accepting some general truth. He does produce a general truth, reduced to a couplet, "He prayeth well, who loveth well/Both man and bird and beast." (Coleridge 254, lines 612-613) But the mariner could not have learned love from such a platitude, however true. He learned love--or came to love or was given the ability to love--by, as Allen says, becoming aware of centers of reality outside himself. This awareness came from experience, not from a proposition.

Iris Murdoch makes a similar point. If the Freudian picture of human beings is at all correct, then coming to see anything outside

ourselves as centers of reality will be difficult indeed. "Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings." (*The Sovereignty of Good* 51) That we ought to pay attention to others is a commonplace; the ability to do so is a rare skill. The "ought" by itself does not produce the ability; indeed, for some narcissists the ought only increases their need to polish their false self. If we want to be lovers, we need, like the ancient mariner, to find our way, as Allen put it, "out of a self-defined world into a world of other realities."

In my teenage years I had a girlfriend who lived in a town more than an hour's drive away. This distance prevented us from seeing each other as much as I would have liked. Fortunately, we attended churches of the same denomination, which brought us together whenever the youth groups of the area had joint outings.

I fancied myself to be romantically attached to this girl. (Was I "in love"? I don't know. Teenage minds hold complex, unrealistic, and constantly changing charts of the territory of love. My friend probably held different positions on my internal "love chart" at different times. She was important to me.) I remember looking forward eagerly to one youth group gathering in particular. We would be in a forest camp setting for a weekend; I anticipated time and place for private walking and conversation.

I remember, in the midst of my musing, a strange and new thought. *She is not me.* Perhaps my ideas for the weekend would not match my friend's. Suddenly her feelings and ideas mattered, not because they might thwart or complicate my plans, but *because*

they were real. My girlfriend was just as much a center of desires and plans as I was. In Allen's terms, I had discovered that my friend was "another reality." For a short while, in a flash of insight, I saw my girlfriend in a different way, not as a thing in my life but as a center of subjectivity on her own. Even then I realized that what was true of my friend must be true of everybody. I did not see them as real; I only knew in an abstract way that each person had an "inside" as I and my girlfriend did.

My flash of insight did not last. I soon reverted to viewing people as objects, the furniture of my world. As an adult--as a pastor and a philosopher--I see most people most of the time as things, despite practiced efforts to pay attention to them.

I do not tell this story in order to make confession or to paint myself as a particularly selfish person. My story simply provides another example of someone living in a self-defined world. We all begin in self-defined worlds, and some of us never leave them. (Murdoch: ". . . modern psychology has provided us with what might be call a doctrine of original sin. . ." *The Sovereignty of Good* 51) I suspect that for many who do momentarily break free of their egocentricity, it comes as a shock, as my vision of my girlfriend surprised me. Further, I suspect that for virtually all of us the insights we are given, in which the alien reality of another person breaks in on us, fade. The reader may consult her own experience. How hard it is to see a person accurately, not as an object of desire, reproach, avoidance, or utility! Murdoch emphasizes the almost

Sisyphean character of the attempt to become good. "The difficulty is to keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity, resentment, fantasy and despair." (*The Sovereignty of Good* 91)

A Murdoch novel, *The Black Prince*, brilliantly illustrates this theme of the difficulty of accurate vision. The action, related in first person by Bradley Pearson, a frustrated novelist in his sixties, happens in the few weeks before the death of Bradley's friend, Arnold Baffin. As he tells his tale, Pearson muses on philosophical problems: what is good art? How does it tell truth? What is the nature of love? Murdoch allows Pearson to espouse many of her ideas given in *The Sovereignty of Good*. For example, in a brief aside to "P. Loxias," his mysterious editor, Pearson says:

1-The natural tendency of the human soul is towards the protection of the ego. (*Black Prince* 152)

2-I dare say human wickedness is sometimes the product of a sort of conscious leeringly evil intent. . . .But more usually it is the product of a semi-deliberate inattention, a sort of swooning relationship to time. (*Black Prince* 156-57)

3-Most artists, through sheer idleness, weariness, inability to attend, drift again and again and again. . . .This is of course a moral problem, since all art is the struggle to be, in a particular sort of way, virtuous. There is an analogous transistion in the everyday proceedings of the moral agent. (*Black Prince* 157)

4-. . .how can one change the quality of consciousness? Around 'will' it flows like water round a stone. Could constant prayer

avail? Such prayer would have to be the continuous insertion into each of these multifarious units of one recurring pellet of anti-egoistic concern. (This has, of course, nothing to do with 'God.')

(*Black Prince* 157-158)

To each of these quotes compare Murdoch's positions in *The Sovereignty of Good*. 1. The ego and its defences prevent us from seeing moral reality. (*Sovereignty* 51) 2. In morals, the orientation of attention is more important than willing. (*Sovereignty* 55) 3. The enemy of excellence in both morality and art is personal fantasy. (*Sovereignty* 59) And, "By the time the moment of choice has arrived the quality of attention has probably determined the nature of the act." (*Sovereignty* 67) 4. Non-theistic prayer--that 'is, attention focused on the good--might be a tool for moral improvement. (*Sovereignty* 55-56) More examples could be adduced; Murdoch has given Bradley Pearson many of her own insights into art and morality. Surely, the reader thinks, here is Murdoch's picture of a good character, one who makes some progress in the school of love.

As one reads the story, though, doubts begin to creep in. Pearson's friend Arnold Baffin is a popular novelist. Pearson, though he has been commercially unsuccessful, claims to be unthreatened by Arnold's success, especially since he judges Arnold's works as artistic failures. But Pearson repeatedly reminds his readers of this. Why?

At the beginning of the story, Pearson's ex-wife, Christian, returns to London from America. Pearson says he left her because she clung too close and choked off his creativity. He angrily demands that she not visit him. He wants nothing to do with her, he says.

Why does he deny what seems obvious, that he thinks about her often?

Pearson believes in artistic inspiration. He has published little, because he wants only to put out great work. He wants to boil his thinking down, nearly to aphorisms. Great literature says only enough. He feels, in an un mistakeable and mysterious way, that his breakthrough lies just ahead. Then he falls in love with Julian Baffin, Arnold's daughter, though he is thirty-eight years her senior. (He lies to Julian, reducing his age by twelve years.) Surely this love is the force that will carry him through to greatness! The reader wonders whether Pearson really understands love and art, or whether he is just self-deceived.

Pearson's sister, Priscilla, an unlovely, unloved, and severely depressed woman, comes to him, fleeing her broken marriage. Pearson claims to understand her pain, but acts in every way as if he wishes she would disappear. She complicates his life. Since the story is written some years after the events recorded, the reader wonders if Pearson really saw his sister as clearly at the time as he describes her in his book.

While at a romantic hideaway with Julian, Pearson learns by phone that Priscilla has committed suicide. Rather than return to London, he reasons that having left his sister in her depression, he might as well carry through his tryst with Julian; he will break the rules of duty for the sake of his love. He returns to the cottage and

makes love to Julian. Does he really see Julian? What will she think of him when she finds out that Priscilla died that day?

Arnold Baffin arrives to interrupt the lovers' sleep, demanding that Julian come home. She refuses at first, but after considering his message (Arnold tells her about Priscilla, and Pearson's true age), she leaves Pearson. Pearson returns to London, only to find the complete works of Arnold Baffin, which he had ordered earlier in the story, on his doorstep. He tears the books to shreds.

Twice in his tale, Pearson relates how he was called to the Baffin house to help because Arnold and his wife, Rachel, were fighting. After his first intervention, early in the book, Pearson claims that he and Rachel very nearly became lovers. The second time, late in the story, Rachel phones him to come again, even though she disapproved of his involvement with Julian. Shortly after he enters the Baffin house, the police also arrive and arrest him for the murder of Arnold Baffin, whose body lies battered in the living room.

In an postscript, Pearson gives us his version of his trial and conviction. Not wanting to accuse anyone else, he changed his story repeatedly. When he told "the truth," that Rachel had killed her husband accidentally in an argument, no one believed him. He writes as one serenely happy, in the quiet seclusion of the prison, his cloister. He offers his whole tale as a "celebration of love," a comedy. Though now cut off from Julian, his love for her will never fade.

Unfortunately, my summary of the plot doesn't do justice to Murdoch's deft touch. I have too greatly emphasized the

inconsistencies in Bradley Pearson's story; someone who has not read *The Black Prince* could conclude that Pearson was obviously self-deluded. Do not think that. Most of the time, Bradley Pearson sounds lucid, observant, and good. Through his eyes we see each character as flawed but admirable. He seems to be really trying to pay attention to people.

The book concludes with postscripts by other important characters, written at the invitation of P. Loxias, who might be a literary agent, a fellow convict Pearson met in prison, or even "the invention of a minor novelist." These postscripts paint four rudely different pictures of Pearson (posthumously, since he has died in prison) than the one we get from his narrative. The postscript views of the other characters do not agree perfectly with each other. At no point does Murdoch make it clear who killed Arnold Baffin or, more importantly, whether Bradley Pearson was a warped, self-obsessed, sad failure or a laconic, penetratingly observant, and loving artist. Readers must judge for themselves.

I speculate that Murdoch intended this result. Achieving clear moral vision requires more than a thorough reading of *The Sovereignty of Good* and the ability to repeat its doctrines. Murdoch writes sympathetically of theological and philosophical views which hold that "goodness is the almost impossible countering of a powerful egocentric mechanism. . ." (*The Sovereignty of Good* 54) Bradley Pearson may be intended as a case in point.

Nevertheless, both Allen and Murdoch think we can make progress. We can begin, Allen says, with those short-lived flashes of insight, like my vision of my teenage girlfriend, when we see people justly.

Allen reminds us of Dante's experience with Beatrice. For several days after seeing her, Dante felt so full of love he could forgive anyone. Of course, this feeling went away, as did my appreciation of the otherness of my girlfriend.

But Dante did something unusual with this experience. For him, the experience showed him the goal of his life: to seek to remain always the way he had been for the short time when inspired by Beatrice's beauty. . . .

All of us have had moments, like Dante, when falling in love, we seem to float on air. . . .For a while, we simply seem to be able to love anyone--to love our neighbor--without any effort at all.

These momentary occasions can be simply that. But they can also give us a glimpse of what it would be to love our neighbor all the time. To that extent such moments can be like little seeds, which if planted and nurtured, can grow and affect our character. (Allen 28-29)

I think Allen says a bit too much when he claims all of us have had moments like Dante. The psychological histories of some individuals seem to indicate that they have never "attached," or made any significant emotional bond to anyone. ("Narcissistic Personality Disorder" 315-317, Answorth and Bowlby 333-340) These extreme cases do not invalidate Allen's point. Most of us, in

starting out to become lovers, have already been graced with insights into the otherness of others. Like Mia Haverø, the ancient mariner, and the teenager I was, we have already been given some seeds of love.

Openings to accurate vision may come in a variety of guises. Besides insights into other people (Mia Haverø) or seeing the otherness of sea creatures (the ancient mariner), Allen and Murdoch suggest several.

-Traumatic experiences, death and other losses, often provoke only self pity. But sometimes, Allen suggests, they strip away our duplicity and pettiness so that we can see. (Allen 30)

-Artistic insight can lift us out of our selves to see the world accurately. (Allen 31, Murdoch *The Sovereignty of Good* 64-65: "The appreciation of beauty in art or nature is not only (for all its difficulties) the easiest available spiritual exercise; it is also a completely adequate entry into (and not just analogy of) the good life, since it *is* the checking of selfishness in the interest of the real.")

-Religious ritual, Allen says, can also help. It portrays ultimacies and thus calls us from ourselves to the huge real world outside us. (Allen 31) Murdoch would warn that such rituals may also tempt us with consolatory myth.

-Influenced by Simone Weil (Weil 44-52), Allen points to school studies--technical work--as a tool to direct our attention to what is not ourselves. (Allen 31-32) Murdoch finds, and agrees with, a similar view in Plato. Plato thought mathematics was the

most important technical study, but Murdoch thinks learning a language would do too.

If I am learning, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never entirely attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me. Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal. (*The Sovereignty of Good* 89)

-In different ways, Simone Weil and Murdoch point to prayer as another seed of love. In her "Spiritual Autobiography," Weil says that in saying the Our Father with absolutely pure attention she was repeatedly freed from the constraints of individual perspective and point of view. Christ himself was present with her. (Weil 17-18) Murdoch, as noted above, thinks that prayer need not be orthodox according to any religion to be a real help in moving attention away from self. Religious believers expect to receive help when they pray. Though she does not believe in God, Murdoch grants that believers do receive help (sometimes, when their prayer is not just self-consoling fantasy, but a true attention directed outward). In attending to God, believers receive grace, the unlooked-for ability to attend better. Nonbelievers may have the same benefit by attending to the good. (*The Sovereignty of Good* 55, 83)

-One may find a seed of love in the beauty of the world of nature. To stop and really see this plant or animal or waterfall keeps me from imagining the whole universe as centered on me. Murdoch links this experience of nature with the attention required by great art. (*The Sovereignty of Good* 85) I conjecture that biologists, botanists, and ecologists have a special opening to goodness here, in that they can combine their technical study with an appreciation of nature's beauty. Non-scientists may speculate that scientific interest might hinder appreciation of a tree's beauty, but my friends in the scientific community report no difficulty in that direction. Knowing about the thing does not prevent them from feeling wonder.

Readers should think of these suggested seeds of love as just that, suggestions. You may never experience some of them as openings to accurate vision. You may find other ways to overcome the vision warping pull of the self.

I have only a few comments on how to nurture seeds of love. First, expect them. Be ready for them; learn from them. Remember, and give some time to contemplation of, times when you have seen the otherness of things.

Second, look for truth rather than gratification or utility in studies, prayer, art, or ritual. Sometimes we experience the seeds of love as thrown at us, pure gifts. They surprise us. Other times we can put ourselves in the way by working at a technical study, giving ourselves to great art or literature, praying, attentively listening to

someone, or simply going outside and looking. In any case, the main thing is just that, to *look*, and when we have some insight into the otherness of things or people, to keep looking.

Third, be humble and grateful for every seed of love. To the extent that I see any individual reality rightly, I am reminded that I am only one center of subjectivity among multiplied billions. The universe is a very big thing, full of wonders! Humility goes with amazement.

Fourth, determine to try to really attend to people. Try. Like Simone Weil's daily effort to say the Our Father without her attention wandering, learning to pay attention involves struggle, discipline. I am convinced the effort is worth while, but proof can only be found in a person's own experience.

Love and Loves

Accuracy is not enough.

I may have unavoidably commingled two distinct, though closely related, ideas in the section just finished. I tried, by example and suggestion, to explain the concept of accurate vision, wherein we see truth, the otherness of others. The second idea, which clings to the first, is the requirement that we see people compassionately. I believe that clear vision must ultimately always include compassion, else it will not be clear. But this second element of love deserves a separate discussion.

David Hume, in Section IX of *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, affirms that in every human being resides "some spark of friendship for humankind." This bit of benevolence may be too weak to show in a man's actions, but it must be there. When we make moral judgments (as in calling someone depraved or vicious) we appeal to a universal sentiment. "And though this affection of humanity may not generally be esteemed so strong as vanity or ambition, yet being common to all men, it can alone be the foundation of morals or of any general system of blame or praise." (Hume 228-229)

Hume is partially wrong in this. Some people, as indicated above, suffer complete freedom from benevolence. Further, some people who have experienced affection or benevolence toward others can so completely bury it in self-seeking (e.g. by overmastering pursuit of career) as to kill it. That is, as I believe in moral progress, I also believe in degeneration, to the point of moral death.

But Hume is right about the importance of fellow feeling. When we see the otherness of people, we need to see them with compassion. Diogenes Allen: "To love perfectly is not simply so see that all else is independent of oneself and so ought to be loved as it is. Perfect love of a living thing is the recognition that it has an inside. To love it is to recognize what it is like to *be* that object. From the outside it looks gloriously radiant; inside, it is fragile and suffering." (Allen 12) "Attention," writes Iris Murdoch, is "a just and

loving gaze directed upon an individual reality." (*The Sovereignty of Good* 34, my emphasis)

Love, then, requires imagination. As a cynic could remind me, a person can never "really" cross the chasm between himself and someone else. He cannot stop being himself, the cynic would say, for even a moment; he has no knowledge of what it would be like to be someone else. And the cynic would pour scorn on the idea of fellow-feeling for the ocean's "slimy things." Against this cynic (admittedly a caricature only), I take the imagination to be a real moral power. True, one person is not another; but he can imagine what it would be like to be the other.

Observe what I will call a simple fact. We can, and sometimes do, ask ourselves, "What must it be like to be her?" Imaginatively, we enter into the life of someone else. As a result, we are able to judge a person's actions and thoughts more justly. We are able to feel and act in ways better for the person and ourselves. From the fact that I cannot *be* someone else, the cynic argues that I can not *feel* her vulnerability. This conclusion not only does not follow from the premise (ignoring, as it does, the power of imagination), it contradicts the facts of our experience. The reader may judge by his own.

Love, then, is accurate vision and compassion.

But what is this love I write about? Christian writers have often taken pains to differentiate between different kinds of love. In *The Four Loves* C.S. Lewis identified familial love, erotic love, the

love of friendship, and agape, divine love. It is likely that Lewis was indebted to Anders Nygren's study, *Agape and Eros*, which has had an enormous influence on twentieth century pastoral theology. Nygren made a radical distinction between the love of God (in both senses, God's love for creatures and creaturely love for God) and the loves of people, which he lumped together under the name eros. To Nygren, divine love is "disinterested" love; entirely self-sufficient, it does not attach itself to any feature in the beloved. By contrast, eros always flows from need or desire. Divine love gives with no thought of receiving; human loves always include an element of desire. Perhaps following Nygren's line of thought, philosopher Irving Singer, in volume one of *The Nature of Love*, has written that agape is unconnected with love between persons. Only God can be the source or object of agape. Nygren glories in the gospel command that Christians are to love/agape God and their neighbor, a command which defines the ideal of Christian ethics and can be fulfilled only by God's love flowing into and through us. Singer, on the other hand, dismisses Christianity, since it leaves no room for human loves in the ideal. (Allen 68)

Nygren and those influenced by him have made a kind of category mistake. With the reader's indulgence, I imagine the titles on a "bookshelf of love." Here is familial love, a slender volume given too little attention. Next to it stands courtly love, an addition to the library invented by medieval troubadours (according to some experts). Then we have the two volume set, romantic love and erotic

love, complete with indexes to motion pictures, novels, music and how-to sex manuals. An older book on the love of friends stands next to a modern text which explores the idea of non-romantic friendships between men and women. A pamphlet at the end of the shelf tries to establish the claim for another sort of love, that of the community. Neither friendship nor familial, this love borrows from both, binding together guilds, therapy groups, and congregations.

Nygren and company want to place another book, on the love of God, on the same shelf. They think of agape as if it were one love among many, distinguished from the others by the its objects (everybody) and its nature ("disinterested"). Contrasted with human loves this way, agape comes to be seen as opposed to them.

Following Allen (24-26), I think agape is no more a love among loves than a college is a particular building to be found among the buildings on campus. (Cf. Ryle 15) We have dozens of buildings on campus, but the college is an entity of a different order. Similarly, Love/agape should be thought of as on a different level from human loves.

The loves are not unrelated to Love. Murdoch's "just and loving gaze," accurate vision combined with compassion, and Simone Weil's "attention" both well describe agape. But if, against Nygren and company, we see agape as accurate vision plus compassion, then we will see agape as the one indispensable ingredient in all the loves. What Allen says of friendship and romance applies to all human loves.

The ingredient of respect for "otherness" enables us to *receive* the love of others in friendship and romantic love, to be free of selfishness. To receive from another requires profound respect. In fact, it takes exactly the same kind of respect to receive as it does to give. Unless another human being is respected as a reality independent of oneself, the act of giving becomes patronizing and insulting. Agape is not to be characterized as always giving and never receiving, or as freedom from even the desire to receive. Rather, agape is the profound respect for the reality of others, a respect which makes it compatible both with giving *and* receiving. When agape is present as an ingredient in friendship and romantic love, these relations in which we give and receive can be unselfish. (Allen 26)

Love/agape undergirds the loves. In a community drawn together by common interests, e.g. a religious congregation, mutual admiration may well fade for a time. If community love were entirely dependent on mutual admiration, the community could dissolve when people tire of others' irritating habits. This often happens. But Love can step in to carry the community over rough places.

Similarly, the heightened emotions of romance make a poor foundation for a permanent marriage. Modern western culture exhibits two minds about marriage. On one hand, many of our social practices and forms of speech still affirm the ideal of lifelong commitment in marriage; on the other hand, romance has come to be widely accepted as the proper basis of marriage. But romance, as many have observed, rarely lasts, and individuals change, so the fact that marriages do not last surprises no one. If we wish to practice

lifelong commitments in marriage, we should practice Love, which can make up for the shortcomings of romance.

In this study, then, when we ask how one can learn love, we mean how one can learn Love/agape. However, to the extent that anyone learns Love, she will also be a more able lover in any of the senses of love. So I try to take examples of love from all sorts of relationships and I have not bothered to sort out the kinds of love until now, late in this second chapter.

Here is a summary of my theses to this point. 1) We can make moral progress, specifically by learning to love. 2) In order to grow in love we need to overcome our narcissistic need not to see ourselves and others. 3) We learn love by nurturing the "seeds of love" which enable us to see other realities, especially people, accurately.

Metaphors for the Moral Life

Return now to the unfinished discussion of chapter one. What should moral philosophy do? I suggested that philosophers ought to puzzle about and wrestle with a real part of human life; we ought to pay attention to actual moral struggles.

So, in these first two chapters I hope to have shown, more by example than by argument, that an important obstacle to improvement in love is selfishness. I don't mean by "selfishness" a

grasping, clutching attempt to have people and things, but rather concentration of attention on the self, a concentration which reduces rest of the universe to small objects orbiting around a central, enormously important consciousness. (Of course, the first sort of selfishness can grow out of the second.) I approve of the role assigned to moral philosophy by Iris Murdoch:

The problem is to accommodate inside moral philosophy, and suggest methods of dealing with the fact that so much of human conduct is moved by mechanical energy of an egocentric kind. In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. *Moral philosophy is properly, and in the past has sometimes been, the discussion of this ego and of the techniques (if any) for its defeat.* (*The Sovereignty of Good* 52 My emphasis)

Rationalistic ethical theory does not do this. Or rather, when rationalistic theorists do address the problem of egoism, it is a decidedly secondary question. Kant, for example, would classify the whole matter as "practical anthropology."¹ Why?

Standard rationalistic moral theory aims to tell us what we ought to do. And it is true that sometimes we do not know what to do--we struggle with conflicts of rights, incompatible goods, etc.--so there is a place for standard theory. (More on this in the next chapter.) But standard theory does not focus so heavily on quandaries in order to be helpful, as if philosophers had ever bracketed their theories and asked themselves what they could

¹ We will return to this discussion in the next chapter.

contribute to the moral life of ordinary people. Standard theory concentrates on quandaries because of its basic assumptions.

Murdoch suggests that foundational issues in philosophy are often addressed by "metaphors" rather than by argument. (*Sovereignty of Good* 77-78) By metaphors she means images, complexes of interrelated ideas which cannot be pulled apart. Some philosophers resist philosophy-as-image-play because disagreements between holders of incompatible images are often inconclusive, or worse, unspeakable--the opposing sides never hear each other. But Murdoch thinks some things, including moral concepts, necessarily present themselves to us as metaphors. Philosophers who try to distill these metaphors into neutral language fail; something is lost in the distillation. When dealing with moral issues, philosophers' talk cannot be neutral any more than psychologists' talk can.

Standard rationalistic ethical theories, for all their emphasis on objectivity and reason, are deeply metaphorical. Utilitarian, Kantian, or other, typical rationalistic moral philosophers live and breathe the metaphor of action. Thirteen year old Mia Haverro, assigned readings in ethics by her tutor, quickly summarizes the field in a way which could fairly describe most standard theory:

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with conduct, questions of good and evil, right and wrong. Almost every ethical system--and there are a great many of them, because even people who supposedly belong to the same school don't agree a good share of the time and have to be considered separately--can be looked at as a description and as a

prescription. Is this what people actually do? Is this what people ought to do? (Panshin 148)

Against ethics as action, Murdoch proposes that a more accurate metaphor is ethics as vision. "I can only choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of 'see' which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort." (*Sovereignty of Good* 37) Obviously, this chapter has been written in the conviction that Murdoch is right.

Observe the results of the ethics as action metaphor. First, and most obviously, morality gets defined narrowly as what people do, right or wrong. Motivation, character, virtue, psychological wounding, and societal advantage or disadvantage are reduced to factors (dispositions, contingent situational details) which influence action. The ethics as action metaphor also narrows the field in terms of which actions are significant; only actions in which an agent chooses seem worthy of attention.

Second, in a fight against relativism, the ethics as action picture inevitably leads to "lowest common denominator" (LCD) rules. As in arithmetic problems in which the student tries to find a denominator for his fractions which fits them all, the ethics as action philosopher tries to find a moral requirement which will fit every agent. Against the proponent of relativism, then, the philosopher responds, "Here, you see, we have an action incumbent on any rational agent in the relevant circumstances. Therefore relativism is wrong." Of course, LCD's other than rationality could be imagined, but the dominant

modern ethical theories, utilitarianism as much as Kantianism, appeal to rationality as the moral LCD.

Third, the ethics as action metaphor denies or ignores (as morally unimportant) private behavior. A person may have it as a goal to become gentle; she may even be gentle. I would want to count this as an important moral fact about her. A philosopher in the grip of the ethics as action metaphor will ask what this gentleness amounts to if it does not show up in her choices. By this he means publicly observable choices: actions. Since he assumes he knows the answer to his rhetorical question (gentleness which does not show up in action is nothing, a mirage), the philosopher will label gentleness as a propensity to act in certain ways which may or may not be overruled in certain situations by other propensities.

In this case the metaphor has simply closed down the area of discussion. What is gentleness? A propensity to act in certain ways? I would suggest that gentleness is a habit of vision, the habit of looking at someone's woundedness before and while forming judgments about him. Is this habit an action? I think it is well described as an *inward* action, just the sort of thing the ethics as action metaphor ignores.

Murdoch should not be read to suggest--and I do not mean to suggest--that ethics has nothing to do with choices and actions. To live a good life a person must act; he must make and keep promises, pay debts, give to the needy, oppose injustice, rescue the drowning, vote (or not vote) for this or that party, and all the other examples of

morally significant choices loved by philosophers under the spell of the ethics as action metaphor. But to live a good life a person must also see the world accurately, a thing not done in a day. He must develop habits of attention, humility and compassion or else his choices and actions will be ill-made, defined by a backdrop of selfish fantasy.

We should abandon the attempt to describe morality in value neutral terms. The metaphor of ethics as vision is loaded with values, for instance, that truth (and knowledge of it) is intimately connected with humility and compassion. What should be obvious--though in standard rationalistic moral philosophy it is often ignored--is that the ethics as action picture is also loaded with values. What some of those values are and what results they lead to, will be partially addressed in the next two chapters, where I will argue that utilitarians and Kantians share many assumptions and that in Kant's case (where the assumptions are pressed to their conclusions) they lead to unacceptable conclusions.

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CHAPTER III

A PLACE FOR RATIONALISTIC MORAL THEORY

In the first two chapters, this study claimed that human beings can make moral progress. Specifically, we can learn to love, first by overcoming our need not to see the truth about ourselves, and second by tending the opportunities we are given to see others accurately. While making these suggestions, I have made critical remarks about modern ethical theory, much of which has little room for such theses. In this chapter we will explore a little more deeply the issues which divide this study from the main streams of ethical theory.

Since offering the criticisms so far, it might be instructive to turn the tables (at least in imagination) and ask how an exponent of standard rationalistic moral theory would respond to what has been said in chapters one and two. Obviously, since I intend to defend my affirmations against the rationalist's critique, this procedure runs the risk of degenerating into an attack on a straw man. I hope to avoid that unhappy fate, because the "defense" of my position against that of the rationalist, here and in the next chapter, will consist mostly in trying to clarify the differences between the position offered in this book and that of standard rationalistic theory. The reader will have

to judge for herself whether the rationalist opponent receives fair treatment.

We can allow Immanuel Kant, in particular the author of *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (hereafter, *Groundwork*), to speak for rationalistic moral theory. Why this author? For two reasons: first, because Kant presents the rationalist approach to ethics with such rigor, and second (and more importantly), because the *Groundwork* clearly illustrates several main features of rationalistic ethics, points which moral philosophers who are often thought to disagree with Kant, e.g. utilitarians, share with him. Additionally, in the *Groundwork* Kant actually does discuss the failings of moralists whose works he would surely say are similar to this study in important ways.

Kant's Critique of Chapters One and Two

The author of the *Groundwork* would probably observe that this study, so far as it has gone, is an example of "popular practical philosophy." (*Groundwork* 30) In particular, he could point out three characteristics of this sort of philosophy. First, what Kant called "material" knowledge is mixed with "formal" knowledge; empirical considerations are interspersed with logical points. Second, Kant would note my heavy reliance on examples, which displace abstract arguments. Third, though perhaps to a lesser degree, what has been

said focuses on results, e.g. narcissism prevents love while learning to see enables love.

All this contrasts sharply with the *Groundwork*. At the beginning, in his preface (*Groundwork* iii-ix), Kant insists that moral philosophy needs a base in "pure philosophy." Every field, he argues, benefits from division of labor; ought not the same be true of philosophy? Surely we only ask for confusion when we mix empirical ethics, which Kant would prefer to call "practical anthropology," with rational ethics. Of course, Kant does not rest his argument on this analogy with industry. "Every one must admit that a law has to carry with it absolute necessity if it is to be valid morally. . ." he says. Obligation is the central moral concept which must be explained and grounded by practical philosophy. No theory tinged with the contingency of empirical knowledge can hope to carry what Kant sees as the most basic load of morality. Kant's own project in the *Groundwork*, which explains the little book's title, is to give a solid foundation to the concept of obligation. Pure *a priori* reason must show us the conceptual framework of ethics.

Kant holds that obligation, if it is to be a real ought and not just a counsel of prudence, must be universal obligation; it must hold for all rational beings, not just people, and it must hold with absolute necessity. So he deliberately turns away from the use of examples. ". . .no experience can give us occasion to infer even the possibility of such apodeictic laws. For by what right can we make what is perhaps valid only under the contingent conditions of humanity into

an object of unlimited reverence as a universal precept for every rational nature?" (*Groundwork* 28-29) Many of the examples used in chapters one and two are rooted in psychology and describe human nature. Kant explicitly rejected such a move, since other rational beings might have different psychologies than ours. Moral laws must determine the will of a rational being as such.

Further on the subject of examples, Kant says that to derive morality from examples actually destroys morality. (*Groundwork* 29-30) By what principle, he would ask, did I select the examples I used?¹ The principle which justifies the choice of examples cannot itself be justified by means of those examples without engaging in vicious circularity. By eschewing examples, the pure moralist would help his readers more readily recognize that reason alone justifies the moral law. (*Groundwork* 33-34, the footnote reply to Professor Sulzer)

Just as obligation must be universal and necessary, for Kant the truly good must be an unconditioned good. According to Kant, only a good will is unqualifiedly good, since virtues of character such as wit or resolution and gifts of fortune such as power or health could be turned to evil uses if combined with a bad will. (*Groundwork* 1-3) Kant readily admits the objection that a good will by itself does not

¹ It seems that Kant had in mind moral writers who justified their claims by reference to moral heroes--hence, his statement that even Christ could not fill that role since he must first be judged by a rational standard--and not examples precisely like mine, since most of my examples illustrate psychological hindrances or helps to love. I do not justify the goal of loving by my examples. Still, Kant could well ask why I thought loving was so important that I would collect examples of hindrances and helps to it.

produce good results, but he holds that this does not affect the value of the good will itself. Since results are often subject to chance, Kant refuses to countenance consequences as a factor determining the value of moral decisions. Now, I did not try to defend my positions in chapters one and two strictly on their consequences as did the utilitarianism which Kant despised. Still, we may suspect that Kant would be leery of the whiff of results oriented thinking in the argument that some narcissistic people need less moral law, since it feeds their false selves.

