Disruption, Conversation, & Ethics: A Study on the Limits of Self-Legislation

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This dissertation exposes the significance of 'self-disruption' in ethical development (the process of understanding how to flourish), especially as incited through conversation. By 'self-disruption', I mean the experience of being torn away from self-concern (which is a self-reflective enterprise) by something other. 'Self-concern' here refers to one's attachment to one's projects and plans—including the future self that one seeks to produce (*qua* preservation of its current identity). This study engages the history of ethical thinking, but it is not antiquarian. To make my case, I primarily rely on Emmanuel Levinas's ethical metaphysics and critically interpret and draw from insights within 1) Kant's account of the moral self, 2) Aristotle's account of the virtuous soul, and 3) the teleological account of the self that we find in contemporary virtue ethics. My claim is that what is latent in each of these accounts is the pivotal role of having one's attention arrested by 'the other', and that fostering this phenomenon belongs to the work of moral philosophy understood as moral cultivation. This research homes in on key discussions within Anglo-American ethics, particularly those that stem from the reevaluation of the nature and task of moral philosophy in the 20th-century. I am skeptical as to whether the resulting Aristotelian virtue ethics is as radical as its advocates claim, and I challenge its reliance on narrative coherence. I do not seek to deny the narrative dimensions of self-understanding, but I do want to underscore the ethical importance of welcoming their disruption.

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Dedicated to the many mentors & conversation partners in my life who had faith in my mind, & taught me how to celebrate & foster the joy & challenge of philosophical conversation.

INTRODUCTION

This project is motivated by two distinct, albeit related movements in 20th-century ethics: 1) the turn to Aristotelian virtue ethics in the Anglo-American tradition; and 2) the radical reclamation of ethics that we find in the ethical-metaphysics of the Continental thinker, Emmanuel Levinas. Despite emerging from different traditions, these movements are both responses to the dire state of 'Western' moral philosophy. As a survivor of the Holocaust, Levinas is also explicitly responding to the atrocities of the 20th-century, understanding them as a testimony to the West's loss of moral sense—the fear of death and drive toward self-preservation clearly overshadowing the fear of war. What interests me is that the former turns to Aristotle to recover sense in ethics, while the latter's recovery of ethics (hearkening to the 'Platonic Good') critiques phenomenology, which is itself born out of a revived interest in Aristotle.

As the title suggests, this project is broadly a study on the limits of self-legislation. 'Self-legislation' refers to the distinctly Kantian notion of autonomy (of the will); 'limits' refers to the question of whether or not moral sense is something that we can theoretically ascertain and autonomously will into being; or put differently, whether moral sense is the product of reflective self-consciousness. I am engaging with Kant because Kant marks a crucial shift in ethics—arguably representing the *ethos* of modern moral philosophy, and depicting the autonomous, self-determining sense of self that, for

the most part, reigns in the Anglo-American West—and his hyper-rationalistic vision of morality is a standard point of critique within contemporary ethics in general (even within contemporary deontology). This is to say that post-Kantian moral philosophy cannot help but contend with Kant's staunch moral law, although critiques almost unanimously agree that despite its provocation, Kant's project (at least to some extent) fails. Although utilitarianism (the other pole of the reigning theoretical binary in moral philosophy: Kantianism-deontology *or* utilitarianism-consequentialism) and its ostensible reduction of ethics to economics is also an obvious point of critique within contemporary ethics, I do not explicitly address the theory or its inception, as this would vastly exceed the scope of this project.

Four of the five chapters will probe phenomenologies of the self and their relation to goodness, as I am analyzing *self*-legislation. Goodness is here loosely understood as ethics, morality, virtue, *eudaimonia*, living well, though I will attempt to refine that definition (as self-disruption) in the last two chapters of the project. Part I (Ch. 1, 2) will turn back to key moments within the history of ethics. Part II (Ch. 3, 4, 5) will focus on the contemporary scene in light of Part I's conclusions.

Since Kant often serves as a springboard for contemporary ethical theory—primarily as an obvious point of critique—I begin by analyzing Kantian morality by way of Kant's understanding of *who we are*, investigating whether there is more to Kant than meets the eye. Chapter 1, "The moral self," claims that, mirroring the motivations we find within contemporary virtue ethics, Kant's project can be understood as a response to the then-dire state of moral philosophy, and a concomitant radical retrieval of an essential dimension of who we are. In this chapter, I argue that for Kant, we are more than

production-oriented patterns of behavior (solely motivated by pleasure and pain), and are in fact constituted by the capacity to bring new and unexpected things into the world—defined by an intrinsic (moral) desire for justice. Crucial to Kant's account is that our desire for justice is experienced as a *disruption* of self-conceit by the other.

Because I am addressing the retrieval of Aristotle within contemporary Anglo-American ethics, Chapter 2, "The virtuous soul," probes the roots of the movement by examining Aristotle's seminal ethical texts with an eye toward Aristotle's understanding of *who we are*. In this chapter, I argue that the most crucial insight we find within Aristotle's account is that the condition for the possibility of happiness (*eudaimonia*)—which involves embracing what is *good in itself*, and embodying confidence while navigating through the world of coming-to-be—is excellent moral education (virtuous others), which ought to be understood as the most important form of justice. Given the role Aristotelian virtue ethics has played as an alternative of sorts to deontology and utilitarianism-consequentialism, this chapter also underlines the sense in which Aristotle's account is by no means incompatible with Kant's, though their respective emphases, approaches, and epochs are obviously distinct. My claim is that there is an important sense in which Kant's moral project can be understood as *grounding* Aristotle's ethical project by establishing the condition for the possibility of virtue and virtuous relations. What is important here is that virtue involves the disruption of a certain mode of means-ends projection (as this heeds unimpeded activity), as well as disruption *qua* intervention by virtuous others.

Chapter 3, "Recollecting the teleological self," fast-forwards to the ways in which Aristotelian approaches have been employed to address the stifled state of contemporary

moral philosophy. The chapter begins with a description of the crisis in 20th-century moral philosophy as rendered by seminal texts in the Anglo-American tradition, underscoring 1) the problematic conception of the self (as predominantly production-oriented) that undergirds and fosters the perpetuation of that crisis, and 2) the movement to reclaim Aristotelian virtue ethics as a response. I then critically interpret two Aristotelian-inspired approaches to reimagining the task of moral philosophy and the moral philosopher—one at the inception of the movement (Alasdair Macintyre), and the other within the last decade (Talbot Brewer). I conclude by identifying the major insights to build from in these exemplary cases, especially their recovery of our intrinsic desire to immerse ourselves in activities for their own sake, that is, our desire to lose or disrupt ourselves. I end by returning to Macintyre's infamous claim that Aristotle and Nietzsche are the only viable theoretical alternatives in our disordered contemporary context, proposing that Levinas's unique reclamation of moral sense and the ethical 'self' may, in fact, be a viable 'third way', especially when understood through, and combined with, the motivations, critiques, and reclamations showcased in this chapter.

The conclusion to Chapter 3 serves as a bridge to Chapter 4, "The disrupted self," which provides an interpretation of Levinas's radical account of the self (with a special emphasis on Levinas's metaphysics of communication and conversation, and conversation's relation to justice), ultimately suggesting that Levinas represents a different ethical tradition that does not fall prey to Nietzsche's indictment or the woes of emotivism. In this chapter, I argue that in addition to providing an innovative approach to the problems we face in moral philosophy—particularly, the question of how we *ground* morality—Levinas's vindication of ethics exudes the spirit of Kant (as portrayed in

Chapter 1), while expressing key insights from Aristotle, especially as retrieved in contemporary Aristotelian ethics.

My ultimate claim is that, despite various dimensions of contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethics resonating with what we find in Levinas, Levinas's conception of the self as disrupted (being-for-the-other) goes further than contemporary Neoaristotelian retrievals of *the good* by insisting on a *deposed* rather than self-governing understanding of who we are. This is to say that Levinas seeks to offer a distinctly ethical sense of the self that is neither primarily self-legislating (autonomous), nor unified by a coherent quest for the good (teleological). For Levinas, the self, even prior to its face-to-face encounter with the other, was not, is not, and never will be an island unto itself. Although autonomy (the self understood as a self-legislator) and narrative coherence (the self understood as an individual on a unique, unified quest for the good) are incontestable modes of being, for Levinas, they are antithetical to ethics insofar as they are self-interested—motivated by self-preservation and self-determination.

The aim of Chapter 5, "Self-disruption," is threefold: first, I address two salient critiques of Levinas's account of ethics; second, in light of my responses to these critiques, I emphasize the significance of self-disruption in ethical development—inspired by Levinas's reimagining of 'the good', but also as latent in 1) Kant's account of the moral self, 2) Aristotle's account of the virtuous self, and 3) the teleological account of the self that we find in contemporary virtue ethics. Third, I end with a brief note on moral philosophy's relation to moral cultivation with a view to the significance of self-disruption and its relation to justice (*qua* conversation) as described in Chapter 4. I contend that ethics is conversation in the sense that ethics hinges on a sense of hospitality

to the disruption of reflective self-consciousness, which ultimately amounts to embracing our exposure to the other—first and foremost through conversation.

In sum, the critical aim of this project is to address 20th-century debates on the task of moral philosophy and the moral philosopher. To get there, I first turn to the seminal works of the figures sitting at the heart of those analyses (Kant and Aristotle), developing a modest theory of their compatibility. My overarching goal is to offer a response to both the impasses and Aristotelian remedies that we find within the Anglo-American tradition by critically interpreting and building upon the most robust reclamation of ethics that we find within the Continental tradition (Levinas), ultimately exploring to what extent these disparate accounts from distinct traditions might be attuned to each other, and can thus lead to new insights about *who we are*, *where we come from*, *where we are headed*, and *why*.

PART I

CHAPTER 1: THE MORAL SELF

> *'Sons of Ariston,' he sang, 'divine offspring of an illustrious hero.' The epithet is very appropriate, for there is something truly divine in being able to argue as you have done for the superiority of injustice, and remaining unconvinced by your own arguments. And I do believe that you are not convinced—this I infer from your general character, for had I judged only from your speeches I should have mistrusted you. But now, the greater my confidence in you, the greater is my difficulty in knowing what to say. For I am in a strait between two; on the one hand I feel that I am unequal to the task; and my inability is brought home to me by the fact that you were not satisfied with the answer which I made to Thrasymachus, proving, as I thought, the superiority which justice has over injustice. And yet I cannot refuse to help, while breath and speech remain to me; I am afraid that there would be an impiety in being present when justice is evil spoken of and not lifting up a hand in her defense. And therefore I had best give such help as I can.*
>
> **—Socrates, Plato's *Republic*, 368a-c**

Although Kant's often-considered 'failed project'[1] marks a problematic moment in the history of ethics (in its hyper-rationalistic account of how one ought to live), serving as an obvious point of critique in various neoaristotelian accounts, Kant's project focuses on a very basic, incontestable dimension of human experience: the experience of being compelled to consider the other before oneself. Regardless of whether one agrees with Kant's moral claims, he persists (more than 200 years later) as a force to be reckoned with, signifying, as we will see below, the original critique of what later becomes utilitarianism-consequentialism—scandalously provoking us to consider the possibility of a sense of morality that is universal, necessary, and non-experiential.

[1] I have in mind Alasdair Macintyre's notorious critique of Kant (and the failure of the Enlightenment in general) in *After Virtue* (which will be highlighted in Chapter 3), as well as various contemporary Kantian accounts of ethics that, while honoring the spirit of Kant's project, challenge and amend his method and claims in distinct ways (e.g., John Rawls, Christine Korsgaard, and Stephen Darwall).

This chapter will probe the roots of contemporary deontology by critically engaging the work of Immanuel Kant. I will begin by analyzing Kant's motivations for crafting the moral project that he does, and, after providing an exegetical account of his seminal ethical texts (grounded in those motivations), I will flesh out the conception of the self that sits at the heart of Kantian ethics, so as to reveal *who* serves as the source of the particular set of values for the self that we find in Kant's moral theory and subsequent breeds of deontology. I will then demonstrate that for Kant, the most authentic self (the moral self) is one that has given itself over to its desire[2] for justice—synonymous with acting from duty—and that the chief values that correspond with this conception of the self are freedom and honesty. For Kant, these two values mark creative capacity in each and every one of us, serving as the condition for the possibility of bringing new phenomena into the world—most importantly, justice: here defined as each member of humanity having the ability to self-determine *among others*. Crucial to Kant's account is that our desire for justice is experienced as a disruption of self-conceit by the other—a point that I elucidate in Chapter 5, after connecting it to Emmanuel Levinas's account of the disrupted self in Chapter 4.

My chief claim is that Kant's primary moral aim is to demonstrate that we are more than self-interested, effect-oriented automatons, and that we should not reduce ourselves to predictable, production-oriented patterns of behavior. It is this dimension of self-retrieval that safeguards Kant's moral theory as something more than a failed project, driving contemporary ethicists to continue to engage him, despite the project's ostensible

[2] While this is clearly a term that Kant is not interested in employing in moral contexts, I use it because I think (as I will attempt to illustrate here) that, phenomenologically speaking, he describes what it is to be *pulled toward* the moral law—pulled toward that which is not experientially determined.

failure. And as we will see in the chapters that follow, this dimension of Kant not only squares with contemporary Aristotelian accounts, but also illustrates an intimate relation between Aristotle and Kant's respective *ethos*.

1.1 KANT'S MOTIVATIONS

A supreme principle of morality. In the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant emphasizes that the project he undertakes is *unprecedented* in moral philosophy, and will thus reveal something that *all* moral philosophers prior to him have failed to see, even if it was latent in their claims. Notoriously, Kant's task is an exercise in pure philosophy: that is, an exercise in *a priori* philosophy, probing the condition for the possibility of moral phenomena.

It is in this mode of probing—understood as Kant's transcendental method—that we find what could be considered the proto-type for what Heidegger later coins an 'existential analytic': a thematized method of analysis that, while examining the human condition, does not rely on biology, anthropology, psychology, or any of the natural sciences. Existential analysis so construed works to uncover what is distinct from *qua* condition of, albeit *immanent in*, things as we encounter them in our day-to-day life.[3]

[3] As Kant writes in the Preface to the *Groundwork*, all knowledge in philosophy is either material (the laws of the nature/physics and the laws of freedom/ethics) or formal (logic). Material philosophy involves objects in the world and the laws that constitute them, while formal philosophy has nothing to do with the empirical. The laws of freedom—best understood as the business of morality (for Kant, distinct from ethics)—involve the laws of the will and the ways in which objects in world are subject to those laws. Unlike physics, however, which considers the laws according to which everything does happen, "the doctrine of morals" considers the laws "according to which everything ought to happen, although these moral laws also consider the conditions under which what ought to happen frequently does not" (4:388).

For Kant, metaphysics—which he tempers by redefining it in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the science dealing with the conditions for the possibility of experience, rather than the unwarranted, despotic overstepping of principles beyond all possible use in experience (Aviii)—has two prongs. The first is the metaphysics of nature (what is arguably established in the first *Critique*), and the second is the metaphysics of morals. Rather than providing an account of practical anthropology dealing with the empirical dimension of ethics (how moral laws unfold in everyday life, i.e., habituated virtues and vices), Kant stresses the need to *first* substantiate the purely rational dimension of ethics to inspect and then showcase, what, if anything, reason can accomplish on its own (4:389). Although the laws of morality "require a power of judgment sharpened by experienced, partly in order to distinguish in what cases they are applicable, and partly to gain for them access to the human will as well as influence for putting them into practice," it is imperative to locate the rules that necessarily apply in all cases, so as to eliminate the possibility of moral corruption (4:389).

What Kant has in mind with moral corruption is a sort of moral relativism in which self-interested ends justify the means—something like Thrasymachus's definition of justice in the Plato's *Republic*: justice is whatever is advantageous to the stronger. Kant writes in his pre-critical meditations on ethics, "One always talks so much of virtue. One must, however, abolish injustice before one can be virtuous. One must set aside comforts, luxuries and everything that oppresses others while elevating myself, so that I am not one of those who oppress their species. Without this conclusion, all virtue is impossible" (20:151). Justice, for Kant, is the condition for the possibility of virtue;

Kant's moral project is perhaps best understood as a search for the condition for the possibility of a virtuous society.

With Thrasymachus's definition of justice in mind, it is not only helpful, but crucial to think of Kant's moral project as a continuation of the conversation set in motion by the *Republic*, as Kant answers both of the questions guiding the dialogue by offering a decisive definition on what, specifically, justice is and why we *ought* to be just. Central to Kant's account is that these answers do not rely on judgment in a life beyond this one (which in turn relies on a dogmatic account of something we cannot know with certainty),[4] but instead on reason alone. As we will see below, this marks Kant's shift from heteronomy to autonomy, daring us to rely on ourselves ("What is Enlightenment?"), rather than on the arbitrary rules we have been fed through various bodies of power—insisting that we can locate the supreme principle of morality (the moral law), universally and necessarily governing everything we do, in reason alone.

A metaphysics of morals must, therefore, precede all of moral philosophy's practical endeavors, including the analysis of moral dispositions (the virtues, and how, specifically, the moral law is fulfilled), and moral education in general. For Kant, these practical endeavors, are not, properly speaking, moral philosophy. Moral philosophy is the consideration of the "ideas and principles of a pure will and not the actions and conditions of human volition as such, which is for the most part drawn from psychology"

[4] I have in mind here an interpretation of Socrates's Myth of Err in Book X of the *Republic* as his final attempt to "answer" the question of why one should be just (or put differently, whether justice is in fact better than injustice). In the myth, Socrates appeals to a final judgment in a "world" beyond this one, in which one's soul is "laid bare" before the gods of the past, present, and future—in front of the spindle of necessity—judged according to its deeds in life. The soul being judged is given a variety of future lives to choose from (the variety depending on the past life of the soul), and then the soul would make its decision based on its knowledge of what is good and what is bad (this understanding of course fostered by its habits in life).

(4:391). Moral philosophy is the consideration of *a priori* moral intention, moral motivation. Kant makes it clear that before he can begin constructing a metaphysics of morals, he must first critically examine pure practical reason itself. But before he can do that, he needs to first establish what (if anything) the supreme principle of morality is (4:392)—and this will be the function of the *Groundwork*. Methodologically, the way in which Kant will locate the moral law is by examining ordinary knowledge, i.e., what most people think the moral law is (because people do, in fact, make moral distinctions), then abstracting the universal principle that is operative within, always and already informing, common sense's understanding of morality. It is worth stressing, as Kant incessantly does, that this (transcendental) method involves conceptually separating things (*essences*) that are never separated *in existence*.

Contra empiricism. In addition to seeking to combat the corruption that can and does result from lacking a supreme norm by which people can correctly appraise their actions, it is important to emphasize that Kant's moral project stands in the wake of empiricism—a tradition relying on sense experience and denying the possibility of non-experiential knowledge. This tradition includes, but is not limited to, the works of John Locke, George Berkeley, and, most provocative to Kant, David Hume.

In Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume asks: *what is the foundation of morality?* The rhetorical dilemma he offers in response to this question is that the foundation of moral principles is either 1) reason, marked by universality, truth, and disputability, or 2) sentiment, marked by particularity, based on perception, and, rather than being disputable, being a matter of taste (134-5). Hume's slippery answer is that it is a false dilemma; both options are right and wrong. Reason plays the role of

adjudicating sentiment, by making decisions and drawing distinction—fine-tuning moral sense, habituating virtue. But in the end, desire (grounding sentiment) is what provides humanity with its final end (3.2). Moral sentiments (virtues and vices), i.e., the observable patterns we find in human behavior, flow from feelings of praise or blame. Virtue involves what is agreeable or pleasing, because it is praiseworthy, approved of by others; vice involves what is disagreeable or painful, because others disapprove of it.

Hume stresses that judgment from others, based on how one *appears*, is a vital indication of moral value. Just as we find in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (as we will see in Chapter 2), pleasure and pain are *the* indicators of moral action—though for Hume, specifically pleasure and pain are felt in response to the approval or disapproval of others. Crucial for Hume is that there is no purely rational measure of what is right and wrong. Reason alone cannot motivate action or indicate what is virtuous. What motivates us are, at least for the most part, the feelings evoked by the way we are received or rejected by others. Kant of course disagrees with Hume's answer, and will go on to claim that it is reason, *and reason alone*, that can truly measure what is right and wrong. And that this measuring process has nothing to do with pleasurable consequences, the tastes of others, or observable patterns in human behavior—intriguing patterns that might tempt one to reduce human beings to mere expressions of those predictable patterns and nothing else.

Means and ends. Within this vein, another key motivating factor in Kant's moral project is providing a moral principle that is defined by the absolute exclusion of the calculation of ends. Or in other words, Kant seeks to undermine moral schemas governed by the Machiavellian precept that, as far as action goes, *the ends justify the means*. As he puts it in the second *Critique*, the empiricism of practical reason is the most serious threat

to morality because it destroys the root of moral dispositions by placing good and evil in experiential consequences (for example, projections of happiness as the sum total of all our inclinations).

In *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Project* (published ten years after the *Groundwork*), Kant questions whether the very notion of perpetual peace is merely a dream among philosophers, given the fact that heads of state can never get enough of war. He then provides an account of the conditions for the possibility of perpetual peace, i.e., a just world, which unsurprisingly hinges on adherence to the moral law, albeit re-construed as *right*. It is worth considering some key aspects of *Perpetual Peace* before analyzing Kant's seminal ethical texts, as Kant's vision of a cosmopolitan constitution[5] grounded in his understanding of what is perhaps best understood as universal human rights, in fact, frames and makes sense of his pre-political texts. Kant's aim is to facilitate humanity's movement toward an international state of perpetual peace—one in which morality is actualized, practically married with politics, ultimately making a case for the relevance of theory in politics.

Most noteworthy in Kant's approach in *Perpetual Peace* is that the condition of peace is not natural (for Kant, the state of nature is a state of war), but must be constructed, cultivated, and practiced. The mere suspension of hostilities among nations—*agreeing to disagree,* e.g., establishing a peace pact rather than a pacific league—simply preserves the constant threat of future hostility, even if the outbreak of

[5] Kant takes pains to distinguish this (the World Republic's constitution) from the constitution belonging to a state of nations, noting that a state requires superiors (the legislators) and inferiors (the legislated), setting up power dynamics that will inevitably inhibit the efforts of the constitution. It is important to note that nations enter into a league of nations, suggesting that it will be a union of nations, rather than a universal monarchy (which Kant thinks is impossible anyway, given the vast variety of languages and religions).

that hostility never occurs (8:349); the threat of future hostility itself undermines any hope for lasting peace. With this in mind, Kant stresses that each society, like a tree trunk, has its own roots (8:344). A society of people is not, therefore, a thing that can be annexed and grafted on to something else, but instead constitutes a dignity unto itself. He highlights the dangerous presumption in then-Europe that states can *marry each other*, denoting, by his account, a new form of industry for making oneself dominant through family alliances and the expansion of land (8:344). Kant is disturbed by the fact that no legislative authority exists that can prohibit the imperializing forces of one nation on another—interfering with their constitution, and exercising acts of hostility (vicious forms of torture, the employment of assassins, and various forms of dishonesty, e.g., going back on promises, espionage, etc.) that can potentially render mutual trust obsolete during future peace (8:347).

Kant notably uses the language of hospitality in his definitive articles for perpetual peace, emphasizing, "cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality" (8:357).

> Here as in the preceding articles, it is not a question of philanthropy but of right, so that hospitality (hospitableness) means the right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility because he has arrived on the land of another. The other can turn him away, if this can be done without destroying him, but as long as he behaves peaceable where he is, he cannot be treated with hostility. What he can claim is not the right to be a guest (for this a special beneficent pact would be required, making him a member of the household for a certain time), but the right to visit; this right, to present oneself for society, belongs to all human beings by virtue of the right of possession in common of the earth's surface on which we cannot disperse infinitely but must finally put up with being near one another; but originally no one had more right than another to be on a place on earth. (8:358)

Thus, each person, and each nation *qua* collective of persons has a right to appear before others without being met by hostility, by virtue of their dignity, their freedom, their being counted as *one*. Kant goes on to describe the horror of the inhospitable behavior of

'civilized' Europeans to those in the Americas, black countries, etc.—behavior justified by an understanding that those inhabitants were *no one*. Pre-empting Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous quote that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," Kant writes: "the violation of right on one place of earth is felt in all," as humanity itself is undermined (8:360). Violence to any instantiation of humanity amounts to violence toward humanity as a whole. We will see what precisely Kant means by this in the next section.

In the Appendix to *Perpetual Peace*, Kant examines the relationship between morality and politics, claiming that it would be absurd to have established the moral law (as he already had), and then claim that acting from duty is impossible. As Kant writes, "Politics says, '*Be ye wise as serpents*'; morality adds (as a limiting condition) '*and guileless as doves*" (8:370). Kant not only thinks it is possible to actualize the moral law, but that true politics cannot proceed without paying homage to it (and the honesty it necessitates). The trouble, of course, is that the political moralist (distinct from the moral politician) pays homage to the (subjective) maxim: *augment your power in whatever way you see fit.* For Kant, the moral law—here cashed out as safeguarding the concept of right—always comes first, no matter the consequences.

The universal right of human beings must be held sacred, however great a sacrifice this may cost the ruling power. The notion that peace can spring from war is what Kant calls the immoral doctrine of prudence, as it subordinates moral principles to the end, ineffectively putting *the cart before the horse* (8:376). Mirroring his remarks on the relationship between duty and happiness in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of*

Practical Reason, Kant stresses that "all politics must bend its knee before right, but in return can hope to slowly reach the level where it will shine unfailingly" (8:380).[6]

In addition to this, it is also important to underscore that, for Kant, justice requires that every claim to a right be *publicly known*, meaning that "all actions in relation to the rights of others are wrong if their maxim is incompatible with publicity" (8:386). This is to say that if one feels as though publicizing one's actions in relation to the rights of others is incompatible with publicity (8:381)—that is, if one takes issue with honestly disclosing oneself before others—then this is an indication that the orientation is immoral, transgressing one's duty to the others. Transparency is, therefore, essential to justice; and there is at least an implicit duty to voice that transparency in one's dealings with others. It is precisely this form of concealment from the public that we find, for example, in cases of totalitarian regimes or among organizations being paid off by various interest groups, that reveals an explicit violation of universal human rights. *If it were not a violation of right, what reason would these bodies have to conceal their principles of action?*

Kant's meditations on what would be required for perpetual peace illuminates his dedication to constructing a moral meta-language (universal to any and every human being), grounded in pure practical reason (a feature that, for Kant, all human beings share), and cleansed of the empirical (all of the things that make each of us perceivably different from each other).

[6] As he writes, "It can therefore be said, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of pure practical reason and its justice, and your end (the blessing of perpetual peace) will come to you of itself'" (8:378).

With these motivations in mind, we can turn to a careful analysis of Kant's pure moral philosophy, and the supreme moral principle that will ground-*qua*-define justice.[7]

1.2 KANT'S MORAL PROJECT

The will. Kant's *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* infamously begins with the claim that it is impossible to conceive of anything—"in the world, or indeed even beyond it"—as good without qualification except *a good will* (4:393). As he writes:

> Intelligence, wit, judgment, and whatever talents of the mind one might want to name are doubtless in many respects good and desirable, as are such qualities of temperament as courage, resolution, perseverance. But they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. The same holds with gifts of fortune; power, riches, honor, even health, and that complete well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called happiness make for pride and often hereby even arrogance, unless there is a good will to correct their influence on the mind…Thus a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition of being even worthy of happiness (4:393).

This passage crucially frames everything that follows within and beyond the *Groundwork*, establishing the thrust of his entire moral project. For Kant, the will lies at the heart of any and every disposition or action—it is what births things into the world, effectively shaping the things we encounter. The will conditions *who we are* and *what we do*; it is what is expressed in the use of intelligence, judgment, wit, talents, power, riches, honor, health, and even happiness. Wit and riches in the hands of a sociopath is a nothing short of terrifying, just as the arrogance of someone who is accidentally famous, rich, and

[7] It is important to note that given the scope of this project, I am not explicitly engaging Kant's account of justice in *The Metaphysic of Morals*, which addresses *how*, specifically, we protect individual rights to freedom, i.e., constructing legislation that enforces the moral law, regardless of whether persons have moral 'intentions'. As mentioned in the introduction, my understanding of justice here is having a just disposition toward others by adhering to the moral law—that is, rational beings choosing to co-exist in a way that safeguards the ability of each member of humanity to self-determine among others, i.e., to be autonomous.

powerful is incredibly frustrating. If one's will is not good, what proceeds from it can only be good accidently. As Kant stresses, the goodness of moral dispositions, e.g., calm deliberation, hinge on their essence: the will. The calm deliberation of a monk is a very different phenomenon than the calm deliberation of a student calculating how to steal the ideas of one of his peers and pass them off as his own.

A good will is, therefore, not good because of what it brings about, or because of the cleverness by which it is able to determine how to secure its desired end, but is good "only through its will, i.e., it is good in itself" (4:394). That is, it is good in its orientation. Kant points out that even if by its greatest efforts, the good will "should yet achieve nothing, and only the good will should remain," it would shine like a jewel "by its own light as something which has its full value in itself" (4:394). To understand what Kant has in mind, one might think of the will of a well-known protagonist like Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. After the jury wrongly finds Atticus's client guilty of rape and assault (biased against him because of the color of his skin), all of Tom's supporters in the back balcony of the courthouse stand up, in deep respect and admiration, as Atticus excites the courthouse. Though Atticus's daughter is initially confused about why everyone is standing, given Atticus's ostensible failure, she quickly realizes they are honoring Atticus's will because it was good. This is a clear illustration of the good will—intent on standing up against bigotry and hate—shining like a jewel, despite "failing" in its efforts.

After establishing the will as essential to uncovering the supreme principle of morality, Kant highlights the undeniable tension that exists in each and every human being—that is, the tension between reason, on the one hand, and happiness *qua* the

indeterminate sum total of our inclinations, on the other. Kant claims that it is because of this tension that people find themselves inclined to hate reason, as it often stops them from or, as a nagging burden, gets in the way of the fulfillment of their desires (4:395). "Desire" here denotes the securing of pleasure and the flight from pain (echoing Hume's conception of human motivation). As Kant puts it, nature herself appears to have frustrated reason from the start, as reason alone is "not competent to guide the will toward the satisfaction of all our needs (which it in part even multiplies)" (4:396). Reason's true practical function, by Kant's account, is not to attempt to fulfill the sum total of our desires (as this is nothing short of impossible), nor to produce a mechanical will—masterful in its ability to successfully calculate the means required to certainly secure a whole host of ends (as this, too, is impossible)—but rather to yield a will that is good in itself.

But what is a will without reference to ends? Is not the very act of willing an act of end-setting? What is left when the will is stripped of its orientation toward things outside of itself, i.e., desired consequences? To further elucidate what the will is, and what makes it *shine forth*, Kant examines the "well-known" notion of duty (4:397); and it is here that we get the much-discussed four examples that illustrate the difference between *acting in conformity with duty* and *acting from duty*, e.g., giving to charity because it makes one feel good, because it is pleasurable, versus giving to charity because it is one's duty. The moral motive is ultimately the latter (acting from duty), whereas the former is only accidentally moral (fulfilling a desire happens to align with duty). Integral for Kant is that in order for duty to be duty, one must be aware of the good one is doing—*and why*. Kant's point here is not to suggest that the presence of a non-moral

motivation (pursuit of future pleasure, flight from future pain) undercuts the moral worth of an action. I think this is a problematic reading of Kant.[8] His point is instead to suggest that it is much easier to understand the motive as moral when non-moral inclinations are not present, e.g., the moral worth of the cold-hearted philanthropist.

A key take-away from this discussion is that only the acting agent can know whether or not an action is truly done from duty. And even then, as Kant points out, we are not completely transparent to ourselves:

> We flatter ourselves with the false claim to a more noble motive; but in fact we can never, even by the strictest examination, completely plumb the depths of the secret incentives of our actions. For when moral value is being considered, the concern is not with the actions, which are seen, but rather with their inner principles, which are not seen (4:407).

That being said, the worth of the will is nonetheless contingent on the principle of volition (what determines it). And since duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law, a good will is a will whose principle of volition is acting from respect for the law, rather than a hoped-for effect. It is a will standing before the law and concomitantly surrendering all desires *qua* sought-ends; it is a will surrendering all vestiges of self-interest, self-conceit.

The condition for the possibility of morality[9] is, therefore, a good will. And a good will is a will that acts irrespective of potential consequences. It is a will that acts out of necessity from respect for the law. *But what law? And in what sense is it necessary?*

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[8] For a rich and illuminating account of the significance of these four examples in Section I of the *Groundwork*, and how *consistency* (independent of circumstances) is the mark of moral worth, see Barbara Herman's "On the Value of Acting From Duty," in *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[9] And ultimately happiness, as Kant indicates in Section One of the *Groundwork* and more fully argues in the second *Critique*.

The categorical imperative. Kant demarcates three types of principles or imperatives that we issue to ourselves, depending on the context—only one of which providing the *force of necessity* that he is looking for. Unlike the rules of skill and the counsels of prudence, which are both hypothetical imperatives issued in the direction of actions seeking the conditions for desired ends/purposes beyond the action itself, a command of morality, the categorical imperative, is binding in its force, and the purpose of the action *just is* the action itself (4:416-17). It is crucial for Kant that the first two principles (problematic and assertoric hypothetical imperatives, respectively): 1) rely on sense data, and 2) help one bring about projected ends, ultimately rendering their outcomes unpredictable: things may or may turn out the way one hopes. In contrast, the commands of morality have nothing to do with the empirical, and involve necessity in the sense that the action necessarily "achieves" its purpose because the purpose is nothing other than the action itself. The "outcome" cannot be otherwise, as there is no other incentive beyond the purpose of the action itself: it is unconditioned, justified in itself. This is to say that acting from duty involves one's will necessarily being fulfilled, as the "consequence" of the action is completely in one's power *qua* the purpose of the action itself. The action is done for its own sake, not for the sake of something else—some projected future determination.

'Acting from duty' denoting the exercise of an action that is completely within one's power is, I think, the most helpful way of understanding what Kant means when he says that *a failure to comply* with the categorical imperative involving a contradiction of our own will, or a contradiction of reason (4:424). As he puts it, a contradiction in our own will holds that a "certain principle [is] objectively necessary as a universal law, and

yet subjectively [does] not hold universally but allow[s] exceptions" (4:424). This is to say that one's objective principle of action (one should always do X) clashes with one's subjective principle of action (but I do not really want to do X, so one should always do X, *except for me* in this case-here-now because I would prefer to secure Y). In other words, one willingly holds something to be true for *everyone* (presumably) including *oneself*, but simultaneously holds it to be false for oneself, thus rendering the principle self-defeating. Another way of understanding this is that when one acts *without* contradicting one's own will, the will relies on itself—and nothing but itself—which means it can successfully determine itself without fail by completely fulfilling its intention because the intention is the purpose.[10] The objective principle of action (the purpose) is harmoniously identified with one's subjective principle of action (the intention), meaning that what one does is in fact what one should always do.

To return to Kant's motivations and his insistence on working within pure philosophy, distinct to the categorical imperative is that it is *formal*, rather than *material*, meaning that it does not rely on subjective ends, which, for Kant, are all empirical (material) byproducts of self-interest, i.e., self-interested desires we have to please ourselves in the future based on what we have experienced in the past or gained from sense data. "Formality" is what ultimately secures the universality Kant seeks, as formality abstracts from subjective interests based on taste. When we abstract the objective formula from which all cases of moral action spring—abstracting that which *makes them* moral by conceptually detaching it from the disparate interests that we find

[10] I have Christine Korsgaard's analysis of the various hypotheses on what Kant means by contradiction here in mind: "Kant's Formula of Universal Law," in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

among human beings—what remains is objective, 'unchanging,' i.e., the definition or *form* of morality under which all instances of morality fall. The formal dimension of the moral law marks the essence of morality—that which makes a moral action what it is—which, practically speaking, if employed, will necessarily yield moral results, ultimately freeing the will from the turmoil that comes with contradiction.

For Kant, the three forms of the categorical imperative—1) the formula of the universal law, 2) the formula of humanity, and 3) the formula of autonomy/the kingdom of ends—are three different ways of expressing the same thing; however, the formula of humanity is unique in the sense that it is the 'material' expression of the categorical imperative, which means that it includes content (an end), albeit an end that is non-empirical, *free from* contingent, conditioned, subjective purposes.

Humanity and autonomy. After Kant establishes the first articulation of the categorical imperative (4:421), and the four duties that follow (4:422-24), he asks whether there is "something whose existence has in itself an absolute worth, something which as an end in itself could be a ground of determinate laws. In it, and in it alone, would there be the ground of a possible categorical imperative" (4:428).

In response, Kant states that each rational being "exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will" (4:428). Rational beings (or *persons*), unlike things, are objective, unconditioned ends in themselves—and as expressions of rationality are, therefore, objects of respect. Kant defines the infinite reiterations of the moral law (in persons) as *rational* nature or "humanity," each "member" is an end-setting end in itself. Or in other words, each member is a *free creator*, capable of bringing new (words and deeds) into the world; for Kant, to set an end

is to bring something about, and this ability is what constitutes our dignity. Crucial for Kant, however, is that humanity is (puzzlingly) not something we encounter *qua* empirical object in the world, but is rather the 'species' or type that any and every human being participates in, insofar as they are rational. It is something that we share and understand *qua* participants in it; each (rational) human being is an instantiation of humanity, a *dignity*, albeit not humanity itself. Humanity itself is, empirically speaking, 'invisible'.

For Kant, humanity is synonymous with the moral community (all the others who are like oneself). And humanity is perhaps best understood as the creative capacity each of us has *qua* rational being; "the moral community" serving as a way of expressing the infinite number of individual creators who participate in the capacity to create in word and deed: *autonomy*.

The *content* of the moral law (humanity), then, is nothing other than re-iterations of the law itself, which is to say that the end that the moral law seeks to secure is simply itself. Or put differently, the end that the moral law seeks to secure is its continued existence—the continued existence of free creation. Upon defining humanity as the unconditioned end that the moral laws seeks to preserve, Kant develops the most captivating articulation of the categorical imperative: *act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means* (4:429). Kant understands the principle of humanity as the "supreme limiting condition of every man's freedom of action" (4:431)—because it commands that we allow ourselves and other end-setters to continue determining, legislating, and authoring themselves. It commands, pulls us toward, justice.

Moral worth, therefore, derives from the capacity to be autonomous—that is, the capacity to simultaneously give and be subject to the moral law (as well as the alignment of motive-intention with action), which can be understood as allowing *both oneself and others* to autonomously bring new things into the world. This is distinct from passively subjecting oneself to laws *outside of oneself*, i.e., doctrines that bind the will from without (e.g., obeying rules from a religious creed, the hope of desirable consequences/eventual happiness), as this inevitably stifles one's ability to act freely, thus limiting one to simply re-acting to what is understood and accepted as law outside of oneself. Vital for Kant is that as far as morality goes, a human will cannot be subordinated to—or as Kant understands it, *enslaved by*—the will of another. Immorality (resulting from the heteronomy of the will) is precisely the subjugation of another's will, or allowing one's own will to be subjugated by another. Morality is being bound by nothing other than oneself (autonomy of the will), albeit oneself *qua* member of the moral community, or what he later calls the kingdom of ends. To choose autonomy is to thus choose to concomitantly understand oneself as determined by others, albeit not in the sense of obeying their wills, but in the sense of understanding oneself as necessarily in relation to them, co-existing and acting in a world with them, co-existing with others like oneself. By Kant's account, what ought to be protected and preserved, then, is the ability of each member of humanity to self-determine *among others*. This is the condition for the possibility of a just society.

Although Kantian morality is often criticized for its homogeneity—grounded in an understanding of the moral community that lacks multiplicity, as it sweeps individual differences into sameness, reducing everyone to interchangeable rational beings—this

charge moves too hastily. For instance, by Paul Ricoeur's account (in the Eight Study of *Oneself as Another*), a shortcoming in Kant's strict moral framework is the favoring of universality (humanity) over singularity (infinite plurality). Although plurality is implicit in the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, it is not explicitly thematized. As Ricoeur I think rightly stresses, this is precisely where the inadequacy of an ahistorical, decontextualized moral norm of the Kantian or Rawlsian breed—inevitably (and tragically) conflicting with other moral norms—requires what Ricoeur calls critical *phronesis*: a practical wisdom that consists in "giving priority to the respect for persons, in the name of the solicitude that is addressed to persons in their irreplaceable singularity," effectively shifting from the realm of right and wrong, to the perhaps more human realm of better and worse (or worse and even worse) (OA, 262).[11]

What I want to stress is that the 'sameness' that Kant is sweeping all of us into, insofar as we are rational beings, is the power to bring things about: potency *qua* self-motion. This is to say that my worth is precisely the same as the worth of every other in the sense that we are all equal in our power to determine ourselves, equal in the possibility of autonomy (if we so choose it), equal in the power to bring things about, to act—'limited' only in the sense that we share the world with others. This limitation need not be seen as an infringement on one's existence, but instead a fact—a fact that does mean we will likely encounter infringements on our individual pursuits of happiness *qua*

[11] For Ricoeur (as I will more fully fleshed out in Chapter 5), critical *phronesis* involves the recognition of both oneself and the other as simultaneously capable (agent) and vulnerable (patient), never forsaking the ethical and moral bottom line of care and respect for the other in their radical singularity. Beyond this, critical phronesis involves the hermeneutic shift away from ahistoricity to something more like contextualism, which acknowledges, considers, and appropriates the "historical and communitarian contexts" of the realization of moral norms (OA, 274). As Ricoeur writes, "It is through public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions that moral judgment *in situation* is formed" (OA, 290-1, emphasis added).

the sum total of our inclinations. Anyone who has siblings or an enormous family learns precisely what Kant means early on in life. You do not have license to do anything any everything you please; you have to work *with* others. From day one, you share a home, space, and time with other people. They might 'get in your way', but only insofar as one understands it that way. Making room for others early on in life makes this fact crystal clear—family relations do not impose limits on the freedom of action, but rather a re-prioritization of action with others in mind.[12]

The fact of reason, respect, and the trouble with consequence-oriented action. This notion of sharing the world with others is, I think, a fruitful way of understanding what Kant later calls the "fact of reason" in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:31). Because Kant decides that a deduction (providing a justification of objectivity and universal validity) of the moral law will not work in the way he hoped it would in the *Groundwork*, he changes his strategy and instead illustrates what it is to (non-empirically) cognize the moral law.[13]

As Kant portrays it, practical reason inevitably hits a crossroads in which it can either do something in pursuit of satisfying a particular inclination, or it can act from duty, and thus do something for its own sake. The "fact of reason" is Kant's way of denoting what it is to experience the tension between acting from duty and acting from

[12] I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Samantha Fazekas, for suggesting this as a way of describing the phenomenon.