Comparing chapters one and two to Kant's conception of pure morality, I think he would conclude that they are--at best--a secondary sort of moral philosophy, better termed practical anthropology. After all, the goal in this study is to ask how someone could become a lover. At no point does it defend the idea that someone ought to become a lover. If a philosopher could show, as Kant believed that it could be shown, that love of others is a dictate of the moral law, then the practical question of how to become a lover could be appended to the *a priori* rational framework of morality.² But without a grounding in pure philosophy, a study like

² Actually, the matter is more complicated than these remarks suggest. Kant says that practical love, love residing in the will, can be commanded, while pathological love, that of the feelings, cannot. (*Groundwork* 13) Much of my interest is in what Kant would call pathological love. However, Kant recognized that on a secondary level practical reason had to pay attention to contingent facts, including human feeling. Thus, if I recognize that selfish inclinations are liable to deflect me from the path of duty laid out by reason, duty demands that I try to change those inclinations. So Kant would approve the project of this book, provided that it be recognized as a secondary matter of practical anthropology and not real moral philosophy.

this one ignores the important theoretical issue and falls to the level of popular philosophy, producing "a disgusting hotch-potch of second-hand observations and semi-rational principles on which the empty-headed regale themselves, because this is something that can be used in the chit-chat of daily life." (*Groundwork* 31) Such an ungrounded combination of material and formal knowledge could damage morality, since it neglects strict rationality, the only defense against relativism.

Kant's most profound accusation against popular philosophy is that it is "heteronomous." (*Groundwork* 87-89) In his view, when a rational agent, by reason alone, sees that the categorical imperative must be obeyed, he has achieved "autonomy." He gives himself the universal law, which he sees as universal, applicable to all rational beings. Autonomy fulfills a rational being's destiny: "This much only is certain: the law is not valid for us *because it interests us* (for this is heteronomy and makes practical reason depend on sensibility--that is to say, on an underlying feeling--in which case practical reason could never give us moral law); the law interests us because it is valid for us as men in virtue of having sprung from our will as intelligence and so from our proper self. . ." (*Groundwork* 123) Kant would say, we may conclude, that a study like this one, if intended as moral philosophy, is destructive of autonomy and true human dignity.

How Kant Illustrates Rationalistic Moral Theory in General

In picking Kant to speak for rationalistic moral theory, I claimed that the *Groundwork* illustrated features shared by utilitarianism as well. Readers may wonder what they are. Kant would criticize my first two chapters for being a mixture of empirical and formal knowledge. Would he not criticize the theory of utility for the same reason, since the first move in utilitarianism is from the empirical observation that people seek happiness to the moral proposition that they should? Kant would criticize the appeal to examples in chapters one and two, but utilitarians probably would not. And, where Kant would be suspicious of results oriented thinking, Bentham and his philosophical heirs claimed that results are the only things that matter in ethics. How does Kant represent all rationalistic moral philosophy?

We need to see that under their much debated differences, Kantianism and utilitarianism share a common view of the role of ethical theory. Begin (first point) with the observation that J.S. Mill, to take an example, would probably classify chapters one and two in a manner much like Kant. Mill distinguished the fundamental principle of morality from the subordinate principles people inevitably use in applying it. Mill supposed that most people get along fairly well most of the time using these secondary moral principles, just as Kant allowed that popular moralizing usually met most people's needs. But when secondary moral principles came up

short, Mill insisted on the need for the primary principle in order to combat relativism:

If utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible. Though the application of the standard may be difficult, it is better than none at all; while in other systems, the moral laws all claiming independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them: their claims to precedence one over another rest on little better than sophistry, and unless determined, as they generally are, by the unacknowledged influence of considerations of utility, afford a free scope for the action of personal desires and partialities. (Mill 277-78)

If utility is the ultimate moral principle, a study like the present one can only have value as an exploration of a secondary principle. For Mill as much as Kant, the primary principle justifies and rules over secondary principles.

Next (second), utilitarians and Kantians agree that the primary principle operates in the realm of rationality. Kant seems more consistent here, in that he also claims to derive his first principle from rationality while the principle of utility is supposedly empirical, but both sides picture the moral agent as a rational applier of the ultimate moral principle. People make moral decisions in an infinite variety of situations, so the first principle (Kant's or Mill's) will result in various actions, but once the facts of any situation are known, for both camps the decision is made rationally.

So (third), for both sides, rational moral agents are interchangeable. Doing the right thing depends not on who I am, but

on rightly applying the principle of utility or universalizing the maxim of my action--in the stipulated circumstances.

Further (fourth), since the fundamental level of morality is rational, it is *as rational beings* that we are moral beings. Again, Kant makes this more explicit. In his account, human freedom and dignity are tied integrally to autonomy, a function of practical reason. Hence, he insisted that right actions must be done, not only in conformity with duty, but from the motive of duty. Right actions done from inclinations such as sympathy or the desire for honor deserve praise (since we ought to encourage the performance of right actions) but not esteem. (*Groundwork* 10) *Reason* tells us what is right and we may not rightly rely on anything else. Even if they do not make it a cardinal point, I think utilitarians make a similar move, as witness the struggles of some of them to make sense of the common notion, denied by Bentham, that motives should weigh in our estimation of actions.³ Once reason has declared this or that to

³ Mill struggled with this problem. First, he says, "It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them . . ." Then, he reaffirms Bentham's position: ". . .utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble. . ." To the objector who claims that utilitarianism must therefore ignore the moral qualities which motivate actions, Mill says, "These considerations are relevant, not to the estimation of actions, but of persons; and there is nothing in the utilitarian theory inconsistent with the fact that there are other things which interest us in persons besides the rightness and wrongness of their actions." (Mill 269-271) But are these "other things" which interest us part of morality, as we normally think? If they are, it seems there is a great deal more to ethics than telling us our duties.

be the right thing to do, it does not matter why an agent does it, so long as she does.

And (fifth), for utilitarians and Kantians, law serves as the model for ethical theory. Kant, of course, is quite open about this; the job of pure practical philosophy is to justify universal obligation. Utilitarianism's legal model expresses itself more often in metaphor, as when Mill says that the first principle "umpires" between conflicting secondary principles or when he says that the job of ethics is to teach us our duties.

Finally (sixth), both sides say the main job of ethical theory is to describe the principle rule of ethics and show how it works. Of course, once the rule is known, particular philosophers may give most of their time to elucidating its application to practical problems, tasks which necessarily involve them in messy empirical details. A utilitarian may fight against cruelty to animals or a Kantian make a detailed refutation of arguments against capital punishment. Both, however, would insist that their enterprise must be grounded in adequate theory.

These similarities--among others, since I make no suggestion that my list exhausts the likenesses between Kantianism and utilitarianism--simply mark out the contours of a rationalistic approach to ethics. A variety of first principles have been suggested in the history of moral philosophy; others could be imagined. In every case, as long as ethical theory is supposed to tell us our duties as rational beings, the general shape of the theoretical enterprise will

be the same. As rational agents we will apply the first principle to the particular circumstances of our situation. In every case, a study which asks how people can become lovers--a study which must pay attention to particulars of psychology and personal history--will be classed as moral philosophy of secondary importance, at best.

I think, for reasons I hope to make clear, that this is simply wrong. Before anything else, moral philosophy must make sense of the great commands, to love God and neighbor. Of course, besides protesting against the intrusion of religious concerns at this point, a rationalistic philosopher would say this objection confuses the practical importance of these commands with their theoretical importance. The great commandments could be crucial in practice while theoretically secondary. This may be. An analogy: think of the difference between the practical importance of a bridge engineer's calculations and the theoretical importance of the equations which underlie those calculations. However much we need to have strong bridges, theory must be more interested in the basic equations. Nevertheless, we may doubt that engineering provides a good analogy for ethical theory, though the stage has not yet been set to explain why. At this point note only that the practical and theoretical importances of a thing *may* diverge does not mean they *do*. Perhaps the practical importance of the great commands should cue us about where we should begin theoretical reflection.

In any case, this study is not intended as an application of a rationalistic moral theory. I do not think moral philosophy must be

grounded in some first principle conceived as operating on the rational level. I do not think it is as rational beings that we are moral beings. The next section explores how these denials come together.

Theories of the Foundations of Ethics

The rationalistic ethical theorist says I need to ground my question--How can I learn to be a lover?--in an adequate theory of ethics, which will reveal that every agent has a duty to love people. Then, since if we take human psychology into account I am more likely to love people if I have certain motivations and inclinations, it is my duty to acquire those motivations and inclinations. Note that in this picture of things, my "duty to love people" is a duty to perform actions of a certain type ("loving" actions). The motivations and inclinations which make these actions more likely are not themselves love.

Philosophers who disagree with this picture usually do so in one of two general ways. Philosophers who take the first way deny that we need a theory of any kind on which to base our moral reflections. Philosophers on the second path agree that moral philosophy ought to be based on theory, but not a theory of ethics. As one of the latter group, I will say something about the kind of theory of the foundations of ethics I find attractive. First, though, we

should recognize and applaud some things the "ethics without theory" crowd could say.

Iris Murdoch, who is not herself an anti-theorist, shows how a philosopher could challenge the rationalist position without proposing an alternative in her essay, "The Idea of Perfection."

There is a two-way movement in philosophy, a movement towards the building of elaborate theories, and a move back again towards the consideration of simple and obvious facts. McTaggart says that time is unreal, Moore replies that he has just had his breakfast. Both these aspects of philosophy are necessary to it.

I wish in this discussion to attempt a movement of return. . .
(Murdoch 1)

"A movement of return": anti-theory philosophers can criticize the standard rationalistic moral theories by pointing to "simple and obvious facts" which those theories ignore, make irrelevant, or deny. As examples of two such facts Murdoch recommends "the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous and the fact that love is a central concept in morals." (Murdoch 1-2) I suggest another fact, that love is an amalgam of inward and outward actions, an example of inward action being gentleness (cf. chapter two, p. 69) and an example of outward action being giving back rubs. Those who recognize this as a fact must set themselves against the picture that love consists entirely of a certain kind of actions. If we neglect either the inward or outward aspects of love, we will produce a caricature of it.

Murdoch's message is, if a theory makes no room for the existence of unreflective virtuous people, so much the worse for the theory! Of course, rationalistic ethical theorists will concede that ordinary folk don't need to spend their time pursuing abstract theory. But this is only because such theorists claim that the unsystematized maxims of ordinary morality can be grounded on and systematized by good theory. It should strike us as odd that such theories have to contort themselves to try to make room for the rightness of most moral feeling and doing.

Again, Murdoch suggests that we should think it strange that standard ethical theories make love into a derivative, secondary concept and/or reduce love to observable actions. One need not have a theory to know that love is central to morality and involves the inward life as much as public behaviors.

In general, the anti-theorist presents the rationalistic theorist with a phenomenological challenge: pay attention to real life morality and see if your theory makes sense of it. If, instead of making sense of the "facts," a theory produces ". . .one of those exasperating moments in philosophy when one seems to be relentlessly prevented from saying something which one is irresistably impelled to say" (Murdoch 21), the anti-theorist can demand that the theory be re-examined. Perhaps the theory is right and what we feel we must say is wrong, but perhaps not. Surely it would be a strike against a theory that it denied or ignored facts which it should explain.

Standard theorists could respond to this phenomenological challenge by denying its validity. Why should a rational moral theory have to explain ordinary beliefs? Utilitarianism, for example, could point to its own history. At one time most people accepted the "fact" that animals could not be moral patients in their own right, but only derivitively, as actions toward animals tended to produce actions of the same sort toward people. Rather than accommodating this fact, the theory of utility overthrew it. Perhaps ethical theorists ought to ignore ordinary moral judgments and take back the concession that most people get things right most of the time.

This response is a counsel of desperation. The anti-theorist will ask if the defender of standard theory really means to lump "love is a central concept of morals" with "animals are not moral patients." Are they both pseudo-facts, which good theory may overthrow? It seems hard to believe that many rationalistic ethical theorists would say yes. And if some philosophers did say yes, if they stuck to their rationalistic guns and claimed that all purported facts of morality had to be backed up by good theory, and if they further claimed that it is just possible that love is not a central concept of morals, the anti-theorist need not feel threatened. Most rationalists are committed to some conception of human nature in which reason is supposed to play a defining (and usually ennobling) role: all people participate (or at least can participate) in reason; thus, all people can

be moral. The anti-theorist need not accept any such conception.⁴ Perhaps moral vision is non-democratic. Maybe the rationalist really can't see that love is a central concept of morals. The anti-theorist has no reason, on that account, to doubt the importance of love.

I think the anti-theorist's criticisms of rationalistic theory are sound. A study which asks how an individual can learn to be a lover can be justified without recourse to theory. Look. Pay attention to morality as you know it in real life. Is not love worth study? The anti-theorist need not worry if some people are not interested in this theme, since some will be.

In spite of the applause which these criticisms of rationalistic theory have won, we should not be content with them, since we can have a theory of the foundations of ethics. However, such a theory will not itself be moral philosophy, but metaphysics. It will tell us who we are and what our place in the world is.

Traditionally, people have understood their place in the world by means of myth and metaphor. Philosophers may build systems on the myths and metaphors, but the deep going currents lie under the system. So, as we have seen, Iris Murdoch argues that the "man" of modern moral philosophy is based on the metaphor of morality as action and suggests that the metaphor of morality as vision is better. She openly endorses Plato's myth of the cave. (Murdoch 92ff.) This story expresses several things well, she thinks. Specifically, our

⁴ Cf. chapter four for a critical examination of the essentialist assumption which underlies the rationalist view of human nature.

moral problems are mainly problems of vision in that we spend our time looking at shadow play; release from shadow play brings a temptation, absorption with the self (Murdoch says the fire which throws the shadows on the cave wall symbolizes the individual psyche); and there is a real, though indefinable good (the sun, which cannot be directly looked at), which illumines all the goods of the world.

I said that Murdoch endorses this myth, but that might not be quite accurate. She says of the story of the cave: "Of course we are dealing with a metaphor, but with a very important metaphor and one which is not just a property of philosophy and not just a model. As I said at the beginning, we are creatures who use *irreplaceable* metaphors in many of our most important activities." (Murdoch 93--my emphasis) Metaphysical systems based on mythological stories often (always?) take those stories to be, in some important way, true; that is, they really do tell us about the world and how we fit in it. Think of religious creation stories and the metaphysical doctrines build on them. It would be hard to believe the metaphysical doctrine if one thought the underlying story was "only a metaphor." Murdoch, of course, does not deride the Platonic story when she calls it a metaphor; it is important, perhaps irreplaceable. It is not just a model. Still, it is not entirely clear how the myth of the cave works for Murdoch. Does it tell us how the world is, or just illustrate moral change? Surely Plato intended it to teach epistemological doctrine (and other things) as well as teach about morality. Myths, especially

myths which provide good rock on which to build systems of metaphysics, illuminate the world in several directions, so to speak. Murdoch does not say whether the myth of the cave throws light on anything but morality.

I look for a theory of the foundations of ethics in a metaphysic built on theistic religious concepts. The fund of myths for such a theory is the traditional stories of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. No doubt similar theories could be built using Koranic material. Metaphysical systems, whether theistic or not, have their own ambitions (quite large, usually) and must be judged as adequate or inadequate, satisfying or unsatisfying, on those terms. Regarding a theory of the foundations of ethics, though, metaphysics must before anything else give us our place in the world. What sort of creatures are human beings? What is the significance of their characters and actions?

Who are we? We ought to expect a theory of the foundations of ethics to make sense of--have room for--human reason *and human feelings*. Rationalistic theories have tended to have room only for reason. The moral philosopher ought to learn from psychologists, since moral theory must deal with real people. What is the significance of human beings? A theory of the foundations of ethics ought to allow us to find significance both in actions and imagination. Rationalistic theory has tended to focus so tightly on action that imagination, the actions which go on "inside," has been neglected.

I do not look for a finished theory, in the sense of something unimproveable. After all, God is transcendent and perfect; our theologies are not. And I wish to leave as an open question whether any extant theistic metaphysic is successful both in terms of its own ambitions and in giving material for a theory of the foundation of ethics. Still, a theory of the foundations of ethics could be constructed out of theistic materials which would not be subject to the phenomenological criticisms the anti-theorist throws at standard rationalistic ethical theory.

(How can I justify a belief about some possible theory which may or may not have been made? The best justification would be to construct the theory, but that is not this book. As a poor substitute, note how the criticisms leveled against rationalistic ethics by the anti-theorist fail to bite on religious ethics. 1. The unreflective virtuous person can hold a place of high esteem in religious moral thought, a position uncontrived and flowing naturally from virtues such as humility and obedience. 2. Religious ethics often emphasize the importance of both the inner and the outer life. 3. In some religious ethics love is seen as the leading moral concept; it is not the stepchild of duty or utility.)

By this time a question may have occurred to the reader. It seems that I object to rationalistic ethical theories because they make the question of this study--how can I become a lover?--a secondary one. By agreeing that there might be a theologically based theory of the "foundations of ethics," have I not made my own study

into something to be appended to metaphysics? What is gained by grounding the question in metaphysics rather than a general theory of ethics? Why not just call a theory of the foundations of ethics a general theory of ethics and be done with it? Perhaps my grudge against rationalistic ethical theories could be assuaged if those theories were characterized as metaphysical speculations.

Three points should be made:

First, it makes a difference whether moral philosophy is organized around a single principle of morality or by reference to something other than morality. Standard ethical theories try to systematize moral thought by subjecting all morality to a ruling principle which is itself a principle of morality. Just as a theistic theory would, a theory of the foundations of ethics may locate those foundations outside moral thought. As *moral* principles, then, the great commands could be of first importance.

Second, rationalistic moral philosophers generally, with the exception of Kant, do not imagine their ruling moral principle to be a metaphysical truth as well. They might object to classifying the ruling principle as metaphysical speculation. The principle of utility, for instance, supposedly is derived empirically. Empiricism can be a metaphysical doctrine (and often is, even when its devotees deny it), but the principle of utility, though derived from empiricism, is supposed to be a moral principle. Kant, on the other hand, thought that autonomy was not only the ruling moral principle, but also the truth about rational beings (and therefore about human beings).

Third, rationalistic theories of ethics do even less well as theories of metaphysics than they do as theories of ethics. As regards ethics, a metaphysical system ought to tell us what we are and our role in the world. If we treat the standard rationalistic theories as metaphysics, they tell us we are essentially rational beings, whose role is to make calculations of utility or give ourselves the categorical imperative. But what can this mean, that we are essentially rational, when irrationality seems such a large part of the human picture? Kant answers, and again he is only more rigorous and clear than other rationalists: ". . .the law interests us because it is valid for us as men in virtue of having sprung from our will as intelligence and so from our proper self; *but what belongs to mere appearance is necessarily subordinated by reason to the character of the thing in itself.*" (Kant 123--Kant's emphasis) We may take Kant to mean that if human beings are not rational, they ought to be; reason itself dictates this conclusion. We can discount all contingent appearance. Reason tells us "our proper self."

This ought to strike us as exceedingly strange.

Kant here engages in myth-making, or shows himself to be building metaphysics on a myth which he found ready to hand when he began philosophizing. The particular myth he believes--or assumes without question--is widespread in philosophy and worthy of attention.

The Myth of Autonomous Reason

We usually think of ancient stories when we think of myths. The myth of autonomous reason is not a story, but it is ancient. It pervades philosophy, almost to the point of being co-extensive with philosophy as we know it in the West. In stripped down form, it is the idea that reason exists independently of any thinker. It includes the belief that in any decision making or belief fixing process there is exactly one most rational path.

Human beings, of course, often fail to fix beliefs or make decisions in the "most rational" way. That is, we often criticize our beliefs and decisions as being confused, shortsighted, foolish or in some other way substandard. According to the myth of autonomous reason, this reflects poorly on human beings and their inability to think straight, but not on reason itself. According to the myth of autonomous reason, right reason leads to truth. Right reason is pure objectivity, "the point of view of the universe" in Sidgwick's phrase.

The myth of autonomous reason shows itself, more or less clearly, in many philosophical enterprises, not just ethical theory. As Bernard Williams notes in the "Preface" to *Moral Luck*, almost all science hopes to attain to a conception of the world "independent of our peculiarities and the peculiarities of our perspective." (Williams x) Philosophers of science follow suit, struggling to find a way to affirm that science is a rational enterprise (a deep intuition which nearly all of them share) while recognizing that current theory is not

the same thing as truth and that the history of science is full of irrational fits and starts.

Another example: philosophers of religion have spilt a great deal of ink debating whether belief in God is rational. Most of them recognize that belief in God is or isn't rational according to one's definition of rationality. They vigorously debate this or that conception of rationality, convinced that rationality is some thing which some definition will best describe.

Whenever a philosopher says, "Reason dictates. . ." or "Clear thinking will show. . ." or ". . . mere appearance is necessarily subordinated by reason. . ." (Kant), we should suspect the influence of the myth of autonomous reason. Whenever *reason* rather than some rational being is made into an actor, we may suspect the myth of autonomous reason is at work.⁵ We need not suppose that all these philosophers have an articulated belief that "reason" is somewhere "out there," independent of thinkers; that would be to convict them all of a sort of Platonism. I do think, though, that for many philosophers the myth of autonomous reason is a deep, almost untouchable assumption. It is connected to the first, most basic of all philosophic instincts: "let's think about this."

Philosophers err, I believe, when they look for some thing which corresponds to "reason." I take this to be a Wittgensteinian

⁵ Of course we should allow writers the freedom to use figures of speech, and sometimes "reason" is an innocent substitute for the thought of some rational being. But often, as in the Kant quote, "reason" appears to be a strange thing: a form, the mind of God, or some such.

point. Asking, "What is reason?" is like asking, "What is meaning?" The myth of autonomous reason assumes there is some thing which is reason. In reality, we use "reason" and "rational" to describe a great many mental activities, which cannot be reduced to any single principle. A reasonable person exhibits skills, not all of them alike in any obvious way:

- the ability to draw inferences,
- the ability to think of counterexamples,
- the patience to stick with a problem when it seems unsolvable,
- the ability to make distinctions between related ideas,
- the ability to see the parts of a whole,
- the creativity to put seemingly disparate parts into a whole,
- the wisdom to pick out the important fact or opinion from unimportant ones,
- the willingness to criticize familiar ideas,
- etc.

A person can think more or less reasonably at different times: "I just wasn't myself; I was so mad I couldn't think straight." Some people are more reasonable than others. But we do not make these judgments by comparing a person at two times or two people at the same time to an independently existing thing. Saying, "Tom is more rational than Bill," is like saying, "Tom is better than Bill at that sort of thing," and not like, "There is more of this sort of thing in Tom than in Bill."

The reader probably expects, now that the idea of autonomous reason has been labeled a "myth," that its every occurrence will be deplored or derided. Actually, I think it has a largely beneficial influence on philosophy. Analogously, science profitably uses theoretical concepts which describe situations which never happen or are impossible. In mechanics, for instance, we may theorize about what would happen on a frictionless surface, though we have no experience of such surfaces. By analogy with this use of a model, the myth of autonomous reason has at least two right uses.

First, the myth of autonomous reason encourages philosophical criticism. According to the myth, in every case there is an ideally rational position or solution. Thus, any actual position or solution is liable to improvement; we are invited to look for flaws and make corrections. Compare the notion of autonomous reason with Murdoch's treatment of "good." Both are what she calls perfectionistic concepts. (Murdoch 60-62) Every good deed or thing invites us to see that it could be better; the good itself lies beyond any concrete good. Similarly, the myth of autonomous reason invites us to judge any rational decision or opinion in the light of reason itself. Philosophy would not be what it is without its spirit of rigorous self-criticism. (Of course, most philosophers find self-criticism hard to do; we happily believe our own howlers. But philosophy as a group activity is notoriously self-critical.) That the myth of autonomous reason encourages philosophical criticism is a good thing.

Second, at an even more basic level, the myth of autonomous reason encourages the philosophers' pursuit of understanding. The myth holds out the promise that life and the universe are not fundamentally chaotic. Somehow, if we keep at it, we will come to understand. Remember that in several dialogues Plato allows his characters come to no positive conclusion, but the conversation ends with an invitation or promise to return to the topic another day. To be a going concern, philosophy needs the confidence that rational thought about problems is worthwhile, whether that confidence is expressed as a belief that reason leads to truth or in some other way. The myth of autonomous reason feeds philosophic confidence. We can find the way if we just attune ourselves closely enough to right reason, which exists independently of us. We only need to keep doing philosophy and not give up.

Though recognizing these good effects of the myth of autonomous reason, we need to see that it also has wrong uses. When we mistake the nature of rationality, taking it to be one thing, we are apt to decide that reason is a science or a calculus. That is mistake enough, but when philosophers like Kant add to it the doctrine that the true nature of human beings is to be rational, we get a distorted picture of what it is to be a person. The familiar picture of the rational chooser emerges, isolated from his history and character by his own penetrating understanding of those contingent (and therefore not ultimately important) facts. This rational chooser is the "'man' of modern moral philosophy" which Murdoch finds

"alien and implausible." (Murdoch 9) He lives in utilitarianism and existentialism as well as Kantianism; Kant only has the virtue of drawing his profile more clearly than anyone else.

The myth of autonomous reason may or may not have deleterious effects in other areas of philosophy, but in moral philosophy it clearly falsifies who we are. I invite the reader to look and see. It is not simply as rational beings that we are moral beings. To the degree that rationality is part of our nature, and we may agree it is, it is a part of our nature as moral beings, but we must not think it is the whole story. We should be as interested in what it takes to be able to love and what it takes to desire to love as we are in decisions to love.

In summary, then, standard rationalistic ethical theories fail as ethical theories unless, as Kant saw, they are also true as metaphysical descriptions of humanity and its place in the world. But Kant's description of humanity, which fits rationalistic theory, is simply not true. It makes wrong use of the myth of autonomous reason.

A Place for Rationalistic Moral Theory

I am tempted to agree with philosophers who at this point would abandon standard moral theories as wholly useless. Why should we not philosophize about the moral dimensions of life in a manner such as was done in chapters one and two, paying attention to psychological material and the facts of morality that seem obvious to us? Some anti-theorists would counsel that we ignore the rationalist desire for a ruling principle and give our attention to small areas of the moral life, making as much sense as we can of one problem, virtue or vice at a time. In general, moral philosophy would be more satisfying if this advice were followed. This study itself is an attempt to think about one such question, a very important one.

Nevertheless, there is a place for rationalistic theories in ethics-though perhaps not the ones we currently have. The characteristics of rationalistic theories which we have noted can clue us about their proper place. 1) Rationalistic theories use a legal model. 2) They focus on public actions, neglecting matters of character and motive. 3) They reduce duty to what can be required of any rational agent, the least common denominator. Some questions of moral philosophy do seem to call for a theory of this sort, i.e., questions of public behavior which must be justified by one party or parties in a society to some other party or parties in that society. In other words,

rationalistic moral theory can be of real use in political and legal philosophy.

This might seem to conflict with what was said above about the possibility of a satisfying metaphysic supplying an adequate theory of the foundations of ethics. If our ethical reflections can be grounded on a good theory which tells us who we are, why should we need a rationalistic theory, which admittedly gives a false reading of who we are, to solve legal or political problems? The answer is that we think about legal and political problems for social and personal reasons rather than rational or philosophical reasons.

The position proposed here follows Bernard Williams. (Williams 80-82) Williams believes that values, moral and others, cannot be reduced to any unitary good, nor can they be traded off in some common currency of value. We shall return to this doctrine of the incommensurability of goods in chapters six and seven. Note now, though, that this position pits Williams against rationalistic theories which look for a single supreme principle.

Williams also believes, against utilitarianism and Kantianism, that in some situations there are unresolvable conflicts of obligation. It is the situation, not the less than perfect rational agent, which keeps the right action from being found.

If these things are true, Williams says, we should re-examine our motives for trying to resolve conflicts about values. "If conflict among our values is not necessarily pathological, and if even where the situation is at fault, as with some conflicts of obligation, conflict is

not a logical affliction of our thought, it must be a mistake to regard a need to eliminate conflict as a purely rational demand, of the kind that applies to a theoretical system. Rather we should see such needs as there are to reduce conflict and to rationalise our moral thought as having a more social and personal basis." (Williams 81)

Williams' point is that modern societies are complex, and morally significant actions are performed by public agencies, which are answerable (in democracies) to those complex societies. The values of two or more parties in a society do not need to mesh or be rationally reconcilable as long as those parties do not impinge on one another. In legal and political arenas, though, the values of various parties do impinge on each other. Since legal and political conflict can be destructive, society needs--for social and personal reasons, not strictly rational ones⁶--to reduce the conflict which arises from conflicts of values.

Shall public agencies perform abortions? Should government be entrusted with the responsibility to execute criminals? How far should private property rights be circumscribed in favor of cultural or preservationist values? Around these and many like questions intense conflict can arise. Our need to reduce that conflict is a practical one.

⁶ Of course, given what has been said in this chapter, it may be doubted if there are such things as "strictly rational reason" as opposed to social and personal reasons. But this doesn't weaken Williams' point, since he merely says we don't need to resolve conflicts for purely rational reasons--he is not thereby committed to believing in purely rational reasons, and even if he does believe in them, his readers can accept this point without believing in them.

Even if, as I believe, a good theory of the foundations of ethics can be made, moral philosophy based on it will not be monolithic. Nor should we expect all parties in a society to subscribe to the theory--especially if, as I expect, a good theory of the foundations of ethics is made out of theistic religious material. So, however much I believe in an ultimate unity of goods (a matter taken up in chapters six and seven), I agree with Williams that we can expect significant conflicts of values in society. Our need to reduce that conflict will not be rational or philosophical. There will be a place, then, for theories which organise moral thinking and feeling, especially about public questions of general duty. In addressing these questions, there may be a place for rationalistic moral theory.

Note first: the role thus assigned to rationalistic moral theory falls far short of the grandiose vision usually held for such philosophy by its creators.

Note second: it is an open question whether some other way could be found to think about legal and political questions, which could meet our practical need to reduce social and personal conflict as well or better than rationalistic theory. Societies must avoid relativism, but rationalism may not be the only way to do it.

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CHAPTER IV

KANT, THE MYTH OF AUTONOMOUS REASON
AND ESSENTIAL HUMANITY

In the last chapter, the myth of autonomous reason was introduced as the idea that reason exists independently of any thinker. It includes the belief that in any decision making or belief-fixing situation there is exactly one most rational path. (If two possibilities are equally rational, the most rational path is to prefer the two to all others while being agnostic as to which of the two should be preferred.) Though this myth has benefited philosophy by encouraging pursuit of truth and rigorous self-criticism, I claimed that the myth of autonomous reason caused mischief in ethics. First, philosophers often fall into the habit of thinking of reason as one thing rather than a collection of skills, a mistake which encourages us to think morality is mostly about making right decisions. Second, and more important, the myth of autonomous reason falsifies who we are. It encourages a wrong understanding of human nature and what our role is in the world.

These charges, if true, justify the limited place assigned to rationalistic moral theories in the last chapter, that of judging public questions of general duty. But are they justified? Can it be shown that moral philosophers accepted the myth of autonomous reason

and were misled by it? Cautious readers may be forgiven for thinking that more needed to be said.

This chapter, then, is an attempt to say more, to fill in some details. It is not, however, at all complete. Rather than explore the presence and effects of the myth of autonomous reason in the work of many philosophers--a project suggested by the claims made in chapter three, but which is beyond the scope of one volume--I will turn again to Immanuel Kant, who, perhaps more than any other philosopher, self-consciously and thoroughly worked out the implications of rationalism in ethics. This investigation will show (1) that Kant's work bears the mark of the myth of autonomous reason, (2) that the myth led him to a certain understanding of human nature (or, at least, that it fit well with a certain picture of human nature, even if Kant adopted that picture independently of the assumptions of the myth), and (3) that this understanding of human nature led Kant to write things which must strike readers, unless they are under the spell of his system, as mistaken and even bizarre. Kant's moral thought can be taken as an illustration of the deleterious effects of the myth of autonomous reason in ethics.

Morality as the Duties of Rational Agents

The place to begin is not with criticism, but with a fuller understanding of Kant's moral theory. There is no room here, of course, for a "full" treatment of Kantian ethics; many interpreters of

Kant have written whole books on the topic.¹ I will trace what seem to me to be the main ideas of Kant's ethics, which will ground the criticisms made later; Kant scholars may judge whether this brief resume fairly presents Kant's position. References will be taken from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (in this chapter referred to as *Groundwork* and *Critique*, respectively).

In Kant's view, morality is at heart a matter of duty. He recognized that emotions impinge on the moral life, but he would insist (as we saw in the last chapter) that any attempt to think about morality which focused first on love rather than duty would be confused and doomed to failure. Moral worth, Kant said, attaches to actions done not just in conformity with duty, but from the motive of duty. (*Groundwork* 9-10)

Duty occupied this exalted place in morality for two reasons. First, Kant thought that careful reflection on the ordinary moral judgments of everyday people revealed the fundamental importance of duty.² Second, the concept of freedom, which is intimately tied to the idea of duty, is "the keystone of the whole architecture of the

¹ Of the secondary literature, the author has been most helped by R.J. Sullivan's *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*. Though most of my interpretation of Kant in this chapter fits well with Sullivan's, it will be based on citations of Kant rather than secondary literature. Naturally, readers should not impute any of my criticisms of Kant's theory to Sullivan.