[13] Because practical reason does not involve describing reality (as is the case with speculative reason in the *First Critique*), but determining it, Kant finds it more effective to start with *a priori* principles. Pure practical reason "proves its reality and that of its concepts by what it does," thus giving us insight into the (*a priori*) idea of freedom (5:3). Further paraphrasing Kant in the Preface to the second *Critique*: with speculative reason, we had to begin with the senses and end with principles, but will proceed in the reverse order with practical reason, because we are considering reason in relation to the will (and its causality). Here (in the process of the critique of practical reason), the law of causality from freedom—that is, from our practical rational principle—constitutes the unavoidable beginning and determines the objects to which alone it can be referred (5:5-14).

inclination—recognizing that one can (and should) obey the moral law for its own sake. Another way of thinking about what Kant means by the fact of reason is that the call of duty is an incontestable fact. It is recognizing that doing the right thing will sometimes, or at least initially, be at the price of an end that we are inclined toward. To relate this to recognizing that we share the world with others, the fact of reason reveals that acting from duty is understanding oneself as a part of a community. That is, recognizing that existence is not just mine, but ours. My self-interested pursuits are **disrupted**, so to speak, by the possibility of acting from duty *qua* understanding myself as a part of the moral community—a moral community that is to be respected and preserved for its own sake; a moral community that is given *not* to the senses, but as a fact of reason to itself.

In the second *Critique*, Kant provides a phenomenological account of 'encountering' humanity—that is, experiencing the fact of reason *qua* the possibility of acting from duty—by describing what he calls the "incentive" of pure practical reason. This account should be understood as a phenomenological account of the *desire* to act from duty, albeit a form of desire that is distinct from an inclination to move toward a given end (i.e., a desire pertaining to our *rational* nature, rather than our *human* nature). Kant begins his account by asking in what sense (if any) the moral law becomes an incentive, i.e., a subjective determining ground for the will, especially if it cannot be empirical, since we do not encounter humanity in experience. Kant stresses that the only way to understand a non-empirical incentive like this is by investigating its effects, rather than that which it supplies itself, as this would be impossible because it (the moral law) is, empirically speaking, nowhere to be found (5:72).

While one might understand Kant's depiction of respect as fear-induced humiliation,[14] it is important to keep in mind that this is only one aspect of the phenomenon. The humiliating dimension is specific to self-conceit. What is humbled is the ego *qua* me-on-my-pursuit-of-happiness. And in that humility, the ego is provoked to, as Kant puts it, *pay tribute*, to offer gratitude, which denotes relinquishing the pride that comes with projecting consequences and believing that those projections are determinate. There is, without question, fear involved in encountering that which has no determined empirical correlate, i.e., *the unknown*, and when at the crossroads of decision, one truly does not know what will happen once one acts, as there is no end in sight other than acting from duty. Important for Kant is that when we react to our fear of the unknown with resistance, we run the risk of constructing seemingly determined consequences that, in reality, may or may not happen. Reacting to the fear of the unknown by resisting it, relying on projected consequences misses the exalting aspect of respect: the joy that comes with letting go of projections and recognizing that we cannot know with certainty the consequences of our actions. The contingency involved in hypothetical imperatives necessarily rests on probability. And while probability can be a pragmatic guide, Kant's reminder is that, in the end, we really do not know how things will unfold—and being honest about this fact is empowering, as it provides a window of insight into what we can and cannot know, what is and is not in our power.

The effect of encountering the moral law simultaneously involves pain and exaltation. The painful aspect is "striking down" self-conceit, which can be understood as

[14] For an innovative phenomenological account of moral sensibility in Kant, especially the exalting dimension of experiencing the moral law, see Owen Wares, "Kant on Moral Sensibility and Moral Motivation," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Vol. 52, no. 4 (Oct. 2014): 727-746. Wares' account is comprehensive and has without question influenced by own interpretation.

experiencing an infringement on "self-love" *qua* pursuing one's projected self-interests. Affectively, one is humbled, humiliated in recognizing the prospect of ignoring one's duty to the other, i.e., turning one's back on the other. The positive aspect, respect, involves self-esteem—recognizing that the instantiation of the power of the moral law in *another* is a mirror of the power of the moral law in oneself. One witnesses humanity in the sense of understanding oneself as the others, and thus wanting to protect autonomy in both the other and oneself—and ultimately in all of the moral community's constituents. While Kant describes this affect in a way that leads one to understand it as looking up at the law-on-high, it is perhaps better to understand this affective phenomenon as experiencing an *immediate shift* from one mode of understanding oneself to another—that is, a shift from understanding oneself as an individual on the relentless pursuit of happiness to an individual understanding oneself as one among others in the moral collective, ready and willing to let go of one's agenda of happiness so as to protect and preserve the free activity of the whole. Crucial for Kant is that the movement to act from duty, ultimately provoked by respect, is not the diminishment of activity, but a transfer of activity, as certain hindrances to self-esteem (barriers to understanding oneself as, first and foremost, a member of humanity) are removed, and one can act in and through a new understanding of oneself as one-with-the-others.

The incentive of practical reason is, as Kant puts it, a "springing" that has no material object. Rather than a desire to pursue an end—that is, some thing, spatially or temporally outside of oneself—it is a desire to "let be," "be-with," and, most importantly, "be free." As Kant writes in the *Groundwork*:

> For the pure thought of duty and the moral law generally, unmixed with any extraneous addition of empirical inducements, has by way of reason alone (which first becomes

> aware hereby that it can of itself be practical) an influence on the human heart so much more powerful than all other incentives which may be derived from the empirical field that reason in the consciousness of its dignity despises such incentives and is able gradually to become their master (4:411).

Thus, for Kant, there is a moral-rational desire that mirrors inclination, but is distinct in the sense that it has no object (for inclinations always have desired-objects), which means that *it does not spring from attempting to satisfy a lack*. It does not seek any *thing* in particular, but is instead an elevation, fulfillment, inspiration, and movement provoked by something it cannot grasp or perceive. This desire evokes humility, commanding reason to respect both the freedom-dignity of the other and the freedom-dignity of oneself.

Beyond this, it seems clear that the desire for the moral law (humanity, dignity, the moral community, our creative capacity, justice) is Kant's way of describing our desire to be free, to actualize our creative capacity. Although, by Kant's account, we cannot prove how freedom is possible, we also cannot help but understand ourselves as (practically) free. And in the end, freedom is what we desire: *it has an influence on the human heart so much more powerful than all other incentives, which may be derived from the empirical field. Reason in the consciousness of its dignity despises such incentives and is able gradually to become their master*. In the end, we do not want to be slaves to inclination/the will of others; and, returning to his remarks in *Perpetual Peace*, to enslave another is to enslave humanity—including oneself, despite oneself. We want to be able to act, to be free, which necessarily involves wanting the condition for the possibility to act: that is, freedom, the moral law, justice.

Crucial to Kant's account is that respect does not ground the moral law, but is the affect that arises upon encountering the moral law, i.e., standing at the crossroads of the fact of reason. For Kant, respect ought be likened to admiration—the awe and amazement

one feels at the foot of a mountain, at the swiftness of an animal, or at the magnitude, distance, and number of the heavenly bodies (5:77). When we feel respect, our spirit bows in gratitude for the human being before us. Respect is not an effect of some quality we empirically perceive in another, but is our recognition of them as a unique end-setter: a distinct freedom that, like you, desires to be free. As Kant writes, respecting the law in another is self-approbation. Despite the moral law striking down self-conceit, respect reveals the harmony between self-esteem and care for the other, eliminating the conflict between self-interest and the interest of the moral community, as these two are in harmony when one lets ego's pride go—recognizing that the other as end-setter *and* the consequences of one's actions are out of one's control; and that what *is* in one's control is acting from duty, obeying the moral law. Specifically, obeying the moral law means to give in to our desire to be free without inhibition, which entails our desire for the others to be free, too: *our desire for justice*.

As Kant stresses, morality is made possible through freedom—that is, by choosing, when face-to-face with the fact of reason, to act from duty, which is *to act for justice*. In Kant's account, the defining feature of morality (acting from duty) is always in our power. As Kant stresses, despite the fact that falling in love with another is not in our power, practically loving another *qua* respecting humanity *is*. The choice to fulfill our obligation to humanity is always in our hands, and when encountering the moral law within another, the fact of reason never fails to deliver an occasion to act from duty, insofar as we are willing to honestly face it, and not shirk away in fear. This is to say that we can always choose to obey the moral law instead of binding our wills to something external, heteronomous—be it a material object, or projected consequences, etc. And

insofar as we choose to act from duty, we will necessarily fulfill our desire for justice, because to act from duty is to be just, thus actualizing justice. The precepts or counsels of prudence merely advise what might (hypothetically) result from proceeding a certain way, whereas the command of reason necessarily and absolutely delivers, as the defining feature of a law; mirroring the notion of natural law that we find in physics, namely, that the cause is bound to its effect *as its effect*. Though the two aspects (cause and effect) are distinct, they express the same content. On this, Kant writes:

> It is always in everyone's power to satisfy the commands of reason, the categorical command of morality; this is seldom possible with respect to the empirically conditioned precept of happiness, and it is far from being possible, even in respect to a single purpose, for everyone. The reason is that in the former it is only a question of the maxim, which must be genuine and pure, but in the latter it is also a question of capacity and physical ability to realize a desired object. A command that everyone should seek to make himself happy would be foolish, for no one commands another to do what he already invariably wishes to do. One must only prescribe to him the rules for achieving his goal, or, better, provide him with the means, for he is not able to do all that he wants to do … regarding the means of obeying [the moral] law, there is no need to teach them, for in this respect whatever he will to do he also can do (4:37).

Thus, to fulfill the moral law is to find plentitude in reality *as it is*, rather than in a projected object that may or may not come about. What is in our power, by Kant's account, is protecting the moral community—acting in such a way that we treat all of the others as ends in themselves, rather than as mere means. Navigating moral experience in this way secures justice *qua* rational beings harmoniously existing in relation to each other by unifying ourselves with *different* rational beings through our common desire: the desire to be free to exercise and actualize our creative capacity; or put differently, the desire for humanity to be what it is.

With this comes another understanding of what Kant might have in mind in his insistence on the universal necessity of the moral law. Insofar as human beings fail to respect humanity (e.g., insisting on war, fulfilling the desire to dominate others via

marginalization and discrimination), the perpetual existence of humanity is not promised; which is to say that the categorical imperative seeks to protect humanity—the moral community—and that the moral community is the condition for the possibility of human existence. In other words, the categorical imperative is necessary for the continuation of mankind.[15]

1.3 WHO IS THE KANTIAN SELF?

Kant provides an explicit answer to *who* the self is, stressing that the human being is a will between worlds: a will caught between two ways of understanding itself in the world. In Section III of the *Groundwork*, Kant explains (in a particularly Platonic moment) that as a rational being, man belongs to the a-temporal intelligible world (humanity, a member of the moral community/kingdom of ends), but as a human being, man belongs to the spatio-temporal sensible world—"enslaved" to the ebb and flow of efficient causality (as a machine among other machines, subjected to the laws of nature) (4:453). To identify with, or understand oneself as a part of, the intelligible world—denoting our rational nature—is to choose freedom. "Choose" is the key word here, as rational choice (versus merely being *pulled* by nature-inclination, the way an animal would be), for Kant, constitutes the most essential feature of being the type of beings we are. To be "between worlds," then, is to dwell in a mode of existence that requires

[15] To understand what Kant might have in mind with this, it is helpful here to consider the all-too-real dystopia depicted in Stanley Kubrick's "Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb." It is also helpful to consider the ecological crisis in which we find ourselves.

deliberation and choice in the sense that one can always choose to be otherwise than the ebb and flow of efficient causality, i.e., where human nature drags us.

Given our ever-present sense of time *qua a priori* intuition, inner sense (time constituting a condition for the possibility of experiencing appearances, succession and simultaneity, alteration and motion), is a mode of existing that involves reflecting on projected consequences in relation to past occurrences, conferring reasons for proceeding in one way or another, and issuing imperatives. Discursive reasoning is itself an activity that occurs over time. To be "between worlds" denotes a mode of being that is not fixed, determined, or complete, but rather a mode of being that is always on the way, becoming, actualizing oneself in one way or another. It is important to point out that the fact that we exist in a mode of being that is never fixed is why the categorical imperative is a synthetic *a priori* judgment, rather than an analytic *a priori* judgment. The will and the moral law are not synonymous. For Kant, insofar as the will chooses to determine itself without reference to anything outside of itself, it remains *a priori*. Insofar as the will subjects itself to anything other than itself (that is, what is empirical), it forfeits its purity, activating synthetic *a posteriori* judgments, which are necessarily hypothetical, as their content involves what is outside of one's power: what may or may not take place in the future, given certain conditions. The moral law assumes freedom because, practically speaking, the reflective experience of projected possibilities necessitates deliberation and choice—or, at the very least, the choice to not deliberate about one's choice.

Kant fleshes out this understanding of freedom *qua* choice (the byproduct of our standing between worlds) most explicitly in the "Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Practical Reason" in the second *Critique*. Kant mentions in the Preface that "freedom is

the stumbling block of all empiricists, but also key to the most sublime practical principles for all critical moralists, who see, through it, that they must proceed rationally" (5:8). The beginning of his proof for freedom's compatibility with determinism runs as follows:

> 1. Causality as a natural necessity (as distinguished from the concept of causality as freedom) concerns only the existence of things insofar as they are determinable in time.
> 2. If one takes the determinations of the existence of things in time for determinations of things in themselves (which is the most usual way of representing them), then the necessity in the causal relation can in no way be united with freedom; instead they are opposed to each other as contradictory.
> 3. For an action to be freely performed it must be in my control; that is, it must not be necessarily determined by a state that has just come before it that is outside my control.
> 4. For things determinable in time, every event and every action that takes place is necessary under the conditions of what preceded it.
> 5. Time past is no longer in my control.
> 6. Therefore, every action that takes place in time in necessary under the condition of something that is not in my control. That is, every action I perform must be necessary by a determining ground that is not within my control.
> 7. Therefore, I do not freely perform any actions in time—I am never free at the point of time in which I act … For at every point of time I still stand under the necessity of being determined to action by that which is not within my control, and the series of events infinite *a parte priori* which I can only continue in accordance with a predetermined order would never begin of itself: it would be a continuous natural chain, and therefore my causality would never be freedom (5:94-5).

To save freedom, Kant unsurprisingly appeals to his doctrine of transcendental idealism (5:95).[16] Rather than attempting to squeeze freedom into things determined in space and time by natural necessity (two concepts that are "mutually repellent"), freedom can be warranted (*quid juris*) as ascribed to "things in themselves."[17] If we consider phenomena

[16] As Kant defines it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I understand by the doctrine of **transcendental idealism** of all appearances the doctrine that [appearances] are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves" (A369).

[17] It is important to make a quick note here on Kant's terminology. The thing itself is distinct from, though closely related to, noumena. Noumena are intelligible objects, or "beings of understanding" (B306). Their contrary, phenomena, are "beings of sense," or appearances (B306). Defined as such, the concept of a noumenon does not correlate to any object of experience, rendering it logically possible, but void of sensory content, i.e., spatial and temporal content. Kant further distinguishes between noumena in the positive sense and noumena in negative sense: this distinction is crucial because he stresses that theoretically we are limited to consideration, and use of, the latter. In the positive sense, a noumenon is reminiscent of Plato's intelligible essences, depicting an "intellectual" intuition – the indeterminate content

as appearances, there is no freedom; everything is bound by causal necessity. But if we consider things in themselves (and our lack of access to them, i.e., our lack of access to a God's eye view), it is possible to ascribe freedom. Thus, when considered as a member of the intellectual world, the self decides with nothing before it, there is no antecedent choice. That is, when considered noumenally, we can say that a given choice was not determined by what came before it because nothing came before it; a "noumenon" is precisely non-spatial and non-temporal: there is no before and after, no succession. When considering oneself as a thing in itself, one "views his existence insofar as it does not stand under conditions of time and himself as determinable only through laws that he gives himself by reason; and in this existence of his nothing is, for him, antecedent to the determination of his will, but every action" (5:98). And in the end, Kant thinks that, practically speaking, this is precisely how we can and do understand ourselves: as immanently free (5:105). Though we cannot explain freedom theoretically, we experience freedom's possibility at every moment of decision—decision being an ineluctable feature of our existence.

Therefore, by Kant's account, in order for freedom to be freedom—that is, for freedom to be free from natural, causal necessity and preserved as absolute spontaneity—it cannot be bound by or subject to time. This means that in every moment of decision, the self leaps into something undetermined, unpredictable, *new*. And that leap involves, at

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of which requires a non-human use of the understanding (B307-8). A noumemon in the negative sense is "a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition, because we abstract it from the manner of our intuition of it" (B307). It represents a philosophical problem, as it limits "the pretension of sensibility" (B311). It marks thinkable terrain that, by definition, lacks real intuitive content, chiefly serving as a boundary concept (A287/B344). The concept of a thing in itself would be considered noumenal in the negative sense: uncognizable and problematic, though not entirely meaningless. Kant metaphorically expresses noumena as members of the "world of understanding," housed in the conceptual (versus sensory) stem of our cognition (B311).

least in some sense, a suspension of time. Or put differently, it involves a lack of consciousness of the future's successive relation to the past—undetermined by what occurred before.

It is helpful to think of Kierkegaard's conception of the self here. For Kierkegaard, we are a synthesis of what is infinite/indeterminate and what is finite/determined, and are defined by the way in which we relate to the relation between those two "poles."[18] Being juxtaposed between finitude (causal necessity, the sensible world) and infinitude (possibility, the intelligible world) is what fuels the experience of *being able*. At the moment of decision, one is not necessarily bound to anything that happened before, and, if one is honest with oneself, one has no idea of what will come after. At the moment of decision, one can choose to be otherwise than self-interested, or one can of course choose to bind oneself to the past and the future by projecting what will *likely* come after (based on the past). At the moment of decision, therefore, one can *either* keep one's feet firmly planted on the ground, standing with conviction beside their projection of what will likely happen if one were to do X instead of Y, *or* one can surrender to the fact that one does not know what will happen: earnestly holding fast to the moral law, humbly accepting that the only thing we truly have control over is our will, our intention.

Crucial for Kant, as is the case for Kierkegaard (despite his critique of the Kantian-Hegelian ethical mode of being), is that freedom does not know the consequences. And who we are when we are honest with ourselves are freedoms who *know not what we do* in the sense that we do not and cannot know the chain of effects

[18] Here I have in mind Anti-Climacus's notoriously difficult description of the self at the beginning of Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* (SUD, 14).

that will flow from what we put into the world, no matter how likely certain outcomes are.[19] Life constantly humbles us with shocking, surprisingly, unpredictable outcomes, comprised of things that we could not have imagined because they have not happened before. They are new. And here we arrive at Kant's notion of morality as that which involves the cessation of calculation; the ground for morality involves hospitality (rather than hostility) toward what is new—hospitality to the disruption of projected or calculated consequences for oneself, the interruption of hypothetical imperatives. As we will see in Chapter 4, this is an essential insight that will be clarified and expounded on in Levinas's ethical-metaphysics, which is, above all, sensitive to and insistent on hospitality.

Vital to Kant's account is that the past and the future do not define us—at least not completely. Although memory lends itself to certain expectations, we can always, at any moment, choose to act otherwise: that is, choose to undermine projections and expectations, and, most importantly for Kant, choose not to fall prey to our self-interested inclinations. To be autonomous is to identify with the sublimity of our supersensible existence—to embrace our participation in humanity's divinity (5:87-8). For Kant, acquiring *personality, personhood,* is choosing freedom in the sense of freeing ourselves from the "machinery of nature" by elevating ourselves from the sensible world. To be unmoved movers is to be able to bring new things into the world, and to not be governed by future projections based on what has happened in the past—that is, to not be governed by hostility toward what is new, chained to expectation, anticipation.

[19] This point is underscored beautifully by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* in Part IV on *Action*, in which she explicitly pays homage to Kant's notion of freedom, recast as *natality*.

Considering Kant's socio-historic context, it is not surprising that he wants to preserve a space for innovation, creativity, and progress—all of which, for him, are necessarily secured by freedom's possibility. In "What is Enlightenment?" Kant famously cries for mankind to awaken from its self-incurred immaturity: to dare to know, and to have the courage to use our understanding. Kant wants humanity to release itself from the shackles of religious dogma (religious devotees as paradigmatic instances of what he means by heteronomy of the will), to not be afraid of shadows, and to think freely, so as to bring about new phenomena, new discoveries, new modes of being—like that of a just society, or international perpetual peace.

It is ultimately in this rendering of freedom in the second *Critique* that we find another response to the "superficiality" of empiricism (5:94), which for Kant inevitably gets no further than a notion of freedom in which one's freedom is that of a "turnspit, which, when once it is wound up, also accomplishes its movements of itself" (5:97). Kant is determined not to reduce human beings to the predictability we find in physics, but wants to safeguard our capacity to act otherwise than predictions based on behavioral analysis (which, by his account, all point to a sort of pseudo-hedonistic self-interest). Through this understanding of ourselves as between worlds, Kant stresses that we could "calculate a human being's conduct for the future with as much certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse and could nevertheless maintain that the human being's conduct is free" (5:99).

To support this position, Kant describes the phenomenon of holding those who were not fortunate in their childhood education and grow up to be "villains" accountable for their "wickedness" (5:100). This, he claims, is something that we do, and is a

testimony of the fact that they are responsible for their decisions, regardless of their context. While this view might seem callous, the flip side of the phenomenon is that these children can change. They can be otherwise. Although, for Kant, they cannot eliminate the guilt they have for wicked past deeds, they can re-construct their character. By virtue of freedom's possibility, nobody is bound to any behavioral fate or psychology, regardless of how solidified their habits may seem. We can and should expect to be surprised both by others and ourselves, and we should not categorize anyone into a box from which they cannot escape, as this would ignore the will's capacity to shift its orientation, to determine itself anew, i.e., the capacity to act as opposed to merely reacting to empirical stimuli/a given socio-economic context. Mirroring the way in which Kant describes societies, each human being has its own roots *qua* individual dignity, and insofar as that creative capacity is protected, the possibility to grow into a noble oak is preserved. Like societies, human dignities are not to be imperialized, and others should not meddle with their constitution, especially because, in the end, the essence of each of our respective constitutions is the same: the desire for the moral law, which amounts to the desire for justice, as described above.

It is worth returning to the notion of hospitality that we find in *Perpetual Peace*; each person by virtue of their freedom has a right to appear before others without being met by hostility. To hospitably allow one to appear in their dignity, in their individuality, is to recognize them as a bearer of the moral law—that is, to recognize them as similar to oneself, despite their difference. To allow one to appear in their dignity is to let them be *in their autonomy*, rather than shaping them into what one wants them to be. The same

goes for oneself. To be autonomously is to appear as you are, rather than the way the others want you to be.

The authentic Kantian self is, therefore, a self that lets others appear as they are, and honestly appears before others. To warrant appearance in this way is to safeguard each freedom's voice. And vital for Kant is each dignity as *having a voice*, contributing to the conversation, as conversation is the road to growth and peace—again, this is a point that will be underscored and clarified in Levinas. As he puts it in his *Lectures on Ethics*:

> Social intercourse is in itself a cultivator of virtue and a preparation for its surer practice ... The exchange of our sentiments is the principle factor of social intercourse, and truth must be the guiding principle herein. Without truth social intercourse and conversation become valueless. We can only know what a man thinks if he tells us his thought, and when he understands to express them he must really do so, or else there can be no society of men. Fellowship is only the second condition of society, and a liar destroys fellowship. Lying makes it impossible to derive any benefit in conversation (198-224).

Thus, in a Rousseauian moment, Kant stresses that the proclivity to be *reserved* spawns from a desire to conceal one's faults and shortcomings (224)—pretending to be otherwise so that others will understand her to have virtues that she does not in fact have, ultimately to gain more, for her own sake. As Rousseau puts out in his *Discourse on Inequality*, the trouble with dishonesty is its fracturing of the subject: it emerges from the reflective distinction made between what one is and how one appears—the former *causing* the latter, like a puppeteer causing movement in a marionette. This objectification of oneself inevitably leads to the fostering of instrumental habits: working hard to secure certain perceptions of oneself to others, so as to obtain certain objectives. In honesty, the self is not spliced, but appears, as it is, without a causal relation between being and perceived

being. Justice requires honesty, which in turn requires a suspension of calculation, a disruption of predictable patterns.

To further understand the Kantian self as a self between worlds, it is important to revisit Kant's point regarding violations of the categorical imperative as inducing a "contradiction of reason." Again, I think the best way to interpret this is as a self-contradiction, or better, an existential contradiction: experiencing the incentive of practical reason to act from duty, *the desire for justice*, in tension with the desire to satisfy self-conceit, the inclination to actualize hypothetical states of affairs. In Kierkegaard, this experience, the tension of human existence, manifests itself as anxiety. This marks the experience of the possibility of letting go of what is not in one's control (outcomes in the future) juxtaposed with a desire to act in way that will lead to ideal or pleasant anticipated consequences. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant describes this perceived tension as that between the two motives to action in man: "the one—self-love—is derived from himself, and the other—the love of humanity—is derived from others and is the moral motive" (200). He continues, "if the purposes of self-love did not demand our attention, we would love the other and promote their happiness" (201). Kant stresses that the unity and harmony of our mental powers can, at times, feel like a pursuit to gain victory over oneself, but it is far better not to need to gain victory over ourselves—far better to not be at war (144-4). For Kant, it is ultimately morality that is the condition for the possibility of overcoming war. Again, the moral law is the condition for the possibility of justice *qua* actualization of justice.

To more concretely flesh out the existential contradiction that Kant has in mind, it is helpful to consider, for instance, a situation in which you are no longer in love with

your significant other, and they ask you if you are, in fact, still in love with them. In this situation you can choose to be honest with them about your feelings, assuming that this will *likely* lead to pain and suffering for both yourself and the other, or you can choose to lie to them, manipulating them by telling them you still love them, sugarcoating your feelings. The fact of reason thus provides you with the opportunity to act from duty: to either be honest with the other and free them (and yourself) from existing in a distorted version of reality, or to avoid pain and suffering as much as possible by keeping them in the dark, and proceeding as though nothing is wrong. With the incentive of practical reason in mind, it is of course terrifying to honor their autonomy *and yours* because of the uncertainty of what will happen next. (They might get angry, they might threaten to hurt themselves, they might hate you, etc.). At the same time, the impulse to be honest is a testimony of our desire for both ourselves and the other to be free: to give them the freedom to respond based on an accurate description of reality, and to give oneself the freedom that comes with transparency, relinquishing the *false* understanding of how things 'will' proceed (painfully) after the truth comes out because, in the end, we do not know. This is the moral law's promise of exaltation; humbly accepting that the future and the other are out of one's control. Anticipation rests on probability—projections that are *precisely* mere predictions.

This contradiction between the self's projections (things it would like in the future) and the self as participant in humanity marks the *ostensible* clash between self-interest and the interest of others. If we consider the same situation from the perspective of the one who is being told that they are not loved anymore, we gain further insight into what Kant means by respect for the other as awakening respect for ourselves, self-

approbation. When the other is honest, freeing one from delusion (of their love), the pain you feel (fear of not knowing what comes next) can of course push you into a debilitating state of distress; but at the same time, the other's honesty in walking away provides a vital occasion to realize that you can walk away too. That is, you, too, can be free; you can constitute yourself differently—recognizing that the other's honesty with you is a way of honoring the creative capacity in you, your dignity. There is without question an elevating aspect of being on the receiving end of such honesty because the other's transparency offers freedom to everyone involved.

Crucial for Kant is that when we act from duty, we become less bound to hypothetical contingencies and externalities, and, more importantly, we become less at war with others and ourselves. To move toward freedom is to move toward a greater understanding of what is and is not in our power: finding plentitude in reality *qua* realizing we need nothing other than a good will, which ultimately amounts to courageously embracing our desire for justice without inhibition. The authentic Kantian self is thus a self who is not only capable of thinking about the other before herself, but is a self who is free from the anxiety that comes with constructing a projected reality that may or may not come to be.

Encountering the moral law in the other ultimately brings the Kantian subject face-to-face with their true self—respect marking an occasion for a gestalt shift or *conversion*. That is, an opportunity to understand oneself anew: to understand *the others as oneself*, to constitute one's will as good. As Kant notes at the end of the second *Critique*, images of good character reveal the dignity each of us has within ourselves, and that revelation is essential.

> And now the law of duty, through the positive worth that observance of it lets us feel, finds easier access through the *respect of ourselves* in the consciousness of our freedom. When this is well established, when a human being dreads nothing more than to find, on self-examination, that he is worthless and contemptible in his own eyes, then every good moral disposition can be grafted onto it, because this is the best, and indeed the sole, guard to prevent ignoble and corrupting impulses from breaking into the mind (5:161).

Thus, by Kant's account, when we honor any and every inclination, operating under the *modus operandi* that I ought to pursue whatever will bring me closer to what I want right now, what I think will be the most pleasurable life, we, in fact, isolate ourselves from the moral community, fracturing our sense of community, repressing our desire for justice. Self-conceit as the governing force in one's life leads to extreme isolation, as one starts to conceive of oneself as an island, understanding the others as nothing other than obstacles in one's pursuit of happiness, or tools to be used in service of one's pursuit of happiness.

1.4 CONCLUSION

To return to the aim of this chapter, given the sketch above of Kant's moral project and the conception of the self that operates within his moral schema, it seems clear that for Kant, the most authentic self is the self that lives by and through their *intrinsic* desire for justice, which amounts to a desire for the good of the whole (of humanity), oneself included. Freedom and honesty serve as the condition the possibility for justice, and are best understood as marking the creative capacity in each and everyone of us, as they facilitate the birth of new phenomena in their suspension of projected states of affairs and the calculation involved in attempting to secure those projected future states. Both values

involve the refusal to reduce human activity to measurable patterns and projected outcomes. This refusal holds open the space for actualizing *otherwise* than the projected consequences that we can predict or 'foresee' based on an imposition onto the future of what was already determined in the past.

While self-conceit may appear to be in direct conflict with justice, I contend that Kant's conviction is that this is a false dilemma. What we all desire most is freedom, albeit not freedom in the sense of license to do anything and everything we want to do (as any inclination wishes), but freedom in the sense of continuing to co-exist and act in a world with others. This sort of freedom is limiting in the sense that it safeguards space for the freedom of others and of oneself, which can involve not always getting what you want. But this sort of freedom is also liberating in its honesty in regard to the significance of the moral community—the membership of which we both want and need—freeing us from the delusion that the preservation of oneself in one's individual pursuit of happiness takes precedence over anything and anyone else.

For Kant, justice is without question the vehicle by which we can adequately protect the free community that (as the fact of reason reveals) we all intrinsically desire. Our desire or *housing* of the moral law is another way of understanding the desire we have for justice and peace. This desire is a reminder of the perpetual possibility, at every moment, of augmenting and enriching reality by bringing new and unexpected phenomena into the world with others. For Kant, without celebrating and protecting our creative capacity, we have no hope for the justice, the perpetual peace that could one day be. And this aspect of self-identity is what is retrieved, recollected in Kant's moral

project. Kant unveils freedom as honest orientation toward unpredictability, and preserves morality as the suspension of calculation.

With this, we can turn to the ethical works of Aristotle to better understand the ways in which Kant's account both squares with and compliments Aristotle's account—an account that fuels the recent revival of virtue ethics as a way of getting ourselves out of the current 'crisis' in moral philosophy, arguably fueled by the production-oriented conception of the self that reigns in the Anglo-American West.

2.0 CHAPTER 2: THE VIRTUOUS SOUL

> *Suppose that we were painting a statue, and some one came up to us and said, Why do you not put the most beautiful colors on the most beautiful parts of the body—the eyes ought to be purple, but you have made them black—to him we might fairly answer, Sir, you would not surely have us beautify the eyes to such a degree that they are no longer eyes; consider rather whether, by giving this and the other features their due proportion, we make the whole beautiful.*
>
> **—Socrates, Plato's *Republic*, 420b-d**

Mirroring the structure of Chapter 1, this chapter will probe the roots of contemporary virtue ethics by critically engaging the work of Aristotle. I begin by analyzing Aristotle's methodology, and after providing an exegetical account of his seminal ethical texts, I will then flesh out the conception of the self—or 'soul' as Aristotle would put it[20]—that sits at the heart of Aristotelian virtue ethics, so as to illuminate *who* serves as the source of the particular set of values for the self that we find in Aristotle's ethical theory, and subsequent varieties of neoaristotelian ethics. Essential here is that virtue involves the disruption of a certain mode of means-ends projection (as this heeds *unimpeded* activity), as well as what can be understood as disruptive intervention by virtuous others. These points will be further clarified in the chapters that follow.

[20] Although it is anachronistic to use the term 'self' here, as it is not part of Aristotle's vernacular, I am doing so for three reasons: 1) in our post-modern context, the term 'soul' is outdated, carrying a religious connotation that muddies the water in these analyses, as it often implies soul *qua* distinct from the body, carrying on after the body ceases to exist (something Kant addresses and critiques in the first *Critique*); 2) I am interested in relating Aristotle to both Kant and our post-Kantian context in ethics, which now involves a reflectively self-conscious subject (understanding itself as a self); and 3) I am interested in Aristotle's account as informing contemporary neoaristotelian accounts in the Anglo-American tradition, which, in the wake of modernity, relies on the term 'self'.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, I will illustrate that for Aristotle, the virtuous self is the properly habituated self, and that the values that correspond with this conception of the self are *eudaimonia* (happiness) and justice. For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is the end that we desire most, and justice is the means to procure this end, as justice aims to safeguard the well-being of all of the individuals that constitute the whole (implying that we desire justice, too). Vital to Aristotle's account of moral development is the role of virtuous others, and my chief claim is that the most crucial insight that we find in Aristotle's ethics is that the condition for the possibility of *eudaimonia* is excellent moral education, which, I will argue, ought to be understood as the most important form of justice. Although friendship is, as Aristotle famously puts it, "the greatest of external goods," upon close examination, it seems that justice is in fact a necessary condition for virtuous friendships based on the good.

Given the role Aristotelian virtue ethics has played in contemporary debates concerning the state of moral philosophy today—serving as an alternative of sorts to deontology and utilitarianism-consequentialism (which will be explored in Chapter 3)—the second task of this chapter is to underscore the ways in which Aristotle's conception of who we are and what it is to live well is by no means incompatible or at odds with Kant's, though their emphases and approaches are, of course, distinct. My claim is that there is an important sense in which Kant's moral project can be understood as grounding Aristotle's ethical project by establishing the *necessary* condition (i.e., the moral law) for the possibility of virtue and virtuous relations.

2.1 ARISTOTLE'S METHODOLOGY

A lack of precision. For Aristotle, there were no specializations within philosophy as they exist today, and, *contra* Kant, ethics and morality were not distinct categories.[21] This is not to say that there were not distinct topics within philosophy, but rather that the boundaries of questions and concerns were not as neatly separated as we find them, for instance, in Kant—and certainly not to the point of specialists exclusively dwelling in their area of expertise, unable to communicate effectively with specialists in other areas. For the Greeks, ethics and politics were related to and informed by metaphysics, which was related to and informed by epistemology, which was related to and informed by aesthetics, and so on.

Keeping Kant's methodological demarcations in mind, for Aristotle, there is no such thing as utterly non-empirical philosophy. In regard to ethics in particular, the practical (rather than purely theoretical) ought to take precedence,[22] and recognizing this is crucial insofar as this informs the way in which his ethical investigation will proceed (e.g., it does not involve mathematical proofs or deductions of any sort). At the outset of the *Nicomachean Ethics (*which I will henceforth refer to as the *Ethics)*, Aristotle stresses:

[21] Paul Ricoeur does an excellent job addressing this point in the "Seventh Study" in *Oneself as Another*, 170-1. Within this project, I will use the terms somewhat interchangeably, though it is worth pointing out that, following Kant, morality is often understood as dealing with the more prohibitive duty to obligatory norms, while ethics deals with what it means to live a good life.

[22] As Nussbaum writes about Aristotle's ethical investigations: "Aristotle's approach to ethics, the one with which I have most sympathy, takes as its subject matter the human good. And its investigations into matters of value are at the same time investigations into the form of life of a being both needy and resourceful, with certain capabilities and certain sorts of incompleteness, and a certain sort of body in which all of this takes place. They are attempts to describe the limits and possibilities of that species-specific form of life, saying where, within those, good is to be found" *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 389.

> Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of; for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, exhibit much variety and fluctuation, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature… We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better. (1094b27-1095a11)

Since ethics concerns what it means to live well, to flourish, it belongs to political science (the master science)—which, by Aristotle's account, concerns the good of the state, i.e., what its members are to do and abstain from (1094b12-1094b26). Moreover, because political science investigates fine and just actions, which admit of variety and fluctuation (thought by many to exist only by convention), political science itself will inevitably admit of 'variety and fluctuation'. This is to say that the answers to key ethical questions, as well as the reasons supporting those answers, will be, at best, *for the most part true*. Thus for Aristotle, ethical truth will always be *rough*; and the results of the investigation will never be as precise or unchanging as we might find in mathematics—and, contrary to what we find in Kant, they are certainly not universally necessary in his sense of the terms.

Aristotle reiterates this point in Book VII of the *Ethics*, stressing that practical wisdom (*phronesis*) involves excellence in deliberation about particulars in the world of change or coming-to-be (1143b12.20), rather than excellence in the knowledge of universals and their theoretical application (*episteme*) or in the skillful production of certain ends (*techne*) (or in Kant's words, a savvy with the rules of skill). With Kant's critique of 'happiness' as a dictate of morality in mind (as something problematically indeterminate), it seems that Aristotle's position on what happiness *is* validates Kant's worry. Aristotle repeats that *eudaimonia* is not the sort of thing one can conceptually

grasp in its completion *à la* scientific knowledge. It is an activity, *a way of being*, which is not only contingent on the particular individual in question, but is something we can only affectively know if and when we 'get there'. Though we can provide a general definition of happiness (as Aristotle does) under which particular variations, depending on the individual, will fall, to know what, specifically, happiness is, we must rely on perception, intuition, and practice-in-action.

Teleology. Also fundamental to Aristotle's methodology is its teleological framework, which he describes most succinctly in the opening line of the *Ethics*: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (1094a18-20). In other words, as human beings, everything we do we do for a reason. There is always some end (a good) toward which we strive, seek, *desire*. From this, Aristotle argues: 1) all actions tend toward some good-end, 2) not all actions-ends can be instrumental (a means to some further end), 3) therefore, there must be some fundamental-grounding reason for the sake of which we do everything we do. The absolute end toward which we do everything must be something that all human beings (at least for the most part) seek, which he ultimately concludes is *eudaimonia*: human happiness, well-being, thriving, flourishing, *activity of the soul in accord with virtue*.

Given the fact that the good of the whole—that is, the happiness of the community, rather than the happiness of the individual alone—is the overarching goal of his ethical investigations, the *Ethics* is, above all, meant to serve as preparation for the

Politics.[23] As Aristotle puts it in Book VII of the *Politics*, the final end or the highest good of humanity is to form an organized state that is not an aggregate, but a union. He later goes on to define this union as a "community of equals aiming at the best life" (1328b7-1328b14). Thus, the more fundamental reason for the sake of which we do everything is the happiness of the community. That is, even beyond individual happiness, we ultimately seek to be members of a just community that actively strives to safeguard each of its members' individual pursuits of happiness *qua* instantiations of the good of the whole. Essential, for Aristotle, is that final good of the individual and the final good of the whole go together, hand-in-hand.

Dialectic: 'digging deeper'. Another key aspect of Aristotle's methodology is what at least looks like a proto-type for Kant's transcendental method. When analyzing phenomena, Aristotle is ultimately hunting for what appears to be constant in a diverse variety of instances—and conceptually distinct from those instances, albeit immanently operative within them as the ground for what they are. This 'constant' is not an eternal, unchanging truth (*qua* problematic caricature of the Platonic 'Forms'). For Aristotle, these constants, or universals, are found in—that is, actually existing in—things in the world. In regard to his pursuit in the *Ethics*, Aristotle emphasizes that although different people living different sorts of lives seem to have disparate understandings of what happiness actually is, it is still happiness that everyone desires.