² Kant, along with most moral philosophers, grants that most moral beliefs of the general populace are correct. The problem is that philosophers haven't been able to make systematic sense of ordinary morality. But the problem is not merely philosophical, as lack of good understanding of morality--and the resulting wrong-headed attempts to inculcate morality in young people--could undermine morality.

system of pure reason and even of speculative reason." (*Critique 3*) In other words, if morality is not primarily a matter of duty, Kant's whole critical philosophy collapses. Both of these reasons for the primacy of duty need more explication.

1. Duty as the Underlying Assumption of Popular Morality

Imagine the case of a parent or teacher dealing with two children who are prone to fight over toys. Generally, the adult tries to prevent the children from fighting, or at least to keep their fights from producing lasting harm. In addressing this problem, the adult may adopt many different strategies. She may separate the children, punish particular behaviors, tell the children to share the toys instead of fighting, or even refuse to intervene in the children's fighting, on the assumption that they will discover for themselves the unpleasantness of unregulated conflict and avoid fighting in the future.

The adult does not merely want the children to refrain from fighting. A sort of armed truce could occur if they were motivated by fear of adult punishment or displeasure if they were caught fighting. At certain stages of development, the children may be incapable of acting on anything higher than a punishment-reward level, but even if the adult recognizes this and provides the indicated punishments or rewards, the adult's long-term goal is for the children to share the toys and not fight because *it is right to do so*.

In other words, the adult wants the children to recognize that they *ought* to do or not do something.

For Kant, the main job of moral philosophy is to make sense of the concept of "ought." "Ought" is not only the goal of moral education (as in the imagined example of the adult with the belligerent children), it is the concept by which the adult participates in morality as a mature agent.

Obligation poses an interesting philosophical question. Where does this conviction, that I or someone else *ought* to do something, come from? What is it? Clearly, to say something ought to be done is not the same as saying it is done. Science teaches us what *is*; morality seems to teach us what *ought to be*. How does this happen?

In the "Preface" to the *Groundwork*, Kant wrote:

Every one must admit that a law has to carry with it absolute necessity if it is to be valid morally--valid, that is, as a ground of obligation; that the command 'Thou shalt not lie' could not hold merely for men, other rational beings having no obligation to abide by it--and similarly with all other genuine moral laws; that here consequently the ground of obligation must be looked for, not in the nature of man nor in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but solely *a priori* in the concepts of pure reason; and that every other precept based on principles of mere experience--and even a precept that may in a certain sense be considered universal, so far as it rests in its slightest part, perhaps only in its motive, on empirical grounds--can indeed be called a practical rule, but never a moral law. (*Groundwork* vi)

This remarkable sentence reveals several important ideas which interlock with each other in the complex which is Kant's moral thought.

First, *the moral law must be unconditional*. This is a basic assumption for Kant; it simply expresses what "everyone" means when he says something ought or ought not to be done. Of course, Kant admitted that most of the maxims of popular morality appealed to contingent, conditioned factors (such as utility, prudence or inclinations) to justify obligation. Underneath the sloppy thinking of popular morality, though, Kant said we would find an unconditioned moral law. The real moral law, even if unrecognized by unphilosophical people, is what gives popular moral judgments their force.

Second, *experience never gives unconditioned truth*. This is a commonplace of philosophy in the modern era. With other philosophers of his age, Kant recognized that empirical science had drastically changed the way Europeans thought about the world. But science, for all its importance, was limited by its inductive nature; it never yielded certainty. This meant, for Kant, that science--and, of course, all other knowledge gained from the senses--could be of no help in discerning moral laws.

Third, *pure reason is unconditioned*. This claim is, in effect, the myth of autonomous reason dressed up in Kantian terminology. More will be said below, in the section regarding Kant's moral theory and the myth of autonomous reason, about *how* Kant thought reason

could be unconditioned, something which he recognized as a problem. For the present, note that Kant thought that if we disregarded "the nature of man" and "the circumstances of the world" we would still be able to ground the moral law "solely *a priori* in the concepts of pure reason." Kant thought that pure reason could operate independently of "the circumstances of the world."

Fourth, *moral laws must be grounded in pure reason rather than experience.* This conclusion simply ties together the previous propositions. If moral laws must be unconditional, if experience is never unconditioned and if pure reason is unconditioned, then moral laws must be grounded in the latter rather than the former. The important thing to see is that Kant thought analysis led clearly from the popular concept of obligation through the intermediate steps to this conclusion; only pure reason could provide the universal necessity integral to the commonly accepted idea of "ought."

Fifth, *moral beings must be rational beings.* This contention, which follows from the idea that moral law is grounded in pure reason, lies behind Kant's comment that a moral law must apply to all rational beings, not just men. Since real obligation allows for no exceptions, it must rule over all moral beings, and since moral laws are grounded in pure reason, all moral beings must be rational. In fact, insofar as we are recognizing and grounding the moral law, human beings are just like any other moral beings. Nothing contingent, in us or them, in our world or theirs, can have any bearing on the shape of moral law.

Sixth, *the essential human nature is rationality.* In Kant's mental chart of things, the class "men" is a subclass of the class "rational beings." No one knows whether there are other non-empty subclasses of the class "rational beings" (at this point; we are in the *Groundwork*--later, in the *Critique*, Kant gives a practical reason for assuming the existence of at least one non-human rational being), but if other rational beings do exist, they will be more like us than different. No matter how great the empirical differences between men and other rational beings, our common rationality makes us merely different species under the same genus, "rational beings."

Obviously, if I say that Kant thought people are essentially rational beings, I need not mean that he thought people always, or even often, act rationally. A purely rational being, e.g., God, would always act rationally and would therefore always act in conformance with the moral law. Kant wrote, "Hence for the *divine* will, and in general for a *holy* will, there are no imperatives: '*I ought*' is here out of place, because '*I will*' is already of itself necessarily in harmony with the law." (*Groundwork* 39) In contrast to a divine rational being, finite creatures such as human beings, who are subject to inclinations and thus not purely rational, experience the moral law as ought. "I ought" emerges in the tension between the dictates of pure reason and contingent inclinations. Without both sides, pure reason in the form of moral law saying one thing and natural inclinations saying something else, people would not experience obligation as "necessitation," Kant's word for the feeling

that I ought to do something I do not want to do. Kant saw no reason to explore how natural inclinations tempt us away from the path of duty, because this is obvious in everyone's experience. But there is a question about pure reason. How does it supply its half of the ought which we experience as necessitation? Kant thought that analysis of popular moral belief showed that pure reason had to have this role, but nothing in popular moral belief showed how pure reason worked to compel the will. To address this question, Kant wrote the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

2. Duty as a Necessary Concept of Kant's System of Critical Philosophy

Kant's call to philosophy came in the writings of David Hume. Hume pressed empiricism to skeptical conclusions, which in Kant's view left science as well as morality and religion without good philosophical foundations. Kant sought to correct what he saw as an intolerable situation by a thorough reconstruction of epistemology, a project he called critical philosophy. Only the briefest summary of Kant's critical philosophy will be given here, just enough to show how duty has an indispensable role in it.

The crux of Hume's skepticism, in Kant's view, lay in his attack on causality. (*Critique* 50-51) Causality, as we normally think of it, is a necessary connection between two things (events or properties): if A, then necessarily B. But, Hume said, experience of connection

between things never shows that they are necessarily connected, only that they are connected. Causality, then, would have to be an *a priori* concept. But it is impossible to have *a priori* knowledge of things in the world. Therefore, Hume claimed, causality--the idea that one event in the world causes another event--is an intellectual fraud; we only believe in it through custom, never for good reason. Causality, Hume said, is inconceivable.

Kant responded to this attack on causality with one of philosophy's oldest tools. He introduced a distinction. He allowed Hume's argument to be sound as regards things-in-themselves, "for it cannot be understood, with reference to things-in-themselves and their properties as such, why, if *A* is given, something else, *B*, must also necessarily be given." (*Critique* 53) But we never deal with things-in-themselves, Kant said, but only with things-as-experienced. Additionally,

. . .it is very understandable that *A* and *B* as appearances in one experience must necessarily be connected in a certain manner (e.g., with reference to their temporal relations) and that they cannot be separated without contradicting that connection by means of which experience is possible, in which experience they become objects and alone knowable to us. This was actually the case, so that I could not only prove the objective reality of the concept of cause with reference to objects of experience but also deduce it as an *a priori* concept because of the necessity of the connection it implies. (*Critique* 53)

Kant turned his attention away from things-in-themselves to the appearances of things as we experience them. While we cannot

tell if things-in-themselves have necessary connections between them (Hume's point, according to Kant), we can clearly see that appearances as we experience them do have necessary connections--otherwise we could not experience them as we do. One of these connections is causality. Thus, at least in reference to things-as-experienced, causality *is* conceivable and is, in fact, an *a priori* concept which makes experience possible.

As an *a priori* concept, the category of causality (and all the other categories introduced in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; we focus on causality because Kant thought it crucial to morality) is free from the contingent nature of empiricism; in Kant's words, it has its seat in the "pure understanding." (*Critique* 54) We may, then, apply the category of causality to things-in-themselves, except that we don't know "the conditions for the application of these categories, and especially that of causality, to objects." (*Critique* 54) So we know the categories do apply to real objects, but we cannot by them gain experience of objects. "And if, when subsequently applied to things-in-themselves which cannot be objects of experience, it [causality] cannot be determined so as to represent a definite object for the purposes of a theoretical cognition, it could nevertheless be determined for application to some other purpose, such as the practical." (*Critique* 54) We are barred from acquiring what Kant called theoretical or speculative knowledge of things-in-themselves, but we may apply the concept of causality to things-in-themselves for what he called practical purposes.

By "practical," Kant meant action in the world. Human beings act when they desire something; for Kant, the faculty of desire is equivalent to the will. Reason is practical when it influences the will. One sort of practical reason evaluates possible courses of action according to their prudential characteristics. For instance, will an action lead to the desired result (happiness, utility, etc.) or not? Kant denied that such reasoning was genuinely moral, since it appealed to contingent facts in the world. As we have seen, his analysis of obligation in the *Groundwork* required that moral law be unconditional.

Another sort of practical reason, "pure" practical reason, if it existed, would not appeal to contingent facts in the world. If a rational being had pure practical reason, it would have a pure will.³ The pure will is a crucial idea for Kant.

In the concept of a will, however, the concept of causality is already contained; thus in that of a pure will there is the concept of causality with freedom, i.e., of a causality not determinable according to natural laws and consequently not susceptible to any empirical intuition as proof [of the reality of the free will]. Nevertheless, it completely justifies its objective reality in the pure practical law a priori. . .(*Critique* 55)

To review, by focusing on things-as-experienced rather than things-in-themselves, Kant claimed to have saved the category of

³ For Kant, "pure will" is not the same as "holy will." A holy will is a will completely in conformity to the moral law. A being with a holy will (God) would always and naturally act according to the moral law. A pure will is a will determined by reason alone, apart from inclinations. A being with a pure will could act in accord with the moral law by recognizing the necessity of the moral law and subjecting all inclinations to its rule.

causality. Causality was shown to be an *a priori* concept, applicable to things-in-themselves, though not able to give theoretical knowledge of things-in-themselves. In the passage just quoted, Kant says that the concept of a will (practical reason) involves the idea of causality. If there is such a thing as a pure will, a will not determined by contingencies but by reason alone, then we have a practical reason to believe in a cause which is free.

In the moral law, the categorical imperative, Kant thought he had the "determining ground" of the pure will. (*Critique* 56) The categorical imperative commanded the will independently of inclinations or hopes for success. Therefore, a pure will, a will undetermined by contingent facts, was possible. Kant carefully guarded against claims that this chain of reasoning gave knowledge of things-in-themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that human wills could be set in conformity to the law, motivated by reverence for the law, gave a concrete reason to accept the idea of "an empirically unconditioned causality," the free will. In a move suggestive of Wittgenstein's idea that some things could be shown but not said, Kant wrote that the "practical reality" of the free will could be "pointed out," even though the free will was not an object of theoretical knowledge. (*Critique* 56)

Kant thought that what he called the "speculative" side of his critical philosophy had rescued inductive science from Humean skepticism. The categories of thought (causality, temporal relations, etc.) made possible only knowledge of appearances, but this was not

a problem; science had only to accept that its proper role was studying appearances rather than things-in-themselves. Within the realm of appearances, Kant had shown causality--the foundational concept of science--to be valid.

The practical side of critical philosophy rescued something else. Many philosophers were worried by the notion, often occasioned by the growing success of science, that material determinism was true. If determinism were true, they worried, morality--insofar as it was conceived as requiring free will--would be undermined. In contrast to these thinkers, Kant readily accepted the doctrine that determinism ruled the world of appearances. Further, he agreed with those who held that morality requires a free will, that without freedom there is no moral responsibility. But by locating the free will in the realm of things-in-themselves, Kant saved morality (and religion as an appendage to morality) from determinism.

We see, then, why Kant wrote that freedom served as the "keystone" of his whole system. (*Critique* 3) Only by freedom was morality saved from determinism. Only through the concept of freedom do concepts of God and immortality gain "stability and objective reality." (*Critique* 4) "Now is explained the enigma of the critical philosophy, which lies in the fact that we must renounce the objective reality of the supersensible use of the categories in speculation and yet can attribute this reality to them in respect to the objects of pure practical reason." (*Critique* 5) Because there is

freedom, we know that things-in-themselves exist and that human categories of thought really apply to them.

We see that the moral law is able to determine a will independently of inclinations or other contingent factors. Therefore, a pure will, a will undetermined by contingencies, actually can occur. Therefore, anytime a pure will occurs we have a practical reason (not a speculative one) for accepting the reality of freedom, since a pure will combines the concepts of causality and freedom. Therefore, whenever a human being has a pure will, a will determined only by the moral law, he has a practical reason to accept the reality of freedom. *Whenever my will is determined by the moral law and not by inclinations or other contingencies, I have a practical reason to accept the reality of freedom and with it the reality of things-in-themselves.*

For Kant, freedom holds everything together.

As we saw in the last chapter, Kant said that when a rational agent sees, by reason alone, that the categorical imperative must be obeyed, he has achieved autonomy. Since the law the autonomous person gives himself is based solely on reason, it is free from the determinism which reigns in the world of appearances. So autonomy is equivalent to freedom.

Now we can see why duty is crucial to critical philosophy. A person achieves autonomy only when she wills in conformity with the moral law. To will in conformity with the moral law is to will to do her duty. If it were not possible for pure practical reason to

determine the will by the individual giving herself the moral law--if, in other words, Kant's conception of morality with duty at its heart was incoherent or false--then she could not be autonomous. There would be no freedom. So,

If morality is not essentially duty, there cannot be moral law.

If there is not moral law, there is no pure will.

If there is no pure will, there is no practical reason to accept the reality of freedom and all the concepts which attach to it.

Therefore, if morality is not basically duty, Kant's critical philosophy falls apart. We are left with skepticism in regard to things-in-themselves. But Kant was confident he had defeated skepticism: ". . . the moral law . . . does provide a fact absolutely inexplicable from any data of the world of sense or from the whole compass of the theoretical use of reason, and this fact points to a pure intelligible world--indeed, it defines it positively and enables us to know something of it, namely, a law." (*Critique* 43) "The least attention to ourself shows that this idea [the moral law] really stands as a model for the determination of our will." (*Critique* 43)

Thus, Kant had two reasons for thinking morality was primarily duty. Duty lay beneath ordinary moral thinking, and duty was integral to the whole project of critical philosophy.

How Kant's Moral Theory Exhibits the Myth of Autonomous Reason

Both of Kant's reasons for thinking that morality is basically duty are rooted in the idea that reason functions in its own right, independent of any reasoner. First, he held that only "pure reason" could give obligation the force which ordinary moral judgments showed that it had. Second, he held that only a purely formal "determining ground" of the will could show that freedom was real, and such a formal rule could only prescribe duty. Both of these moves assume that pure reason, the source of the moral law (the purely formal determining ground of the will), actually exists. This is the myth of autonomous reason.

To a certain degree, it is unnecessary to prove this point. Even a quick reading of Kant's work suggests that Kant's ethical thought is shot through with the idea that reason is independent of reasoners. For Kant, reason is an actor; it can determine the will apart from anything empirical. (*Critique* 20, 41-42, etc.) But we must be careful, for Kant recognized a difficulty in the myth which many philosophers have missed.

As we have seen, Kant granted that mechanical necessity, i.e. determinism, reigns in the empirical world. (*Critique* 48) So human beings, including the self, viewed as objects of experience, are determined. For example, a person's emotional attachments and desires (in Kant's terms, the person's inclinations) often color his thinking. Kant would agree with the determinist who claims that

these inclinations, combined with other admittedly hard to measure contingent factors, cause a person to think one thing and not another. So how can pure reason, assuming it exists, have any bearing on human thought, since human thought is as determined as any other part of human existence?

Kant's answer, of course, makes use of the distinction between the world of appearance and things-in-themselves. Viewed as an object of experience (which is how I must see even my own subjective thoughts and feelings), I am entirely determined. But it is possible that I am also a thing-in-itself. As a thing-in-itself, I could be undetermined. I could be--but there is no speculative reason for saying I am. Only when the moral law appears, determining my will without reference to any contingencies, do I have a practical reason for saying more, that in me reason can be undetermined.

Strictly speaking, this explanation does not explain. It does not say *how* pure reason expresses itself in my thoughts, which are part of the world of experience. Kant leaves as mysterious the interaction between noumena and phenomena, though he instructs his readers how to apply the categorical imperative without understanding the connection. "Ask yourself whether, if the action which you propose should take place by a law of nature of which you yourself were a part, you could regard it as possible through your own will." (*Critique* 69) If the natural law which would describe the action could be approved if it were a maxim of pure practical reason, then the action accords with duty. Note how Kant assumes the reader is able to

compare her "own will," presumably a pure will, determined only by the moral law, to some hypothetical "law of nature," a description of mechanically necessary causation. That people might do this, that is, that people could judge possible actions by the purely formal requirements of the moral law, is for Kant the greatest concrete proof that freedom and things-in-themselves exist, even if no example could be given of a person who actually did judge her actions solely by the moral law.

It seems, then, that Kant recognized the problem, but failed to answer it. He does not say how pure reason can be related to the thoughts of people. He only insists that people *may* be seen as things-in-themselves as well as appearances (so far with speculative reason) and that they *must* be so regarded insofar as they are autonomous (the additional reach of practical reason). It is a mystery how a person whose every thought is determined by antecedent events can judge possible actions by pure reason, but Kant thinks practical reason shows this must be.

Kant's position is equivalent to saying the myth of autonomous reason is true, even though no person, as observed, exhibits autonomous reason. Mystery shrouds any connection between true reason and the thinking of actual persons, but we still have reason to believe that true reason exists. If true reason did not exist, neither

would the moral law; since the moral law does exist, true reason must exist too.⁴

So, though Kant was more self-conscious than many philosophers about the myth of autonomous reason--he at least saw that the idea is problematic--he still believed it. Morality, as Kant understood it, demands that reason be independent of the world of experience. Enough has been said, then, to justify my first claim, that Kant's work bears the mark of the myth of autonomous reason.

How Kant's Work Exemplifies a Certain Picture of Human Nature

Above, while listing central ideas in Kant's moral theory, I said that according to his mental chart, human beings were a species under the genus rational beings. In other words, Kant thought people were essentially rational, even though they may rarely, or never, act rationally. To further support this important contention, I offer these passages, one of which was partially quoted in the last chapter.

This much only is certain: the law is not valid for us *because it interests us* (for this is heteronomy and makes practical reason depend on sensibility--that is to say, on an underlying feeling--in which case practical reason could never give us moral law); the law interests us because it is valid for us as men in virtue of having sprung from our will as intelligence and so from our proper self; *but what belongs to mere appearance is necessarily*

⁴ This is simply an alternate way of putting the point of Kant's footnote comment (*Critique* 4) that freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, while the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.

subordinated by reason to the character of the thing in itself.
(*Groundwork* 123, Kant's emphases)

To substitute subjective necessity, i.e., habit, for the objective which pertains only to a priori judgments would be to deny the faculty of judging an object, of knowing it and what belongs to it. It would mean, for example, that what usually or always follows a certain prior condition could not be inferred to follow *from* it, since that would imply objective necessity and an a priori concept of a connection. It would mean only that similar cases may be expected, as animals expect them. (*Critique* 12)

Man is a being of needs, so far as he belongs to the world of sense, and to this extent his reason certainly has an inescapable responsibility from the side of his sensuous nature to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to the happiness of this and, where possible, of a future life. But still he is not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to everything which reason says on its own and to use it merely as a tool for satisfying his needs as a sensuous being. That he has reason does not in the least raise him in worth above mere animality if reason only serves the purposes which, among animals, are taken care of by instinct; if this were so, reason would be only a specific way nature had made use of to equip man for the same purpose for which animals are qualified, without fitting him for any higher purpose. (*Critique* 61)

In the first passage, Kant says that reason tells us that rationality is our "true self," in spite of any experiential evidence to the contrary. The second passage distinguishes between human knowledge, which is made possible by *a priori* judgments, and animal expectation, which is the most that can be had *a posteriori*. Only unconditioned reason enables our thought to rise above "habit." The third passage, besides giving another example in which reason is

an actor (reason is said to say things "on its own"), tells us that reason is what distinguishes people from animals.

These, and similar passages, show that Kant held a certain view of human nature. Kant did not invent this view; it is so common in philosophy that it may be called the traditional belief.

In the history of philosophy, the traditional belief often arises in response to a metaphysical question: What is Man? This question is sometimes understood to ask what separates people from God, and a Kantian phrase gives the traditional answer: Man is the finite rational being (as opposed to the infinite rational being). More often, the traditional belief has arisen to answer another question: What separates people from animals? According to the traditional belief, rationality separates people from animals; *people are essentially rational*. For all his innovations, Kant was at one with the main tradition of western philosophy in this basic position.

The third passage quoted makes it plain that Kant did not consider the non-rational elements of human nature (our "sensuous nature") to be unimportant. He said we ought to use our rational faculties to look out for our interests and inclinations--as far as we can within the moral law. But if that is all the use we make of rationality, we are no different from the animals. And Kant put this in evaluative terms; we are *better* than the animals only to the degree that we use our rationality for those ends which reason itself commands.

This evaluative note is part of the traditional belief. In virtually all cultures and in most of philosophy, human superiority to animals is taken for granted. Our tradition often asks how or why people are better than animals, but rarely whether they are better than animals.

Consider how the traditional belief uses an obvious difference between people and animals, the fact that animals do not talk. According to the traditional belief, animals do not talk because they are not rational; speech is the best behavioral mark of rationality. The fact that virtually all people talk while animals do not is thus made into evidence for the traditional belief.⁵ Further, since rational beings are superior to non-rational beings, animals' lack of language (and therefore reason) justifies human use of animals.

Observe that the traditional belief results from a search for the essential human characteristic. The traditional belief is essentialist. Like Socrates grilling Meno for a definition of virtue, philosophers who search for a definition of Man want a characteristic common to all people which at the same time distinguishes them from animals. The traditional belief says that characteristic is rationality.

Clearly, Kant accepted the traditional belief; rationality is the true human self. Since it is so basic to the Western philosophical tradition, he may never even have questioned it. But in swallowing

⁵ Experiments in which apes learn some sign language only underscore the traditional belief. With great effort one or two animals have been taught a fraction of the language skills billions of human two-year-olds pick up effortlessly.

the idea that reason is our true nature, Kant also accepted the principle of essentialism, that humanity has some defining characteristic that separates it from animality (and raises it above animality). Kant's position, which in this case is the position of most philosophers in the West, rests on essentialism.

The third main point I want to make in this chapter is that Kant's picture of human nature led him to mistaken conclusions in ethics. But if, as I have just contended, Kant's picture of human nature agrees with the dominant picture of human nature in our philosophical tradition, it may be hard to see his mistakes as mistakes unless the outline of the picture is challenged and redrawn. So, before we reach the last point, we must take a detour: an examination of the essentialist assumption which undergirds the traditional belief about human nature. The detour sign is found in a passage in Wittgenstein.

A Wittgensteinian Challenge to the Traditional Belief

In section 25 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says:

It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: 'they do not think, and that is why they do not talk.' But--they simply do not talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language--if we except the most primitive forms of language.--Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history

as walking, eating, drinking, playing. (*Philosophical Investigations* 12)

If we unpack this little paragraph, we will find a direct challenge to the traditional belief. To see this, one needs only to remember that in the traditional belief, human language is the most telling of all the behavioral marks of human rationality. Reason shows up in science, of course, and practical decisions (e.g. Aristotle says reason allows people to pursue happiness rather than mere pleasure), but the ability to talk marks us as rational as nothing else does. Wittgenstein sums up the traditional belief simply as "they [animals] do not think, and that is why they do not talk."

Wittgenstein's rejection of the traditional belief cuts to the heart of its doctrine: "But--they simply do not talk." He admits that animals do not use language, with the stipulation that we only mean they do not use complicated language, but he rejects the move from "they do not talk" to "they do not think."

Curiously, Wittgenstein does not make his point about animals explicit in the passage just quoted. He does not say that animals think. Instead, he makes a point about people. "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing."⁶ The things the traditional belief turns to as the best marks of rational beings, Wittgenstein lists as part of our natural history. He implies, I take it,

⁶ Note that commanding, questioning, recounting, and chatting are all complicated language uses; according to traditional belief, all marks of human rationality.

that natural history describes us as one of the animals. Human rationality, then, is part of our animality, not the thing that separates us from other species. This is in direct opposition to Kant, who held that reason raises us above other species.

Later in *Philosophical Investigations* (part II, section i; p. 174), Wittgenstein considers whether a dog could hope. He conjectures that while a dog could be angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, and startled, it could not be hopeful. Only someone who has mastered language can hope. "That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life," he writes. It seems that Wittgenstein thought of language on a scale of complexity, from the primitive forms of language of animals to the complicated forms of people. He probably thought of thinking in the same way, as ranging from simple to complex.

Possibly, Wittgenstein here offers a different answer to the question, What is Man? Where the traditional belief defines humanity as finite rational beings, Wittgenstein could be read as defining humanity as the animals with the most complicated forms of thought and language. I think, though, that this is a wrong way to put things. Wittgenstein is not giving a different answer, but a different kind of answer (better still, a different kind of response) to the question.

The traditional belief, we noted, is essentialist. In other contexts, Wittgenstein laid the blame for many philosophical errors on the urge to understand words through their essences. In section

66 he writes, "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." (*Philosophical Investigations* 31) Rather than attribute to Wittgenstein a new essentialist definition of humanity, I read him as challenging the craving for such a definition.

Whether this reading of Wittgenstein proves accurate or not (a matter hard to settle), it suggests that the traditional belief rests on a faulty assumption, the assumption that humanity can be defined by a single trait or particular combination of traits common to all people and not shared with animals. Since anybody can readily pick out many examples of human beings, the question, What is Man? affords an opportunity to follow Wittgenstein's instruction to "look and see."

Let us list candidates for an essential trait of humanity.

1. All human beings are *homo sapiens*, that is, they share a common biological nature. Biologists undoubtedly could define the term more precisely, probably mentioning a certain genetic structure or a combination of physical traits. This definition is true, and it is essentialist: the specified biological description fits all people and no animals. It is also not what the traditional belief needs.

The biological candidate borders on tautology. In the context of our question--What is Man? What is human nature?--it says people are people. (In other contexts, I presume, such as medicine, the biological definition of humanity is not tautological and represents a real gain in knowledge.) The philosophical quest for an essential characteristic of humanity looks for something that grants special

dignity to people as compared to animals. A biological comparison of *homo sapiens* with other species reveals differences, but not a special status.

For example, consider the differences between me and my cat. The cat has fur; hair grows thickly only on parts of my body. I can perceive certain colors my cat cannot. My cat can leap startling distances in comparison to his body size; I cannot. I can drive a car, but my cat can stalk and capture a bird. My beard grows fairly evenly, while he has some whiskers that protrude far beyond the other hairs on his face. Etcetera. All of these differences in ability or appearance derive from the real biological difference between us. But none of them support the conclusion that one is better than the other. And if some characteristic did ennoble me above the cat, it would be that characteristic--not merely the underlying biological difference--that ennobled me. So the search for an essential characteristic of humanity goes on.

2. People do seem to have a special status if viewed as ecological variables. In recent years environmentalists have taught us to think of people and other animals as components of ecological systems. In contrast to other species, which often exist together in symbiotic relationships, humanity has a record, not just of killing individual creatures, but of exterminating whole populations and species. Perhaps the essential trait of humanity is the ability to so

alter ecological systems as to render many species extinct, something no other animal does.⁷

Besides throwing the concept of special human dignity in doubt, which would disqualify it for the task imagined by the traditional belief, this trait--the ability to greatly modify ecological systems--has not been common to all human beings. According to accepted theories of prehistory, human beings lived for millenia on earth without significantly affecting ecological systems. Only the innovations of agriculture and technological industry enabled people to displace or destroy multiple species. The ecological importance of the race in the last 3000 years cannot serve as a defining characteristic of all people throughout its history.

3. Healthy children, unless they are prevented, play. Adults, unless they have learned not to, also play. Playfulness is an important human trait, many would say. But it will not serve the philosopher who wants an essential human trait, because at least some animals share it with us.

Of course, some philosophers will object that an animal, e.g., a kitten with a ball of string, does not really "play," because it doesn't have the mental experience associated with what we call play. Such objectors assume, first, that there is some characteristic mental

⁷ It has come to my attention that this is not completely accurate. The brown tree snake of Papua New Guinea, for instance, when introduced to Guam after World War Two, multiplied rapidly. Without natural predators there, this aggressive creature has eliminated at least sixteen native species of birds and reptiles. Of course, this sort of example pales before the immense ecological impact of *homo sapiens*.

experience which accompanies play, and second, that animals cannot have such experiences. Both assumptions are unsubstantiated and probably false. The objection exhibits what Wittgenstein called a mental cramp.

4. In his science fiction story, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Robert Heinlein hit on laughter as the distinguishing mark of humanity. Apparently no animals other than people engage in humor. (Obviously, the hyena's "laugh" is not a laugh.) Once again, we may wonder how we know animals do not laugh, but even if that is granted problems arise. We could doubt that all people laugh; some people really are humorless and not all of them see that as a lack in themselves. One could speculate that all people are capable of humor and that humorless people have merely lost something human. But if that is true, humor can hardly be the essential human trait, since people are still people after they lose it.

More importantly, the ability to laugh is not the sort of essential characteristic the traditional belief wants. Like biological differences between our species and others, it does not seem to support the elevated status people (not just philosophers) want to give to people. For instance, surely we are not justified in testing carcinogens on rabbits merely because we laugh and they don't. Laughter's failed candidacy reminds us that for the traditional belief, the essential characteristic of humanity is also an ennobling and praiseworthy characteristic.

5. Human beings enjoy things, such as music, food, sex, hot showers, and baseball. For a philosopher like Kant, this trait is the opposite of what we are looking for. Enjoyments, based on inclinations, are precisely the things we share with animals. If we cannot think of something other than these sorts of traits, Kant might say, we are no different from (implying, no better than) the animals. But if we subtract from life all such enjoyings, is what is left a human life?

Of course, one can overstate Kant's denigration of inclinations. He did believe we have a duty to pursue our own happiness, which includes enjoying things. But he would insist that the essential part of humanity cannot be anything contingent; reason reveals that the true self is noumenal. Therefore, we can fairly attribute to him the belief that human life is still essentially the same, even if we subtract from it all phenomenal enjoyments. If we find that we rebel against this idea because it is literally incredible, we have cause to doubt Kant's picture of human nature.

6. Human beings think and talk. More specifically, they sometimes think rationally and talk philosophy. Together, of course, thinking and talking constitute the core of the traditional belief. Wittgenstein, we have seen, challenges the idea that animals do not think. Perhaps their thought and language are only less complex than ours. But then, the thought and language of one person may be much more complex than another person's. Could we measure complexity of thought, so that the differences between all people is

so much smaller than the differences between people and animals that we would have a reliable way to tell them apart? This is at least conceivable, if doubtful. Even if this is granted, the difference between our species and another would only be larger than the difference between individuals of our species, a difference of quantity, not quality. I wonder if the traditional belief can be content with anything less than an absolute qualitative difference between people and animals. Kant thought there was.

The traditional belief could be wrong about its particular claim--that rationality and language distinguish humanity from animality--and still be right in its general claim that some essential trait of humanity exists. I will suggest three more.