[23] Thus, echoing a crucial point he makes in Book I: "Since [politics] uses the rest of the sciences, and since, moreover, it legislates what people are to do and what they are not to do, its end seems to embrace the ends of the other sciences. Thus it follows that the end of politics is the good for man. For even if the good is the same for the individual and the state, the good of the state clearly is the greater and more perfect thing to attain and safeguard. The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine. In short, these are the aims of investigation, which is in a sense an investigation of social and political matters" (1094b7-13).

Thus, in order to understand what happiness *is*, it is crucial to probe what happiness is to most people (to us, the many), locating both the shortcomings and insights that we find in our everyday discourse—that is, the false opinions and the kernels of truth—so as to work toward a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon at hand (in this case, happiness).[24]

Within this vein, also central to Aristotle's method is his insistence on engaging with the positions of his predecessors—ostensible experts on the topic at hand—in a way that, again, seeks to locate kernels of truth in their discourse while simultaneously locating and dismantling problems there within by juxtaposing their positions with puzzles and counterarguments. This mode of conversation with what has come before safeguards philosophy's pursuit to unconceal truth, as it respects thinkers who have wrestled with similar concerns, while dialectically moving beyond those positions in light of new puzzles and insights.

Paraphrasing Martha Nussbaum (indirectly agreeing with major figures within the Continental-hermeneutic tradition like Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur), dialogue is the

[24] This process of probing *pros hen* equivocation is one of Aristotle's great methodological insights. 'Pros hen' means in relation to or tending toward one. As Aristotle writes in Book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics*: "The term 'being' is used in many senses, yet not equivocally, but all of these are related to something which is one and a single nature … Thus, 'being' is used in many senses, but all of these are related to one principle, for some are called 'being' in view of the fact that they are substances, others by being attributes of substances, or else by being destructions or privations or qualities of substances, or productive or generative either of substances or of whatever is related to substances, or negations of any of these or of substances" (Γ.2.1003a33-12). For example, the attribute red is an aspect of "substance" (substance considered as the central case of being), and really *is* being, but only in a partial sense, as it is always defined in relation to, or predicated of, substance. Substance, on the other hand, is not an attribute of anything, and stands alone as the primary definition of being to which all other senses of being are related. For Aristotle, *pros hen* equivocation arises when a given term, e.g., being or happiness, is said or used in many ways, but each way is related to a central meaning or a definition of that term. When attempting to understand something in itself, surveying the host of ways in which the phenomenon is used and figuring out what each of those understandings are tending toward is therefore critical for Aristotle. Typically, what inhibits insight into the thing in itself is a lack of understanding, fostered either willfully or because of a poor education.

vehicle through which we can work toward the harmonious adjustment of our beliefs—both individually and in community with one another.[25] Aristotle is without question committed to a dialogic pursuit of ethical truth that seeks to overcome obstacles to communal agreement, as these, for Aristotle, mark "deficiencies in judgment and reflection."[26] This process is vital because it pushes the evaluator to remove themselves from their own prejudices: suspending disbelief, and committing themselves to the data of human experiences—especially to the opinions of the wise. Beyond this, for the Greeks, as Nussbaum stresses, the mark of being educated is understanding the ways of one's community—the various discourses of the people—and recognizing that these positions, even if problematic or shortsighted, are relevant in themselves.[27] People have reasons for what they believe, and, as Aristotle puts it in the *Eudemian Ethics*, "every man has some contribution to make to the truth" (1217a18-1217a29). Whether or not those reasons are strong is what is to be evaluated; and this process of sifting and sorting through various opinions and their reasons is the vehicle to further clarity.

The priority of particulars. With this dialectical method in mind, chief among Aristotle's interlocutors is of course Plato. Aristotle never fails to evaluate the positions held by the 'Platonists'; and in regard to ethics, there are key points of disagreement with 'Platonism' that motivate Aristotle's position. Perhaps most significant is what Nussbaum refers to as Aristotle's 'anthropocentricity', which can be understood as a response to Socrates's challenge to Protagoras's dictum that *man is the measure of all things*—the challenge being that *if* man is the measure of all things, *then* there can be no

[25] Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,* 1986*),* 10-11.
[26] Ibid., footnote on 11.
[27] Ibid., 252.

absolute truth, given the (often contradictory) variety of truths we find among men.[28] For Socrates, this sort of relativism leaves much at stake, especially if things like 'knowledge' and 'justice' admit of that sort of variety, often leading him toward a more 'divine' perspective in which god, not man, is the measure of all things. For Aristotle, the lens through which we are able to understand phenomena is, and will always be, distinctly human, meaning the only appropriate place to start an investigation on what it means to live well is to understand what this means to human beings. While this might initially lead to what appears to be a sort of brute relativism (as human beings tend to disagree, as Aristotle remarks, on any point—especially in regard to norms or customs), Aristotle's commitment to the aforementioned dialogic methodology safeguards a steadfast pursuit toward a sort of agreement that acknowledges difference, but is nonetheless committed to what remains constant.

This is to say that, for Aristotle, there is no view from nowhere, no ultimate standpoint, no non-experiential (like Kant's supreme moral principle) or divine (like a 'Platonic Form') measure. Thus, our perspectives and judgments on morality are necessarily conditioned by our being human. And for Aristotle, the pursuit of the good is the pursuit of what is (empirically speaking, as evidenced in experience) good *to us*. There is no standard or criterion other than that of a diverse variety of human beings, each making judgments and claims about phenomena. As Aristotle puts it in his notorious critique of the universal 'Platonic Good' in Book I of the *Ethics*:

> But then in what way are things called good? They do not seem to be like the things that only chance to have the same name. Are goods one, then, by being derived from one good or by all contributing to one good, or are they rather one by analogy? Certainly as sight is in the body, so is reason in the soul, and so on in other cases. But perhaps these subjects had better be dismissed for the present; for perfect precision about them would

[28] Ibid., 243.

> be more appropriate to another branch of philosophy. And similarly with regard to the Idea; even if there is some one good which is universally predicable of goods or is capable of separate and independent existence, clearly it could not be achieved or attained by man; but we are now seeking something attainable. Perhaps, however, some one might think it worthwhile to have knowledge of it with a view to the goods that are attainable and achievable; for having this as a sort of pattern we shall know better the goods that are good for us, and if we know them shall attain them. (1097a15-1097a23)

Central for Aristotle, therefore, is establishing a notion of the (human) good that is relevant and attainable *in this life*. That is, a life that we can actually live. The backdrop for these remarks in the *Ethics* is the 'Good beyond being' that we find in Platonism—a Good (denoting the essence of all that is predicated to be good) that at least appears to be transcendent and only problematically connected to life, as we know it.[29] By Aristotle's account, if the Good did exist in the way that his characterization of the Platonists propose, i.e., as a self-subsisting, ontologically distinct substance, then it is unclear how the sensible variety of particular goods that we experience in the world 'participate in' these eternal, unchanging, self-subsisting things. For Aristotle, a good of this sort ('the One'), ontologically distinct from the variety of goods ('the many') that we encounter in the world, does not make sense, and is, practically speaking, not helpful (1218b25-1218b31).

Again, decisive for Aristotle is that universal predications (e.g., goodness) only exist immanently in their particular instantiations. This point is crucial because particularity denotes being-reality in the most fundamental sense. Universals, *essences*, are only real as immanent in the plurality of their sensible instantiations, though they are not the 'most real' feature of a given thing. By Aristotle's account, to be is to be a particular *this* (*tode ti*)—an incommunicable differentiating factor (*thisness*) makes a

[29] It is important to note that this puzzle (the relation between 'the One' and 'the many') occupies the vast majority of his investigations in the *Metaphysics*. It is perhaps the most fundamental ontological problem.

thing what it is most fundamentally. Universals are what enable us to conceptualize and discuss particulars, as knowledge is always of universals (1003a7-18). This metaphysical point is important, as particulars (that which is distinct, different, singular) are what illuminate reality more so than anything else, whereas concepts (which are still real, though in a lesser degree) are what make particular things intelligible, understandable, and ordered objects of knowledge. For Aristotle, *to be* (in the most fundamental sense) is to be actual (*Metaphysics*, Books *Eta* and *Theta*), and to be actual is to be a particular *this*.

Beyond this, the many particulars that we encounter in experience are what ultimately provoke movement in the soul (DA, 433b5- 433b26)—they are what awaken our appetite, *desire*, affecting us and calling us to respond. For Aristotle, we do not desire concepts. Concepts are formed after our immediate encounter with a particular thing. And as we will see in 2.2, these metaphysical and epistemological points have clear implications within his ethics.

The things themselves: phenomena. It perhaps goes without saying that in line with his prioritization of particularity, and his insistence on relying on a distinctly human perspective, Aristotle is also deeply committed to the prioritization of phenomena: the things we perceive in the world through experience, as they appear to us. For Aristotle, appearances are precisely the sorts of things that we can make claims about; appearances are what are actual, and ever-present for us to access and probe. Appearances are what affect us and what are affected by us.

This of course marks a clear distinction from Kant's moral project, as Kant wants to establish and safeguard an *a priori* conception of morality that cannot be served by the

empirical-examples-appearances, as these inevitably fall short of the sort of universally necessary objectivity that he is interested in. That being said, it is important to point out that Aristotle is not concerned with the distinctly modern political concerns that Kant has (i.e., international perpetual peace, or anything like universal human rights). Moreover, as we will see below, Aristotle's conception of the self is, while in many ways similar, of course distinct from Kant's. Kant's 'two-standpoint' perspective mirrors what could be considered a more Platonic picture—that is, a conception of human beings simultaneously participating in the divine *and* in the world of appearances. Aristotle instead attempts to make sense of our ethical pursuits by honoring our species. For Aristotle, we are animals that belong exclusively to this world (of appearances), and this is not a defective feature of our condition. For Aristotle, we are not fallen, and we do not participate in two different realms or worlds, but are simply the type of animal that employs reason. Thus, we truly share certain features with animals—features that should also be taken into consideration—and we also appear to have capacities (namely, reason) that are distinct from animals, which should be taken into consideration. While I think Kant would agree (as this dimension of who we are is the dimension that clouds moral thinking, bound to the world of appearances), Aristotle does not find the 'animal' aspects of ourselves to be immoral, but instead valuable sources of information.

While Aristotle, as we will see below, is committed to self-sufficiency as a key dimension of his rendering of *eudaimonia*, his notion of self-sufficiency is radically distinct from the sort of self-sufficiency we find in Kant (i.e., autonomy). As both Bernard Williams and Nussbaum argue, vulnerability (to luck, fortune) plays a major role in Aristotle's project. And this is something that falls out of the picture in modern and

contemporary ethics with the rise of a conception of the self that can will to constitute itself in a particular way if it so chooses. Despite the fact that we all start off morally neutral, we are not born into equal opportunity or an equal playing field. Some people are more fortunate than others—this is a fact of life that has a major impact on whether one can flourish. As Williams puts it, the modern project is committed to providing us with "good-news" about our condition: we can always choose to be good—it is in our power. In agreement with Williams, Nussbaum reiterates that Aristotle, in reverence to the Greek tragedians, recognizes the caprices of amoral power.[30] And that in the end, for some of us, no matter how hard we try, we simply will not be happy, given our lot in life.

With this framework in mind, we can turn to a careful analysis of Aristotle's account of ethics: an account in which the *phronimos*, the practically wise human being, flourishes as one 1) who can deliberate gracefully in any and every situation, 2) who feels no tension between reason and passion, habituating their co-operation (under the rule of reason), and 3) who is constitutive of and, more importantly, is constituted by one's community.

2.2 ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS

What is happiness? For Aristotle, Happiness is directly related to our proper function-activity (*ergon*) as human beings, and therefore hinges on what we are *qua* what we do. In Aristotle's notion of proper function, we find a clear illustration of his teleological impulses. Just as all things tend toward some desired end, all human action is for the sake

[30] Nussbaum, *Fragility*, xxxv.

of some desired end or good. Since human beings are rational animals, our proper function is "activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle or, at least, not without it" (1098a5-10). Reason (or at least the capacity for reason) is our distinguishing characteristic, as this is what makes humans properly human. The human good, then, is activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (*arete*) or excellence; to act virtuously is to habituate activities that make us good at performing our proper function, ultimately enabling us to flourish, as habituating those activities enables us to do what we *truly* desire to do.

Thus, to be human is to act in accord with reason, as reason, ultimately governed by intellect (*nous*), is our distinguishing feature; *nous* "by its very nature rules and guides us" and "gives us our notions of what is noble and divine" (1177a14-16). To be most fully human is to let reason be our primary guide. As he writes in *De Anima*, because we are beings in time (able to reflect on the future), our appetites can originate movement counter to rationality, stretching out toward multiple things (433b5-433b11):

> Since appetites run counter to one another, which happens when a principle of reason and a desire are contrary and is possible only in beings with a sense of time (for while thought bids us hold back because of what is future, desire is influenced by what is just at hand: a pleasant object which is just at hand presents itself as both pleasant and good, without condition in either case, because of want of foresight into what is farther away in time), it follows that while that which originates movement must be specifically one, viz. the faculty of appetite as such (or rather farthest back of all the object of that faculty; for it is it that itself remaining unmoved originates the movement by being apprehended in thought or imagination), the things that originate movement are numerically many. (433b12-433b26)

Thus, our condition is constitutive of experiencing multiple and often conflicting desires, and being able to reflect on them—as he puts it, *thought bids us hold back because of what is future*. This means that the fine-tuning of the rational principle—and ultimately

fostering *obedience to* the rational principle—requires an active tempering of certain desires. The habituation of this tempering is how we eventually let reason be our guide.

It is worth noting that Aristotle often describes the relation between the soul and body as that between a master and slave (e.g., Book I of the *Politics*), or ruler and subject. As he puts it in the *Eudemian Ethics*, "we, by nature, are composed of a ruling and subject part, and should live according to the governing part" (1249b24-1249b25). The mind should, therefore, govern the appetites, because the mind, *thought itself*, is always right, while the appetites can be wrong, often striving toward apparent goods rather than the good itself (DA, 433b5-433b11). Thus, in order to live well—to most fully be what we are—we must live according to the activity of the ruling principle of reason. And while the appetites are the source of self-movement—driven to reach out toward objects of desire—thought can resist what the appetitive part of the soul desires, rendering thought a source of movement as well (DA, 433a9-433a12). It perhaps goes without saying that this schema is very similar to that which we find in Kant: an explicit call for obedience to reason in the face of conflicting desires. That is, a need to temper certain appetites (or as Kant puts it, a need to *legislate one*self), and a conception of thought itself being a source of movement (as we saw in Chapter 1, for Kant, we are unmoved movers).

While Aristotle's emphasis on rationality might lead one to think that he is quick to dismiss the role of the body in decision-making, Aristotle is mindful of our being composed of an animal element and a rational element, and the animal element's influence on deliberation and action. The passions and their associated pleasures and pains provide important truths about human life, and serve as sources of insight, e.g., fear

in the case of courage, or anger in the case of gentleness. Rather than being 'good' or 'evil' (NE, 1154a1-5), pleasure and pain are vital sources of information, indicators of moral action, meaning the virtuous person has the right attitude toward pleasure and pain—that is, not dismissing pleasure, pain, or any of the emotions, but rather using them as evidence (revealing something about our relation to the objects evoking pleasure or pain, e.g., feeling pained by anger toward somebody lying to us).[31]

Aristotle's acknowledgement of emotions, pleasures, and pains as valuable sources of information in human action distinguishes his ethical theory from Kant's. As we saw in Chapter 1, Kant contends that to be virtuous is to go against one's inclinations (*qua* expressions of self-love—fleeing from pain, running toward pleasure), and act from duty (for justice), whereas for Aristotle, the virtuous human being finds pleasure in doing virtuous things, maintaining the right attitude toward pleasure and pain. As Aristotle writes in Book IX of the *Ethics*:

> A happy man ought to be pleasant. … For a morally good man, inasmuch as he is a morally good man, finds joy in actions that conform to virtue and is displeased by actions which display vice, just as an expert in music feels pleasure when we hears beautiful tunes, and pain when he hears bad tunes … life is about the good and pleasant. We can see that from the very fact that everyone desires it, especially good and supremely happy men: for them life is the most desirable of all things, and their existence is the most blessed … they are pleased when they are conscious of the presence in them of what is in itself good. (1170a4-1170b10)

[31] For a more on the informative nature of the emotions, see Nussbaum's "Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature" and "An Aristotelian Conception of Rationality" in *Love's Knowledge*. As she writes, "practical reasoning unaccompanied by emotion is not sufficient for practical wisdom; that emotions are not only not more unreliable than intellectual calculations, but frequently are more reliable, and less deceptively seductive" (40). She of course further qualifies what she means by this, explaining that for Aristotle, emotions, e.g., fear, anticipation, grief, hope, anger, etc., are not blind animal reactions, nor are they merely false judgments or instances of pernicious reasoning, *contra* the Stoics, Plato, Kant, Spinoza, etc. Though they are not "self-certifying sources of ethical truth," there is a "richness of connections between emotions and judgments" that is beyond condemnation (42). She continues, explaining that emotions, to her, "are closely related to value judgments, and that the relevant judgments are judgments about things that we don't fully control" (388).

Aristotle continues this train of thought in Book X, stating that it is no wonder that men aim at pleasure, as each man finds that it "completes his life, and his life is desirable" (1175a17-20). For Aristotle, activity and pleasure (which also is an activity pertaining to the organic dimension of ourselves) are interdependent. Each type of pleasure, e.g., pleasures of thought, pleasures of sense, etc., accompanies and completes its respective activity. Thus, life itself and living ethically are pleasant in themselves. If ethical life were not pleasurable, we would be denying an important aspect of what it is to most fully be what we are.

Aristotle's ethical theory (in contrast to someone like Kant's) is, therefore, one that is uniquely hospitable to life in the sense that he is attuned to distinctly human moral indicators that lie beyond universality, e.g., universal duty, as well as his understanding of the often messy reality that is lived experience.[32] As Aristotle writes, "there are no fixed data in matters concerning action and questions of what is [morally] beneficial … the agent must consider on each different occasion what the situation demands" (1104a3-5). Moral action is about carefully attending to the particularities of both oneself and the given set of concrete circumstances. For Aristotle, when we are honest about decision-making, we realize that there is no one-size-fits all rule. Decisions always have to be made in relation to the particular situation at hand. As is the case with excellent doctors, we can and should use the 'rule' as a rule of thumb (e.g., you ought to treat this case of Y with X), but more importantly, we need to be ready, willing, and able to adapt that rule to the individual being treated. Adaptability is essential to virtue.

[32] Ibid., 179.

With adaptability and attunement to particularity in mind, the defining features of happiness, as Aristotle delineates them, are: 1) its self-sufficiency (not in the sense of isolation, but in the sense that the happy human does not lack anything, e.g., one is not striving for something beyond one's current state—one is utterly fulfilled as one is); 2) that it is an activity and an internal good (i.e., an orientation or way of being of the soul); 3) that it requires a sufficient amount of external goods (e.g., a higher social status, a degree of material wealth, friends); 4) that it occurs within a complete life (1089b26-29; 1099a30); and 4) that it does not happen by chance (1100b20). For Aristotle, it is not be possible to live well without certain goods outside of oneself (e.g., sufficient resources that are basic to life, a decent amount of fortune, beauty, good social standing, and healthy relations with others), and can only occur in a complete life since it requires the development of *nous* (experience gained by actively living life), as well as the proper habituation of virtue (including taking pleasure in virtuous activities), which takes practice and time. To enjoy virtuous activity—activity that is not initially pleasant—it must be repeated (like exercise), eventually giving way to pleasure in the activity as one reaps the benefits of excellence.

What Aristotle means by virtue being the 'mean' is that virtuous activity involves habituating moderate, rather than extreme, dispositions or characteristics (i.e., *how* we are). Aristotle's notorious notion of virtuous activity being the mean (e.g., friendliness) between extremes (e.g., obsequiousness and cantankerousness) is far from surprising. For Aristotle, the virtuous path is the middle path. And while it is often difficult to live moderately, the aim itself is quite intuitive. These moderate habits are acquired through

proper education: observing, experiencing, and ultimately living/doing/being the activities to the point of habituating them. As he writes:

> Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do; but it not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who also does them as just and temperate men do them. It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts the just man is produced… But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in the soul by such a course in philosophy. (1105b5-15)

This point is crucial and is often taken for granted. Aristotle stresses that virtuous activity not only involves observing and emulating what virtuous people do, but also intuiting the right way to perceive in various contexts and confidently acting in precisely that way. One can only be good if one's activities follow suit. The virtuous mean is always going to be determined in relation to the subject, i.e., the mean for you will be different than the mean for me, given our particularity (personal strengths, weaknesses, natural capacities, etc.). This means that the individual alone has access to what the mean is for them: nobody can tell them how, precisely, to proceed in a given context. While this might make it seem like virtue is subjective, relative—an expression of the mean as one sees fit—the way in which virtue is taught, in the observation and emulation of (virtuous) others, there is a general, flexible, measure (a rule of thumb/standard deviation) that is resized, reshaped to fit the soul in question.