7. Our ethical traditions tell us that every human being is the focus of moral worth. The cry of the oppressed is: "I, too, am a human being!" The traditional belief holds that the moral status of human beings depends on their distinction from the animals. Again, Kant is an example. People have dignity as autonomous rational beings, that is, those who are able to give themselves the form of the moral law. Hence, we should never treat a person as a means only.

I have no desire to deny the moral dignity of every person. But if human moral worth depends on some trait that distinguishes us from the animals, then human moral worth cannot itself be that trait. (One could maintain, of course, that human beings are distinguished from and superior to the animals simply because they

have individual moral worth. But this is bald assertion, not explanation. It is not the traditional belief.)

But, some defender of the traditional belief might object, human beings *do* have moral worth, worth not attributable to any animal. (Only the most radical animal rights proponent would deny we ought to choose the interests of a human being over those of an animal in hypothetical forced choice scenarios.) So there *must* be some characteristic or combination of traits which people share and which no animal has and which explains human moral worth.

Well, we do crave an explanation for our belief that people have greater moral worth than animals, a belief I share. But, do not say there must be a common element. Look and see.

8. People are self-conscious subjects. Philosophers make much of this idea, but what does it come to in real life? We ought to have an understanding of self-consciousness before we say it serves as the characteristic the traditional belief looks for.

Here are examples of what could be called self-consciousness: (a) "I was embarrassed." (b) "And then I thought, 'She's going to say no,' so I really turned on the charm. Boy, was I cool--and I knew it." (c) "Let it be the real I that prays, and the real thou I pray to." (d) "Mom, Dad and my boyfriend were all in the stands, but I said to myself, 'Forget all that,' and just concentrated on the basket."

In (a), someone felt a feeling. In (b), a person acted a part which he was able to label. In (c), a person assumes that her personality may include elements hidden from herself and tries to

make allowance for this possibility. In (d), a person pushed away distractions in order to accomplish a task. Perhaps this is enough to make us doubt that self-consciousness is a single phenomenon. If it is not, how does it serve to mark humanity? Is one of these sorts of self-consciousness, or some other one, the essential human trait? Is there a common element to every experience we call self-conscious? (A chasm opens before us. The common element of humanity is self-consciousness; the common element of self-consciousness is something else; that something else has yet another common element; etc.)

Two more questions: do all people share the requisite experience of self-consciousness? Do we know there is no such experience for animals such as monkeys or dolphins? Taking self-consciousness as the essential characteristic of humanity is fraught with many questionable assumptions.

9. Human beings are moral agents. We not only want others to pay attention to us, we feel we ought to pay attention to others. We accept blame and take credit for things we do. We exhibit such traits as honesty, laziness, kindness, etc., or their opposites. Can moral agency serve to distinguish humanity from animality?

No. First, like moral worth, moral agency is held by the traditional belief to depend on, not constitute, the essence of humanity. Second, like rationality and language, moral agency seems to lie on a scale from irresponsible automata like viruses to the completely self-aware chooser of existentialist novels. It can be

doubted that an easy cut-off will be found between human character and that of animals. Ordinary speech, for instance, ascribes viciousness, loyalty, and bravery to some dogs. Is this only a manner of speaking, as defenders of the traditional belief usually say?

Wittgenstein noted that we do not speak of dogs as hoping (Fido expects his dinner; we do not say he hopes for it). I suggest that the fact that some words seem to apply to dogs while others do not may indicate a real, if unsystematized, observation that dogs have certain characteristics but not others. Wittgenstein would probably say that some moral characteristics are part of one form of life, while others are only part of more complicated forms of life. If this makes sense, the difference between people and animals again appears to be one of degree, not of kind.

We have taken this long detour in order to raise doubts about the underlying assumption of the traditional view of human nature, the assumption that there is some essential human characteristic. Wittgenstein compared our concept of number to a thread, made of many intertwined fibers, with no element common to the whole. (*Philosophical Investigations*, section 67, p. 32) If we reject the search for an essentialist definition of humanity, we may use the same metaphor for human nature. *Many* traits, including reason and speech, make up our nature, but none of them need be common to us all.

I suggest that there is no defining trait of humanity. Even if there is, it is not rationality or speech.⁸ This means that Kant's picture of human nature is thoroughly misconceived. Therefore, we ought not to be surprised that his understanding of human nature led him to conclusions which are mistaken.

Kantian Conclusions Which Cannot Be Accepted

Many passages could be quoted, but two will suffice. Kant wrote:

It is doubtless in this sense that we should understand too the passages from Scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbour and even our enemy. For love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty--although no inclination impels us, and even although natural and unconquerable disinclination stands in our way--is *practical*, and not *pathological*, love, residing in the will and not the propensions of feeling, in principles of action and not of melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone which can be an object of command. (*Groundwork* 13)

⁸ Scripture says that God created people in her image (Genesis 1:26), and that God is love (1 John 4:16). It would seem that Christian speculation about the *Imago Dei* should center on the possibility that the ability to love is the defining human characteristic. Cf. Marilyn McCord Adams' brief comments in the section "The Nature of God" in her article, "Forgiveness: A Christian Model." (*Faith and Philosophy*, July 1991, 277-300, esp. pp. 290-291) Historically, of course, theologians have adhered to the traditional belief instead.

It would be interesting to explore the contention that love is the essential human trait. I will not do so here, because 1) it would require another volume, and 2) the criticisms of Kant (and through him of the traditional belief) in this chapter stand without it. At this point, it is enough to see that *rationality* is not the essence of humanity.

For inclinations vary; they grow with the indulgence we allow them, and they leave behind a greater void than the one we intended to fill. They are consequently always burdensome to a rational being, and, though he cannot put them aside, they nevertheless elicit from him the wish to be free of them. Even an inclination to do that which accords with duty (e.g., to do beneficent acts), can at most facilitate the effectiveness of moral maxims but not produce any such maxims. . . . reason, when it is a question of morality, must not play the part of mere guardian of the inclinations, but, without regard to them, as pure practical reason it must care for its own interest to the exclusion of all else. Even the feeling of sympathy and warmhearted fellow-feeling, when preceding the consideration of what is duty and serving as a determining ground, is burdensome even to right-thinking persons, confusing their considered maxims and creating the wish to be free from them and subject only to law-giving reason. (*Critique* 118)

The *Groundwork* passage gives Kant's famous reading of the great commandments. Love, according to Kant, is a positive good will toward everyone, that is, control of our maxims in accordance with duty--rather than anything pathological. Why did he think this? Kant's immediate answer was that we cannot directly control our emotions; therefore it would be unjust for God to command that we do so (the doctrine of ought implies can). More fundamentally, though, Kant grounded morality in the traditional belief. If rationality is the essence of a person, and if all morality (the moral law, moral agency, moral responsibility) is tied to that essence, then pathological inclinations are irrelevant to morals, or at most a decidedly secondary matter.

It is important to see that this reading of scripture is only possible through a kind of philosophical spectacles. A less biased reading of the New Testament (and the Pentateuchal materials which lie behind the gospels) will not restrict the great commandments from matters of inclination. Indeed, the commandments say we are to love God and each other with all our heart. Kant's philosophical commitments have led him to a blatant misreading of the text. Unless we share similar philosophical commitments, we have no reason to think morality is mostly a matter of applied reason. What we call morality may be importantly related to several traits, not just rationality. Once free of the traditional belief, we may see that sensitivity, desires (bad and good), and imagination, to name only obvious candidates, play roles in morality as surely as rationality does. If they do, and if God paid attention to people as they are, then it might well be possible for God to command people to love him (and each other) pathologically--with all their heart.

In the passage from the *Critique*, Kant reaches an equally strange conclusion. Truly rational people, he says, will regret having inclinations, even good ones. Though it is impossible, they will "wish to be free of them." Why? In practice, inclinations are not dependable, since feelings come and go. But Kant gives a deeper reason: inclinations--even those which move us to act in accord with duty--cannot "produce" truly moral maxims. Only unconditioned pure reason can produce real moral law. So, the truly rational (and therefore truly moral) person would wish consistently to live out his

true nature; he would wish to be free of all emotions, including "sympathy and warmhearted fellow-feeling."

There is always a danger, when reading a text from another time or place, of not entering into the author's worldview enough to read it fairly. In other places, Kant argues that we have a duty to develop benevolent feelings in ourselves, since we know they will increase the odds we will act in accord with duty. But this does not change Kant's basic position. The heart of morality is recognition of the moral law, so all matters of inclination are secondary. In actuality, Kant's position here simply draws out the implications of the traditional belief. If human beings are essentially rational, then morality really is chiefly a matter of duty.

Nevertheless, we must recognize and reject this position as mistaken, even bizarre. It is simply not true that healthy people would wish to be free of sympathy and fellow-feeling. Readers may judge for themselves. Would a parent hope that her child develops a strong sense of duty, but regard sympathy as unimportant in the child's moral growth? Would a teacher hope this for a student? A husband for his wife? A friend for a friend? Someone who wishes to argue Kant's position cannot take refuge by noting that these are cases of other people while Kant said the rational person would wish himself to be free of benevolent inclinations. Kant's conclusion rests on the iron implications of his starting point and apply as much to other rational beings as to the self. In Kant's view, the truly rational person would wish all rational people to be free from all inclinations,

since they cannot ground the moral law. Assumptions which drive us to such a conclusion cannot be right.

Enough has been said to support the third point of this chapter, that Kant's view of human nature led him to espouse positions which, unless one is under the spell of his system, must strike the reader as mistaken. Much of the lure of Kant's moral theory lies in the fact that it works out the implications of a widespread traditional philosophical belief. I contend, though, that upon examination that belief is groundless; upon examination, Kant's ethics and other similar theories will lose their attraction.

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CHAPTER V

HOW NOT TO THINK ABOUT MORAL PROGRESS

A passage from *The Sovereignty of Good* I have quoted already:

The problem is to accommodate inside moral philosophy, and suggest methods of dealing with the fact that so much of human conduct is moved by mechanical energy of an egocentric kind. In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. Moral philosophy is properly, and in the past has sometimes been, the discussion of this ego and of the techniques (if any) for its defeat. In this respect moral philosophy has shared some aims with religion. To say this is of course also to deny that moral philosophy should aim at being neutral.

What is a good man like? How can we make ourselves morally better? *Can* we make ourselves morally better? These are questions the philosopher should try to answer. (Murdoch 52)

If Murdoch is a philosopher trying to win a place for discussion of moral progress in philosophy, Lawrence Kohlberg is a psychologist who has tried to win a place for discussion of cognitive moral development in psychology. The large extent to which he has succeeded can be judged by the enormous quantity of theoretical and research literature published in the field of moral development since

Kohlberg began his doctoral research in 1956. For both his admirers and detractors, Kohlberg's work has dominated the discussion of psychological theories of moral development for a quarter century.

As reconceived by Murdoch, moral philosophy will learn from psychology. She thinks we need to gain some understanding of the workings of the selfish ego so that we may overcome its tendency to define all the world in terms of itself.¹ The reader should note how drastic a reconceiving of moral philosophy this is. Standard ethical theories do not have much room for questions of moral improvement, because in them the right thing to do (the crucial moral question) is determined by the rational application of theoretically well-grounded decision procedures. Agents can only progress by becoming able to judge more rigorously the right action and/or be becoming more conscientious in performing the actions such judgment demands. For example, Kant, who said we have a duty to develop certain inclinations, and thus could have developed a doctrine of moral progress, relegated such matters to "practical anthropology," not really a moral question at all. Against this, Murdoch holds that a central task of moral philosophy is to find techniques for the defeat of egoism, i.e. methods of moral progress.

In a manner parallel to Murdoch, Kohlberg thinks psychology can learn from philosophy; more than most social scientists, he shows

¹ Note that in her turn to psychology Murdoch finds certain Freudian conceptions helpful; this does not mean, however, that she endorses all of psychoanalytic theory. Similarly, my use of Steven Johnson's work in chapter one doesn't mean I endorse any particular psychological theory. Philosophers should be free to learn from various psychological schools.

an awareness of the philosophical issues inherent in psychological studies of human nature and morality. The revolution Kohlberg has proposed, and to some degree fomented, in psychology is as great as the revolution indicated by Murdoch's reconception of moral philosophy in that field.

In this chapter I will try to summarize Kohlberg's methods and results; discuss his philosophical assumptions, only some of which he seems to be aware of; and criticize his work as being an example of how not to think about moral progress. The reader should be aware of two obstacles which greatly increase the difficulty of this stated task. First, the sheer volume of work published by (1) Kohlberg, (2) his associates and students, (3) other research psychologists friendly to his theory, and (4) the many psychologists, sociologists and philosophers who have attacked his theory from a variety of perspectives makes it impossible to give anything like a complete summary of the issues Kohlberg's work has raised. I can only point out those matters which I deem most important and leave it to readers familiar with the literature of moral development research to decide if I have read it fairly. Second, Kohlberg's theory is a moving target; he and his associates have significantly revised their methods and claims over the years. No doubt, this speaks well of Kohlberg's willingness to accept criticism of his own theory and change his mind, but it makes the task of analysis and criticism more difficult. Fortunately, in 1984 Kohlberg published the second volume of his *Essays on Moral Development*, entitled *The Psychology of*

Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages, a collection of articles written by Kohlberg and his associates which traces the development of his theory and includes a current statement of it. Most references in this chapter will be to that volume.

At the outset, Kohlberg's work must be seen against the background of American social science of the mid-twentieth century. Like Murdoch, he found that as understood by most of his professional colleagues, his field did not allow him to say things which seemed obvious. In particular Kohlberg rebelled against social relativism and the anti-cognitivism of behavioristic theory. Kohlberg wanted to study how moral actors think about moral issues; he rejected theories which told him thinking was irrelevant to moral behavior or that it amounted to internalizing arbitrary social standards.

Kohlberg quotes Berkowitz as an example of social relativism in psychology: "Moral values are evaluations of actions generally believed by the members of a given society to be either 'right' or 'wrong.'" (Kohlberg 3) With this definition went the assumption that different societies could have radically opposed evaluations of actions, so that children in different societies would judge some particular action differently (right in one society, wrong in another) and both children would be correct. This seemed to Kohlberg to ignore the fact

. . .that individual moral actors have their own points of view. Student civil disobedience is an example of a behavior studied by psychologists that may be wrong by the standards of the majority but right by the moral actors' own moral standards. Socially relativistic studies of moral values and behavior that neglect the actors' own standpoint soon lead into inconsistencies and lack the ability to order the research data gathered. (Kohlberg 3)

Kohlberg recognized that his objections to social relativism and behaviorism ran deeper than their failure to make sense of research data. After all, the great virtue of behaviorism, according to its devotees, is that it strictly limits itself to observable and manageable data and rejects unnecessary theoretical entities. B.F. Skinner was thus able to equate *good* with whatever provides *positive reinforcement*. According to Kohlberg, it is the "psychologists' fallacy" (modeled on Moore's "naturalistic fallacy") "to think that a definition of morality could be made purely in terms of effectiveness in ordering research data without dealing with the philosophic concern about what the truly good should be." (Kohlberg 2) In other words, psychologists who commit this fallacy slide from theories which explain behavior to theories which explain morality without realizing they have moved from "is" statements to "ought" statements.

Behind both behaviorism and social relativistic theories of morality Kohlberg detected the influence of logical positivism. (Kohlberg 278-279) Social scientists typically tried to give value-neutral definitions of moral matters, striving to limit their discourse

to scientific, verifiable statements. But this was impossible, since value-neutral discussion of moral matters inevitably assumes a moral relativist stance. In matters of morality, Kohlberg denied that psychology could be neutral. (Compare Murdoch: "To say this is of course also to deny that moral philosophy should aim at being neutral.")

So far, philosophers will probably approve of Kohlberg's rebellion against this sort of background. Positivism has long since lost its cachet in philosophy. Kohlberg's reading of analytic philosophy, in particular R.M. Hare's *Language of Morals*, encouraged him to break with the dominant philosophic assumptions of American social science of the 1950's, assumptions which are still distressingly prevalent in many schools of psychology and sociology.

The counter-assumptions which Kohlberg made, which enabled him to study the thinking of moral actors, and the research he built on those assumptions have greatly changed psychological thought about morality. I will try to summarize both fairly.

Kohlberg's Project: Assumptions and Methods

Kohlberg's writings show him to be conscious of three main groups of assumptions underlying his work.

Influenced by Hare, Kohlberg tried to make metaethical assumptions which seemed to him to fit with the ordinary use of

words like *moral* and *moral development*. Compared to many psychologists, he was wonderfully explicit about what these were.

a. The assumption of value relevance implies that moral concepts are not to be understood as value neutral. . .

b. The assumption of phenomenalism implies reference to conscious processes.

c. The assumption of universalism implies that moral development has some features to be found in any culture. . .

d. Prescriptivism is the idea that one ought or should do something, not simply the idea that one would do it. . . .

e. Cognitivism or rationalism is the idea that moral judgments are not reducible to, nor directly expressive of, emotive statements but, rather, describe reasoning or reasons for action where reasons are different from motive.

f. Formalism is the notion that there are formal qualities of moral judgment that can be defined or argued upon regardless of whether or not agreement exists on substantive matters.

g. The assumption of principledness implies that moral judgments rest on the application of general rules and principles. They are not simply evaluations of particular actions.

h. The assumption of constructivism implies that moral judgments or principles are human constructions generated in social interaction. . . .

i. These assumptions lead to a corollary assumption of the primacy of justice. . . . Thus, moral judgments and principles imply a notion of equilibrium, balancing, or reversibility of claims. (Kohlberg 215-216)

These assumptions let us see what Kohlberg was looking for in his research: conscious, rational mental processes which could be found in all cultures and which progressed in an orderly fashion to produce principles of justice which would prescribe right actions for

moral agents. These processes would have identifiable formal structures, structures independent of actual decisions by individuals about moral dilemmas.

In addition to metaethical assumptions, Kohlberg made certain theoretical psychology assumptions. In his research, Kohlberg looked for Piagetian stages of cognitive development. In the cognitive-developmental tradition of psychology, Piagetian stages had four characteristics: 1) different modes of thinking--structures--can be distinguished which serve the same general function at different times in an individual's life; 2) these structures appear in an invariant sequence which in an individual can be sped up, slowed down or stopped by societal influence, but not changed in order; 3) each sequential stage forms a "structural whole," an underlying organization of thought which the individual uses on a variety of tasks; and 4) the stages form a hierarchical pattern in which each succeeding stage integrates and displaces the earlier stage. (Kohlberg 238) Kohlberg hypothesized that research would find such an invariant pattern of stages in test subjects' thinking about moral dilemmas.

Kohlberg made yet another assumption or set of assumptions. He thought that moral philosophy would have no trouble giving a rational explanation for the pattern of stages in moral reasoning. Each stage would supplant the one preceding it for logical, not merely psychological, reasons. The development of moral reasoning would be seen as moving to higher, more adequate levels, finally issuing in

a general moral principle at the highest level. He assumed, then, that if research confirmed his hypothesis, that confirmation would tend to support the normative claims of the philosophical principle which best ordered the development of the moral reasoning stages as a rational series. Kohlberg realized that such claims--that psychology could inform philosophic debate about normative ethics--would be highly controversial. Nevertheless, he stood by this third group of assumptions and the conclusions derived from them until the late 1970's. (Kohlberg 222)

Kohlberg first tested his hypotheses in a cross-sectional study of three groups of boys, ages 10, 13, and 16. The boys differed in social class and sociometric status. 53 of these boys were subjects of a longitudinal study in which they were re-interviewed regularly at 3-4 year intervals for 20 years. (Colby and Kohlberg 44)

Interviewers asked each boy to respond to nine hypothetical moral dilemmas. The dilemmas addressed three problems of justice identified by Aristotle: distributive justice, commutative justice and corrective justice. The dilemmas were grouped into three forms (A, B and C), each of which had one dilemma of each kind.

Each dilemma consists of a short story which tells of some person facing a moral problem; the boys were asked what that person should do.² An example, the famous Heinz dilemma.

² There is one exception to this: in dilemma VII, the question is which of two characters did the worse thing in a comparison of cheating and stealing.

Dilemma III: In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$400 for the radium and charged \$4000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means, but he could only get together about \$2000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So, having tried every legal means, Heinz gets desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Should Heinz steal the drug?

(Kohlberg 640)

After asking a boy what Heinz or the fictional agents in the other dilemmas should do, the interviewer probed the boy's thinking with "why?" questions, e.g. "Is it actually right or wrong for him to steal the drug?" "Why is it right or wrong?" etc. The purpose of the interview was to determine if the hypothesized formal structures of thinking about moral dilemmas would be present. The boys' answers and reasons were transcribed, which allowed them to be evaluated at the time of the original study (1957-58) and re-evaluated later.

Over the years, Kohlberg and his colleagues devised different ways to score test subjects' responses. The early scoring systems, "Sentence Rating" and "Global Story Rating," produced results which initially seemed to confirm Kohlberg's hypotheses. But in the longitudinal study and in other studies which sought to replicate

Kohlberg's work, these scoring systems produced enough sequence anomalies in moral stages to provoke a reworking of the scoring. Kohlberg and his colleagues claim these revisions resulted in a clearer differentiation of moral judgment structure from content. The result, "Standard Issue Scoring," aims at greater objectivity and reliability by specifying clear and concrete stage criteria. (Colby and Kohlberg 43-44) In the 1980's, the transcripts of the longitudinal study were re-scored using Standard Issue Scoring and a blind rating system; different raters scored each form for each interview.

The original study focused on boys from the Chicago area. Since 1958, however, researchers have done similar studies (sometimes using slightly modified questions, depending on cultures) including women, adults as well as children, and people in various countries, including separate studies in Turkey and Israel.

Though one might want to break into the story at this point to make analytical comments, we are not ready for that. Before asking what really drives Kohlberg's thought, I ought to summarize his early public claims and the storm of controversy they aroused. Then we need to see how Kohlberg and his colleagues modified their claims--and how they did not modify them--before evaluating those claims.

Claims and Controversy

Beginning with "The Development of Children's Orientations Toward a Moral Order: Sequence in the Development of Moral Thought" in 1963, Kohlberg and (later) his associates have published over one hundred articles and several monographs presenting the results of their research. Having read only a fraction of these many thousands of pages and a smaller proportion of the even more extensive secondary literature written in response to Kohlberg, I must again emphasize that what follows are what I deem the important issues in cognitive moral development research. However, since Kohlberg returns again and again to similar themes, we can be confident that they also reflect what he thinks important in his work.

In brief, Kohlberg and his associates claim that empirical research tends to confirm his initial hypotheses.

Subjects seemed to use a coherent structural orientation in thinking about a variety of moral dilemmas. Their thinking developed in a regular sequence of stages, neither skipping a stage nor reverting to use of a prior stage. The Standard Issue Moral Judgment Scoring System was found to be reliable and appears to be a valid measure of Kohlberg's moral judgment stages. (Colby and Kohlberg 41)

According to Kohlberg's theory of moral stages, individuals' thinking about moral issues develops through six discernable stages, grouped by pairs into three main levels. The *preconventional level* is marked by the social perspective of the concrete individual, the

conventional level by a member-of-society perspective, and the *postconventional level* by a prior-to-society perspective. Over time, Kohlberg modified his definitions and claims about some of his stages, especially stage 6, but the three main levels have remained the same.

The six developmental types of stages defined in my dissertation were divided into three major levels of development:

Level A. Premoral:

Stage 1--Punishment and obedience orientation.

Stage 2--Naive instrumental hedonism.

Level B. Morality of conventional conformity:

Stage 3--Good-boy morality of maintaining good relations, approval by others.

Stage 4--Authority-maintaining morality.

Level C. Morality of self-accepted moral principles:

Stage 5--Morality of contract, of individual rights and democratically accepted law.

Stage 6--Morality of individual principles of conscience.

(Kohlberg *xxix*)

Each stage gives different answers to Kohlberg's questions:

"What is the right thing to do?" and "Why should we do the right thing?" At the preconventional level, stage 1 (Heteronomous Morality), right is obedience and the avoidance of rule-breaking; the reasons are avoidance of punishment and the power of authorities/parents. The stage 2 (Instrumental Purpose and Exchange) child follows rules only when it is to his immediate interest. Right is what's fair. The reasons for right action are to get

what you want and get along in a world where other people have interests of their own.

At the conventional level, stage 3 (Mutual Interpersonal Expectations and Relationships), right is living up to expectations and "being good," which includes trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude. The stage 3 person does these things in order to be a good person in her own eyes and because of her belief in the Golden Rule. Stage 4 (Social System and Conscience) brings an emphasis on law and a more systematic understanding of conventional relationships. Right consists in fulfilling actual duties to laws and social groups, motivated by the need to defend the society or institution from breakdown.

At the postconventional level, stage 5 (Social Contract or Utility and Individual Rights), right is impartiality and obedience to rules mutually agreed upon--the social contract--in a world where people have differing values and many rules are relative. A stage 5 person acts from a sense of obligation to the good of the whole group and belief in individual rights like life and liberty. Stage 6 (Universal Ethical Principles) individuals follow self-chosen ethical principles, which are seen to underlie the social contract. When societal rules violate the principle of justice, one acts in accordance with the principle rather than rules. Belief in the rational validity of universal moral principles motivates stage 6 behavior. (Kohlberg 621-639, cf. chart 174-176)

In his earliest published reports of his research, Kohlberg called these stages developmental ideal types, rather than stages. Only after longitudinal and cross-cultural data had been collected and an assessment method which revealed invariant sequence in the data had been developed did he write (in 1983) that the evidence justified calling them stages. (Kohlberg xxx)

As the longitudinal data were accumulating, a problem emerged in Kohlberg's own research and that of others who tried to replicate it. A significant minority of the test subjects seemed to revert from stage 4 to stage 2 around age 20. All of these subjects returned to stage 4 or 5 by age 25. Evidently, college age relativism played a role of some kind in a complicated and roundabout progression from conventional to postconventional morality, in which for a period of 2 or 3 years the individual would give responses characteristic of naive hedonism. For a time, Kohlberg's research team entertained the idea that real regression occurred in these cases. Then, since all of the "regressees" returned to higher stages, they tentatively labelled them "stage 4 1/2," a transitional stage between stages 4 and 5. Eventually, the reversion problem and other anomalies in stage scoring led Kohlberg and his colleagues to reformulate their scoring system. By postulating A and B substages to the six stages of the system and more precisely defining the structure of thought in each stage, they obtained a scoring method which they could claim was valid and reliable and which revealed an

invariant sequence of stages. (Kohlberg 426-446, Colby and Kohlberg 44-47)

Scoring changes brought about changes in age to stage correlations. Early reports by Kohlberg and his associates indicated a fairly rapid growth through the stages in youth. For instance, in his 1969 paper, "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Socialization," Kohlberg reported that studies in the U.S., Taiwan, and Mexico all showed a marked progression from age 10, at which far more than half of all subjects were at stages 1 and 2, to age 16, at which stage 4 had become dominant (about 30%) with stages 3 and 5 close behind and a significant minority (5-10%) at stage 6. (Kohlberg 55-56) With Standard Issue Scoring, this picture changed significantly. By the 1980's, no longer did Kohlberg claim to have found any true stage 6 subjects, and no true stage 5 subjects were found before age 24. (Kohlberg 270, 458)

In spite of these on-going struggles to organize and understand a rapidly growing body of research, Kohlberg suggested far-reaching conclusions and made recommendations for moral education based on his findings.

First, regarding theoretical psychology, Kohlberg claimed that the evidence showed that children developed morally in a generalizable pattern in which cognitive change was the key. He did not deny motivation or emotional affect a place in morality, but claimed that their development was largely mediated by changes in thought patterns. (Kohlberg 63-64) Many studies, including the

famous research by Hartshorne and May in the 1920's, had indicated behaviors such as cheating and lying correlated far more highly with situational factors such as likelihood of detection than with the subjects' reported values, lending support to a behaviorist suspicion of supposed entities such as "character traits." In contrast, Kohlberg claimed that cognitive and developmental factors did correlate well with Children's behavior, especially at stages 5 and 6. (Kohlberg 69-70)³

Second, concerning moral philosophy, in the 1971 paper "From *Is* to *Ought*: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away with It in the Study of Moral Development," Kohlberg argued that a normative philosophical theory which could explain the greater adequacy of each successive stage revealed in his research would be *isomorphic* with a psychological theory which explained why one stage led to another. (Kohlberg 223) The two theories would be one theory. Thus, Kohlberg claimed that his research tended to support the philosophic theory which best explained the progression of the stages. "From *Is* to *Ought* " left the reader with the unmistakable impression that an adequate philosophic theory of justice would be some variety of Kantianism. (Utilitarians were stuck at stage 5.)

Third, regarding moral education, education could be structured so as to promote moral development. Beginning with the work of Kohlberg's graduate student Moshe Blatt with intermediate

³ Obviously, these claims (in "Stage and Sequence," 1969) were made before scoring revisions attenuated any claims about stage 6 and made stage 5 into an adult stage.

and high school students in 1969, cognitive-developmental interventions were tried in a variety of institutional settings. Blatt engaged his students in Socratic classroom dilemma discussions for a semester. With before and after testing, he found that a third of them moved up a stage while a control group remained unchanged. (Kohlberg *xii*) Where possible, in other interventions Blatt's methods were combined with democratic governance, e.g. in a high school many school related decisions were put in the students' hands. Evaluations made in connection with most of these interventions reported individual stage progression. (Higgins, Power and Kohlberg 74) Later, attempts were made to measure the "moral atmosphere" of high schools in order to compare alternative schools, in which democratic governance was practiced, to regular schools. This research tentatively indicated that cognitive-developmental interventions could affect the moral atmosphere of a school as a whole, as well as individual students. (Higgins, Power and Kohlberg 103-105)

Given the sweeping nature of Kohlberg's positions, many social scientists and philosophers criticized the assumptions, methods and conclusions of cognitive-developmental moral psychology. Of these criticisms, here are eight.

1. A number of Kohlberg's critics seem offended by his non-relativism or "absolutism." Anthropologist Rick Shweder (421-424) and psychologist Robert Liebert take this line, which can be read as the response of the behaviorist and/or social relativist in social

science. Liebert represents what he calls the cognitive-behavioral approach, which

. . . assumes that appropriate responsiveness to environmental consequences is the fundamental mechanism of biological adaptation. Verbal and substantial behavior within the moral sphere, like all behavior, is under the direct influence of both objectively and subjectively perceived or anticipated consequences. Any such behavior is intended to gain reward, avoid punishment, win praise, or secure some other advantage within the payoff matrix of social interaction. It is not a romantic expression of moral goodness or principled thinking. (Liebert 184)

Liebert goes on to say that what develops in "moral development" is *moral sophistication*, the ability to secure advantages in ever more efficient, powerful and complex ways. Hard-headed relativism recognizes that all individual organisms pursue their own interests. "Moral maturity, from the cognitive-behavioral perspective, involves the expression of increasingly farsighted efforts to live pragmatically and pursue one's own self-interest." (Liebert 185)

A good number of anthropologists and sociologists criticized Kohlberg for ignoring the fact that moral values are dependent on culture. (The cultural relativism argument seems to be alive and well in some fields, if not in philosophy.) His work was thus an example of cultural imperialism. We can place such objectors in this first category.

To the extent that this first criticism is simply a restatement of traditional behaviorism, it explains much of the heat of the debate over cognitive-developmental moral psychology. The philosophical reader of some literature in this field is struck mostly by the way opponents talk past each other. It goes without saying that Kohlberg felt no need to adjust his theory to the criticisms of relativists, which were based on assumptions he rejected.

2. Along with a restatement of behaviorism and relativism, many of Kohlberg's critics in the social sciences took issue with specific research findings. Sometimes the differences center on different interpretations of the same data. For instance, Liebert and Kohlberg both refer to studies of students who participated in the free speech movement at Berkeley in the 1960s. Liebert says the original study published by Haan, Smith and Block in 1968 showed a lack of correlation between sitting-in and scores on developmental tests. (Liebert 186) Kohlberg claims that when the original transcript were rescored with "Standard Issue Scoring" (see above) there was a clear and positive correlation between higher moral stage and sitting-in. (Kohlberg 541-546) I will not try to adjudicate these matters or say more about data debates. They are not crucial to the philosophical issues as I see them.