The role of the 'rule of thumb' is important. These rules are not universally necessary laws, but rather general guidelines to be appreciated, reassessed, and tweaked though experience and discourse. We rely on the actions and conclusions of past-experts and then modify them to suit the present. As Aristotle puts it, virtue is "a state of

character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by the rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (1106b45-1107a5). While it might be easy, for instance, to get angry, to do this "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble" (1109a20-30). To be happy and thus to attain the highest good, therefore, is rare, difficult, and contingent on an exceptional education—that is, a window into how the practically wise man would determine things. The practically wise man provides the rule of thumb.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of happiness (in the fullest sense, as he defines it) is that it is a choice.[33] For Aristotle, happiness is voluntary (free from external forces), and requires awareness of what one is doing: it cannot be accidental. The defining feature of choice is that it is a byproduct of reasoned deliberation. We deliberate about things that are in our power and that can be realized in action. That is, we deliberate about means to desired ends, and about things that are not fixed, *indeterminate*. As he writes, "Deliberation, then, operates in matters that hold good as a general rule, but whole outcome is unpredictable, and in cases in which an indeterminate element in involved" (1112b10). Deliberation enables us to actively choose a preferred course of action to achieve the desired end in view—ultimately happiness. When Aristotle stresses that we deliberate about means to ends, rather than the ends themselves, his point is that the end is already decided, so to speak; the day-in, day-out choices that we make are

[33] It is important to stress here that the fact that we desire happiness is not up to us. We do not choose whether or not we want to be happy; happiness is the end that we all seek, whether we like it or not. What is up to us, however, is how we actualize that desire. My claim here is that happiness *qua* activity of the soul is accord with virtue is the byproduct of deliberation. This is to say that virtue is a choice (as we do not get there by default), but our desire to flourish is not (as this is the case by default).

always for the sake of flourishing, living well. Aristotle is *not* talking about comparing and selecting among options (a variety of ends), but instead a response to desires (that we are *pulled* by), influenced by pleasure and pain. This is distinct from achieving a pre-determined goal, producing something, or bringing about some state of affairs—which in the end, is out of our power (1114b30-1115a).[34]

So, how do we 'get happy'? As stated at the outset of this chapter, vital to Aristotle's account is the role of others in the development of virtue. Learning through observation and training require an exemplar—a virtuous paradigm—in whom, upon observation, one can see-feel-experience virtue's nobility, and thus feel motivated to aspire to what one observes in the other person. This is where Aristotle's account of friendship and justice crucially factor into his conception of happiness. And, as I will stress in the final section of this chapter, the condition for the possibility of *eudaimonia* is excellent education; that is, loving guidance from others, which is ultimately a form of justice.

Friendship. In Book VIII of the *Ethics*, Aristotle states that friendship requires that two people: 1) have a mutual good will toward each other (which means wishing each other's good *qua* wanting the other to improve in capacity for their own sake) (1155b30),[35] 2) are aware of each other's good will, and 3) are moved toward each other by desiring one of the three loveable qualities in each other, i.e., pleasure, utility, or

[34] The further the effects get from the original source of movement, the less power we have or them to be moral. To be moral, then, is to properly orient oneself so as to intend virtue. Grasping what that proper orientation is (*intuiting virtue*) is the result of much experience with many choices involving or assuming virtuous deliberation.

[35] As Aristotle puts it, "For many people have good will towards persons they have never seen, but whom they assume to be decent and useful, and one of these persons may well reciprocate this feeling. Accordingly, the two parties appear to have good will toward one another; but how can they be called 'friends' when they are unaware how they are disposed to one another?" (1156a).

goodness. This means that above all, friendship requires a good will, as well as a personal investment in the pleasure experienced with the other, the utility exchanged with the other as a means to pleasure, or the virtue shared with the other. Moreover, as Aristotle stresses, in order for a friendship to truly be a friendship, the relation stipulates that the better friend ought to receive more, as each ought to receive what they deserve, equalized through proportionate equality.

Friendship based on goodness is the most complete sense of friendship, though the other two types of friendship are also friendship, albeit in a partial sense.[36] Unique to friendship based on the good is that these friendships are rare and among few, as they require a lot of time and energy, living in close proximity to the friend, and immersing oneself as fully as possible in the friend's joys and sorrows, i.e., empathizing with the friend. Like virtue, friendship based on the good is the only type of friendship that is properly a choice: that is, being pulled to the other by reason (the result of deliberation), rather than the appetites alone (being pulled to the other because they are pleasant or useful). This is to say that in friendship based on the good, what you love and seek in your friend is ultimately what you love and seek in yourself: *eudaimonia*, living in accord with the rational principle within oneself (1157b25-25).

It is worth quoting Aristotle's initial remarks about friendship in the *Ethics*, as it is here that he underscores the necessity of others in the good life:

> After what we have said (about virtue), a discussion of friendship would follow, since it is a virtue or implies virtue, and is besides most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need

[36] For a thorough presentation of Aristotle's meditations on friendship, see Gary M. Gurtler, S.J., "Aristotle on Friendship: Insight from the Four Causes" in *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, ed. by Gary M. Gurtler, S.J. and Suzanne Stern-Gillet (Albany, SUNY: 2014), 35–50.

> friends most of all; for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? … And in poverty and other misfortunes men think friends are the only refuge. It helps the young, too, to keep from error; it aids older people by ministering to their needs and supplementing the activities that are failing from weakness; those in the prime of life it stimulates to noble actions—'two going together'—for with friends men are more able to both think and act… Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction and their worst enemy; and when men are friends there is no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality. (1155a5-25)

For Aristotle, the value and necessity of friendship is self-evident, though he provides reasons for those who might be skeptical about whether friends are truly necessary to the good life.[37] Aristotle emphasizes that despite the fact that happiness involves self-sufficiency, it would be strange to assign all good things to the happy man, but to not assign him friends, who are thought to be the greatest of external goods (1169b5). Since human beings are political by nature—again, community itself as the end above all ends that human beings seek—living with others is simply part of the human condition. Aristotle points out that those who suggest the happy man does not need friends are partially correct if what they mean by 'friends' is friendships based on utility: that is, friends sought for a particular use, an economic agreement, a "commercially" oriented relation (1158a20). Someone who is self-sufficient (in Aristotle's sense of the term) has little need for commercial relations, though they will always need friendships based on pleasure, as this involves sharing activities one finds pleasant with others (1158a20), which is vital to life.

With the skeptic in mind, Aristotle stresses that a major reason why friends are essential to the good life is that we learn from other people: "A certain training in virtue

[37] For a wonderful account of friends being the necessary condition for self-knowledge, and how loving and valuing the other for his own sake is the condition for the possibility of being able to love and value oneself, see John M. Cooper, "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle" in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Jul., 1977): 290-315

arises also from the company of the good…" (1170a10). Friends are mirrors by which we are able to observe and understand the nature of our actions, as it is far easier to observe other people's actions than our own (1169b30-1170a5). Experience is a testimony of this. In addition to this, Aristotle stresses that others are far better at *stimulating* activity—they motivate us more than we motivate ourselves. Experience is a testimony this as well, as other people often ignite the desire for activity, e.g., hearing a friend describe how meditation has helped her ease her anxiety and being motivated to try a meditative activity as well, or hearing a friend discuss things she learned in philosophy and being motivated to read philosophy, too, or even simply seeing a friend and being motivated to do things (rather than stay at home). Within this vein, actively sharing in discussion and thought are vital activities (1170a25-1170b15); this is of course something that we do with our friends. It is through sharing our experiences, thoughts, and reflections that we are able to think and grow both individually and with others.

In regard to others serving as sources of self-knowledge—mirrors through which we can better understand virtue in others and ourselves—in Book IX of the *Ethics*, Aristotle takes pains to sort out the relation between self-love and love-of-the-other. For Aristotle, virtuous friendship proceeds from one's relationship with oneself (1166a); habituating self-love is the basis for habituating a healthy love for others. By self-love, Aristotle is of course not referring to anything like narcissism, egocentricity, or what Kant would call self-conceit, but rather a properly ordered soul that embraces its capacity for reason, and is actively working toward *eudaimonia* through the habituation of excellent deliberation. For Aristotle, to truly love oneself is to honor one's capacities, and

thus live a life that is devoted to making those capacities excellent.[38] To honor one's capacities in this way—what Kant would call self-respect—one must have a sense of what virtue *is* instilled in them, so as to habituate movement in that direction. Naturally, if one loves (or rather, values) these capacities within oneself, one inevitable loves-values these capacities in the other(s)—that is, one loves other(s) who also honor themselves in precisely the same way, valuing the same things that the other values.

The takeaway here is that self-love is, in many respects, the same as love for the other insofar as what one loves is virtuous activity (acting in accord with virtue, acting in accord with one's rational principle). Though virtuous activity will be slightly different for each individual (as virtue is always determined in relation to oneself, i.e., one's particularity), the desire for the excellent exercise of reason is the same. Friendship based on the good is a mutual striving for excellent rational activity (happiness), loving and activating the rational element within oneself and the other by exercising reason by way of dialogue, discussion, conversation.

It seems clear that while we are, of course, capable of exercising reason alone—reflecting on the context-specific situations that we face, working to understand what the context at hand demands—we do not start out as virtuous (good reasoners), wherefore we need to observe, practice, and engage in this process with others who excel in reasoning well. This point is crucial; it hinges on the fact that we are shaped by those we are surrounded by. We are infected by their habits, so to speak. We become like our friends

[38] For an excellent article on Aristotle's notion of self-love *qua* self-respect/self-esteem, see Marcia L. Homiak's "Feminism and Aristotle's Rational Ideal," in *Feminism and History of Philosophy*, ed. Genevieve Lloyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

and they become like us, meaning *who* shapes us is of the utmost importance. This process begins when we are young, and continues through the end of our lives.

Justice. Although it is clear that the moral education (of the youth) is a vital, if not the most vital, element in a virtuous society,[39] it is not clear how, specifically, education relates to friendship and justice. With his definition of friendship in mind, Aristotle defines justice—the "greatest of virtues," concerned with what is *fair*—as the exercise of complete virtue in relation to one's neighbors (1129b25-30). This is to say that justice involves one having practical wisdom and orienting that activity toward the community. This definition of justice can be understood in the sense of legislation, instilling virtue-conducive laws in the community, and also in an unwritten/moral sense, in one's disposition or orientation toward others—friends and otherwise (1162b20). Justice (in the legal sense and in the moral sense) is the means by which we regulate our interaction with others, acknowledging that they, too, are animals acting in accord with their rational principles, pursuing *eudaimonia*.

In addition to this, Aristotle stresses that: 1) justice and friendship are concerned with the same objects and the same people (1159b25); 2) all communities have both friendship and justice (as they exist in the same relationship and coextensive in range (1159b25-1160a30); and 3) friendship itself depends on the justice established within a

[39] Aristotle's words on education *per se* in the *Politics* are sparse, and while it is clear that it is a vital ingredient in the virtuous city, the sketch he provides is very rough. He emphasizes that many disagree on what the character of education should be (e.g., is it of what is useful, or of what is virtuous, or of higher knowledge?), and that the practice as it existed then was "perplexing," to say the least (1337a30-35). Not much has changed since the time Aristotle was writing. What we do know is that for Aristotle, education begins with cultivating the body, and then cultivating the mind (134b25), and that different age groups are educated according to what is appropriate for their souls at that age (telling stories that are age-appropriate, e.g., sweeter stories of virtue, rather than vice, to the young, as "we always like best whatever comes first" (1336b30)). We also know that for Aristotle, education should be public, universal/unified, and controlled by the state (1337a2-30), and that music plays a fundamental role in moral cultivation. In addition to this, for Aristotle, "education should be based upon three principles—the mean, the possible, the becoming, these three" (1342b30).

given community (based on the type of constitution that community has) (1159b25-1160a30). Friendship is, therefore, contingent on the form of justice it is situated within; for instance, as Aristotle puts it, "the role of friendship decreases to the same extent as the part played by the just. It is least significant in the worst form: in a tyranny friendship has little or no place" (1161a30). And presumably, the just state is able to house not only a host of friendships, but also a host of friendships based on the good.

In light of Aristotle's remarks on justice and its relation to friendship in Book VIII of the *Ethics*, it seems reasonable to conclude that a just disposition—that is, being virtuous and being able to orient that virtue toward one's neighbor—is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for friendship. As Aristotle states, "the just in the fullest sense is regarded as constituting an element of friendship" (1155a30). Accordingly, justice is distinct from friendship in that it can be less intimate (though the "gravity of an unjust act increase[s] in proportion as the person to whom it is done is a closer friend" (1160a5)), and one can be just toward anyone and everyone (in contrast to one only being able to have a handful of virtuous friendships). It is also distinct from friendship in that it involves a duty to give what is owed (in proportion to merit), mirroring friendships based on utility, rather than friendships based on the good. There is ultimately a rehabilitative aspect to justice that is not required in friendships based on goodness, as the two are equal in goodness and their distribution of that goodness; though that rehabilitative movement could become necessary between friends who are on their way to a virtuous friendship, as the two must learn how to love each other well.

There is, therefore, a duty-based dimension built into justice that is latent in virtuous friendships—latent in the sense that the two in a virtuous relationship never fail

to fulfill their duty to the other. This fulfillment is built into the expression of their *philia*. There is no question as to whether the virtuous friend will give what is 'owed' or 'deserved', as both friends love, value, and appreciate the same thing—namely, flourishing—and desire it in the other. Their values are completely aligned: they value and desire *eudaimonia*, and value and desire each other as instances of it. As Aristotle notes, between friends, there is no need for justice in the sense of enforced legislation (though the just, like anyone, of course need friends) (1155a27-30). It is crucial, for Aristotle, that virtuous friends do well by each other for the sake of each other's well-being, which rests in an unwavering trust in each other's desire to foster precisely this.

To return to the question of how we might categorize education (as a form of friendship or justice), it seems clear that education is a form of justice, though in some cases, it is a form of friendship, too, but not necessarily. Education is the exercise of virtue in relation to unequal others (in the sense that one is a teacher and the others are learners)—others that are not necessarily intimate in relation, but others whose well-being the community has a vested interest in (for their own sake *and* for the sake of the whole). For Aristotle, education in virtue is vital. In order to become virtuous in relation to others 1) as a just human being, and 2) as a friend (entering a friendship based on the good), the individual needs to first *be virtuous*, as this clearly is the condition for the possibility of being virtuous toward the others. The condition for the possibility of virtue is a proper education in which the student is habituated into a virtuous existence by observing, emulating, and ultimately *living* the lives of virtuous role models—that is, not just by understanding the good, *but being good by doing good*.

2.3 THE ARISTOTELIAN SOUL

First and foremost, as mentioned at the onset of this chapter, the Aristotelian self is not a self that is caught between two worlds—fallen, depraved, in need of rehabilitation—but instead an animal that is unique from other animals in its capacity to reason. To be human is to act in accord with the rational principle within oneself; to most fully be human is to do this well.

It is important to point out that for Aristotle, reason conceptually breaks down into two faculties: one dealing with what cannot be otherwise (the scientific, theoretical faculty), the other dealing with decision-making in the world of coming-to-be, or dealing with what *can* be otherwise (the calculative, practical faculty) (1139a17-1139a18). Deliberation is the activity proper to the calculative dimension of reason (e.g., deliberating about whether to quit a current job trajectory for the sake of one's well-being). As detailed above, everything we do, as human beings, is for the sake of flourishing. Desire necessarily leads us toward *eudaimonia*: an activity of the soul in accord with virtue. To act is accord with virtue—to be practically wise—is to deliberate well.

To deliberate well involves the ability to identify relevant, salient features in new contexts, so as to tactfully make decisions that are informed by past experiences, albeit fine-tuned to fit the phenomena at hand. This process involves referencing 'rules of thumb' or 'right-reason' (universal notions of how one ought to proceed in various situations, derived from the community's social norms and personal experience), and then tweaking them, so as to most adequately address the present situation—striving for

the mean (in relation to oneself) between excesses. To be virtuous is to have habituated this sort of adaptability, driven by a confidence in one's ability to excellently respond to what is changing, unexpected, otherwise than before. This confidence derives from a habituated openness to external phenomena, and an acceptance of one's exposure in the face of the unpredictable. This should be understood as a form of self-sufficiency, marked by a trust in oneself to respond appropriately, no matter the circumstances.

This self-sufficiency *qua* self-confidence is what Aristotle has in mind when he describes self-love: it is taking pride in, and thus loving-desiring, one's ability to reason well, even in the face of adversity, and especially in the face of something new and unexpected. Aristotelian self-love is the activity of trusting our capacity for virtue—a capacity that we can actualize and polish through intentional care toward how we respond to (changing) things outside of us. This trust in oneself is a necessary condition for being hospitable to, and thus vulnerable before, new data.

With the Kantian self in mind, it is important to stress that the Aristotelian schema is by no means incompatible with Kant's. The emphasis on self-legislation, i.e., governance by reason, is crucial for both thinkers, and while Kant has a different understanding of happiness than Aristotle (as Kant is ultimately critiquing a more hedonistic/relativistic/heteronomous sense of happiness than we find in Aristotle), both thinkers agree that happiness is not completely in one's power, and that happiness is not the sort of thing that permits a universal definition that is not at least in some sense contingent on the agent. Kant's response,[40] however, is to provide a determinate moral

[40] Here, I am following suit with his insistence on equality among rational beings, and, as Bernard Williams puts it, the need for "good news" about our human condition. For more on this, see Bernard Williams's argument in *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

principle that is not only accessible to all, but completely within our control—and, in fact, something that we desire/will to do. That fact (of reason) never changes. For Kant, despite happiness being something we do not have control over—something we can simply *hope* for—we do have control over forming a just disposition; it is always in our power, it is always a matter of choice. It is in this sense that we are capable of being completely self-sufficient agents—freely choosing the autonomy of the will *qua* obeying the moral law/acting from duty. The bottom line for Kant is that satisfying individual happiness is never promised (contingent, conditioned), though a just community is ours, if we will it to be: *if we will freedom*. For Aristotle, if we are fortunate enough to find ourselves in a just community, and are properly trained by way of excellent moral education and good friends, virtue is for the most part in our power. This is to say that virtue is something that we are responsible for, but only insofar as we are provided with the right conditions. For Aristotle, we might simply be unlucky: born in an unjust community, born a slave, born a woman, or born in an environment that is simply inhospitable to virtuous behavior.

In addition to this, and in contradistinction to the depiction of virtue that we get in Kant, the *phronimos* knows the good, does the good, *and* finds pleasure in that activity. This is to say that for Aristotle, there is no tension felt in the exercise of virtue—especially not in the sense of a painful striking down of self-conceit (which, above all, honors inclination). For Aristotle, if self-conceit is pained, one is not fully virtuous, but rather morally strong or continent. Accordingly, moral strength involves knowing the good, doing the good, being pained by the process, but not shunning that pain in the way a morally weak/incontinent soul would. A central feature of virtue is that the virtuous self

is able to deliberate and choose in a way that is, as Aristotle puts it, "unimpeded" (1153a15), meaning that the subject is fully present to the content at hand, and is not at war with herself in any regard ('war' indicating a tension induced by fear's hesitation, or the drive to flee from pain). Thus, the properly habituated soul does not feel painfully pulled by duty to do the right thing, or drawn toward the pleasure associated with various excesses. The properly habituated soul finds joy in the process of measuring, seeking the mean, and (through the habituation of temperance) working toward balance in any given context: by understanding all of the variables, locating what is and is not in one's control, and then confidently choosing the best course of action, i.e., what is most conducive to happiness.

Pleasure, as Aristotle understands it, is not a perceptible process, but an unimpeded activity that *augments* the full exercise of one of our faculties (1153a15-35). The pleasure specific to virtue is perhaps best described as a tranquil freedom, which is markedly distinct from the pleasures that are marked by self-indulgence (1153a30). Kant does not use this language in his account (as he dismisses all notions of pleasure as antithetical to virtue), but it seems clear that Aristotelian temperance is not incompatible with Kantian morality. The *phronimos's* tranquil freedom is something akin to Kant's autonomous will—a will not menaced by things that are ultimately not within one's power. Moreover, Aristotle's understanding of the pleasures of self-indulgence as something to be avoided is akin to Kant's understanding of non-moral inclinations.

The important point that Kant makes, which again, is in fact not at odds with Aristotle's account, is that we cannot even begin talking about the practical dimensions of ethics (e.g., the virtues, friendship, etc.) until we know with certainty what is *right*: the

moral law, justice. For Aristotle, too, a just community is the condition for the possibility of virtuous dispositions and virtuous relations. Kant's decisive move is to bring our desire for justice (the crowning virtue for Aristotle) 'into the subject' as the condition for the possibility of living well with others, ultimately redefining it as the moral law. For Kant, this is the baseline for peacefully co-existing in a community, ultimately built upon a notion of self-respect as an affect that springs from feeling respect for others by rationally encountering the humanity that each of has within ourselves (by virtue of reason). I would contend that, for both thinkers, justice is the necessary condition for effective moral education; and justice is the necessary condition for the ability to be an authentic friend. For Kant, following the moral law is nothing more than respecting the dignity (capacity for reason) in oneself and the other. Without a respect for dignity (or in Aristotle's terms, a recognition and love of activity in accord with virtue), how could a friendship based on the good ensue? The moral law, as Kant establishes it, safeguards the integrity of non-economic relationships—that is, relations in which the other is always considered as an end in itself, never a mere means to something else (as is the case in Aristotelian friendship based on pleasure and utility). For Kant, friendships based solely on economy or pleasure would effectively be non-moral relations.

To return to Aristotle's account, it seems clear that justice—including education—is the condition for the possibility of the self-love that is required to properly order one's soul, which ultimately involves granting reason the role of the master, i.e., respecting it as the highest and most noble part of the soul, and then habituating activities conditioned by reasoning well, so as to eventually find pleasure in activities that are, in fact, pleasant in themselves. In order to love oneself *qua* housing a rational principle, one

needs to be educated in a way that celebrates that dimension of oneself, and provides adequate space and time for one to learn how to do precisely this. As Aristotle writes at the end of the *Ethics*:

> But it is difficult to get from youth up a right training for virtue if one has not been brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most people, especially when they are young. For this reason their nurture and occupations should be fixed by law; for they not be painful when they have become customary. But it is surely not enough that when they are young they should get the right nurture and attention; since they must, even when they are grown up, practice and be habituated to them, we shall need laws for this as well, and generally speaking to cover the whole of life; for most people obey necessity rather than argument, and punishments rather than the sense of what is noble. (1179b30-1180a5)

Thus, those who do the work of actualizing justice (both unwritten and *qua* legislation) need to facilitate the habituation of virtue by constructing laws, systems, and structures that instill this in the community—above all, through the education of the youth. As Aristotle writes, "It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference" (1103b27-1104a9). We are the types of animals that form habits, and, *qua* social animals, those we are surrounded by inevitably in-form those habits. We are mirrors of those we are surrounded by, and as Aristotle stresses, this makes all the difference, as we are not born with habits innately built into us. Habits are either taught actively (e.g., observing and reflecting on a virtuous protagonist in a story with friends or classmates), or passively (e.g., becoming friends with someone who is a liar, and, over time, acquiring their habit of lying when facing painful situations). By instilling virtue into the youth, they can grow with their desires in line with virtue.

For Aristotle, education begins with the child integrated into the discourse of their community (by way of stories, traditions, music, morals, etc.,), and then gradually, with

age, reflecting on those accounts they are provided with, so as to learn how to construct judgments, and provide good reasons for those judgments. If properly habituated, the virtuous self is a self who is able to foster an orientation toward unpredictability and indeterminacy—the world of coming-to-be—that allows one to not only deliberate with confidence, but also to find tranquil freedom in this activity, embracing the unpredictability of life as we know it. Moral educators are, therefore, like doctors training aspiring physicians—both activities involve a lack of precision and predictability. They educate youth who are not only learning about what it might mean to live well, but who are actively engaged in the first steps of that process—hearing stories of virtue and vice, observing acts of virtue and vice, discussing them with their teachers and peers, and then eventually acting in light of those stories. With this in mind, it seems clear that conversation (and the habituation of conversation) is a vital, if not the most vital, dimension of moral education. That is, conversation understood as opening oneself to what is other than oneself *qua* listening (e.g., to a story, or to another person's perspective), then working to understand the phenomena at hand *with* another. It goes without saying that the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues is paradigmatic of this activity.

A brief note on the life of contemplation. I will refrain from entering the debate as to whether or not Aristotle's account of happiness in Book X.6-8, i.e., happiness as the life of contemplation (activity of the soul in accordance with its highest or best part, *nous*), is at odds with the rest of the *Ethics*, i.e., the claim that happiness is the life of practical wisdom. However, it seems clear that, given Aristotle's account of the faculties of reason, there is an excellence specific to our capacity and need to make decisions (*phronesis*), as well as an excellence specific to our capacity to study and behold

theoretical truths: namely, theoretical wisdom (*sophia*).[41] Contemplation is the activity proper to the scientific/theoretical dimension of reason, accompanying theoretical wisdom.

It is absurd to think that the philosopher, living the life of contemplation, completely ceases participation in the world of particularities and action altogether, or that the calculative element of the rational part of her soul somehow dissolves, and that making virtuous choices is no longer necessary. Deliberation is an intrinsic feature of human existence; deliberation is how we work toward the ultimate end that we all seek. As Aristotle writes:

> It is now clear that we should still need practical wisdom, even it had no bearing on action, because it is the virtue of a part of our soul. But it is also clear that <it does have an important bearing on action, since> *no choice will be right without practical wisdom and virtue.* For virtue determines the end, and practical wisdom makes us do what is conducive to the end. (1145a3-6, emphasis mine)

Thus, it seems like the human good (given our embodied and social context, and our proper function) would *ideally* encompass both theoretical and practical wisdom—though this is an admittedly tall order. That said, I think Aristotle's point is that although *sophia* and *phronesis* are distinct, the two intellectual virtues are by no means mutually exclusive, as "both theoretical and practical wisdom are necessarily desirable in themselves," each simply involves a different part of the rational soul (1144a1-3). *Sophia*, pertaining to the "better part of our soul," does not ever lose authority over practical reason; however, "man fulfills his proper function only by way of practical wisdom and moral excellence," as "no choice will be right without practical wisdom and virtue" (1144a3-11). Insofar as a human is human, *phronesis* is a vital component of the good

[41] For an impressive solution to this long-standing debate, see Gary M. Gurtler, S.J.'s "The Activity of Happiness in Aristotle's Ethics." *The Review of Metaphysics* 56 (June 2003): 801-834.

life because human life necessarily involves making decisions as one navigates through the particularities of experience—regardless of the type of life one is living.

Beyond this, *phronesis* is what *makes the provisions to secure or attain theoretical wisdom*, even though *phronesis* is always subordinate to the contemplative end that it secures (1145a7-12). Given the fact that practical wisdom makes the provisions to secure theoretical wisdom, it seems somewhat unlikely that the philosopher would lack practical wisdom altogether (as she virtuously chooses to live the life of contemplation as a means to *eudaimonia*), though it is possible (as Aristotle notes in Book VI, referring to Anaxagoras and Thales). The philosopher inevitably needs to make decisions based on the concrete, particular circumstances she is confronted with, meaning she will inevitably be called to deliberate, exercise right reason, consider the emotions, and make good choices in a variety of situations. This means that it is by no means unthinkable for the sage, in addition to being wise in the most complete sense, to be practically wise, successfully habituating the moral virtues.

Per Aristotle's account in Book X, it seems like philosophers ought to strive to be both practically and theoretical wise—deliberating, acting, and contemplating *at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner* (1106b21-23). As Aristotle puts it, contemplation itself can be injurious to health (1153a21)—not because it is pleasurable, but because it can, like anything else, be pursued in excess. An example of this might be an academic, completely immersed in her contemplative-scientific activities, disconnecting themselves from her communities, forgetting to tend to the practical dimensions of her well-being (e.g., her physical health),

and not having healthy social relations, which are crucial to being a part of the discourse of the community, and knowing the language of the people.[42]

2.4 CONCLUSION

To return to the chief aim of this chapter, given the sketch above of Aristotle's ethical project and the conception of the self that operates therein, it seems clear that, for Aristotle, the virtuous soul is a soul habituated toward *eudaimonia* by and through a just community. *Eudaimonia* is the end that we desire most, and justice is the means to procure this end, as justice aims to safeguard the well-being of all individuals that constitute the whole community—thus implying that justice, including just education, is a concomitant end toward which all of our actions aim as a necessary condition for *eudaimonia*. Wherefore, we desire justice, too.

Thus, the Aristotelian self is a self whose well-being depends on others. For Aristotle, we are social animals that require: 1) a just community through which we receive a proper education, and 2) friends who seek to love, preserve, and augment our well-being (and for which we do the same). Virtuous others are most necessary to living—necessary in the sense that it is (as Aristotle defines 'necessary' in the *Metaphysics*), "(a) that without which, as a condition, a thing cannot live … (b) the conditions without which good cannot be or come to be, or without which we cannot get

[42] For an insightful and illuminating account of the relation between the philosophical and political lives in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Gabriel Richardson Lear's "Two Happy Lives And Their Most Final Ends," Chapter 8 in *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics,"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

rid or be freed of evil; e.g., drinking the medicine" (*Metaphysics*, 1015b10-15). This is perhaps self-evident, but crucial, for it bears repeating that the road to *eudaimonia* hinges on the people around us (determining *how we govern ourselves*), which reiterates that *eudaimonia*, while a choice that we are responsible for, is something that is only partially in our control. We are vulnerable to those around us.

Beyond this, it is ultimately through conversations with others who are older and wiser, and others who are our age, experiencing the things that we are experiencing as we experience them, that we are able to make sense of phenomena and work toward the aim of promoting *eudaimonia* both in ourselves and in the community at large. It perhaps goes without saying that habituating this sort of conversation is vital not only to one's health, but also to the health of the community. It is this fundamental dimension of *who we are*—animals that are groomed, shaped, and habituated by others—that is safeguarded in Aristotle's project. As is the case with Kant, it is ultimately the other who helps or hinders our capacity to *know thyself*. Furthermore, for Kant, it is our desire for the well-being of the community—our desire for justice—that serves as a necessary condition for the possibility of our own well-being. And in the end, acting for the good of the whole takes precedence over everything, as this is the condition for the possibility of virtue.

With this in mind, we can fast-forward to contemporary Aristotelian accounts, and the ways in which Aristotle's ethics has been recollected, rejuvenated, and reimagined to address the allegedly dire state of 20th-century Anglo-American moral philosophy.

PART II

3.0 CHAPTER 3: RECOLLECTING THE TELEOLOGICAL SELF

> *Nay, I said, ask if you will; but I am certain that you have heard the answer many times, and now you either do not understand me or, as I rather think, you are disposed to be troublesome; for you have been told that the idea of good is the highest knowledge, and that all other things become useful and advantageous only by their use of this. You can hardly be ignorant that of this I was about to speak, concerning which, as you have often heard me say, we know so little; and, without which, any other knowledge or possession of any kind will profit us nothing. Do you think that the possession of all other things is of any value if we do not possess the good?*
>
> **—Socrates, Plato's *Republic*, 505a-b**

This chapter fast-forwards to the ways in which Aristotelian approaches have been employed to address the arguably stifled state of contemporary moral philosophy. I will begin by describing the 'crisis' in 20th-century moral philosophy as rendered by seminal texts in the Anglo-American/analytic tradition, underscoring the problematic conception of the self that undergirds and fosters the perpetuation of that crisis—as production-oriented and anti-contemplative—and the movement to reclaim Aristotelian virtue ethics as a direct response. I will then critically interpret two Aristotelian-inspired approaches to re-imagining the task of moral philosophy and the moral philosopher—one at the inception of the movement (Alasdair Macintyre), the other within the last decade (Talbot Brewer). Both Macintyre and Brewer are deeply committed to reclaiming the teleological self who is on the way to *the good*.

I conclude by identifying the major insights to build from in these exemplary cases, particularly the recovery of our intrinsic desire to immerse ourselves in activities for their own sake, that is, our desire to lose or *disrupt* ourselves (what I will call 'self-disruption' in Chapters 4 and 5). I end by returning to Macintyre's claim that Aristotle and Nietzsche are the only viable theoretical alternatives in our disordered contemporary context, ultimately proposing that Levinas's unique and radical reclamation of moral sense and the ethical 'self', may in fact, be a viable 'third way'—especially when understood through, and combined with, the motivations, critiques, and reclamations showcased in this chapter.[43]

3.1 THE CRISIS

In Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggle's 2016 *New York Times* piece, "When Philosophy Lost its Way," the authors argue that philosophy, in its attempt to emulate the method of the natural and social sciences in the modern university, deleteriously began "operating under the modus operandi of knowledge production," prioritizing "knowledge of the good over doing the good."[44]

[43] I am grateful to Drew Alexander, Jorge Garcia, and Micah Lott for illuminating key debates within 20th-century Anglo-American ethics, and for helping me appreciate the (re)turn to Aristotle there within.

[44] Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggle, "When Philosophy Lost Its Way," in *New York Times*, "The Stone" (January 11, 2016). It is important to stress that in order to do the good, there must be some sort of knowledge of the good, so this is not to say one comes without the other. Their point is that knowledge of the good *qua* concrete answers with supporting data/adequate justification has become the status quo in philosophy at the expense of the most pressing concern of being and doing good. Another way of putting it is that *true belief* in the good has taken precedence over the activity of understanding the good, which involves living that good.

At the onset of his 1981 text, *After Virtue*, Alasdair Macintyre notoriously laments that although we who do moral philosophy within academia's walls use the language of morality, moral philosophy itself is in a grave state of disorder. Philosophy has lost its theoretical and practical comprehension of morality, which is to say that, despite Aristotle's warning in Book II of the *Ethics*, philosophical knowledge of the good has effectively been divorced from doing the good. Rather than striving to help both others and themselves understand what it means to flourish or live well, moral philosophers now strive to keep up with the hard sciences: producing knowledge *qua* concrete answers, supported by adequate evidence, to a prefigured set of questions (e.g., *what grounds the claims that morality makes on us?*). This method often leads to reductionism for the sake of clarity, simplicity, universality, and normalization.[45] And as we will see, it has also arguably led to the calcification of a predominantly production-oriented understanding of what it is to be, which has in turn de-emphasized the significance of activities and sources of value that are otherwise than industrious, efficient, or well-calculated.

As Frodeman and Briggle stress, the language(s) of philosophy have somehow become more and more arcane and abstruse to those both inside and outside of academia's walls—inhibiting both *intra* and *inter*-disciplinary communication. The most troubling aspect of this phenomenon is that once philosophers decided to stick to debates among those of 'their kind', esoterically quibbling over minor details within complex, abstract, and obscure arguments, people stopped listening to philosophers—and perhaps for good reasons. It is, after all, difficult to listen to someone who has fallen so deep into

[45] Ibid. For a beautiful account of how the biggest danger to philosophy is not ignorance, but rather 'bad philosophy', see Chapter 8 of Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness*. It is here that she characterizes bad philosophy as philosophy that values oversimplification and reduction, and captivates because of its clarity—ultimately simplifying life, as we know it.

their area of expertise that they have (almost) forgotten how to break things down to their most basic elements, or invite others into new discourse by way of accessible language. This is all to say that in its pressure to keep up with and protect a space for itself within the academy, it seems that philosophy has lost its way in the sense that it has strayed from an understanding of itself as a way of life—therapy for the soul—perhaps best exemplified by Socrates, the philosopher *par excellence*.[46] Working within a results-oriented paradigm (extending far beyond the academy, within K-12 spaces, too), graduate students and faculty feel the all-too-often insurmountable pressure to "publish or perish," and are driven to become experts in a sense that often eliminates the possibility of having conversations with those outside of their area of specialization (sometimes including their own students).[47]

It is important to stress that in itself, the pressure to keep up with the hard sciences is not necessarily a problem; it becomes a problem when philosophy—especially ethics/moral philosophy, questioning what it is to flourish in a world with with others—is rendered obsolete. That is, it becomes a problem when philosophy comes to be understood as a discipline that perhaps has no place in education, especially if there is sparse evidence of its efficacy.[48]

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[46] Authors like Pierre Hadot have made precisely this point, attempting to swing philosophy back, in the spirit of the ancients to philosophy as a way of life. See Hadot's 1995 text, P*hilosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*.

[47] There are, of course, exceptions to this, but the way the discipline is set up, in order to succeed in the academic world, one must become an expert on a thin slice within the tradition—perhaps opening up to a set of thinkers or questions adjacent to the thinker or question at hand, but never much more than that. And how could they? We only have so much time, and between teaching, publication, and service requirements, it is incredibly difficult to become well-read beyond a given piece of the philosophical pie, and the approved strictures beyond which one need not proceed.

[48] I have in mind here what is now referred to as the crisis in the humanities, which involves the growing lack of institutional-financial support for various programs in the liberal arts due to skepticism on how these programs contribute to student success. For a rich account of the problem and subsequent defense of the value of the humanities, see "What Good are the Humanities," a lecture delivered by Talbot Brewer on

Rewind to 1912: in H.A. Prichard's seminal defense of ethical intuitionism, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?,"[49] Prichard provides a much-cited, thorough account of the crisis in 20th-century moral philosophy. He begins by explaining that a time inevitably comes when the student of moral philosophy finds herself dissatisfied with the subject as a whole. The arguments becoming decreasingly convincing and the aim of the subject becomes increasingly obscure. The aspiring moral philosopher cannot help but ask herself what she is arguing for, for whom, and *why*.[50] Though Prichard does not get into this, it is important to underscore that this inevitable moment of existential crisis often leads to frustration, apathy, and at its worst, resentment toward one's activities within the discipline—and the discipline as a whole. While Prichard's description of the plight of the student of moral philosophy is apt (even 100 years later), it seems strange that the aim of moral philosophy could be or become so obscure. Although living well is not always an easy task, what about it is so abstruse?

What Prichard is referring to is an abstruseness that is the result of a particular way of proceeding in moral philosophy—that is, a methodological approach that (in the wake of Kant) requires 1) proofs or arguments for specific ways of understanding ourselves and how we ought to be within a world with others, and 2) the relentless critiquing, tweaking, and sharpening of those proofs (in deference to the literature/debates on the table) over and over again. Prichard's claim is that the chief reason the student of moral philosophy becomes increasingly unconvinced by moral

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December 14, 2016. Also see Frodeman and Briggle's recent publication, *Socrates Tenured: The Institutions of 21st-Century Philosophy*, which uses data to elaborate on their claims in this article.

[49] H.A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" in *Moral Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-17.

[50] Echoing Prichard: *what are we really going to learn by Moral Philosophy? What are the books on Moral Philosophy really trying to show, and when there is clarity, why are they so unconvincing and artificial? And why is it so difficult to substitute anything better?* (Ibid., 1).

philosophy's arguments and suspicious of its aim is that moral philosophy is repeatedly, mistakenly, and even foolishly attempting to answer an improper question: namely, *why should I take care of the other(s)?* Or in Kantian terms, *why should I act from duty?*

The moral philosopher's task, therefore, presupposing the precedence of some version of this question, is to 1) find the ground of morality—namely, the fundamental thing, *à la* Kant, that justifies why I ought to do my duty and take care of the other(s)—and then to 2) convincingly prove why it is so. And by Prichard's account, methodologically speaking, this is a mistake.

Critical of both the deontological and utilitarian-consequentialist traditions, as well as the predominantly binary ethical *milieu* in modern moral philosophy (that is, the theoretical either/or of some breed of deontology or utilitarianism), Prichard stresses that the underlying fallacy in moral theory is that 'right' and 'wrong' have something to do with motives or aims. His claim is that these things have nothing to do with motives because duty has nothing to do with (a certain form of) justification. And why? Because it is immediate, intuitive, and self-evident. There is no motive for our motives in the sense of reasons that lie somewhere outside of immediate apprehension of the value in engaging in the activity itself—that is, desiring to engage in the activity itself.

Kant himself suggests as much in the *Groundwork*, carefully delineating the difference between hypothetical and categorical imperatives: the former involving an action done for the sake of an intended purpose (denoting a lack of moral worth), the latter expressing the marriage of action and purpose (denoting moral worth). Where moral worth is concerned, the 'purpose' is the action. That is, the action is done for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else. For Kant, as we saw in Chapter 1, the mark

of morality is precisely the fact that the action is not chosen on the ground of something different from the action itself. Granted, Kant nonetheless asks and tries to answer the allegedly illegitimate question.

So why, then, do we insist, like Kant, on finding a ground for just actions? Prichard's claim is that we insist on finding a ground because reflection evokes the *why* question (why did you do X? And why should you do Y?), ultimately leading reason to demand a motive for the moral motive (though the motive for the motive *does not actually exist* in the form that reason demands). Prichard's point is that when we reflect on our actions, and untangle our motives (as Kant does in the *Groundwork*), we cannot help but arrive at a sense of mediation that leads us to think there were reasons (beyond engaging in the right thing) for doing the right thing, somehow disconnecting the action itself from the *purpose* of that action (what the action will bring about). Prichard stresses that 'motive' is not the same thing as 'purpose', as the latter implies an understanding of obligation based on the recognition of goodness (in or by the action), whereas the former is simply a desire-inducing action, which need not involve a determinate object of desire or *purpose*. Reflection thus leads us into a moral perspective that problematically presupposes the need to prove the purpose of our action, as though every action has an objective aim or purpose outside of itself that we *ought* to desire to bring about.