3. In early papers such as "Stage and Sequence" and "From *Is* to *Ought*," Kohlberg claimed that many high school age students reached stage 5, some even reaching stage 6. A number of readers, more sympathetic to cognitive-developmental moral psychology than

Liebert or Shweder, wondered whether this made sense of adult development. Do most people reach their full moral development so early? Or are there adult stages of moral development? As we have seen, Kohlberg later retreated from some of these claims, partially in response to critics who asked that his theory make some room for the common sense notion that people continue to grow morally in their 30's, 40's, and beyond. In particular, Jurgen Habermas' suggestion of an adult "seventh stage" moved Kohlberg to modify his thinking, even though he rejected the idea of a seventh "hard" stage, that is, one that would meet Piaget's criteria. (Kohlberg 249-250, 385-386)

4. Some writers criticized Kohlberg for giving too simple an account of moral motivation. According to his theory individuals at stage 5 and 6 are motivated by their rational appreciation of societal structures, individual rights, impartiality, and universal principles. When someone realizes that his behavior violates the principles he recognizes as rationally valid, cognitive dissonance will move him to change his behavior.

But critics noted that later stages are supposed to integrate, not obliterate, the insights of earlier stages. Surely, even if people at stage 6 act out of a need to live up to rational principles, people at earlier stages often act from other motives. How does a stage 6 principle make room for the essential affective element in love? Such critics were not always unsympathetic to Kohlberg's general theory. For instance, M.L. Hoffman has written a good deal about

altruism and empathy, suggesting not only that they motivate much behavior, but that there may be links between the development of empathy and justice reasoning. (Hoffman 299-300)

5. Many critics noted that Kohlberg based his findings on data drawn from hypothetical dilemmas. But real life moral issues have a different phenomenological feel than hypothetical stories. Can we assume that moral progress measured by responses to hypothetical dilemmas will be matched by progress on actual problems faced by the test subjects? Behaviorists like Liebert like to point to studies which seem to indicate wide discrepancies between responses to test questions and moral problems created by researchers to mirror real life dilemmas, such as the Milgram experiments in which test subjects were asked to administer painful shocks to other people, though there were in fact no shocks given. (Liebert 186)

6. Kohlberg's most famous critic combined these last two objections to his theory, his dependence on hypothetical dilemmas and his neglect of actual motivations. Carol Gilligan interviewed women (a marked contrast to Kohlberg's main longitudinal study) about a problem they faced in their own lives, whether to have an abortion or not. It seemed to Gilligan that these women did not see their problem in terms of principles (right to life versus right of self-determination), but in terms of care and responsibility (care for the self versus care for the other). Superficially, these responses could be scored as a Kohlbergian stage 3. This Gilligan refused to do. She proposed two orientations to moral problems: the justice orientation

which organizes Kohlberg's stages and an orientation of care and responsibility. While most people use both orientations, she claimed, most men use the justice orientation more while most women use the care and responsibility orientation more.

I will note later how Kohlberg took Gilligan's criticisms into account in modifying his theory. It should be noted that her critique came from within cognitive-developmental psychology. Her basic approach to research fits well with Kohlberg's; though well-known, her criticisms do not present a radical challenge to his assumptions.

7. The "psychologist's fallacy" which Kohlberg pinned on his behaviorist opponents is a form of the naturalistic fallacy. Yet, in "From *Is* to *Ought*," Kohlberg thought he could make empirical findings inform normative ethical discussion without falling into the naturalistic fallacy himself. Many philosophers denied that he had.

From the beginning, Kohlberg's reading of philosophy had led him to hypothesize moral development much like that he found in the data. It is no surprise, critics objected, that if you begin by reading Kant your highest stage sounds like the categorical imperative. Such theory tainted research could have no bearing on normative ethical debate.

In time, Kohlberg greatly changed his *Is* to *Ought* claims, though he did not abandon them completely (see below).

8. Several friendly critics charged Kohlberg not so much with error as with narrow vision. His work researched only one important facet of moral development, they claimed. For example, James Rest

wrote that psychology ought to study at least four inner processes which interact to produce behavior: (1) interpreting a situation, (2) determining what ought to be done in a situation, (3) deciding what one would do in a situation (given that human beings have other values in addition to moral values), and (4) implementing a course of action. Some research has been done in each area, but very little has explored the interrelationships between these processes. In Rest's view, a comprehensive theory of moral development would completely integrate all four. Since Kohlberg's work tells us something about the second and third processes, but not the first or fourth, it cannot be considered at all complete. (Rest 27-33)

Adjustments and Responses to Criticisms

As noted above, Kohlberg modified some of his claims, especially from the mid-1970's on. Examples of his responses to criticism:

1. Though he gave no ground to behaviorism or cultural relativism in terms of his basic assumptions, Kohlberg became more circumspect in presenting his findings. For instance, he wrote that the claim that stage 5 is a more adequate level of moral reasoning than stage 3 was *not* a claim that a person at stage 5 was better than than someone at stage 3. Similarly, Kohlberg repudiated any intention of comparing different cultures in terms of moral development. (Kohlberg 330-331)

2. Against objectors who challenged his empirical data Kohlberg simply produced more studies or otherwise defended his work.

3. Influenced by Habermas, Kohlberg gave up calling his theory one of moral development and described it as a theory which gives a "rational reconstruction of the ontogenesis of justice reasoning."

(Kohlberg 217-224) Kohlberg learned from Habermas to think of his work as hermeneutic interpretation of subjects' responses in test interviews rather than a positivistic test measurement.⁴ He stopped thinking of the interviewer as an observer and saw him as a participant in a dialogue. Necessarily, then, interviewers brought their own normative beliefs to their interpretation of test subjects' responses. The research goal became by imagination to enter into the subject's way of seeing the world so that her responses could be understood as rational. This, of course, *assumes* that subjects' responses are rational; hence, the theory gives a "rational reconstruction" of the development of thinking about justice issues.

Kohlberg did not retreat from his claim that the stages are stages. Human beings do move through just this sequence of ways of thinking about moral dilemmas. So much he claimed to be supported by empirical fact. But reading Habermas helped Kohlberg to see that his psychological theory which tried to explain the facts was *complementary* (rather than isomorphic) to a normative ethical

⁴ I oversimplify events. As I have noted, Kohlberg and co. had become dissatisfied with their scoring methods for reasons of their own. They began moving toward a more interpretive stance in evaluating interviews as early as 1975. Kohlberg's reading of Habermas in the 1980's confirmed and gave philosophic grounding to this shift.

theory. In moving from the "identify thesis" to the "complementarity thesis," Kohlberg gave up the heart of his "Is to Ought" claim. He no longer thought that the success of a psychological theory which explained how one stage emerged from its predecessor could serve as evidence for its complementary normative ethical theory. However, if a theory in psychology failed to account for the evidence, that failure would count against the theory's philosophical counterpart. So, in a way reminiscent of Popperian philosophy of science, psychology might falsify a philosophical theory, but it could not support it. (Kohlberg 318)

4. In Kohlberg's original theory, stage 6 represented the endpoint of moral development, that of thinking and living in Kantian autonomy. As I noted above, Kohlberg later abandoned any claim to have found stage 6 in his research. Stage 5 was also re-envisioned as a completely adult development.

Along with these changes, Kohlberg showed increasing interest in possible adult stages of morality. (Kohlberg 249-250) He was convinced that adult development did not fit Piaget's criteria for hard structural stages (e.g. invariant sequence), but that important changes--"soft" stages--did occur in adulthood. Postconventional justice reasoning could tell a person what to do in a dilemma, but Kohlberg found older subjects still asking Why be moral? and What is the purpose of life? Kohlberg thought older people often continued a search for ethical and religious perspective on life, a search which led to an integrative sense of morality fitting into a cosmic order.

5. Though he had given up stage 6 as an empirically supportable endpoint to moral development, Kohlberg continued to hold that some endpoint was theoretically necessary. A rational reconstruction of the ontogenesis of justice reasoning could be proposed only from the standpoint of a goal. If the sequence of stages is a rational one, to what do they lead?

In a major change, Kohlberg allowed that one could state a stage 6 principle otherwise than in terms of a principle of justice, for example, in terms of care or *agape*. (Kohlberg 273) A researcher like Gilligan need not accept the rather Kantian ethical theory which undergirded his stage theory in order to study moral development with it. She could give a rational reconstruction of the sequence of stages from the perspective of a principle of care. But Kohlberg rejected the idea that a care orientation was opposed to or independent of a justice orientation. In a passage of special interest to this study, he turned to the Bible for an example of the tie between justice and care:

In the New Testament there are two alternative statements of the Golden Rule. The first can be seen in the fairness orientation as 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' The second version is phrased in terms of the orientation of care as 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' Like other statements of postconventional morality, the teachings of the New Testament often integrate considerations of care and justice presenting, as modern moral philosophy does, a view of justice which is beyond either strict contract, strict retribution, or strict obedience to rule. Rather, it is a view of justice which focuses on ideal role-taking, a principle which can be called, alternatively, respect for persons (i.e., justice) or caring for

persons as ideal ends in themselves (i.e., the ethic of care).
(Kohlberg 357)

6. His outlook broadened by Gilligan's criticisms, Kohlberg came to see his theory as explaining, not the whole moral domain, but a part of it. His was a theory of the ontogenesis of *justice reasoning*, not of morality. (Kohlberg 212) Further, he admitted that moral reasoning was not the whole of morality; researchers had to address the connection of reasoning to moral action, which necessarily would mean giving attention to questions of affect. Nevertheless, Kohlberg remained convinced that justice reasoning played a central role in moral development, a point made explicit in "The Current Formulation of the Theory." (Kohlberg 304-307) The primacy of justice reasoning in morality united several of Kohlberg's concerns, specifically that moral judgment is prescriptive, universal, cognitive and structural. "While the assumption of the primacy of justice has not been 'proved' by our research, the fact that data collected under this assumption meet the requirements of sequentiality, structured wholeness, and relationship to action indicates the empirical fruitfulness of the assumption." (Kohlberg 308)

7. In later studies, Kohlberg and his associates tried to respond to those who objected to his dependence on hypothetical dilemmas. Interviews allowed test subjects to talk about their thinking about such issues as military service, divorce, etc. in their own lives. They also tested high school students with "practical dilemmas," which,

though still hypothetical, were set in situations in the students' own schools. (Higgins, Power and Kohlberg 82-83)

8. Critics of Kohlberg's early claims persistently asked that his theory make better sense of the gap between moral reasoning and moral behavior. In response, he and his colleagues distinguished between deontic judgments (judgments of right) and judgments of responsibility (judgments of what *I* should do). They then measured judgments of responsibility by various interview techniques. (Kohlberg and Candee 58-60) According to these studies, judgments of responsibility lag behind deontic judgments (e.g., someone giving stage 4 reasoning about a deontic judgment might, for stage 3 reasons, make a different responsibility judgment about the same issue), but they conform more and more closely to deontic judgments at higher stages. Thus, the cognitive-developmental school admitted that people's actions often do not square with their words while still maintaining that change in the way people think about moral problems is the main factor in change in their behavior,

Critique

A detailed account of the criticisms of and changes in Kohlberg's theory has been necessary in order to say why it fails to help us think about moral progress. Kohlberg and company have been willing to hear objectors and change their theory; but the changes have not touched the theory's deepest roots. It remains

fundamentally flawed. Saying this does not mean I think Kohlberg's work is useless. Surely he has performed a valuable service by pointing out and disagreeing with the positivistic assumptions of much social science. One can disagree with Kohlberg without wanting to re-enshrine relativism as a totem of behavioral science.

Regarding moral progress, Kohlberg's early presentations of his theory (roughly, through 1975) go wrong in just about every way they could. Four main problems:

1. Kohlberg emphasized thinking, to the neglect of affect. Of course, this flowed naturally from his desire to defend the place of rational cognitive processes in morality, and we cannot justly expect a researcher to cover all aspects of morality. But Kohlberg made extraordinary claims about the importance of cognitive processes in moral development.

The very word "development" gives away the game. Human beings may very well go through identifiable stages in the way they think--about everything, not just moral dilemmas. I am no expert, but as a parent I am quite willing to believe psychologists who say that at certain ages/stages children are ready to tackle certain cognitive tasks. We naturally expect them to develop in these ways, and would be alarmed if one of them did not. Kohlberg wanted to transfer the same expectation to moral development: here are the stages that children naturally ought to move through.

I do *not* want to challenge Kohlberg on empirical grounds here. As noted above, many psychologists have questioned his empirical

findings, but I am willing to assume that the stages of justice reasoning are pretty much as he describes. What I am challenging is the move from "development of justice reasoning" to "moral development." Real moral development, if there is such a thing, must include affective development.

Kohlberg's theory has little room for moral regression. This is predictably. The concept of development implies natural progression. One stage flows logically into the next. But we may observe that a fact of the moral life is that people can get worse as well as better. I can give in to the easy view of things, in which people are furniture in my world. I can forget to pay attention to others. I can fall back into the traps of narcissistic defenses in order to feel good. I can quit loving. Something is wrong with a theory which so focuses on cognitive stages that it makes no sense of moral regression.

2. Kohlberg emphasized action, to the neglect of "seeing" (in the sense of chapter two). As I have noted, some of his critics attacked his theory for not accounting for moral action, since people's actions often differ from their reported thinking. We should not let this criticism obscure the basically act oriented nature of Kohlberg's theory. Though he probed his subjects' thinking, it was always thinking directed to action.

In the Heinz story, as in all the hypothetical dilemmas in Kohlberg's original study, the details of the problem are *given*. In effect, the interviewer tells the subject, "These facts are all you need

to know. Now, should Heinz steal the drug? Why or why not?" But this act orientation ignores the "fat relentless ego" which, as Murdoch reminded us, makes it maddeningly difficult to see the facts of many situations. We do not live in a world in which the facts relevant to a moral problem are given; none of us face "Heinz" problems. Indeed, the first hindrance to moral progress is my inability to even see a problem. A research method which ignores the fundamental moral problem of coming to see the moral world accurately cannot tell us much about moral progress.

3. Kohlberg emphasized ought rather than good, to the neglect of "moral vision" (in a sense to be given in chapter six). "Ought" is a minimalistic idea; like rationalistic moral philosophers, Kohlberg was interested in what could be required of anybody in a specified situation. In contrast, the good is a perfectionistic idea; since every good thing could be better, philosophers who emphasize the good tend to ask how someone can get better in his particular situation. If my goal is to do the rationally required right thing, I need properly grounded rules of conduct and a high degree of conscientiousness. But if my goal is to get better (e.g. become a lover), I need a vision of something better. I need something I can admire and pursue. A theory of ethics which does not give me a vision of the admirable does not give me anything to progress toward.

4. Kohlberg's is to ought claim rested on theory-tainted data. In an overarching way, this is true of his whole theory; it reflects the assumptions of much modern moral philosophy. In particular,

though, Kohlberg wanted empirical psychological data to inform normative ethical theory. But the data gathered were as much a product of his ethical beliefs as of the research which those beliefs shaped.

I am not now retracting what I said earlier, that moral philosophers ought to be "paying attention to psychological material and the facts of morality that seem obvious to us." (Chapter 3, page 100) The problem with Kohlberg's is to ought claim was that he tried to establish facts of morality on the basis of psychological material which had been gathered in a search organized by those facts of morality. Even if, as Kohlberg believes, justice reasoning is central to morality, responses to the Heinz dilemmas do not show it, because the Heinz dilemma was constructed to focus on justice reasoning, not morality.

As we have seen, Kohlberg later greatly changed the is to ought claim. He no longer said his data directly supported his theory, only that if his data had been different they would have disconfirmed his theory. But, should we grant that this change answers the charge of theory tainted data, the later presentations of Kohlberg's theory (after 1975) still do not correct the first three problems, though they modify details of the theory considerably.

The reader will probably have noticed that the first three problems I identified--that Kohlberg emphasized thinking, action and obligation, to the neglect of feelings, seeing the facts and moral vision--parallel main themes of this study. In short, Kohlberg serves

as an example of standard modern ethical theory, only drawn from the ranks of psychology rather than philosophy. This matter is worth detailing a little. Compare the six points in common between Kantianism and utilitarianism (Chapter 3, pages 79-82):

First, Kohlberg would agree with Kant and Mill that in morality, matters of principle come before matters of affect. Standard theories tell me that the first principle directs such and such an action; since certain dispositions (in psychological terms, certain affects) make such actions more probable, I ought to acquire those dispositions (affects). In another way of saying the same thing, Kohlberg says that justice reasoning is primary in defining the moral domain.

Thus, while morally relevant emotions and sentiments are part of moral development, it is important to distinguish between the description or expression of a feeling about a moral situation and the making of a moral judgment about it. Expressions of the speaker's emotions about Heinz and the druggist or about the feelings of Heinz or the druggist do not directly constitute moral judgments. *Such expressions tell us something about the affective and ego development of the subject, but they do not tell us anything directly about the specifically moral development of the subject.* (Kohlberg 293, my emphasis)

I suspect a passage like this is directed against a familiar target, emotivism. But one need not make the emotivist claim that all normative moral talk merely expresses feelings in order to insist that affective and ego development are part of the "specifically moral development" of a person.

Second, again like Kant and Mill, Kohlberg looks for rational principles to adjudicate moral disputes. And among rational principles, Kohlberg looks for a hierarchy, so that some supreme principle will umpire between the secondary ones. The alternative to principleness, Kohlberg believes, is relativism. (Kohlberg 296-300)

Third, Kohlberg agrees with standard ethical theorists in regarding rational moral agents as interchangeable. Moral judgments are supposed to be applicable universally, not just to individuals within a culture, but to people in all cultures.

Fourth, just as Kant does, Kohlberg's theory plays up one motive of moral behavior, a kind of conscientiousness driven by a need for cognitive equilibrium. In Kant's terms, right actions are performed in accordance with duty and from the motive of duty. Kohlberg is not quite so restrictive, in that he does not question the validity of other moral motives at the conventional level, but the only motive his theory seems to use (especially in his earlier presentations of it) at the postconventional level is the cognitive need to avoid disharmony between one's deontic judgments and one's responsibility judgments, expressed in actions.

Fifth, implicitly rather than explicitly, Kohlberg uses law as the model for ethics. Readers can see this in the general tone of the test dilemmas, as well as in dilemmas which ask for responses to specifically legal problems.⁵

⁵ Examples from Kohlberg's original study: in dilemma III', which follows the Heinz dilemma, a police officer wonders whether to report that Heinz stole the drug; in dilemma IV', a doctor wonders whether to report a fellow doctor who

Sixth, Kohlberg's belief in the primacy of justice reasoning suggests that he would agree with standard ethical theorists that the main task of ethical theory is to describe the first principle of morality and show how it organizes the field.

In response to Gilligan and other critics, Kohlberg allowed that his theory covered only a part of the "moral domain."

We admit, however, that this emphasis on the virtue of justice in my work does not fully reflect all that is recognized as being part of the moral domain. We may note that, in addition to justice, the moral domain also includes reference to a virtue emphasized by Christian ethical teachings. This virtue, *agape* in the Greek, is the virtue we call charity, love, caring, brotherhood, or community. In modern American research this virtue has been called prosocial behavior (see, for example, Rushton [1982] and Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg [1977] or an 'ethic of care and responsibility' Gilligan [1982]). (Kohlberg 227)

In spite of thus making room for love, and admitting that justice reasoning was a part of morality, Kohlberg clearly believed that justice was the central concept of morals. Against this, I suggest that we ought not to look for a most important rule. It is not just justice vs. love, though those are the terms Gilligan has pressed on Kohlberg. A voice from the religious tradition of our culture suggests other important concepts of morals, also neglected by standard ethical theories: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to

mercy-killed a cancer patient; also in dilemma IV', a jury has to consider whether to convict the doctor who killed his patient.

walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8 New International Version)
While this study is devoted to questions about love, similar labor could be given to mercy and humility.

As an example of standard ethical theory, Kohlberg does not see how limited a place his theory of justice reasoning has in morality. It neglects moral feelings, the need to see the world and its people accurately, and the need for something to admire and pursue. Since it is in our interest to limit the conflict which arises in societies from conflicts of values, theories of justice have a place in morals. But worrying about such theories should not be the first task of moral philosophy. As Murdoch suggested, moral philosophers ought first to recognize the nature of the ego which prevents us from loving and try to find ways to defeat it.

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CHAPTER VI

A VISION OF THE GOOD

Begin with stories of lovers.

Jean Donovan

Jean Donovan was a Catholic lay volunteer who worked with an Ursuline sister named Dorothy Kazel in El Salvador.¹ They traveled the countryside in the midst of civil war in a white Toyota van. They moved supplies, gave rides to refugees, and helped villagers who could not afford vehicular travel search for family members when they "disappeared." Jean was especially concerned to help children, the orphans of war or other disasters.

Jean enjoyed a reputation among Maryknoll missionaries as "St. Jean the Playful." She had a guitar and a motorcycle; with one she played Irish folk ballads, with the other she gave rides to children. Every week Jean baked chocolate chip cookies for Archbishop Romero--until his death in March, 1980. As a lay volunteer, Jean struggled to decide her future; should she marry or continue her ministry as a missionary?

¹Information about Jean Donovan has been taken from four articles in the December, 1990 (Vol. 19 No. 10) issue of *Sojourners*. See works cited.

In late November, 1980, Jean and her friends hosted the U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, Robert White, whom they had met at a Thanksgiving service, at their base in La Libertad. The ambassador and his wife invited the sisters to visit in his official residence when they next came to San Salvador. On December 1, 1980, Jean and Dorothy, with Father Paul Schindler, took up the Whites on their invitation. They talked far into the evening and--since night travel was dangerous--stayed the night.

On December 2, Jean and Dorothy did some shopping before going to the airport to pick up some missionary friends. Two of the friends, Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, had been unable to get tickets for the flight, so Jean and Dorothy returned to the airport to pick them up at 6 p.m. The four did not make it to La Libertad for a party which had been planned for that evening. Their friends, concerned for their safety, discovered the van the next day: abandoned, stripped, burned. On December 4, Ambassador White witnessed the removal of the bodies of the four women from a shallow grave; they had been first identified by their sandals, an item few Salvadoran peasants could afford. Jean's face had been crushed by a bullet. At least two of the women had been raped.

Unfortunately, it must be said that respectable people soon hinted that the churchwomen died because they were somehow tied to one side in the civil war. Ronald Reagan had just been elected President of the United States. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, designated by Reagan to be Ambassador to the United Nations, said that the nuns

were political activists on the side of the guerillas. On March 18, 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig suggested that the women's van had tried to run a roadblock and ". . .there may have been an exchange of gunfire."

It must also be said that Ambassador White, who was familiar with U.S. efforts to investigate the killings until he was removed by the Reagan administration, insists that there was no evidence whatever for Haig's statement.

Why was Jean Donovan in El Salvador? Her own words may help explain. In a letter to a friend,

Several times I have decided to leave El Salvador. I almost could except for the children, the poor, bruised victims of this insanity. Who would care for them? Whose heart could be so staunch as to favor the reasonable thing in a sea of their tears and helplessness? Not mine, dear friend, not mine.

In the question she asked the Whites on December 1, the night before her death,

What do you do when even to help the poor, to take care of the orphans, is considered an act of subversion by the government?

Jean Donovan died, I think, because she wanted to love children in a place and time where there was little room for it.

Andre Trocme

Andre Trocme pastored a protestant church in the French village of Le Chambon in the 1930's and 1940's. When he and his wife, Magda, and their four children moved to Le Chambon in 1934, the village seemed to them to be dying. Located on a high volcanic plateau in Southern France, the village alternated between long, cold, windy winters and a busy three-month tourist season in which the villagers tried to fleece every coin they could from visitors. Trocme thought it was as if he had been called to help this inhospitable village die. (Hallie 78) To inject new life into the community, Trocme fostered the opening of a school, a year-round enterprise which would bolster the local economy. But the Cevenol School was to be more than that. Independent of the state school system, it would show forth a spirit of peace, internationalism and nonviolence, causes important to Trocme. Trocme induced a conscientious objector friend from university days, Eduard Theis, to come to Le Chambon as assistant pastor and schoolmaster.

A largely protestant village in Catholic France, Le Chambon housed long memories of persecution of Huguenot forebears. Trocme's energetic ministry soon tapped into the Chambonnais' sense of community. They became intensely loyal to him. As Hitler's Germany rearmed and French patriotism revived in response to it, many people criticized the nonviolent ideals of the Cevenol school. But protestant churches in France, since they are outside the dominant Catholic church, have their own political structure in which

local presbyteries make most decisions without consulting regional or national leaders. In spite of criticism, the presbyterial council of Le Chambon decided to stand by their pastor, even if he was listed as a conscientious objector, an illegal status. (Hallie 84)

In the "temple" (a name of derision given to Huguenot churches in France by persecutors in earlier centuries) of Le Chambon, Trocme and Theis preached a message of active nonviolent resistance to evil. Trocme scorned any connection between pacifism and passivity in the face of evil. Accordingly, he and Theis denounced the racism, brutality and hatred of Nazi doctrine and urged the Chambonnais to overcome evil with love. They had no specific plan. A follower of Christ must simply be ready and look for creative ways to love when the time came. (Hallie 85)

With German occupation of France, the time came. At first, resistance to the Vichy government in Le Chambon was largely symbolic; villagers refused to salute the flag or ring church bells when commanded to do so. But these symbolic actions were significant in their timing. Imagine the situation for a Frenchman in 1940. We have lost the war, yet we have a French government; the leader is Marshal Petain, our great hero; French police enforce the laws; and Germany seems certain to defeat its last foe, England. Why, in this situation, should anyone make trouble by resisting? It would be pointless and hopeless. The Chambonnais' quiet refusal to salute and ring bells cut through this moral fog; they recognized and were determined to resist evil. (Hallie 86-92)

Soon Le Chambon found more concrete ways of love. Refugees began turning up at the Trocmes' door and were taken in. A simple phrase--"and were taken in"--but a phrase of illegal love. For refugees to be helped, they had to be hidden. False identity and ration cards had to be made. Some of the refugees had to be led secretly to the Swiss border, others hidden until the end of the occupation. All this the nonviolent resisters of Le Chambon did. As time passed, they began to "specialize." Le Chambon became a place of refuge for children.

Resistance in Le Chambon was not that of a tightly controlled organization. Unlike the Cimade, an underground network created and led by Madeleine Barot and other women for the one purpose of helping refugees escape France, Le Chambon was simply, first and always, a village. Few of the villagers knew whether or how many Jews were hiding in their neighbors' houses. But from the winter of 1940-41, when Magda Trocme heard the knock of the first refugee and immediately admitted a German Jewish woman, until the end of the occupation in 1944, no Chambonnais ever refused to give shelter to a refugee and no Chambonnais ever betrayed a refugee. (Hallie 196)

There were, of course, others who resisted the Germans. Especially as the war went on and Germany suffered defeats, people joined various groups of the Maquis or De Gaulle's Secret Army. Undoubtedly, such armed resistance required courage. It is not the Chambonnais' courage that marks them as different. Rather, their

love, an intensely practical readiness to do the good thing that lies at hand, a love which included the persecutor as well as the persecuted, draws our attention to Le Chambon.

Andre Trocme was not a gentle person. "Magda Trocme once called her husband a turbulent stream, thrusting its way with great speed and force through and around obstacles, changing always as it struck and flowed." (Hallie 47) In contrast to the steady and self-effacing Eduard Theis, Trocme could explode in great anger. Trocme described himself as *un violent vaincu par Dieu*, "a violent man conquered by God." (Hallie 265) Briefly, in the late 1930's, Trocme toyed with a plan to use his German fluency to get close to Hitler and assassinate him. But he wrote that he feared "seperating himself from Jesus who rejected armed violence to counteract the crime being prepared against him." (Trocme 5) Trocme believed that Jesus' example of love was one of immediate help to the concrete individual combined with a deliberate rejection of two things: violence committed in the name of massed individuals and "abstention," the route taken by those who withdraw from conflict with evil. (Trocme 142-148)

Andre Trocme's passionate, active, inventive love led eventually to his recognition as one of the "just ones" by Israel. In 1972, after his death, Magda planted his tree at Yad Vashem, the memorial of the holocaust victims, along the path of the just ones.

John Woolman

Born in 1720 in New Jersey, John Woolman died in York, England, in 1772. He worked at times as an orchardist, dry goods shopkeeper, schoolteacher and surveyor, though he found his lifelong trade as a tailor could meet his financial needs. Far more important than any of these occupations, to his mind, would have been his role as a Quaker minister. As such, Woolman traveled often, by foot and horse, through several of the English colonies in North America.

While working as a young man for a retailer, Woolman was asked to write out a bill of sale for a slave. "The thing was sudden; and though I felt uneasy at the thoughts of writing an instrument of slavery for one of my fellow-creatures, yet I remembered that I was hired by the year, that it was my master who directed me to do it, and that it was an elderly man, a member of our Society, who bought her; so through weakness I gave way, and wrote it; . . ." (Woolman, *Journal* 14-15) The sensitivity which made him see this as a moral failure, a co-operation with evil, drove Woolman into a remarkable ministry of love.

Since George Fox, who said that he "lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars," Quakers have held a testimony against war. In the early eighteenth century, though, they had no such testimony against slavery; in fact, in America, Quaker prosperity enabled many to own slaves themselves. But Woolman saw that the getting and keeping of wealth is surely one of the greatest occasions of war. (Woolman, *Journal* 162-163)

How could he, a Christian called to love his neighbor, participate in a system in which the labor of prisoners captured in African wars was used to bring wealth to white men? Surely this injustice could only lead to hatred and violence. To be obedient to truth, Woolman felt he must refuse to ever again cooperate with slavery.

Besides writing letters and pamphlets against slavery, Woolman visited slave holding Quakers. During these visits he spoke against slavery and, since he was often hosted in slaveowners' homes, paid for such hospitality--urging the masters to give the money to their slaves, or else giving it to them directly--rather than benefit from forced labor. Further reflections on slavery led him to abandon the use of sugar and clothing dyes, since both products were heavily dependent on slave labor. One could imagine that such direct confrontation of slave owners would produce angry contention, if not violence. But Woolman's concern, in opposing slavery, was for the evil effects of the system on the master as well as on the slave. His gentleness, compassion and integrity won him a hearing even in the homes of Quaker slaveholders. As a result of the ministry (agitation would be the wrong word) of Woolman and other Friends concerned about slavery, American Yearly Meetings officially disapproved of slaveholding before Woolman's death.

Readers should not imagine that Woolman's ministry was limited to opposing slavery. He wrote and spoke about the connections between wealth and luxury on one hand and social divisions and war on the other. In 1763, while the passions of the

French and Indian war were still high, he visited Indians in wilderness country, an experience which led him to protest the sale of alcohol to Indians. (Woolman, *Journal* 134-139) In the last year of his life he traveled to England to engage in ministry there.

One could analyze Woolman's motivations in many ways, but the deepest source of his ministry was love. His thoughts about his desire to visit the Indians (while confined all day to a tent in the wilderness) probably apply to all his work.

Twelfth of sixth month being the first of the week and a rainy day, we continued in our tent, and I was led to think on the nature of the exercise which hath attended me. *Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in,* if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by me following the leading of truth among them; and as it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing, and when, by reason of much wet weather, travelling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favorable opportunity to season my mind, and to bring me into a nearer sympathy with them. As mine eye was to great Father of Mercies, humbly desiring to learn his will concerning me, I was made quiet and content. (Woolman, *Journal* 142, emphasis added)

When one reads William Lloyd Garrison or other abolitionists of the nineteenth century, the sense of conflict, of a great social struggle, cannot be avoided. In Woolman, the struggle is quiet, inward. He did not measure his ministry by success, though he

cheerfully noted episodes in which slave owners granted freedom to slaves after conversations with them and recorded decisions by monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings against slavery. For Woolman, the quiet rest of an obedient and loving soul was the important thing.

Herbert Nicholson

I wish that I could remember exactly when and where I first met Herbert Nicholson. It seems I have known him all my life. But I know it was sometime during the chaotic and turbulent years of World War II. The memory is clearest about what he did at Manzanar War Relocation Center. There I saw him bring joy where there was sadness, hope where there was despair, and love where there was hate. He brought these gifts to us as we struggled for dignity behind barbed wire and watchtower. -Togo Tanaka (Nicholson and Wilke *vii*)

Born in 1892, Herbert Nicholson went to Japan as a Quaker missionary in 1915. While there, he met and married Madeline Waterhouse, a Congregationalist from California. The Nicholsons continued in Japan, with occasional visits to the U.S., until 1939, when the growing threat of war settled them in Southern California, where they ministered in the West Los Angeles Japanese Methodist Church. Though a lifelong Quaker, Nicholson cared little for denominational labels; he worked with anyone in whom he sensed the motions of divine love.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, permitting the removal and concentration of Japanese Americans in the Pacific States and parts of Arizona. In the rushed evacuation that followed, many families sustained great losses in selling their belongings while others hastily stored their goods in warehouses or churches. By August, 1942, over 110,000 people had been interned without charge or trial.

Receiving permission to visit the camps in July, Nicholson loaded a rented truck with pianos, hymn books, discarded library books, and many other requested items and drove it to Manzanar, the relocation camp closest to Los Angeles. In the next two years he made numerous trips to the Poston and Gila camps in Arizona as well as to Manzanar. Nicholson also drove to Topaz in Utah, Minidoka in Idaho, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, and Amachi in Colorado. (Nicholson and Wilke 80, 86, 98) On most of these visits he drove a truck belonging to Tom Yamamoto, an internee, ferrying all sorts of personal belongings to the prisoners.

In January, 1944, the United States began drafting Japanese Americans into the Army. (The famous 442nd, a special combat unit made up of Nisei volunteers, had been authorized in January, 1943.) This additional injustice--drafting young men from among people detained without trial, to serve in the military of the country which considered them dangerous aliens--caused anger and bitterness in the camps. Herbert Nicholson decided to go to Washington, D.C. to express his feelings to John McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War.

Along the way he revisited some of the relocation camps, urging the young men not to make their situation worse by rioting. In Washington, military officials agreed with Nicholson that Japanese soldiers had proven their loyalty, that drafting people from the camps was unjust, and that the camps should be emptied. But they claimed public opinion demanded that the Japanese not be released. If Nicholson could demonstrate a public desire for the camps to open, he was told they could be opened immediately. So Nicholson organized a letter writing campaign, using contacts he had made all over the western United States. Within four months, 150,000 letters came to Washington, requesting the internees' release. Nevertheless, the release was not announced until December, after the 1944 election. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Mitsue Endo case, which said that Japanese citizens could not continue to be held, was subsequent to these political decisions. (Nicholson and Wilke 111-122)

After the war, Nicholson raised funds for agricultural relief efforts in Okinawa and Japan. With the help of other volunteers, he transported hundreds of goats, useful for their milk production, on old liberty ships. Then he and Madeline resettled in Japan, where they ministered in hospitals, prisons and leprosaria regularly. In 1961, they retired to the United States.

In 1977, the 89 year old Madeline slipped into an unconscious vegetative state. I knew Herbert in those years, the late 70's and early 80's, when, helped by his daughter Virginia, he cared daily for

his comatose wife with patience and evident love. In his nineties, he still visited Quaker meetings and other churches, speaking with humor and deep concern, urging people to trust God and grow in love.

A.K. Smith

My father grew up in rural poverty in the Arkansas River valley of southeastern Colorado. As a young man, he followed an older brother to Washington State, where he worked in fruit orchards, forests and factories of one sort or another. Unlike Jean Donovan, Andre Trocme, John Woolman and Herbert Nicholson, my father's drama as a lover did not take place against the backdrop of war or massive oppression. A story slow to unfold, it occupied the days, months and years of ordinary family life.

Things started slowly, without being sought. My father and mother married in 1948, in the heart of the baby boom. By 1951, when they had not yet had a child (and worried that they might not), they adopted an infant boy born to a young woman in the hospital where my mother worked as a nurse. When I was born in 1954, followed by my younger sister in 1956, they felt they were only one child short of the family size they wanted. (Remember that large families were common in those years.) Then Andrew Smith was born in 1958--and died the next day. After three cesarian deliveries, doctors forbade any more pregnancies for my mother. My

parents felt as if Andrew's death had left a permanent hole in their lives.

A few years later, an opportunity came to fill the hole. My older sister, a teenaged "juvenile delinquent" in the terminology of the day, was placed as a foster child with our family. Her behavior had already disrupted more than one foster placement. Apparently she saw something special in this home; a year later she asked Dad and Mom to adopt her.

State Foster Agency caseworkers recognized a good thing when they saw it. If these people could help a difficult teen, why not persuade them to open their home to other hard to place children? And so, through the sixties and early seventies, a procession of foster children came to share our home. Some lived with us only a few months, some a few years. Two of my brothers, though never officially adopted, stayed through high school graduation; my parents are still "Dad and Mom" to them. Later, after my older adopted brother's death, my parents took in Steve's daughter and legally adopted her. Once again Dad is shepherding a child toward healthy adulthood.

Stories and Vision

I want to say two things in this section: 1) to grow morally, we need a vision of the good (to grow as lovers we need a vision of love), and 2) visions are given through stories.

I should try to say what I mean by "vision." Though importantly related to the topic of chapter two, what is meant here by a vision of the good is not the same as the moral seeing of that chapter. Moral vision (chapter two sense) is the ability to pay attention to the reality of other things and people, to see them as subjects in their own right and have compassion for them. A moral vision (present sense)--of the good, or of love--is a global understanding, involving rational thought, emotions, and imagination, of something toward which a life can be directed. A moral vision seizes on some thing or person and makes that thing or person an object of admiration and pursuit.

Note that as defined, many things can be the object of moral vision. I think, in fact, that people have different moral visions, directed to different objects; that these objects of admiration and pursuit are as various as success, greatness (military, artistic or moral), racial purity, happiness, a theological or philosophical creed, nationalism, integrity, renunciation, love, and many other things; and that much of human goodness and evil results from the pursuit of the objects of our moral visions.

The claim being advanced here is this. To grow morally, we need a vision of the good; more specifically, to grow as lovers we need a vision of love. We need to understand what love is in a way that involves our emotions and imagination as well as our rational thought. The moral life is characterized by growth, motion, travel (not, of course, in the behaviorist sense of public actions); we are all

pilgrims of one sort or another. If as pilgrims we want to reach or avoid some destination rather than another, or even make progress toward or away from some destination, we need to have a vision of what we are pursuing or avoiding.² Without such an understanding, we may well waste our lives traveling in circles. That we need a vision is, I think, obviously true; I will make no more positive argument for it. In the next section ("Vision and the Good"), however, I will try to defend this assertion--that we need a vision of love to grow as lovers--against an objection to it.

Modern moral philosophers do not write much about moral vision. But if, as Iris Murdoch suggests, moral philosophers ought to ask how we can make ourselves morally better (Murdoch 52), they need to think about the goals toward or away from which people travel in the moral life. Given the assumptions and questions which frame most discussion in ethical theory, assumptions and questions generated by the myth of autonomous reason, we should not be surprised that ethical theorists have largely ignored moral visions.

²Readers might wonder at my awkward insertion of the idea of avoiding a moral destination. An example might help. Hermann Graebe was a German engineer working for the Todt organization in Poland and the Ukraine in World War II. He did not want to believe reports that the Einsatzgruppen were killing Jews. But then he witnessed an "action" in Dubno. Later, he said, "One of the most terrible things I remember seeing--and that I have reported before--was a father, perhaps in his fifties, with his boy, about as old as my son, Friedel, was at that time--maybe ten years old--beside him. They were naked, completely naked, waiting for their turn to go into the pit. The boy was crying, and the father was stroking his head. The older man pointed to the sky and talked quietly to the young boy. They went on speaking like that for a while--I could not hear what they said because they were too far away from me--and then it was their turn." (Rittner and Myers 40-41) Repelled by the vision of evil this experience gave him, Graebe helped save over three hundred Jews in Eastern Europe.

Ethical theory generally is not interested in moral pilgrimage, but in principles and decision procedures. Even the accepted forms of philosophical conversation--lectures, treatises, etc.--work against us.

As I have claimed in chapters three and four, standard ethical theorists labor under the myth of autonomous reason. As philosophers they are supposed to appeal to reason; the truth, moral truth included, is supposed to be open to any rational mind that cares to think. Hence, we have the philosophical lecture, which aims to be precise, coherent, and well-grounded.³ But human rationality is never autonomous rationality. Since human beings feel and dream, moral truth (to say nothing of other truths) demands more than rational apprehension. Moral philosophy needs to make a place for stories.

Stories provide the stuff of visions because they touch our emotions and imaginations as well as our rationality. By helping us to a more global understanding of the thing we pursue, stories give us a goal.

a. Stories obviously engage the rational mind. Consider theology, which can be characterized as attempts to systematize the truth of stories. Like philosophy, theology has in it opposing movements of thought. One theologian or school of theology builds up a position, much like the impulse in philosophy to construct a metaphysical or epistemological system. Then critics tear the system

³My remarks should not, of course, be construed as lack of appreciation for precision, coherency, or well-groundedness. Would that my own writing had these virtues.

apart. Where philosophical critics often accuse the system of incoherency or ignoring some plain fact, the theological critic often accuses the system of ignoring an important facet of traditional stories.

Stories have a staying power greater than theologies. Theologies can go stale and lose their ability to hold people's attention. When this happens, impassioned reformers sometimes step forward to shake the religious community and reshape the theology. Whence the reformers' passion? Usually, they have heard the stories with a fresh ear, as if for the first time. Engaged by the story, they try again to understand it, thus producing new theology.

Stories have a greater fecundity than theologies because they are less precise. Often reformers find them applicable to a new generation's issues while the old theologies seem tied to tired questions. After centuries of repetition, having been used in different ways by different theological systems, a story may generate new questions (or old, forgotten questions) for theologians to ponder.

Obviously, I have special interest in some theological stories, Biblical ones. But what is true of Biblical stories is also true of moral stories in general. Stories can engage the intellect. Perhaps even for those purposes of rational discussion, for which moral philosophers have adopted discursive lectures, they should consider telling stories.

b. Stories engage the emotions. Consider, for example, Philip Hallie's account of his first encounter with Le Chambon and Andre Trocme.

There was once an art critic, I have been told, who had a sure way of identifying ancient Maltese art objects: he found himself crying before them. . .

Of course these are symptoms of an awareness of excellence. . . any doctor will tell you that symptoms are important, and just as pain can be a symptom of disease, painful joy can be a reliable reaction to excellence.

One afternoon I was reading some documents relating to Adolf Hitler's twelve-year empire. . . .

Across all these studies, the pattern of the strong crushing the weak kept repeating itself and repeating itself, so that when I was not bitterly angry, I was bored at the repetition. . . .

On this particular day, I was reading in an anthology of documents from the Holocaust, and I came across a short article about a little village in the mountains of southern France. . . .

About halfway down the third page of the account of this village, I was annoyed by a strange sensation on my cheeks. The story was so simple and so factual that I had found it easy to concentrate upon *it*, not upon my own feelings. And so, still following the story, and thinking about how neatly some of it fit into the old patterns of persecution, I reached up to my cheek to wipe away a bit of dust, and I felt tears upon my fingertips. Not one or two drops; my whole cheek was wet. . . .

And so I closed the book and left my college office. . . . But that night when I lay on my back in bed with my eyes closed, I saw more clearly than ever the images that had made me weep. I saw the two clumsy khaki-colored buses of the Vichy French police. . . I saw the police captain facing the pastor. . .

Then I saw the only Jew the police could find, sitting in an otherwise empty bus. I saw a thirteen-year-old boy, the son of the pastor, pass a piece of his precious chocolate through the window to the prisoner. . . I saw the villagers passing their gifts through the window until there were gifts all around him. . .

Lying there in bed, I began to weep again. I thought, Why run away from what is excellent simply because it goes through you like a spear? (Hallie 1-3)

Hallie admits that an emotional reaction is not an infallible rule by which to separate excellent things from dross. But no theoretical account of nonviolent loving resistance to evil, e.g. one of Andre Trocme's more abstract sermons in the period before the war, can cause wonder and admiration in us as can the story of the empty buses. We rejoice to hear such stories. We wish we could be like that. Desiring to become like what we admire, sometimes we do (to varying degrees).

c. Stories engage and feed the imagination. One could readily admit that stories touch our emotions and intellect and fail to see how important their affect is on our imagination. I count imagination--one function of which is to let me see the world from someone else's point of view, even though I am not that person--as crucial to character. (Cf. Chapter 2, p. 61)

I can imagine a world, and my own self, different from the way they are now. But this is possible only if my imagination is rich enough. An impoverished imagination, which cannot see the world or the self other than they are, often lies behind the passive indifference to evil which makes it possible. Few alcoholic co-dependents are aware that their "helping" and "patience" only enable the alcoholic in their lives to destroy himself.

Lack of moral imagination can cause evil. I suspect that few people who beat children think to themselves that they are doing wrong. They probably do not think much about it at all; this is just the way children are treated in their world. Child beaters do not need to be told what they are doing is wrong so much as they need to be able to imagine themselves living in a world where children are treated differently.

The stories that feed a person's imagination probably indicate that person's character more accurately than any doctrine of morals she espouses. What does she admire? What does she pursue? Of course, the stories we profess to admire (such as the catalog with which I began this chapter) are not the only ones which shape our imaginations. Stories of horrible, ugly and evil things often fascinate us and help create our moral vision. We hope that stories of evil will always repel us, but sometimes we must admit that they attract us. In this regard, as in the matter of coming to see people accurately, a person can do something to aid her own progress, even if it is a difficult and only partially effective thing. We can--to some degree--choose which stories will feed our imaginations.

I have given a sampling of the stories which are important to me. These stories are rooted in Christian non-violent ethics, the *agape* commands, which in turn are rooted in the story of Jesus. They share other similarities. Woolman, Nicholson and Trocme were avowed pacifists; Jean Donovan, Trocme and my father were especially involved with children; Nicholson, Trocme, and Donovan

faced their greatest tests in time of war; Woolman and Nicholson were Quaker ministers; and all but Trocme were Americans--and even Trocme attended seminary in New York, where he met Magda. These people are also different in various ways--their educations, social backgrounds, etc. I think, though, that such similarities and differences are superficial; the main thing is their common moral vision.

Any moral theology based on the story of Jesus must make sense of his saying that the commandments to love God and neighbor surpass all other religious duties. So Christian theologians and moral philosophers have tried to communicate the primacy of love. The story sets the bounds and provides the raw material for the theological task. Most often, in the process of making a coherent system out of the story material, the theologians and philosophers reduce things to ordered and connected propositions, such as, "the commandments to love God and neighbor surpass all other religious duties."

(So I include myself with the philosophers and theologians. There is nothing wrong with trying to make sense of religious stories, even producing an ordered propositional system or a creed. The problems come when we think the system we have made of the stories can replace the stories.)

Many people have noted the inability of such propositional systems to help moral pilgrims. However true a theology is (by definition, no theology is perfectly true; God is not captured in

doctrine), it remains only an intellectual system, with limited grip on our emotions or imaginations. Stories, on the other hand, can give people on the way visions which fire their passion and enlarge their imagination.

So if I believe, for instance, that Jesus' command that his followers love their enemies means that modern Christians ought to be pacifists, how should I explain this to someone else? I can certainly arrange sentences in a logical "argument" that proves my abstract proposition. Would this persuade a Christian who takes a just war position? Almost surely not. Disagreement goes on and on between people who give good rational arguments for mutually exclusive conclusions. Just war theologians know the arguments for pacifism and pacifists are regularly confronted with the arguments for just wars. I suggest the arguments do not persuade because the disputants have differing moral imaginations; they see different possibilities and give different accounts of events in the world. So how can I speak for Christian pacifism to a friend? Perhaps if I tell a story he will by it gain a moral vision in which pacifism makes sense.

Jesus' story is foremost for Christians, of course. But Biblical stories have been told so often and so overlaid with interpretation that they sometimes leave us cold. Latter day stories capture the imagination and make the theology based on Jesus' story come to life.

Clearly, moral excellence does not depend on believing Christian theology, but it does need an imagination shaped by a vision of the good. I suspect that any vision of the moral goal will be

better communicated by stories than by the propositions of a ethical system.⁴

Vision and the Good

I have repeatedly used the phrases, "a vision of the good" or "a vision of love" in this chapter. Some philosophers would object that such talk reveals my naivete. After all, what is "the good"?

Bernard Williams writes approvingly of Isaiah Berlin, who "always insisted that there is a plurality of values which can conflict with one another, and which are not reducible to one another; consequently, that we cannot conceive of a situation in which it was true both that all value-conflict had been eliminated, and that there had been no loss of value on the way." (Williams 71) Williams disbelieves in any Utopian future in which value conflicts have been eliminated; this could only be accomplished by the loss of some things which have been counted as virtues by people at different places and times.

Utopians might object that such purported virtues represent false consciousness. A pacifist Christian might claim that when the Kingdom comes, ferocity, sometimes prized in martial societies, will be revealed as a false value. A Marxist might claim that when

⁴Cf. Kant's opinion of moral examples (*Groundwork* 25-34), which is almost diametrically opposed to mine. He claims that universal rational laws cannot be based on stories; therefore, they are useless for pure practical philosophy. But that is just the wrong use of stories.

communism is achieved, many bourgeois false values will fall by the way. Williams shares Berlin's scepticisms about such claims: "As in a given choice at a given time one value has to be set against another, so also there is loss of genuine human value over time." (Williams 76)

Williams does not think the existence of such persistent conflicts of value is a bad thing. He claims, for instance, that aesthetic values sometimes come into conflict with moral claims and that "while we are sometimes guided by the notion that it would be the best of worlds in which morality were universally respected and all men were of a disposition to affirm it, we have in fact deep and persistent reasons to be grateful that that is not the world we have." (Williams 23) Williams illustrates his point by suggesting that it would be a duller world if Gauguin, for conventional moral reasons, had not gone to the South Seas. A similar example: by many accounts, Wagner was a scoundrel, a dishonest freeloader who thought the world not only owed him a living but its constant undivided attention. Yet we are grateful that he lived and that people allowed him to abuse them, for this enabled him to write music. Not all values we treasure are moral values.

Of course, conflict of values must be managed and, in some circumstances, reduced. But Williams denies that we have a rational need to reduce conflict of values; rather, as I noted in chapter three, social living gives us practical reasons to keep conflicts under control. (Williams 81-82)

Iris Murdoch, on the other hand, thinks that good is unitary, though she recognizes that such a belief is a consoling idea: "The notion that 'it all somehow must make sense,' or 'there is a best decision here,' preserves from despair. . ." (Murdoch 56-57) She is wary of consolation, since it tempts us to believe all sorts of fantasies and keeps us from seeing the real world. Nevertheless, she draws attention to the virtues. How, for example, do we distinguish between true courage and rashness, ferocity, self-assertion and so on? By reference to other virtues: the best courage is also steadfast, calm, temperate, intelligent, loving, etc.⁵ Her suggestion is that the virtues are connected, and that increasing moral sophistication reveals increasing unity.

Now it might be supposed that my contentions in this chapter, in particular my contention that to grow morally we need a vision of the good, depend on this debate being decided in favor of Murdoch and against Williams. If there is not "the good," but only many incommensurate goods, how can it make sense to speak of "a vision of the good"?

This supposition is wrong for two reasons. First, if Murdoch is right and the good is unitary, its unity is on a rarified level, as she

⁵This suggests a possibly better way of putting the contrast between the Chambonnais and the Maquis. I said before that they were both courageous and that it was the Chambonnais' love which drew our attention. Perhaps we should say that it was the superior *quality* of the Chambonnais' courage, in that it was marked by love rather than hatred, which makes us admire them. Someone convinced of the unity of good might even suggest that the Maquis exhibited ferocity rather than true courage. Someone who thinks, like Williams, that goods are not unitary, would prefer the first way of putting the matter.

recognizes. "It might be said that 'all is one' is a dangerous falsehood at any level except the highest; and can that be discerned at all?" (Murdoch 56) Believers in a single good might think (like the utopians Williams disagrees with) that some of what appear to be goods really are not. But they would also have to agree that the ultimate good might well appear as diverse goods in a penultimate world. Finite creatures can only collect or pursue a finite number of goods. If the number of penultimate goods is large (as believers in the unity of good would probably admit), finite creatures can only pursue some of them. So even if there is (in an ultimate sense) only a (single, true) vision of the good, finite creatures will necessarily pursue (limited and probably diverse) visions of the good.

Secondly, if Williams is right and there exist many incommensurable goods, this fact in no way diminishes the role of a vision of (some) good in human development, whether that development is moral progress (or regress) or something else. So long as one admits that character develops, that human beings are always on the way, one must admit the importance of the goals toward which or away from which people move. Believers in the incommensurability of goods *could* question whether moral progress is worth much attention or effort. Williams notes that scepticism about certain features of the concept of morality, such as its being independent of luck and its being grounded in a moral order, may lead to scepticism about the importance of morality. (Williams 39) Perhaps egoistic values or aesthetic values would seem (to some

people at least) worth greater attention, in which case we should speak of the need for an egoistic vision or a vision of beauty.

As readers could guess, I am more inclined to agree with Murdoch than Williams. One reason lies just here. Williams says that if morality becomes less important to us we will still have a concept of morality, only a different one. But he does not say how far to go on this line. Suppose I like playing electronic games on my computer; achieving high scores is a good. But achieving high scores on computer games requires time, a precious commodity for a finite creature. If goods are incommensurable, it may not make sense to ask how the good of achieving high game scores measures against the good of spending time with my sons (or writing philosophy). Yet it seems I can measure these goods against each other. How far can our concept of morality be modified by admitting the idea that goods are many and unique before it becomes unrecognizable as morality? But all this is beside the main point. Even if goods are many and unique, we need a vision of a good to pursue it.

So, whether good is unitary or not, people on the way need a vision of something admirable to pursue. But not just anything will make a suitable object of admiration. The admired good must be *rich* enough to support global understanding; it must engage reason, emotions and especially imagination. I cannot yet have a vision of the good of achieving high computer game scores. I cannot enter into it; there is not enough there. It would be hard to imagine a story which presented achieving computer games scores as admirable,

though I suppose some master storyteller could do it. In contrast, the stories of lovers with which I began, even in the truncated forms in which I presented them, appeal to our emotions, challenge our understanding and enliven our imagination. I suspect that stories of lovers will always be richer than stories of computer game high scorers. Murdoch would agree and would have no trouble explaining why, for love is much more closely related to good than computer game success is.

The Good and the Journey

Pierre Sauvage was born in Le Chambon in 1944. Later, he became fascinated with the story of the village that sheltered his parents, making his very existence possible. His film about the Chambonnais' resistance during the war, "Weapons of the Spirit," makes important connections between a vision of the good and healthy self esteem. The Chambonnais identified themselves as Christians; their vision of love was shaped by Andre Trocme's and Eduard Theis's presentation of the New Testament story. But Sauvage also points out that they had a solid sense of who they were, as individuals and as a people. He asks a question.

If, indeed, it is true that the people of Le Chambon and elsewhere had a very secure, very anchored sense of self, a spontaneous access to the core of their being, that resulted in a natural and irresistible proclivity to see the truth and act upon it, and if it is indeed true that many or all the Righteous

Gentiles of the Holocaust displayed the characteristic of psychological solidity, then a question arises that my wife and I face all the time as we raise our young son: How does one nurture that powerful and benevolent sense of self-esteem?
(Rittner and Myers 138)

This returns us to the questions of chapter one: how can I overcome my need not to know? How can I help my children to know that they are worthy citizens of the world just as they are, without meeting impossible standards of beauty, success, or moral perfection?

Sauvage also raises a question about stories and the language we use to tell them.

The people of Le Chambon, through their individual and collective actions, endangered the lives of each and every one of them. Yet, there, too, the risks are acknowledged but not considered to have been a critical part of the decision-making process. We tend to interpret this, and indeed dismiss it, as modesty. But could it be that everybody, except the courageous themselves, attaches more importance to courage than is warranted? Could it be that whenever we overemphasize the courage of the righteous, we do not communicate anything about its nature or help to encourage its emergence?

A glib reference to the courageous, selfless people of Le Chambon may thus have a hollow ring to our ears and generate no real responsiveness in these people, because such words correspond to an empty concept. Perhaps the subconscious intent of such vocabulary is in fact to make such people seem essentially different from you and me, and thus not really, not challengingly, relevant to our daily lives.

How do we learn to view the people of Le Chambon, and others like them, as people with a solid, productive grasp on life, and not as incarnations of fairy-tale virtues which we can then preach about and/or ignore? (Rittner and Myers 139-140)

The good that we admire in a story must also be a good we can pursue. I suggest that we ought to multiply our stories. Just as the story of Jesus can seem helplessly distant from us, encrusted as it is with theology and debate, any story of a lover can seem high and unreachable. But stories of latter day lovers can give us access to the story of Jesus, and multiple stories can give us access to the story of a Magda Trocme or an Eduard Theis.

As Sauvage implies, we need to remind ourselves that these lovers were ordinary people like us. Perhaps they were psychologically healthy, but no more healthy than we can be.

As I have noted (Chapter 2, p. 49), Iris Murdoch thinks there is something right about the Christian idea of grace, though she does not believe in God. Feeble attempts to see the world accurately, she says--in art, nature or people--are rewarded by an increased, unlooked-for ability to see. She does not argue for the existence of grace; she invites her readers to check their own experience. (Murdoch seems not to have noticed, or else she has ignored, the consolatory power of this idea.) If she is right, or if some religious doctrine of grace is true, then moral pilgrims can expect wonderful surprises. Selfishness is almost impossible to escape, and a vision of the good may seem almost impossibly high; but if we pursue the vision, real moral progress can occur. We *can* get better.

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CHAPTER VII

ON ORDERING LOVES

Readers of chapter six, "A Vision of the Good," may have been unsatisfied with the cursory attention given there to the problem of incommensurable goods. It described how Iris Murdoch and Bernard Williams can be taken as representatives of two sides, one which affirms the ultimate unity of goods and one which denies any such unity. The aim, of course, was simply to defend the importance of moral visions and the stories which give them, whichever side was right. One need not take Murdoch's side to see that a moral vision can help the moral pilgrim. But if goods are incommensurable, the fact that they are must condition the way we think about many issues in moral philosophy, hence the reader's dissatisfaction with the discussion in chapter five.

Clearly, not all the ramifications of the alleged incommensurability of goods can be discussed in a short space, so this chapter will focus on just one problem connected with it, which may be called the problem of ordering loves. We will find that this problem is a central one, consideration of which will reveal something right and something wrong in the ways the incommensurability of goods has been expressed by philosophers.

The problem of ordering loves arises if someone loves more than one person or thing and if those loves can conflict with each other. I will take it for granted that lovers do love more than one person or thing and they often find these loves in at least *prima facie* conflict. Whether loves remain in conflict after all things have been considered is part of the problem; philosophers who assert the incommensurability of goods will say yes, while philosophers who believe in the unity of good affirm that ultimately all right loves will harmonize.

Discussion of this problem could begin at a number of places. I will start with Susan Wolf's article, "Moral Saints," which raises in a distinctive way the plurality of goods people pursue. Consideration of Robert Adams' response to Wolf will define more clearly the issues involved. Since moral relativism is never far from the discussion of the incommensurability of goods, I will explore what Bernard Williams and John Kekes have to say about relativism and how Kekes distinguishes between a pluralism of goods and relativism, defending the former against the latter. Only after considerable exposition, then, will I try to say something constructive about ordering loves.

How Good Should I Be?

In "Moral Saints," Susan Wolf writes with some awareness of the importance of moral visions, though she writes of "ideals" rather than visions. If we strive to be as good as possible--as that ideal is

given in utilitarian or Kantian ethical theory--Wolf claims we will find a contradiction between that ideal and other ideals we hold, even though, she says, "it is generally assumed that one ought to be as morally good as possible." (Wolf 419) If we are not as morally good as we could be, she says, the generally accepted view marks this down as a failure, attributable to imperfections in our nature. But the ideal of moral goodness, of either main variety, may conflict with other ideals we have of a good life, that is, the sort of life it would be good to live.

Wolf points to several non-moral excellences which good lives may display, such as haute cuisine, athletic prowess, artistic skill, biting humor, skill in interior design, etc. Her criticism of moral sainthood begins (1) by accepting these non-moral ideals of the good life as things we ought to admire. "In general, the admiration of and striving toward achieving any of a great variety of forms of personal excellence are character traits it is valuable and desirable for people to have." (Wolf 426) Then she notes (2) the empirical fact that our world has practically unlimited opportunities for doing moral good (alleviating hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, etc.). So, if we ought to do as many morally excellent things as possible, there will be no time or energy for non-moral excellences. Since for Wolf both (1) and (2) are true, she says we have to change in one of two ways; either we should improve our theories of ethics so they produce an ideal for which we can strive without excluding non-moral ideals, or we

should realize that it is not generally true that we should be as morally good (as expressed in a theoretical ideal) as possible.

Wolf describes two general pictures of moral saints. The Loving Saint genuinely finds her happiness in the happiness of others; her desires are unlike most people's. The Rational Saint has ordinary human desires, but for duty's sake always acts in the interests of others. Both lives are other directed: "dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole." (Wolf 420) Neither gives a place to the pursuit of non-moral excellences, since "if the moral saint is devoting all his time to feeding the hungry or healing the sick or raising money for Oxfam, then necessarily he is not reading Victorian novels, playing the oboe, or improving his backhand." (Wolf 421) Utilitarian theory will generally approve of the Loving Saint, and Kantians will like the Rational Saint. (Wolf 427)

A utilitarian, Wolf admits, need not preach moral sainthood for everyone. Utilitarians recognize the great variety of interests, talents, and pleasures which people admire. If very many people devoted themselves to the interests of other people or society as a whole, then necessarily some of these good making things would be neglected and the general happiness would suffer. So the utilitarian would approve of most people pursuing personal values. But what about the utilitarian himself? Wolf says he would have to devote himself to moral sainthood; no improvement in the general happiness which he could achieve by pursuing personal values (through

cooking, art, or whatever) could be preferred reasonably over what he could achieve by giving himself to feeding the starving or housing the homeless. (428) Further, even if the utilitarian did increase general happiness through some excellence (say, playing a really beautiful game of chess), he would value the excellence *because* it produced general happiness. But this is backwards, says Wolf, "it is not because they produce happiness that these activities are valuable; it is because these activities are valuable in more direct and specific ways that they produce happiness." (429) Utilitarianism, it seems, cannot escape Wolf's criticism of moral sainthood.

Wolf considers two versions of Kantianism. The first, which takes cognizance of Kant's belief that we have a duty of benevolence, falls victim to a criticism similar to that leveled against utilitarianism. A duty of benevolence in a world full of unmet basic needs such as the world we have would leave little room for intellectual or artistic excellence. And, to the degree that the Kantian did develop non-moral excellences, it would be out of respect for the "dignity that members of our species have as a result of being endowed with pure practical reason. . . .But [that] is hardly what one expects to be dominantly behind a person's aspirations to dance as well as Fred Astaire, to paint as well as Picasso, or to solve some outstanding problem in abstract algebra, and it is hardly what one hopes to find lying dominantly behind a father's action on behalf of his son or a lover's on behalf of her beloved." (Wolf 431)

The second version of Kantianism, Wolf says, sees in the requirement to universalize maxims a limit to moral saintliness. We could not desire that everyone's every action be an act of benevolence, and we can treat others as ends without promoting their interests at every moment. In this version of Kantianism, we fulfill our moral duty by observing a list of specific duties. Beyond these minimum requirements, morality has nothing to say, so this interpretation of Kant will not yield an ideal of a moral saint.

Interestingly, Wolf criticizes this second Kantianism for just that feature of it that avoids the problem of moral sainthood.

For to put such a limit on one's capacity to be moral is effectively to deny, not just the moral necessity, but the moral goodness of a devotion to benevolence and the maintenance of justice that passes beyond a certain required point. It is to deny the possibility of going morally above and beyond the call of a restricted set of duties. Despite my claim that all-consuming moral saintliness is not a particularly healthy and desirable ideal, it seems perverse to insist that, were moral saints to exist, they would not, in their way, be remarkably noble and admirable figures. (432)

I think that Wolf rightly has put her finger on something important here, which I have tried to express in terms of admiration and pursuit of a vision. Morality consists not only in keeping certain minimal requirements, but also in pursuing something excellent. As Wolf says, "A moral theory that does not contain the seeds of an all-consuming ideal of moral sainthood thus seems to place false and unnatural limits on our opportunity to do moral good and our

potential to deserve moral praise." (433) In sum, the minimalistic version of Kantianism unnaturally limits the scope of morality, while the perfectionistic version falls prey to Wolf's criticism of moral sainthood.

Wolf concludes that utilitarianism and Kantianism cannot avoid projecting an ideal of moral sainthood. In general, she doubts that any theory of morals could be constructed which would not come into conflict with our beliefs that certain non-moral excellences ought to be pursued in preference to purely moral interests. (434) We are driven to the only remaining alternative, i.e., we should change our attitude toward moral theories. If some ethical theory leads to an untenable ideal, as both utilitarianism and Kantianism do, we should not count that against the theory. Rather, we should recognize that if we want to live "perfectly wonderful" lives, we may well not live "perfectly moral" lives. (436) It is not true, according to Wolf, that we should be as morally good as possible.

Wolf's argument moves between two foci, moral goods and non-moral goods, while my interest in this study has been love. While "good" and "love" name significantly different concepts, whose relationship is complex, they are enough alike for Wolf's conclusions to bear on the problem of ordering loves.

Think of an executive in a famine relief agency. Her fund raising and project planning literally save lives, but she feels as though the time her work takes is stolen from her husband and children. We can describe this as a conflict of two goods, but it is just

as appropriate to describe it, as the woman might, as a conflict of two loves. How can she answer the legitimate calls of two loves? This dilemma is familiar to nurses, teachers, ministers, and many others.

We can imagine a second example, in accord with Wolf's emphasis on non-moral goods, in which a love for one's family conflicts with a love for intellectual excellence.¹ A philosopher, to take an obvious example, might describe the conflicting demands made by thinking and writing on one hand and children on the other as a conflict of two loves. He will want to order them properly, not so that he can devote himself entirely to whichever is more important, but so that he can give to each love the attention and energy it merits at that time in the context of his life as a whole.

I think this desire to rightly order one's loves is a common, though perhaps not often recognized, feature of serious attempts to live good lives. It stems from a fundamental desire that a life--including its emotional side--make sense, that it not be basically arbitrary, rigid or chaotic. Standard ethical theories can be read not only as prescriptions of the right thing to do, but as ways to

¹ I will ignore, in this discussion, the objection that "love" is wrongly used in relation to things. It is, for example, hard to reconcile a "love" for a well-played sonata or even for the playing of the sonata oneself with the notion I approved in chapter two, that agape (defined as accurate vision and compassion, Murdoch's "just and loving gaze") is an indispensable ingredient in all loves. How does one have fellow-feeling for a thing?

We could be fastidious, using "like" for our feelings for things and reserving "love" for sentient beings. But this would get us nowhere. After all, we do say we love sonatas, beautiful paintings, and all the non-moral goods which interest Wolf. And, whether we say like or love, we still admire and pursue these things; we still have the problem of ordering our loves. How much of my limited time and energy should I give to the many varied things I admire?

discipline our emotional attachments, to order our loves. The utilitarian's highest attachment is to the general welfare, while the Kantian's is to rational duty. The good person subordinates all other loves to the supreme love.

Wolf's criticism of moral sainthood serves to criticize utilitarian and Kantian theories as ways of ordering loves. The complete victory of moral goods over non-moral goods does not seem to lead to what we want in a good life. At an even more fundamental level, there is something strange in speaking of love for the general welfare or rational duty.

Moreover, there is something odd about the idea of morality itself, or moral goodness, serving as the object of a dominant passion in the way that a more concrete and specific vision of a goal (even a concrete *moral* goal) might be imagined to serve. Morality itself does not seem to be a suitable object of passion. Thus, when one reflects, for example, on the Loving Saint easily and gladly giving up his fishing trip or his stereo or his hot fudge sundae at the drop of the moral hat, one is apt to wonder not at how much he loves morality, but at how little he loves these other things. . . .The Rational Saint, on the other hand, might retain strong nonmoral and concrete desires--he simply denies himself the opportunity to act on them. But this is no less troubling. . . .[One suspects the Rational Saint of having] a pathological fear of damnation, perhaps, or an extreme form of self-hatred that interferes with his ability to enjoy the enjoyable in life. (Wolf 424)

That standard ethical theories *can* be read as prescriptions for ordering loves does not mean they *should* be read that way. Since the main theories of ethics are directed to the non-specific rational

being, they necessarily treat emotions as secondary to actions (usually understanding them as dispositions to action), because emotions are specific and personal while actions are conceived as independent of particular agents. For such a theory, rightly ordering loves is only important as it increases the odds that right actions will be performed. The moral agent would do better to improve his ability to calculate utility or recognize duty (and--in both cases--become more conscientious) than to order his loves.

If the desire to order loves is as important as its common occurrence would suggest, we must look elsewhere for clues to how to do it. Wolf does not offer any explicit suggestions in this regard, since her project was a critical one and focused on goods rather than loves. At most, she can be read as suggesting that loves for moral goods need not always outrank loves for non-moral goods. We need to turn elsewhere to further sharpen the question.

Maximal Devotion

Robert Adams, in his response to Wolf entitled "Saints," agrees with much that she says. She is right to reject the ideal of a life devoted only to moral goodness and to insist on the place of non-moral goods in a good life. Also, she is right to think that a moral theory ought to ". . . contain the seeds of an all-consuming ideal of moral sainthood"; that is, we ought to be able to be devoted to something. (Adams 401)

Adams' criticism of Wolf centers on her definitions of moral sainthood. She says, at different points, that a moral saint is (1) ". . .a person whose every action is as morally good as possible" (2) ". . .a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be" and (3) "[a person] dominated by a commitment to improving the welfare of others or of society as a whole." (Wolf 419, 420) Wolf treats these definitions as equivalent, Adams implies, though they are quite different. ("Saints" 394) Noting, but not discussing, Wolf's controversial limitation of morality to the welfare of others in the third definition, Adams concentrates on the confusion between the first two definitions. The second, he says, ". . .probably comes closest to expressing an intuitive idea of moral sainthood in its most general form." ("Saints" 396) But Wolf seems to think that to *be* as morally good a person as possible one's every *action* must be as morally good as possible. Against this, Adams says, "The idea that only a morally imperfect person would spend half an hour doing something morally indifferent, like taking a nap, when she could have done something morally praiseworthy instead, like spending the time in moral self-examination, is at odds with our usual judgments and ought not to be assumed at the outset." ("Saints" 394)

In "Saints," Adams writes to defend the desirability of sainthood against Wolf's attack. By confusing her first two definitions she has made her argument's premises irrelevant to her conclusion. Adams agrees that a life whose every action was as morally good as possible (conceived in the narrow sense of

promoting the interests/rights of others and not the self) might not be a good life. But, since a person whose every action is as morally good as possible is not equivalent to a person who is as morally worthy as can be, Adams thinks that Wolf's argument does not show that sainthood is undesirable.

Since Wolf goes awry, in Adams' view, through confused definitions of saints, he offers his own: "Saints are people in whom the holy or divine can be seen." ("Saints" 399) Wolf rejects saints, he thinks, because she conceives of *moral* saints, people devoted to morality, whereas real saints are people devoted to divine reality. "What interests a saint may have will then depend on what interests God has, for sainthood is a participation in God's interests. And God . . . is not so limited that His moral concerns could leave Him without time or attention or energy for other interests." ("Saints" 399)

A saint, e.g. Albert Schweitzer, can recognize that humanitarian commitments have a higher claim on his life than treasured artistic and intellectual pursuits and still find time to play piano while serving in a medical mission in Africa. "Very likely that time could have been employed in actions that would have been morally worthier, but that fact by itself surely has no tendency to disqualify Schweitzer from sainthood, in the sense in which people are actually counted as saints." ("Saints" 397)

In *Religion and the Foundations of Ethics*, Adams notes that underlying Wolf's attack on moral sainthood is an acceptance of what Thomas Nagel has called "the fragmentation of value." ("Devotion" 1-

- 2) She is unable to see how any theory could give a viewpoint from which moral and non-moral values could be ordered, so "at some point, both in our philosophizing and in our lives, we must be willing to raise normative questions from a perspective that is unattached to any particular well-ordered system of values." (Wolf 439) Adams readily accepts that "we may be faced with hard and painful choices about which we are bound to have conflicting feelings." ("Devotion"
- 4) But he finds the idea that we may just have to accept fragmented values "deeply disturbing."

Where I have written about ordering loves, Adams speaks of integrating a person's motives. If values are fragmented, motives will be chaotic rather than integrated.

To have inner conflicts is not necessarily to be at war with oneself; the difference is important, but not easy to explain.

If I am at war with myself, I will sometimes have no better explanation for a decision than to say, 'There was a fight in me, and this side won.' The two sides in me will look at each other with unsympathetic hostility, and perhaps with a sort of incomprehension. For from the perspective of the motives that favor one side in the conflict, no value can be seen on the other side.

If I am at peace with myself, I may still have conflicting motives, but they will be related in such a way that each, so to speak, can acknowledge the others as good and as belonging to the same family. . . . Few if any of us, I imagine, have fully attained such inner harmony, but it seems a desirable part of a motivational ideal.

. . . I need an inclusive perspective; ideally, none of my motives would need to be simply suppressed. And if I am not to be just a battle-ground on which now one side wins and now another, I need a basis for saying what is most important to me. . . . There certainly need not be any algorithm or set of

rules that would predict my preferences and decisions. But my values must form a system at least in the sense that my motives have enough kinship among themselves for me to be at peace with myself in the way I have indicated. . . . And I must be attached enough to the system to have a reasonable constancy over time in the pattern of what I care about, and how much; otherwise I become again a fluctuating battleground, and it will be hard to speak of character or integrity in my case. ("Devotion" 5-6)

We may note here that the "ideal" of which Adams writes consists in a harmony, or order, among a person's motives. Such harmony would not remove inner conflict in the sense of "hard and painful choices," since conflict may arise from sources other than disordered motives, e.g. from finitude.

The heart of this passage is Adam's use of "need" and "must": "I need an inclusive perspective. . . I need a basis for saying. . . my values must form a system. . . I must be attached enough to the system." What kind of necessity is proposed here? A practical one: "otherwise I become a fluctuating battleground." The persuasiveness of Adams' argument rests on his readers feeling a similar practical need. Adams assumes that "character" and "integrity" name qualities that readers will recognize as part of good lives. He does not give, then, a logical refutation of Wolf's position. The "fragmentation of values" disturbs Adams because it conflicts with his idea of a good life, which includes stable character and integrity of person. The philosopher who disbelieves in any unity of goods, who finds goods incommensurable, could avoid the power of Adams' "need/must" by

denying that character and integrity figure in good lives in the way Adams thinks. In the language of this chapter, Adams sees a practical need to order loves to avoid inner chaos and arbitrariness; an opponent may, however, see no need to order loves because she may not see inner chaos or arbitrariness as inimical to a good life.

Adams finds his "inclusive perspective" in a sort of religious platonism in which "a love for art, an aspiration to intellectual honesty, a regard for the welfare of one's neighbor, and all other good motives [are] forms of love for God." ("Devotion" 11-12) He suggests that loves for these things are loves for God in three ways. First, loved things may resemble God. ". . . a pattern of caring about goodness makes one a person who cares about what is in fact a sort of resemblance to God, whether one knows it or not. God is the focus, identified or unidentified, around which such a pattern of motivation is organized. This is obviously not an explicit love that involves a thought or state of mind that has God as its intentional object." (15) Second, we may enjoy God *in* enjoying something else. As we enjoy other people in our experience of their personal characteristics--their voices, their touch, their feelings and ideas--so we may enjoy God in creation or in our enjoyment of fellow creatures. (16-18) Third, we may share God's love for something else, e.g. a fellow creature. "The most obvious point here is that love for God can be manifested in *wanting* to share God's love for what is good in the creation." (20)

We should note again, that in offering this "inclusive perspective," Adams does not offer a decision procedure for deciding

between moral and non-moral loves. Someone who loves both the cello and her children may face recurring difficult choices between practicing her instrument and being with her children, even if she sees both as gifts from God. Nor does Adams think that everyone should order loves alike; different people have different vocations. Only ultimately do all true loves harmonize; in a penultimate world lovers may feel unresolved conflict between the calls of various loves. But by seeing all loves for goods as forms of love for God, Adams thinks he avoids a fragmentation of values in which the competing "sides" of a person stare at each other with incomprehension.

Adams' reader might wonder just what he has gained by an ideal of devotion which gives so little aid to agents trying to decide between moral and non-moral goods. I think Adams' best response would be that he gains just that, an ideal of devotion. If Adams is right, it is at least possible to order rightly my loves, even if it is like an artistic accomplishment rather than a correct application of a decision procedure.

Wolf, having dethroned moral sainthood as anything to which we ought to give maximal devotion, seems willing to have nothing take its place. If Wolf is right, it will never be possible to order my loves *rightly*; any such ordering must necessarily be arbitrary. While she insists that "the ideal of moral sainthood should not be held as a standard against which any other ideal must be judged or justified," she does not condemn the person who aspires to be a

moral saint. (Wolf 435-436) "A person may be *perfectly wonderful* without being *perfectly moral*," Wolf says, but wonderfulness is not thereby enthroned as a standard by which morality could be judged. Sometimes normative questions should not be answered by reference to any ordered system of values, but by "intuition." (Wolf 439)

The disagreements between Adams and Wolf suggest two questions. First, is Adams' theistic version of an "inclusive perspective" the only way to order loves or integrate motives? Under the influence of platonism, Christian theology has traditionally identified the good with God, though in the process non-moral goods have often received little approbation. Adams wants to maintain the identification of the good with God, but to recognize and explicate the place of non-moral goods in the good which God is. If, like Adams, someone wants to avoid an internal battle between mutually incomprehensible "sides," need he be, as Adams is, a monotheist? I will briefly discuss this first question, but only after considering the second.

Second, is it possible to believe in the incommensurability of goods without slipping into moral relativism, and if so, how? Wolf says, "Moral sainthood should not be held as a standard against which *any* other ideal must be judged or justified." Suppose again, as in chapter six, I were to devote myself to achieving high computer game scores. Can trivial items of life become ideals? If so, should not such ideals be judged against moral standards? Perhaps by

emphasizing "any" I distort Wolf's intent, but philosophers who have defended the incommensurability of goods have taken pains to defend the idea against such charges of relativism. We will turn to two of these next.

How Pluralism Does Not Imply Relativism

The contagion of a philosophical idea can spread rapidly and broadly in a culture. One might speculate that this indicates something deeply human about philosophizing, a notion flattering to philosophers. I doubt, however, as I have noted in other connections², that philosophers' ideas infect by virtue of their logical power or righthheadedness (as philosophers would like to believe), but because they answer a feeling or desire already present in a culture. Someone whose anthropological theory emphasized communal notions rather than individuality might go so far as to say that a culture calls forth certain philosophical ideas, rather than a philosopher's ideas changing a society.

Susan Wolf's attack on moral sainthood, the fragmentation of values, the incommensurability of goods, and the plurality of values are familiar themes in recent writings on ethical theory. These terms, though not synonymous, constitute a cluster of ideas (I shall call them the "pluralist cluster") which have received a ready acceptance in certain parts of our society. What Wolf wrote about

² Cf. Chapter 1, p 29.

the claims she made in "Moral Saints" applies to all of them: "they call into question the assumption that it is always better to be morally better." (Wolf 438)

Now, if 1) it is at least sometimes better to do and/or be less than the morally better, and 2) there is no ordered system that can tell us whether this time is one of those times, but instead we rely on intuition, then it seems that 3) no claim of the form, "this is a time when it is better not to do/be the morally better thing," can be rejected, except as it conflicts with intuition. Since people's moral intuitions vary, (3) is a version of moral relativism. I suggest that part of the ready acceptance of the pluralist cluster is due to the way it can so easily be made to imply moral relativism.

Several philosophers who advocate one or more elements of the pluralist cluster have written to distinguish its claims from relativism.³ Bernard Williams, for example, lists four denials which the claim that values are incommensurable can be thought to involve:

1. There is no one currency in terms of which each conflict of values can be resolved.
2. It is not true that for each conflict of values, there is some value, independent of any of the conflicting values, which can be appealed to in order to resolve that conflict.
3. It is not true that for each conflict of values, there is some value which can be appealed to (independent or not) in order rationally to resolve that conflict.

³ While this section focuses on Bernard Williams and John Kekes, cf. also Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 200-203. Nagel thinks that the "fragmentation of values," (his own phrase) can be overcome from within a moral point of view.

4. No conflict of values can ever rationally be resolved.
(Williams 77)

Williams thinks that the believer in incommensurability (such as himself) will support (1), (2), and (3), but need not accept (4). (Williams 77, 80) The obvious quality which differentiates denial (4) from the first three characterizes most defenses of the pluralist cluster against moral relativism. The first three denials simply mean that *some* conflicts of values are not rationally resolvable, while the fourth says that *all* conflicts of values are conflicts which are not rationally resolvable.

In a later essay in *Moral Luck*, Williams makes a similar point when he tries to say what is "the truth in relativism." He introduces a mental machinery which he claims can be applied to all sorts of relativism. (Williams 132) The problems of relativism can only arise, he says, if there are two or more "systems of belief" which are in some specifiable way "exclusive of one another." (Williams 132-134) Williams deals with a number of worries in defining these terms, worries which I will pass over, since the basic ideas are clear enough. The problems of relativism concern communication and issues of preference between conflicting systems of belief. Williams admits that a conflict between systems of belief may be hard to define, since some systems of belief are so different that they cannot be compared at all. (Think of the contrast of the cosmological beliefs of a primitive villager with those of a university astronomer.) All that is required, Williams says, for systems of belief to be exclusive of each other, is

that it be impossible to "live within" both systems of belief, a phrase Williams admits to be vague.

To further set up the problems of relativism, there needs to be a "locus" of the exclusivity between the systems of belief. There has to be at least one description of some belief or action which the two systems will agree is an adequate description of that belief or action, but in regard to which the two systems give differing answers.

(Williams 136) In ethics, for example, two systems of belief might agree on the description of an action and disagree whether it is morally correct to perform the action.

With this machinery in place, Williams introduces two contrasting concepts: "real confrontations" and "notional confrontations." (Williams 138) A real confrontation between two systems of belief occurs when some group of people which holds one of the belief systems could "go over" to the other, provided that 1) they could remain sane, and 2) they could acknowledge the transition in the light of a rational comparison of the two systems of belief. (Williams 139) Notional confrontations are like real confrontations in that some holders of at least one of two systems of belief are aware that the systems exclude one another. But in a notional confrontation there is no "real option" of going over to the other system of belief. An astrophysicist cannot go over to the cosmological beliefs of a primitive villager because the transition could not be acknowledged as rational; a psychiatrist cannot go over to the delusional beliefs of her schizophrenic patient without losing

her sanity; and a German businessman cannot go over to the beliefs of a medieval Samurai, because there is no way of living the life that accompanied them (perhaps he too would be considered insane). Of course, confrontations between some systems of belief are notional confrontations for some people and real confrontations for others. A real confrontation may become a notional confrontation for the same person at a different time, and vice versa. No sharp line divides real and notional confrontations; it is a matter of degree. (Williams 139)

In real confrontations, Williams says, we use a "vocabulary of appraisal," i.e., true vs. false, right vs. wrong, acceptable vs. unacceptable, etc. (Williams 141) We must use some vocabulary of appraisal in real confrontations, because real confrontations present us with live choices and we need to be able to think and express our feelings about those choices. We *can* use the vocabulary of appraisal in notional confrontations, and, since confrontations form a continuum from purely notional ones to purely real ones, we will often use a vocabulary of appraisal for confrontations which lie somewhere in the middle. But for at least some distantly notional confrontations of systems of belief, the language of appraisal is inappropriate. Williams writes, "While the vocabulary can no doubt be applied without linguistic impropriety, there is so little to this use, so little of what gives content to the appraisals in the context of real confrontation, that we can say that for a reflective person the question of appraisal does not genuinely arise for such a type of

[system of belief] when it is standing in purely notional confrontation." (Williams 141)

With all this background, Williams is finally prepared to say what the truth of relativism in ethics is, and is not.

Relativism, with regard to a given type of [system of belief], is the view that for one whose [system of belief] stands in purely notional confrontation with such [a system of belief], questions of appraisal of it do not genuinely arise. This form of relativism, unlike most others, is coherent. The truth in relativism--which I shall state, not argue for--is that for some ethical outlooks at least this standpoint is correct. (Williams 142)

Williams claims this formulation of relativism protects two truths. First, sometimes, i.e. in a real confrontation, we need to have a way to characterize and evaluate a system of belief not our own; second, sometimes, i.e. in a notional confrontation, a system of belief is so foreign to us that it is inappropriate to apply the language of appraisal to it. The problem with "vulgar relativism," the view, Williams says, "which combines a relativistic account of the meaning or content of ethical terms with a non-relativistic principle of toleration," is that it fails to see the difference between real and notional confrontations and treats real confrontations as if they were only notional. (Williams 142-143)

Beneath the complex machinery, in "the truth in relativism" we again see Williams distinguishing between pluralism, the idea that some conflicts of value are past rational discussion and evaluation,

and relativism, the idea that all conflicts of value are past rational discussion and evaluation. However, while Williams claims that at least some value debates are rationally resolvable, he does not say much about which he thinks are rationally resolvable, or how. In contrast, John Kekes' *Facing Evil* can be read as an extended discussion of how, in one area of moral interest, moral relativism is false.

Kekes offers a particular conception of morality, which he calls "character-morality," in contrast and opposition to Kantianism, utilitarianism, and other forms of what he labels "choice-morality." Character-morality has evil-avoiding and good-producing aspects. In *Facing Evil*, Kekes gives his attention almost entirely to the evil-avoiding aspect of character-morality, a concern he thinks is greatly underexamined by most ethical theories. (Kekes 3)

Kekes focuses not on all evil, but on what he calls "simple evil." Simple evil is the undeserved violation of the minimum requirements of human welfare. "The minimum requirements are universally human, culturally invariant, and historically constant features of human life." (Kekes 51) As examples of the minimum requirements Kekes mentions physiological requirements such as food, drink, sleep, etc.; psychological requirements related to universal human psychological characteristics such as the desire to go beyond meeting physical needs by meeting them in ways we count as desirable, and our capacities to think, remember, have emotions, etc.; and sociological requirements created by the fact that

we all live in relationships with friends, family members, sexual partners, and/or enemies. (Kekes 51-52)

Some evil ("complex evil"), Kekes says, derives not just from such universal human characteristics as the ones he lists, but also from the particular conceptions people have of good lives. For example, self-actualization may represent a universal psychological need, but a person's pursuit of self-actualization in some particular way--through art or music, let us say--is not universal. Some evil consists of the undeserved thwarting of such desires, but such evil is complex, since it is a frustration not merely of the basic universal need, but also of the particular conception of a good life the person has. In regard to complex evil, as well as in regard to people's various conceptions of goods, Kekes agrees with the pluralists. In contrast, simple evil is objective. "Since morality is concerned, among other things, with minimizing simple evil, there are some objectively true or false moral judgments. They are objective in the sense that they concern factual matters, and whether the facts are as judged is independent of the moral attitudes of the person judging. Let us call this *the thesis of the objectivity of simple evil.*" (Kekes 53-54)

Kekes gives other theses of character-morality, nine in all. (Kekes 155-156) They develop character-morality in a way dramatically opposed to "vulgar relativism" as Williams described it. If simple evil is the undeserved suffering of harm that violates a universal, minimum need, then it is irrelevant whether the agent

who caused the evil intended it--Kekes' second thesis. "Whether agents choose to cause evil has a bearing on our judgments of the agents, but not on whether simple evil has been caused." (Kekes 155) Taking his cues from examples and tragic literature, Kekes says that people may cause simple evil through their habitual, unreflective actions. So simple evil is reflexive--the third thesis. "Vices are character traits that regularly issue in evil actions. In evil people, vices are dominant character traits resulting in enduring patterns of evil-causing actions. . . .the vices of agents may result in their agents' themselves being evil." (Kekes 155)

Without an exposition or even a listing of all Kekes' theses, the reader can see the direction he is heading. Kekes believes in moral desert. A clear-eyed look at evil forces us to see that some people, whether they choose to or not, habitually cause objective evil. In its evil-avoiding aspect, morality should seek to minimize the damage done by such people, a project Kekes goes on to theorize about.

At the end of his book, Kekes relates his study to the pluralist cluster and to the relativism that is sometimes read off it.

It is widely, but by no means unanimously, accepted by those who share our sensibility that there is no summum bonum, no such thing as a best life for human beings. Let us call this view *pluralism*. . . . I think that pluralists are right, although I have not discussed the merits of their case here. The reason I broach the topic now is that there is a tendency in our sensibility to go on from pluralism to relativism, which constitutes another obstacle to facing evil.

Relativists suppose that one consequence of the incommensurability of goods is that the lives that aim to

embody some particular arrangement of goods are also incommensurable. . . .

However, before we allow ourselves to be swamped by the rhetoric [of relativism], we should remember that infanticide, child prostitution, suttee, female circumcision and footbinding, rampant disease, . . . torture, . . . beating, . . . corruption, and political instability are also parts of other forms of life. Is it really true that external moral criticism of these evils is always illegitimate? . . .

The reason why the progression from pluralism to relativism is illegitimate is that it involves disregarding the objectivity of simple evil. . . . There are some things that are harmful for all people, always, everywhere; as we have seen, human welfare has certain minimum physiological, psychological, and social requirements. . . . Consequently, relativism about simple evil is mistaken. (Kekes 232-234)

Though far more explicit than Williams about how relativism is false in regard to some moral judgments, Kekes adopts the same basic position as Williams. For both these writers, the pluralist cluster is right, but needs to be distinguished from relativism. While some conflicts of values cannot be resolved rationally and some conceptions of a good life cannot be appraised from within other conceptions of a good life, it does not follow that no actions and forms of life cannot be judged as evil, worthy of disrepute and avoidance.

Obviously, Williams and Kekes do not directly address the problem of ordering loves or Adams' similar problem of integrating motives. Still, we would be on solid ground to say that in regard to the visions of goods which people pursue, both would deny the possibility of giving a rule for ordering loves. Loves, like goods, are plural and incommensurable.

A tension exists between this defense of the pluralist cluster and the denial of the possibility of love-ordering rules, a tension which points out something wrong in the thesis of the incommensurability of goods. We are now ready to see where that tension lies.

Why We Need a Vision of Love to Avoid Simple Evil

Williams and Kekes defend the pluralist cluster by distinguishing it from relativism. In particular, Kekes says that while the goods that people pursue are incommensurable, it is objectively true that there are some evils which everyone ought to avoid. Obviously, this defense of the pluralist cluster depends on the possibility of distinguishing between the goods that people may pursue and the evils they must avoid. Consider, then, the following argument, which assumes Kekes' definition of simple evil.

1. Every human infant has a need to be loved.
2. Therefore, if an infant is undeservedly not loved, she has suffered simple evil.
3. There is an enormous number of infants, none of whom deserve not to be loved.
4. Only a very large number of lovers will be able to love the infants and prevent them from suffering simple evil.

5. Therefore, to avoid simple evil a very large number of people need to be lovers.

6. People need a vision of love to pursue in order to grow as lovers.

7. Therefore, to avoid simple evil a very large number of people need a vision of love.

Comments on the steps in this argument:

1. I make this as a generalization from empirical studies, which provide overwhelming evidence of the detrimental effect of emotional deprivation on infants. Kekes, as noted above, explicitly includes psychological characteristics among the universal minimum requirements of all good lives.

2. This follows from #1 and Kekes' definitions of simple harm (violation of a universal minimum requirement of good lives) and simple evil (undeserved simple harm).

3. Kekes writes, "the only acceptable moral reason for overruling the presumption against simple harm being undeserved is that by doing so the general concern of morality is better served." (Kekes 56-57) And, "What makes individuals deserving is that they have certain characters or they have acted in certain ways." (Kekes 57) I take it, then, that no infants are undeserving of love.

4. This proposition is a matter of practical, not logical, necessity. A defender of the pluralist cluster might suggest that even the requirement of a "very large number" of lovers leaves open the

possibility that for some other people there is no need to love infants and therefore no need for a vision of love. However, similar (though more complicated) arguments could be constructed beginning with the needs of children, adolescents, adults, or the aged to be loved.

5. Taken as a group, these arguments (based on the needs of infants, children, adolescents, adults and the aged to be loved) make it probable that virtually all people need to be lovers, if we are to avoid simple evil.

6. In chapter six, I hoped to have shown, rather than argued, that this proposition is true. Moral pilgrims need a goal to admire and pursue; would-be lovers need a vision of love.

7. This proposition follows from the others.

If this argument is sound, the evil-avoiding and good-producing aspects of morality cannot be so neatly separated as Williams and Kekes seem to think. Interestingly, when Kekes considers violations of the minimum requirements of good lives, he does so only in regard to what he calls "deep prohibitions." (Kekes 172-179) He stresses that deep prohibitions, against such things as murder, torture, mutilation, and enslavement, represent objective moral truth. "For deep prohibitions are of simple evil, and they define simple moral situations. The objectivity of our moral judgments depends on our ability to identify such situations. . . . Whether a prohibition is deep depends solely on whether it protects a minimum requirement of human welfare." (Kekes 177)

Kekes seems never to consider the possibility of a "deep prescription." Consistent with his description of deep prohibitions, a deep prescription would enforce actions necessary to all good lives. It would seem that deep prescriptions represent objective moral truth as much as deep prohibitions, though in a more complicated way. No one can rightly think that a deep prohibition, e.g. "do not torture innocent human beings," does not apply to him. However, one could recognize a deep prescription, e.g. "give adequate food to infants," and rightly think that the prescription should be fulfilled by other people and not himself. So, while deep prescriptions represent objective moral truth, they do not apply to every person at all times.

I do not claim that my argument is a refutation of Kekes' and Williams' defense of pluralism. If there were a deep prescription which applied, as deep prohibitions do, to every person at all times, and if that prescription was tied to some particular vision of the good, then their defense of pluralism could be refuted. My argument does not assume or establish such a prescription.⁴ I only claim that my argument shows that the objective evils which we must avoid cannot be so neatly divided from the goods that we may pursue as Kekes seems to think.

Objective, simple evil can occur not only through what people do, but through what they fail to do. My argument shows that unless a very great many of us pursue love, simple evil will occur.

⁴ I think there is such a prescription, the great commandment. However, I doubt that it can be established by argument, and many readers will not agree to assume it.

Therefore, the goods that we pursue are interwoven with the avoidance of objective evil.

Logically, there is an ambiguity in my argument, but an innocent one. Someone could object that "love" is used in two senses when I say that all infants need to be loved, and therefore people need to be lovers. The love that infants need, it could be claimed, is a hard-to-specify group of behaviors by others which produce in the child a sense of self-esteem and well-being (and, more basically, health, nutrition, safety, etc., but the focus here is on emotional and psychological well-being). The love which lovers give or have, on the other hand, is a complex of emotions, intentions and beliefs internal to the lover. The objector could conclude that it is possible for infants to "be loved" in the relevant sense without any, or at most few, people "being lovers." This objection may be logically astute (I do not say it is), but it is psychological nonsense.

At this point, philosophers of a certain sort would seek to fashion a rule for ordering loves. If the goods that we pursue are connected to the evils which we must avoid, then perhaps we can create a hierarchy of goods so that the need of infants to be loved (and other deep prescriptions, if they are found) will be rightly placed above, say, the good of computer game success.

The reader of chapter six will not expect such a move here. To grow as lovers we need a vision of love, not a rule which tells us what we are to love. We need to hear again stories which place

before us an image of something admirable, which we can pursue. We order our loves by pursuing the admirable thing.

We return, then, to the question put aside earlier. Is a monotheistic vision of the good, like Robert Adams', the only way to integrate motives or order loves? It is not. Iris Murdoch, for instance, offers a nontheistic version of a platonic good in *The Sovereignty of Good*. No doubt Buddhist or Hindu thinkers could tell stories which would give the moral pilgrim a vision to pursue, the pursuit of which would help order his loves. But not all visions of the good or of love have equal claim on our attention. If life lived in pursuit of some vision of a good neglects the love of infants, then that vision of the good is defective when compared to one that promotes the love of infants, for the love of infants is a requirement of all good lives, including those which pursue a vision which neglects the love of infants. In general, at a minimum a vision of the good must be rich enough to promote all deep prescriptions. Beyond that, we look for a vision of the good rich enough to promote all of the many nonmoral goods writers like Wolf and Adams have described. Ultimately, there may be one unifying good, and only a vision of that good would perfectly harmonize all goods, thus rightly ordering all loves. In the less-than-ultimate world that we have, we may expect many visions of love (this is what is right about pluralism), even though not every story will yield an even minimally adequate vision of love (this is what is wrong about pluralism).

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CHAPTER VIII

COMMUNITY AND LOVE

Communities can help people become lovers.

A mild statement like this defends against the temptation to make overbroad assertions. Leave open the possibility that some people may have grown significantly as lovers while never being part of a healthy community. We are only saying here that healthy community can help some; this is enough to motivate an exploration of the topic.

How do communities help would-be lovers? Without claiming to exhaust the topic, here are three suggestions. Communities 1) help heal the narcissistic wounds which prevent us from seeing each other, 2) flesh out the stories through which we are given moral vision, and 3) support individuals in their specific projects of love. In explaining these assertions I will refer repeatedly to the work of the psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, and the theologian/philosopher, Stanley Hauerwas. To a lesser extent, some observations by a poet, Robert Bly, will mix into the stew.

In *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, Peck says, "there is no adequate one-sentence definition of genuine community." (Peck 60) He then tries to give his readers an idea of his subject by describing various facets of community. According to

Dr. Peck, true community is marked by inclusivity, commitment, consensus, realism, contemplation, safety, brokenness, gracious conflict, and an imprecise something he calls "spirit." Fortunately, he supplements this list of somewhat abstract qualities with many stories of communities. I will try to imitate this admirable policy of illustrating with cases rather than giving a verbal definition of community.

A Home for the Wounded

We have all suffered narcissistic wounds. While very young, we faced the challenges of separateness, vulnerability and limitation. The world was not the perfect oyster it had seemed when we learned to walk and mother was God and we were one with mother. Though the rapprochement with reality was painful, most of us came through those crises, and--unlike the extreme narcissist--we have made a fairly realistic adjustment to the world. But the old wounds still hurt. We sometimes feel the desire to cover them up and live in a false self. To the extent that we do, we are unable to love.

So far, this just recapitulates the psychoanalytic theory presented in chapter one. Note that we need not accept this picture's universalizing tone ("We have all suffered. . ."), nor its explanation of the etiology of narcissism, in order to accept the working description it gives of problems faced by would-be lovers. We can see in our

own lives and in the lives of friends, that people often live behind false selves. We internalize the lie, "I am nothing unless I am united with the perfect other," "I am nothing unless I am always and completely good," or "I am nothing unless I am succeeding." We need to replace the lie with the truth, "I am somebody, and I can get better."

Consider this simple thesis. A community can help a wounded person believe that she is somebody, even though she is not perfectly good, completely successful, or connected to the perfect other. If this is true, then we have a way in which a community can help a person learn love. However, not all groups of people, not even those which are sometimes called "communities," do this. What marks the difference between the community which helps heal wounds and the false community which does not? Examples will help.

I spent four unhappy years in a rural high school in Washington state. (The school no longer exists, as the school district was consolidated into a neighboring district.) I do not mean that I was unhappy all the time; away from school, many good things happened to me in those years. But virtually every day of my attendance at this school was marked by an intense awareness that I did not fit in. I wanted to be liked by other students at the school, but I felt excluded as not quite acceptable.

As happens sometimes in small country schools (I suppose it happens in big schools as well), the student body had united in a

nearly universal disdain for academic achievement. Study was to be endured, not celebrated; if someone applied himself, asked questions, and showed interest in school work, he was suspected of currying favor with the principal and teachers, the warden and guards of our little prison. So I could not win my peers' approval by scholastic success. Brought up in a teetotalling religious tradition, I either lacked the courage to rebel against my parents' values or was wise enough to see the emptiness of teenage drinking parties. So I could not win approval by joining in a primary social gathering of my peers.

Athletics remained. Perhaps I could be accepted if I was good enough in sports. But I failed to rise above mediocrity in football, basketball, or track, even though I went out for all three each of my high school years. Of course, had I "succeeded" in sports, whatever acceptance I would have won thereby would not have eased my pain. I would have been trapped in the performance syndrome, in which the narcissistic style pushes for ever more success. (Cf. "Martin," in chapter one.) We long to be loved for who we are, not what we do. In the end, I graduated as valedictorian of a small class, still feeling rejected and lonely.

Two comments should be made at this point. First, I would not have said, at the time, that I played sports in order to win approval. I was only dimly conscious of how pained I was by exclusion, and I was unaware how that pain drove me to sports. Nor did I see that my driven desire to be accepted by my peers stemmed from from

I felt no "tension out in the hall." I could relax. I began to feel like I was somebody. I began to deal with my tears.

College was clearly an emotionally more healthy place for me than high school. Why? Obviously, in college I felt much more comfortable with the values of the group; academic success was honored, the social life did not include alcohol use, etc. But my acceptance at college was not merely a matter of natural affinities.

M. Scott Peck says that true communities are marked by *inclusivity*. (Peck 61) Communities include people just because they are people; they do not have to prove their worth. To the contrary, a person has to demonstrate his unworthiness or threat to the community in order to be excluded. At George Fox, a deliberate and concerted effort was made to extend welcome to new students. I received the acceptance I always struggled for in high school--and it seemed I did not have to do anything to get it. Of course, the challenge to a community's inclusiveness comes when an individual challenges the group's ways of thinking or acting; perhaps some other student, with different needs, would not have experienced George Fox as a healing community. Perhaps I benefitted from a fortunate fit between my needs and the college milieu. Such things are hard to judge, but it was the college's policy to foster an accepting community, and at least one student was helped by that policy.

In comparing my high school to my college, it becomes clear that real groups only approach the ideal of true community. My high

school was not perfectly awful, nor was George Fox perfectly good. This need not prevent us from seeing that some communities are far more welcoming and productive of self-esteem than others.

Not all communities are long-lived like a college. Peck tells of his experience in a marathon therapy group led by Mac Budgely in 1967. (Peck 33-41) In one weekend of intense interaction, twelve psychiatric professionals experienced the hard work and rewards of community. Three incidents of the weekend which Peck relates illustrate the inclusive nature of community.

First, Peck tells of an experience much like that of the ancient mariner (cf. chapter two). One of the members of the group disliked Peck's East Coast mannerisms and clothing. In return, Peck dispised this Midwesterner's boorishness and cigars. In the wee hours of the morning, the boor fell asleep, snoring obnoxiously.

Wave upon wave of fury built up in me. The waves intensified as I looked at the ashtray next to him with its four stale-smelling dead cigars, their chewed ends still wet with his saliva. My hatred became pure white hot, utterly unforgiving and righteous.

But then a most odd thing happened. Just as I was looking at him with such disgust, he turned into *me*. Or did I turn into him? In any case, I suddenly saw myself sitting in his chair, *my* head rolling back, the snores coming out of *my* mouth. . . . The waves of fury, disgust, and hatred turned instantly into waves of affection and caring. And stayed that way. (Peck 34)

This chapter intends to explore ways community helps one love. It may also be that love makes community possible; this

possibility will not be explored in this chapter. Suffice it to say that Peck's changed attitude toward the Midwestern psychiatrist contributed to the inclusivity of the group as it became a community.

Second, later in the weekend, after much good feeling developed in the group, Peck tells how he began experiencing unaccountable depression. When he reported this to the group, most of the other members accused him of damaging the wonderful process the group was experiencing. If he was depressed at such a time, he must be seriously disturbed. Maybe he should leave the marathon session.

One of the group members suggested that Peck was the voice of the group's depression. At this, most of group began attacking the speaker. Finally, though, group denial broke down and everyone began admitting that he was angry, tired, etc. Once it was able to express and come to grips with depression, the group returned to high spirits. Accepting the unwelcome message of the "misfit" enabled the group to be a community.

Third, near the end of the weekend, a division arose among the group members over the significance of what they were experiencing. Some of the men expressed their insights in spiritual terms, while precisely half of the group rejected all such religious talk. Recognizing the problem, though, the group rapidly resolved it, not by trying to convert the other side, but by affirming the worth of the group in spite of its division. They could accept one another and

even reach consensual decisions without making each other conform to a particular mode.

How does the inclusivity of community help a person learn to love? Unconditional acceptance undermines the narcissistic lie. A person does not have to do or be or have a connection if she is already somebody. The style of psychotherapy known as "client centered" draws much of its power from the "unconditional positive regard" which it offers to each client. For many patients, the therapist's actual words or suggestions matter very little; the thing that draws them back to the weekly hour of therapy like bees to nectar--and the thing that heals them--is the astonishing sense of acceptance they get nowhere else.

Usually, a client sees her therapist once a week or less often. Meanwhile, she lives in the "real world," which for many people consists of family systems, work groups and social organizations which do nothing to counteract the self-devaluing lie of narcissism, or worse, add their own excluding and devaluing messages to her picture of herself. A healthy community, then, without the advantage of the therapist's expertise and in spite of its occasional shortcomings, can do what the therapist cannot do. It can bring healing into the rest of the week.

No matter what we call them, non-inclusive groups are not true communities. Consider again "Martha's" home church, discussed in chapter one. Martha had to earn her acceptance there by being a "good" person. she could not dress in certain ways or engage in

certain activities, one of which was sex. Think of a street gang in an inner city. Boys and girls can only win acceptance in the group by demonstrating they are "bad" people. Initiation may involve wearing certain clothes, participating in petty crime, providing sex to gang leaders, or assisting in more dangerous gang activities such as drug sales or gun fights. In both the unhealthy church and the gang, continued acceptance of the individual is dependent on his or her continued conformity to group norms.

As Peck notes, inclusivity is not an unconditioned value in communities. (Peck 61, 158) An order of monks or nuns might welcome non-believers to visit them and worship and study with them, but it could not admit them into the order. A much less structured weekly support group could accept members (though it would not have any official list) from all sorts of religious or political persuasions, but even it could not be totally inclusive. An alcoholic, for instance, who denied his condition and yet repeatedly showed up at group meetings drunk, might need to be excluded for the group to survive. Behind the exceptions, though, stands the rule; healthy communities accept people without striving to convert their thinking or control their behavior.

A false community, whether a street gang, a college fraternity or an office steno pool, tries to stamp out individuality by converting its members to one way of thinking or controlling them into one way of acting. Sometimes, for instance, in some churches and social clubs, the veneer of polite "community" (Peck, 86-90, calls it

"pseudocommunity") forces individuals to stifle themselves. Mac Budgely's marathon therapy group had to overcome its desire to exclude Scott Peck in order to admit its own angers and depressions and become a genuine community. In a pseudocommunity no one feels safe to be who they really are. Again, we should take "pseudocommunity" as an ideal type; neither hypocritical churches nor criminal gangs are completely devoid of acceptance.

If someone does not feel safe to be who he is, he covers up with a false self which he hopes will win acceptance. Now, it might be argued that one of the marks of health in adults is that they have the cognitive and emotional resources to sustain long term performances, sometimes for good reasons, e.g. to keep a necessary job. But too often group pressures to produce a false self only reinforce the false selves we have from our pasts. Many people cannot feel who they are and they have no safe place where they can learn to feel who they are. Unfortunately, false selves can only offer false love. For such people, a community can help.

Living Out a Vision

In chapter six, I maintained that growth in love requires more than the ability to pay attention to individual realities, as rare and difficult as that skill is. I suggested that lovers need a vision of love, something they can admire and pursue, and that such visions of

admirable things are best communicated by stories. But how do we learn stories?

Many parents have had the experience, on reading a bedtime story to a toddler for the twentieth time (or fortieth, or sixtieth-- children at a certain stage seem to have an insatiable desire for repetition), of being corrected by their audience. The word was not "jumped;" it was "hopped." The wise pig did not merely deny the wolf entrance to his house; he said, "Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin." Precisely. Parents should realize that, while for them bedtime stories might be a convenient way of getting the little person into bed, for the child the stories are much more than that. At the least, besides entertainment, stories nourish children's imaginations and shape their understanding of the moral world.

(Remember this one? The loving mother sheep left her lambs at home with the warning not to be taken in by the strategems of the wolf. But the wicked and clever wolf dusted his feet with flour and thus deceived the lambs. Once the wolf fooled the lambs and entered the house, he gobbled all the lambs save one, who hid behind the clock. Fortunately, the greedy wolf ate so fast that he did not chew, but swallowed the lambs whole. Later, the littlest lamb and the mother found the wolf lying gorged and asleep near the river. They cut open his stomach, thus freeing the lambs, filled the stomach with stones, and sewed it up. When the wolf awoke and tried to stand, he fell into the river and drowned.

Adults may try but never fully understand what this story means to a three year old, combining as it does terror, despair, warning, admonition, humor ["'What a tummy-ache I have,' said the wolf."], and joyful relief.)

Obviously, then, we learn stories at our parent's knee. I do not want to question the importance of the nuclear family in passing on stories and the visions they carry. I want to suggest, though, that families--especially isolated nuclear families--are not enough to communicate moral vision.

A crucial element in individuation is separation from parents. A child must psychologically leave home in order to become an adult on his own terms. Unless we want to imagine that children can learn to be healthy adults apart from their parents *all by themselves* (remember Goldman's *Lord of the Flies*), a child will need others to supply the stories which tell him what it is to be an adult. In his book, *Iron John*, Robert Bly writes that American culture faces a particular crisis about boys in this regard. "We know that our society produces a plentiful supply of boys, but seems to produce fewer and fewer men." (Bly 180)

Bly quotes the wisdom of tribes in New Guinea. "A boy cannot change into a man without the active intervention of the older men." (Bly 15, 86, 87) All over the world, traditional cultures have rites of passage which help children join the adult community outside their nuclear family. Sometimes the men of the village simply appear, without warning, at a boy's door. Until now the boy has lived with

his mother, in the company of women and children. The older men take him away from home. There is no recourse; the mother may put up a mock protest, but she cannot interfere with the way of men. The older men take the boys of the village away to the forest; there they teach them about religion, wisdom, women, courage and dignity. They may subject the boy to silence, darkness, solitude or ritual wounding. He begins to learn the dances, songs and stories which constitute the wisdom of the tribe. When the boy has come through initiation, he is a man. Bly is willing to believe that, more often than not, traditional initiation not only confers the status of adult, it actually helps the boys achieve healthy individuation. (Bly 181-182)

In contrast, our culture has virtually no initiation, no rituals by which the older generation can help boys break free from their parents.

Even worse, boys in our culture do not bond with their fathers. Part of the work of the older men is to help the boy individuate from the father as well as the mother. But how does one break away from what he has never known?

Traditional cultures still in existence seem to have plenty of father. In so-called traditional cultures, many substitute fathers work with the young men. Uncles loosen the son up, or tell him about women. Grandfathers give him stories. Warrior types teach weaponry and discipline, old men teach ritual and soul--all of them honorary fathers. (Bly 93)

By the middle of the twentieth century in Europe and North America a massive change had taken place: the father was working, but the son could not see him working.

Throughout the ancient hunter societies, which apparently lasted thousands of years--perhaps hundreds of thousands--and throughout the hunter-gatherer societies that followed them, and the subsequent agricultural and craft societies, fathers and sons worked and lived together. As late as 1900 in the United States about ninety percent of fathers were engaged in agriculture. In all these societies the son characteristically saw his father working at all times of the day and all seasons of the year.

When the son no longer sees that, what happens? After thirty years of working with young German men, as fatherless in their industrial society as young American men today, Alexander Mitscherlich . . . developed a metaphor: a hole appears in the son's psyche. (Bly 95)

What is "father" to boys in our culture? Bly says the main images of father in our society are the object of ridicule (Dagwood Bumstead, Homer Simpson), the dangerous and probably evil stranger (Darth Vader--"dark father"), the bad-tempered fool (the office worker who comes home unable to teach the son what he does all day), and the weak puddle of indecision (the liberated non-chauvinist who is unable to assert himself because it feels like aggression). (Bly 99) To a large and growing number of boys, "father" has no content at all; products of single (female) parent households and the urban underclass, their world includes no adult men.

Bly thinks our culture needs to recover initiation, but initiation cannot be carried out in an isolated nuclear family. Initiation needs the "old men."

Communities can help replace the missing father in boys' lives, and they can help the boys cross over into adulthood, but such communities need to be intergenerational entities.¹ Bly could be read as simply suggesting that boys (and probably girls, though that is not his interest) need to be connected with older men in order to achieve psychological health. I want to add that psychological growth makes possible, is made possible by, and sometimes just is moral progress. If a boy needs old men to become a man, he will need old men to become a lover.

To grow as lovers, we need a vision of love. We will not hear all the stories we need, if we want to have a vision of love, from our parents. We need to hear and see the stories in a wider community. Perhaps the events in Le Chambon, which I described in chapter six, should be traced less to Andre Trocme's preaching than to something he found already there when he arrived. Pierre Sauvage quotes from a 1934 letter Trocme wrote to a friend.

Here, the old Huguenot spirit is alive. The humblest peasant home has its Bible, and the father reads it every day. So these people, who do not read the papers but the Scriptures, do not stand on the moving soil of opinion but on the rock of the Word of God. (Rittner and Myers, 135)

¹ Perhaps this should be qualified. Peck (160-163) insists that genuine communities have different life spans, and that some rightly pass away quite quickly. So maybe I should say *some* communities need to be intergenerational entities. Whatever benefits a weekend community building experience may have--and I am ready to admit it has many--such short term communities can not initiate boys. Only a long term intergenerational community has the time for the wisdom of the old men to be passed to its boys.

The Chambonnais were a community before the Trocmes arrived. As Sauvage put it in a televised conversation with Bill Moyers, *they knew who they were*. Their clear identity as Huguenots, who had experienced persecution, was distilled in the stories passed down from generation to generation.² The Trocme letter suggests that they understood their own stories to be rooted in the Biblical story. When Andre Trocme and Eduard Theis preached Christian non-violent resistance to evil, they added something to the cumulative story-telling of the community, but they did not reinvent it.

I said in chapter six that we ought to multiply our stories of lovers. A living community does this in the best way. In an intergenerational community we not only hear the old stories, we see them fleshed out in the lives of others.

In 1947, Herbert Nicholson asked a young man, Paul McCracken, to help him transport goats to Okinawa. For McCracken, it was the adventure of a lifetime; he experienced the unseaworthy liberty ship *Simon Benson* (which split open on the succeeding voyage), storms at sea, an unfamiliar culture in the Far East, and Herbert Nicholson preaching love, hope and reconciliation in Japanese and English. Long afterward, in the 1980's, I knew Herbert Nicholson as a kindly, leathery old man who walked with a stoop. But Paul

² During the war, Roger Darcissac, a schoolteacher and friend of Trocme's, collected a book of songs for young people. Included was a song praising and mourning a pastor of Le Chambon who had been arrested centuries before during the Catholic persecution of Huguenots. Cf. Hallie, p. 26.

McCracken, then in his late fifties, remembered and told me about the man who visited the internment camps and took goats to Okinawa. Paul also told me of his own father, who received a dishonorable discharge from the Army during World War I because he would not train as a rifleman. And I add Paul's stories to the stories I tell my sons; they are stories of love, which make a vision of love accessible.

Stanley Hauerwas, in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, writes, "The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stories that constitute a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community." (Hauerwas 24) Hauerwas thinks the project of rationalistic ethical theory, which he calls the search for an "unqualified ethic," which seeks to define morality in terms of the non-specific ahistorical rational being, must be a failure. More importantly, to Hauerwas' mind, an unqualified ethic must make central Christian beliefs irrelevant to ethics. In an unqualified ethic, every person is no less and no more than a rational being. (This is the picture of human nature we saw in Kant in chapter four.) But this is untrue not only to human nature, but to the stories of the tradition. To be a Christian, Hauerwas says, is to "grow into the story of Jesus as the form of God's kingdom." (Hauerwas 30)

Like Iris Murdoch, Hauerwas distrusts the existentialist idea of freedom in which I am only free in my present decision if I am free of all "decisions" I made in the past which were less than "fully

mine." (Hauerwas 36, 37) None of my decisions in the past were "fully mine" as the existentialist would like. I can not "identify myself with my will," as Murdoch quotes Stuart Hampshire as writing. (Murdoch 5) I am a historical creature, engaged in the process of pursuing a moral vision, perhaps a good one, perhaps not. Hauerwas rejects the idea of the moral agent as pure chooser: ". . .to be an agent means I am able to locate my action within an ongoing history and within a community of language-users." (Hauerwas 42)³

Just as communities need not be perfect to give enough acceptance to help heal narcissistic wounds, they need not be perfect to flesh out a vision of love. Love, like good, is a perfectionistic

³ This last phrase, "a community of language-users," raises a Pandora's box of questions beyond the scope of this book. In rejecting any unqualified ethic, Hauerwas insists that we should speak of qualified ethics; he is most interested in a Christian ethic, but others might be interested in a secular ethic or a Muslim ethic. In each case Hauerwas would insist on the importance of the qualifier. How, then, do ethicists of each sort talk to each other about morality? Do the adherents of a Jewish ethic and a Christian ethic live in the same "community of language-users"? The defender of the search for an unqualified ethic--an adherent of any of the standard rationalistic theories--might claim that a happy result of his position is that everybody lives in the same moral community. This defender sees rational ethics as a defense against relativism. If we allow someone's particular history, including the tradition in which he was nurtured, to *count* in defining and interpreting his moral life, are we not then committed to the idea that "right," "good" and other such words mean different things to different people?

Similar questions sometimes arise for philosophers who speak of "forms of life" and "language games" when dealing with epistemological questions. Wittgenstein tried to imagine conversations between educated twentieth century Europeans and tribal people from non-technological cultures. Do such people inhabit the same community of language-users? What about modern, educated believers in God and modern, educated disbelievers: are their seemingly intractable disagreements due to diverse communities of language use?

In spite of the interest of these questions, they must be passed over. In this chapter I am interested in community in so far as it incarnates a vision of something morally admirable and pursuable.

concept. A wife may have loved her husband with exquisite joy, and yet truthfully say she loves him better three years later. So a community, when it lives out a vision of love, *points* to a love which always lies further on, beyond the love which has been enacted in the community's history.

A moral vision tells me who I am by showing me what I can become. In this they resemble initiation rites, which integrate children into their cultural traditions and let them see what they can become. A moral vision and the initiation process are both normative; they tell someone what he *really* is (in spite of appearances), and therefore what he can be.

Interestingly, modern psychology both rejects and accepts the normative aspect of initiation and moral vision. On one hand, psychology regards itself as a science, interested only in the neutral empirical questions of how people behave and think. On the other side, psychology tries to be therapeutic. Therapists interest themselves at least as much in what people *should* do and think as in what they do and think. In its therapeutic mode psychology substitutes for the old men and women of traditional societies who intervene to help children grow up and who tell the stories which give moral vision. Thus, novelists have recognized the likenesses between therapists and shamans. For example, in Murdoch's novel *The Good Apprentice*, Thomas McCaskerville, a psychiatrist, repeatedly considers retirement from his practice, not just because of age, but because he sees himself in the role of magician, carefully

arranging meetings and developments in his patients' lives so as to make them better, and his magic has about run out.

In a society in which family has been reduced to the nuclear family or less, in which there is in effect no older generation to initiate its young, and in which pseudo-communities abound, we should not wonder that people turn to therapists. How else can they gain the ability to love? Nor should we be surprised that therapists feel like lonely magicians whose magic supply may soon run dry, since they are ambivalent about the normative aspects of their science.

A community which accepts an individual for who she is, and lives out the stories of a vision of love so that she can see it, may greatly help her learn to love.

Supporting Projects of Love

No one loves in the abstract, a point well made by Charles Schultz when he put the self-contradictory words in Linus' mouth: "I love mankind; it's the people I can't stand!" If I want to be a lover, at some point I get involved with other people (or beings, if loving God is part of my goal).

I have to love somebody, a person with a history and a particular combination of character traits. Love, then, takes the form of historically particular projects of love, i.e., friendships, romances, mentorings, parentings, etc. Sometimes we exercise a measure of

choice or will in entering a project of love (a person agrees to date someone, knowing a romantic relationship may result; a couple plans a pregnancy, knowing it will lead to parenthood), but often we simply find ourselves already engaged in a project of love (a child does not choose its parents, yet feels obligated to love them; when a monastic order merges two houses, the monks have no choice but to try to love their new brothers). Since projects of love are historical and particular, they exhibit an ineliminable character of chanciness. Lovers know that *this* relationship will be different from all others; past experience cannot guarantee success this time. The chanciness of love can influence a person's choices in entering, or not entering, projects of love. The commitment-shy playboy is a stock figure of fiction and film, but the fear that motivates him--that love carries unforeseeable risks--affects the choices of real people.

Diogenes Allen uses a character from Murdoch's *An Unofficial Rose* to illustrate what Soren Kierkegaard called the life of the aesthete. (Allen 68-82) Randall feels trapped in his marriage to Ann, his respectable, dutiful, boring wife, who symbolizes his whole life, encased in his old dreams. The rose nursery garden which they built, their children, memories of early romance: none of this touches Randall anymore. So, when the chance comes, Randall flees to Rome with his mistress, where he realizes that one day she will bore him too; this does not matter, since "There are lots of other beautiful women."

According to the Judge of Kierkegaard's "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage," the aesthete, represented by Randall, does not understand what love is. Only in commitment, the bonds of marriage, can romance reach its fullest flower. Of course, Kierkegaard criticizes this ethical stage, including the commitment it requires, too. The Judge recognizes that marriage needs commitment for love to grow and develop. But what justifies an unconditional commitment? The Judge tends to justify it on the basis of the happiness such a marriage may provide. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard indicates this is not enough. The Judge's ethical stage needs to be surpassed by a religious stage. Allen agrees: ". . . Christians know that the fundamental foundation of marriage is the same as the fundamental foundation of life, namely, the conviction that our goal and end is beyond every merely human state and condition. Our goal is instead the kingdom of God, which is only partly realized at present." (Allen 82-83)

I want to generalize Allen's point about romance to all projects of love. Should I give myself as mentor to this student? Should we adopt a child into our family? Should I let my acquaintance depend on me as a friend? In each case we may quite legitimately worry whether the relationship may not bring more pain and evil than good. A merely "ethical" response to these worries--that the risk is necessary in order to achieve a potential good only available by commitment to the project--cannot justify a commitment which needs to be unconditional.

Some projects of love (not all), as Kierkegaard saw in relation to romance, need to be entered with unconditional commitment in order to give the conditions in which our hopes for the projects can be realized. As examples, consider adoption and marriage. An adoptive parent must be able to say to a previously abused child who is throwing a tantrum, "I love you. No matter what you do, I will keep loving you." A bride or groom promises to love, "for better or for worse." Without the unconditional nature of the commitment, the child or spouse lives on emotional tenderhooks.⁴ *People have a need to be loved for who they are, not what they do* --if that is true, at least some of us need to love other people unconditionally, on pain of a basic human need going unmet.

But projects of love are historical and particular; they cannot be cured of chanciness. Knowing this, how can anyone enter a project of love in the right way? How can we make an unconditional commitment to a spouse or a child when we are aware of the statistics surrounding divorce and disrupted child placements?

⁴ Someone might object that this insistence on unconditional commitment is out of date, like traditional marriage vows. Marriages last as long as they are good for the people in them. Similarly, adoptive parents should make realistic commitments to their children; after all, the child may act so outrageously that the placement has to be disrupted. Not all children are adoptable. Two comments:

1. These objections miss the force of Kierkegaard's Judge. He knows that life is chancy, but he argues that in marriage the best "odds" come to those who commit.

2. In regard to adoption at least, the objection is simply wrong. If the "realistic" parent adopts with the attitude that the placement is conditional, the child will know it; no one is a good enough actor to hide the truth from the child. Then, even if the placement is "successful"--the child lives with the parent until its majority--the child will have been pushed into performing for acceptance, a recipe for narcissism.

Agreeing with Kierkegaard, Allen holds that an unconditional commitment must be grounded in religious considerations.

So the only possible basis for the endurance and continuation of the state of marriage is a quite 'arbitrary' element, arbitrary from every human point of view, namely, a vow taken before the eternal God. From either the aesthetic or ethical point of view, a person who undertakes a pledge which binds her unconditionally is utterly arbitrary and absurd. It is for this reason that the Judge actually slipped over into the religious category. (Allen 83)

I want to use the language of a moral vision to say something similar. We take on projects of love in pursuit of some vision of love. (Compare Allen's wording. The Christian's "fundamental foundation" is a "conviction" about a "goal and end.") Though I am aware of the chanciness of marriage or adoption, I make the commitments necessary to them, not because of some personal characteristic which makes me think I am immune to chance, but because I admire and pursue some vision of love.⁵

If I am right about this, that it is in pursuit of a moral vision that people can make the unconditional commitments needed for at least some projects of love, then communities have an important role

⁵ I want to leave undecided the question whether this move transfers all the talk of moral visions in these last two chapters to a Kierkegaardian religious stage. Some readers may think it does. Other readers may see moral vision talk as a way of grounding the unconditional commitments of love without resorting the division between ethical and religious.

Naturally, then, I will also bypass discussion of the interesting idea that all moral visions, even those which produce evil (e.g. a vision devoted to racial purity), belong to the religious stage.

in supporting individuals in their projects of love. Communities nurture the visions which enable certain commitments.

Communities can support projects of love in at least two other ways, both prosaic and obvious. First, a community listens and encourages. Second, community members can hold one another accountable to their vision.

Peck says that genuine community is marked by *realism*. (Peck 64-65) In a healthy marriage, two minds working on the same problem give much better odds that a good solution will be found than one alone; each one sees possibilities and issues that the other does not. Larger groups have an even greater advantage, says Peck, provided they encourage individuality through acceptance. In a community I am free to be myself; I can say what I think and feel. The pooled experience and wisdom of a group which shares my vision of love becomes available to me when I tell them of the struggles (which inevitably come) in my projects of love. The other community members listen to me; then, knowing me intimately, they can encourage me to keep working at love's projects.

Some moral philosophers have given attention to "weakness of will," wondering why people sometimes know the thing they ought to do without doing it. Other thinkers have thought this phenomenon of little importance to philosophy, since they envisioned the task of moral philosophy as giving rational explanations of right conduct rather than practical advice, which they left to moralists. Readers of chapters three and four can predict which side I think is right.

Obviously, philosophers ought to be interested in possible ways to overcome weakness of will.

John Wesley discovered--in the sense that no one told him, though many wise people in many cultures have also known it--a simple device which can help overcome weakness of will. If someone tells other people whom she trusts what she thinks she ought to do, it is far more likely that she will do it than if she kept the matter secret. And if she meets with an accepting community on a regular basis, she will be even more likely to fulfill the historically particular requirements of her projects of love, because the group, by its knowledge of her and its desire that she become what she envisions, holds her *accountable* to her projects. So the founder of Methodism instructed his followers to hold "class meetings," in which believers were to confess their sins to each other and pray for each other on a weekly basis.

Accountability in a community carries the danger of legalism, perhaps especially in religious groups. Remember that, according to Peck, a genuine community must be inclusive; it must value people for who they are rather than what they do. The ability of a community to hold its members accountable to the shared vision is mirrored by the pseudocommunity's pressures on individuals to conform to group norms and convert to group dogmas. Discerning the difference in real life, where no community is perfect, but only on the way, requires practical wisdom. Nevertheless, I maintain that

a community can help the individual in his projects of love by holding him accountable to do the things he knows love demands.⁶

The example of Wesley's class meetings shows something obvious, to which I will draw attention. Much of this chapter (and this whole study, for that matter) has been couched in the language of psychology. Further, I suspect that the locutions of popular psychology have entered my unconsidered speech at least as much as into any other late twentieth century American's.⁷ We must resist, though, the idea that healthy communities require the ability to speak the language of psychology, at least in the forms we are used to. Wesley's followers (think of eighteenth and nineteenth century American farm families) confessed their sins to each other, prayed for each other, and--if we grant that at least some of the thousands of class meetings were healthy communities--helped each get better psychologically and morally. They were "vulnerable;" they gave "unconditional positive regard;" they "processed feelings;" they "held one another accountable;" etc.--without using any such psychological locutions.

The moral pilgrim need not find a group that speaks the language of therapists in order to find a community that can heal

⁶ Again, do not read this "doing" in behavioristic terms. I may well confess to my meeting a need to change an attitude or way of thinking. Later, they may ask me how the matter is going. Knowing they may ask, I am more careful to "do" what I am supposed to do. Real moral action may be entirely internal.

⁷ Consider: "What I hear you saying is . . ." "That's not where I'm at." "She is really into . . ." "Hey, you're ok" "And then his parent said . . . (not another person) Etc. I suspect that popular psychology has impacted our language and thought as much as Freudian ideas changed the language and thought of Europe's intelligentsia in the first three decades of this century.

hurts, flesh out a vision of love, and support projects of love. For example, Peck thinks the most successful community in the country is Alcoholics Anonymous. (Peck 77) Some AA groups probably have psychologically trained members, but most get along without any serious study of psychological theory. AA procedures strongly encourage acceptance and honesty in the group, characteristics which foster community and health.

Conclusion

Perhaps the best way to end this chapter, and the book, is simply to indicate the interrelations between the theses made here. In this chapter I have suggested that healthy communities aid would-be lovers by providing a place in which 1) narcissistic wounds can be healed, 2) stories of love told, and 3) projects of love supported. The first two of these theses correspond to two of the four main positive contentions of the book, i.e., that narcissism inhibits love (chapter one) and that we need a vision of the good/love to pursue (chapter six). The other main positive ideas of the book are that we learn to love by learning to see others accurately and with compassion (chapter two) and that healthy communities can help us learn to love (the present chapter).

Thus, the four main theses of the book relate to a simple contention, that moral progress--in the sense of learning to love--is possible. The rest of the book--chapters three, four, five and seven--

attempt to defend the positive contentions of the study as philosophically sayable and important.

A comment from chapter one should be repeated here. It is possible, though I cannot think how, that all four of the positive suggestions of this book are mistaken; that is, none of them is good counsel for the would-be lover. But if they are wrong, they are wrong because some other way is right. And if they are wrong, it is worth philosophers' effort to find the right way, for basic to the entire study is the conviction that, as Iris Murdoch wrote, "love is a central concept in morals."

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