For Prichard, hearkening to Aristotle, we do not appreciate obligation by way of argumentation. Our sense of obligation results from, as he puts it, our immediate apprehension and appreciation of goodness, intuition. Thus by Prichard's account, we (moral philosophers) have been duped in the sense that reflection has tricked us into reinforcing a problem that we cannot solve because it is ultimately self-evident; it is a

fool's task to try and prove what is already the case. Our mistake in moral philosophy, therefore, is presupposing the possibility of proving what is right in front of our faces. As Nussbaum puts it in the *Fragility of Goodness*—echoing Aristotle's insistence in Book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics* that we cannot prove what is self-evident—the charge to prove what is right in front of our faces is ultimately made by one who does not know the ways of one's community, as they lack a certain degree of education (*apaideusia*).[51] In Prichard's case, the non-community member who demands a demonstration for what need not be demonstrated is the moral philosopher.

With the discontented students of moral philosophy in mind, Prichard appropriately asks: *if there can be no answer to an illegitimate question, except that the question is illegitimate, what can moral philosophy hope to answer or offer? What work is there to be done?* By Prichard's account, we, moral philosophers, will inevitably and erroneously continue to repeat an improper question—demanding, like Kant, a ground for morality—until we realize that obligation is self-evident, immediate apprehended.[52] That is, we will continue asking an illegitimate question until we realize that there is no ground for morality—at least not in the way philosophical reflection has assumed there to be.

Does this mean that ethical intuitionism—unwavering confidence in instant ethical knowledge—has the final word? And that when it comes to questions concerning duty, justice, and what we owe each other, there is no place for a certain type of argumentation? What, then, is the task of moral philosophy?

[51] Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 252.
[52] Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", 8.

A plethora of 20th-century philosophers have agreed with Prichard, discarding morality and moral theories as illusions or futile attempts to prove something that we simply cannot prove. Because the sense that we ought to do something arises in our unreflective consciousness, occasioned by the various situations in which we find ourselves, it rests on immediate confidence in response to certain phenomena—apprehended by an act of moral thinking. This resonates with the 'Aristotelian' approach, as Aristotle is not trying to prove why we ought to be just, or to convince us (via *logos* alone) that we ought to do things. The best that virtue ethics can offer, as Prichard stresses, is the *details* of our desire to flourish, to be more fulfilled, which is always and already being the case. But this will not tell us what we ought to do and why. As Prichard writes, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is so "disappointing" to moral philosophers because Aristotle does not do what moral philosophers want him to do, i.e., answer why we ought to do our duty.[53] As we saw in Chapter 2, Aristotle does not promise to tell us what we ought to do and why, but instead describes virtue and its relation to *eudaimonia.* Virtue, as Prichard puts it, *is no ground for morality*. For Aristotle, there is an immediate apprehension of the goodness of good dispositions: they are pleasing, intuitive, intrinsically fulfilling.[54]

[53] Ibid., 13.

[54] That said, plenty of ink has been and continues to be shed on attempts to ground our duty to others, presupposing that we can in fact argue our way into moral behavior, or satisfy the egoist's demand for proof as to why one ought to proceed otherwise than in a way that is in one's self-interest. This is not to say that this work (of attempting to demonstrate what is allegedly non-demonstrable) has been in vain, but that it is symptomatic of habits that we (in moral philosophy) have trained ourselves into (e.g., how to approach philosophical problems)—habits that have calcified, and are extremely difficult to break, given the power structures operative within the discipline itself. The Kantian approach, crucial for our purposes here, (illegitimately) demands that we locate the fundamental thing that justifies why I ought to do my duty and take care of my neighbor—and then to prove why it is so. It is important to keep in mind, as we saw in Chapter 1, that Kant himself ditched the need for a deduction proving the moral law, as the moral law is not the sort of thing can be proven that way, but is simply a fact of reason: something that is immediately apprehended when human dignity is at stake.

Prichard's somewhat scandalous point at the end of the essay is that the remedy for moral philosophy does not lie in the process of reflection (e.g., providing a new and improved argument for a new ground for morality, thus attempting to answer what Christine Korsgaard calls, "the normative question": what justifies the claims that morality makes on us?), but instead in a reconsideration of the nature of A (e.g., obligation to be honest) and B (e.g., when you do not love someone anymore) as it leads to the knowledge that A necessarily involves B. That is, it lies in the process of enriching our understanding of the relations among things.

Prichard stresses that the realization of the self-evidence of moral thinking is in fact positive knowledge, and that as long as moral philosophy is confined to this type of knowledge, the work of moral philosophy is not in vain. Thus, the best (and perhaps only) way to understand morality is to get ourselves into situations that occasion obligation, talk to those who have been in those situations, or imagine ourselves in those situations, and then let our moral capacities do their work—reconsidering/working to understand, by way of experience, what is self-evident. As Prichard writes, "if we do doubt that there is an obligation to originate A in a situation B, the remedy lies not in the process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of the situation B, and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in that situation."[55] Or in other words, if we come to doubt that 2+2=4, then we should do the math again. And, as he concludes, when doubts arise in regard to obligations that affect the whole conduct of life, the business of 'doing the math again'—legitimate moral philosophy—is vital.

[55] Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", 17.

Forty-six years later, Elizabeth Anscombe notoriously addresses the still-troubled state of moral philosophy in her 1958 piece, "Modern Moral Philosophy." In the text—famous for explicitly initiating the renaissance of Aristotelian virtue ethics—Anscombe presents three clear theses, all of which have served as a starting point for a number of contemporary moral projects:

> The first is that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. The second is that the concepts of obligation and duty—moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say—and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of "ought," ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it. My third thesis is that the differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance.[56]

In regard to the first thesis, by "philosophy of psychology," Anscombe is referring to a careful analysis of what links motives to actions, as well as a thorough description of action, intention, pleasure, wanting, and virtue in general—including what type of *characteristic* virtue is. This should be understood as a call to provide a more adequate account of *who we are*, as revealed in the things we desire and do.

In regard to the second thesis, Anscombe is suggesting that moral philosophy ditch the *moral ought* and all of its associated action-focused (rather than character-focused) baggage, i.e. the Kantian-inspired language of obligation, duty, right, wrong, should, need, must, etc., and should instead 'return' to a more Aristotelian way of proceeding. The moral ought, by Anscombe's account, is nothing more than the residue of divine command theory in Christianity, which reigned throughout the middle ages and the renaissance (initiated by the Church's need to adequately deal with sin), ultimately requiring a divine source to serve as the absolute criterion by which one can determine

[56] G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," in *Philosophy* (1958) 33, No. 124.

whether an action is right or wrong. This was re-appropriated by Kant, who located the 'divine' source in rationality itself, still serving as an absolute criterion by which one can decisively determine whether an action is right or wrong.

Anscombe's final thesis is in direct response to what she takes to be the ethical theory that had come to dominate modern moral philosophy: *consequentialism*. Her chief issue with consequentialism, as she strikingly reiterates at the end of the piece, is that it is the sort of ethical theory that could in fact warrant the judicial condemnation of the innocent, insofar as it produces the 'best' consequences by conventional standards. She charges the theory (the latest breed of utilitarianism) as being shallow, anything but profound, ultimately revealing the detachment of theorizers in their imagined hypotheticals (laced with *false dilemmas*) from life, as we know it. For Anscombe, English philosophy—setting the status quo in Anglo-American philosophy—was in fact dwelling so high up in the ivory tower than they failed to recognize the self-evident problems with this sort of theory, e.g., that human beings can be used as a means to secure the most desirable set of (subjective) ends.

Anscombe somewhat pessimistically ends her piece by stressing that the then-current situation in moral philosophy lacks the philosophical equipment it needs to adequately move forward, and that our task in modern moral philosophy is to start constructing that equipment, so as to get ourselves out of the dire situation in which we find ourselves. Like Prichard, Anscombe stresses that Aristotle will not provide us with an adequate account of moral theory as universal norms, a defense of why we should act from duty, etc., though his methodology and focus sheds light on *how* we might

proceed—namely, by focusing on character, the acting subject, rather than the actions themselves and their possible consequences.

Korsgaard later emphasizes that the active 'flight' from utilitarianism is an apt way of describing the task of late 20th-century moral philosophy (to the present).[57] As a Kantian, Korsgaard recognizes the trouble with locating moral worth in the often unpredictable consequences of our actions, as well as the fact that morality so construed looks something more like economics—locating value in *what* is brought about, rather that *how* an agent orients themselves toward the phenomena at hand. Korsgaard takes this a step further, and rightly emphasizes that morality is not about owing or doing something to one another, but rather *doing something together*.[58] The force of morality comes from the inter-subjective dimension of it, our personal relations.

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With contemporary moral philosophy's crisis in mind, the question moral philosophy and moral philosophers face is: *how might we re-imagine our approach to the problems moral philosophy and moral philosophers inevitably face?* Namely, A) the methodological problems that come with attempting to answer a problematic set of

[57] In her 1993 article, Korsgaard provides a description of the situation in moral philosophy. As she writes: "To later generations, much of the moral philosophy of the twentieth century will look like a struggle to escape from utilitarianism. We seem to succeed in disproving one utilitarian doctrine, only to find ourselves caught in the grip of another. I believe that this is because a basic feature of the consequentialist outlook still pervades and distorts our thinking: the view that the business of morality is to bring something about. Too often, the rest of us have pitched our protests as if we were merely objecting to the utilitarian account of what the moral agent ought to bring about or how he ought to do it. Deontological considerations have been characterized as 'side-constraints', as if they were essentially restrictions on ways to realize ends. More importantly, moral philosophers have persistently assumed that the primal scene of morality is a scene in which someone does something to or for someone else. This is the same mistake that children make about another primal scene. The primal scene of morality, I will argue, is not one in which I do something to you or you do something to me, but one in which we do something together" ("The Reasons We Can Share: An Attack on the Distinction Between Agent-Relative and Agent-Neutral Values," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10, no. 1 (1993): 24-51), 24.
[58] Ibid.

prefigured moral questions (e.g., what do we owe each other? And why do we owe each other anything at all?) by way of a certain mode of argumentation, and B) the existential problems that result from moral philosophers being dissatisfied with the discipline as a whole.

In direct and indirect response to Prichard's problematization of the reigning method in moral philosophy, we find at least three different movements in contemporary ethics: 1) some, in the legacy of Kant, continuing to produce arguments for moral behavior, still asking what grounds or justifies the claims that morality makes on us;[59] 2) others heeding the call initiated by Elizabeth Anscombe to return to the virtue ethics of the ancients, in hopes of the wisdom of the past saving us from the sad state of the present;[60] and 3) some probing what gives ethics meaning in the first place.[61] This chapter will primarily focus on those who have heeded Anscombe's call; Chapter 4 will focus on Levinas's probing of what gives ethics meaning in the first place.

As has been alluded to above, the 20th-century's revival of virtue ethics is perhaps best characterized as a direct response to the false dilemma between Kantianism-

[59] This question comes from Korsgaard's *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), spawning, as she explains, from the philosopher's demand to justify morality (20). Here I have in mind thinkers like John Rawls, Thomas Nagel, T.M. Scanlon, Christine Korsgaard, and Stephen Darwall, among many others within the Anglo-American tradition (representing various breeds of moral theories, e.g., deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics).

[60] I also have in mind here the work of thinkers like Martha Nussbaum, Paul Ricoeur, and Richard Kearney, who advocate a narrative approach to ethics, which is itself grounded in a 'return' to Aristotelian ethics.

[61] E.g., Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Nancy, Derrida, Sartre, and Levinas, among many others in the so-called 'continental tradition'. For a helpful account of "the problem of responsibility" or the continental tradition's response to the futility in arguing for, or proving, a moral code of conduct, see François Raffoul's, *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). As he puts it, referencing Jean-Luc Nancy, "In fact, one may ask whether it is the role of philosophy to prescribe norms of ethics, to establish a 'morality', to posit norms or values. Jean-Luc Nancy, for instance, considers that "no philosophy either provides or is by itself a 'morality' in this sense. Philosophy is not charged with prescribing norms or values." Rather, the task of philosophy is to question the ethicality of ethics, to engage a philosophical reflection on the meaning of ethics, on what puts us "in the position of having to choose norms or values" (2).

deontology and utilitarianism-consequentialism as the reigning options in moral theory. It has become the 'third option', a new solution to the same problem (how ought we to act? And why?), though its status as a third option has been contested.[62] That being said, the neoaristotelian approach differentiates itself by reclaiming: 1) the significance of metaphysics as informative to ethics; 2) a robust sense of goodness/the good; and 3) the importance of narrative and conversation. This reclamation is born out of a response to the predominantly binary ethical milieu in contemporary ethics: a theoretical either/or between deontology (the legacy of Kant) and utilitarianism-consequentialism (the legacy of Bentham and Mill).

While I think that the approach to and account of the subject that we get within contemporary virtue ethics marks an important shift in moral thinking in the 20th-century, the position is perhaps less radical than one might expect. As we saw in the first two chapters, Kant and Aristotle are far from incompatible, but rather emphasize different dimensions of our ethical lives. Within this vein, Nussbaum stresses in *Fragility* that, first and foremost, this "taxonomy" (of 'virtue ethics' versus, for example, 'deontology') is confused, as Kant and major utilitarian thinkers have theories of virtue.[63] Beyond this, there is little unity within the 'virtue ethics' movement itself, which makes sense, given the fact that Aristotle is an extremely wide-ranging thinker, often included contradictory perspectives within his own account.[64] As Nussbaum points out, some use virtue ethics as the cornerstone of anti-utilitarian thinking (allowing for a heterogeneity of values), others use virtue ethics as the cornerstone of anti-Kantian thinking (because Kantian project

[62] By both Alasdair Macintyre and Talbot Brewer, among others.
[63] Nussbaum, *Fragility*, xxiv.
[64] Ibid., xxv.

focus too much on rationality, at the expense of sentiments and passions), and still others understand Kant and Aristotle as complementary, ultimately seeking to synthesize their respective projects to construct a more robust/comprehensive moral theory.

It is important to stress that Aristotle, Kant, Mill, etc., are part of the same Western tradition (and they are certainty taught within the same curricula)—even if, as Macintyre will argue, the Aristotelian tradition was lost with the rise of the modern *autonomous* moral subject, and the lack of historical context in 20th-century Anglo-American ethics. That said, as Talbot Brewer rightly points out in *The Retrieval of Ethics* (as I will elucidate below), using virtue ethics as yet another theory among normative moral theories—the silver bullet that will save moral philosophy was its disordered state—is problematic, as it still fails to address the problem(s) moral philosophy and moral philosophers face. It simply throws another solution at the same problematic problem, rather that working to understand the problem in the first place.

With this sketch of the 'crisis' in contemporary moral philosophy mind, we can now turn to two case studies within the neoaristotelian movement in contemporary Anglo-American ethics—one residing at its inception as an initial diagnosis of the troubled state of contemporary moral philosophy/proposal for something otherwise (Alasdair Macintyre), the other serving as a current-exemplary-comprehensive case elaborating on Macintyre's proposal (Talbot Brewer)—to critically analyze the ways in which each author has rejected the *ethos* of modern moral philosophy, and attempted to propose something new. This will ultimately give us the tools we need to frame the chapters that follow, fine-tuning and elaborating on their insights.

3.2 A REVIVAL OF VIRTUE ETHICS: ALASTAIR MACINTYRE & THE NARRATIVE SELF

Macintyre's *After Virtue* is, without question, one of the most significant contemporary texts on the revival of virtue ethics—grounded in a genuine despair about the state of 20th-century moral philosophy. As Macintyre writes in the prologue to the 2007 edition of *After Virtue*,[65] "ours too is a time of waiting for new and unpredictable possibilities of renewal. It is also a time for resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the dominant social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity." (He calls not only for a renewal within the academy, but within our culture as a whole.) For Macintyre (echoing Anscombe), a lot of work needs to be done before we can *do* moral philosophy again. And part of this work involves relinquishing certain methods, models, and understandings: above all, the Enlightenment-inspired understanding of ourselves as atomized autonomous agents. This process includes looking back, retrieving, and rehabilitating Aristotle's ethical project—attempting to bring the past into the present, first and foremost, because in the ancients we find robust philosophies of psychology *qua* descriptive accounts of desire, deliberation choice, intention, and action.[66]

Macintyre reiterates that the point in rehabilitating virtue ethics is *not* to use Aristotle to battle and defeat the Kantians, utilitarianism, etc., once and or all, but rather to use Aristotle as a precious resource for understanding "why the culture of moral modernity lacks the resources to proceed further with its own moral enquiries, so that

[65] Because I am providing a close analysis of *After Virtue* (and am not referencing other texts by Macintyre) I will include parenthetical references in cases that would otherwise be relegated to footnotes.
[66] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 26.

sterility and frustration are bound to afflict those unable to extricate themselves from those predicaments" (x). As we saw in Chapter 2, crucial within Aristotle's framework is his understanding that human beings function as they do because they are directed toward a very specific end. He finds Aristotle's teleological conception of the self to be vital, as the death of teleology in modern/Enlightenment era philosophy marks both the death of the good, and (in the wake of Kant) the rise of secular, rationalistic accounts of the nature and status of morality—which have all failed.

Morality as it stands (that is, Anglo-American/analytic moral philosophy) possesses only fragments of morality without socio-historic context, rendering morality, as we know it, to be nothing more than simulacra of being moral-ethical. What's worse is that moral philosophy as it stands may not even know that philosophy has suffered and is suffering—and if it does, it may be struggling to recognize and admit defeat. Although, for Macintyre, there is no remedy for a disaster this big, he thinks that pessimism is a cultural luxury that is simply not acceptable (5). Macintyre thus calls for, as Brewer succinctly puts it, "radical reform in modes of ethical thinking in and beyond the academy."[67]

So, what, specifically, makes 20th-century moral philosophy so disordered? And how does this relate to a problematic understanding of who we are?

Macintyre argues that 20th-century moral philosophy is best characterized as something resembling political debates, in which opposing parties air out their feelings, attitudes, and preferences (approvals and disapprovals), masquerading them as impersonal criteria-objective standards. The trouble with this is that moral disagreements

[67] Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

on certain issues (e.g., is abortion wrong?) have no terminus because, despite opposing arguments simultaneously being *valid*, their assertions are incommensurable, meaning there is no way to determine who should win an argument when each side is appealing to incommensurable values-criteria (preferences)—like a religious war between peoples whose sacred texts have radically different orientations toward truth, or a debate between an atheist and a theist.[68]

What is most alarming for Macintyre is that despite the fact that *emotivism*—the theory suggesting that all evaluate judgments (including moral judgments) are nothing but subjective expressions of preference, attitude, or feeling (11-12)—fails as a theory of meaning (because it fails to "decipher the meaning of key expressions in both everyday and scientific language" (20)),[69] it retained power, culturally speaking, in 20th-century England, thus setting the agenda in Anglo-American moral philosophy. (This is to say that methodologically speaking, Anglo-American moral philosophy predominantly consists of arguments defending somewhat arbitrary preferences.) Though emotivism turns to language to understand moral judgments, it fails to acknowledge that language is contingent on its socio-historic context, ultimately underestimating the complexity of history/the heterogeneity of moral sources that we have inherited.

As Macintyre notes, the most powerful response to emotivism in early 20th-century moral philosophy is the Kantian claim that we can only justify judgments by referring to a universal rule—a claim defended by deontological thinkers like John

[68] As Kierkegaard I think rightly points out through Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*, an argument is not going to convince you of the existence of god (that is *truly believing it* with every ounce of your being), or push you into a new mode of living. These shifts are the result of passion—a leap—and this is not the sort of thing that an argument in itself will induce. Although arguments can help someone understand something differently, being wholly convinced requires more.

[69] Because moral judgments are, in fact, more than arbitrary choices.

Rawls. But again, the trouble with this claim is that its defenders cannot agree on "the character of moral rationality or on the substance of the morality which is to be founded on that rationality" (21). For Macintyre, this is case and point of the fact the universal-rule project fails, as each perspective again rests on the preferences, attitudes, or feelings of the subject advocating the universal-rule. As he writes:

> The diversity of contemporary moral debate and its interminability are indeed mirrored in the controversies of analytical moral philosophers. But if those who claim to be able to formulate principles on which rational moral agents ought to agree cannot secure agreement on the formulation of those principles from their colleagues who share their basic philosophical purpose and method, there is once again prima facie evidence that their project has failed, even before we have examined their particular contentions and conclusions. Each of them in his criticism offers testimony to the failure of his colleagues' constructions. (21)

Emotivism's stronghold on 20th-century moral philosophy is, therefore, a key dimension of its disorder. Macintyre's **twofold** task in *After Virtue* is thus 1) to show that he is correct in his characterization of "the modern age"—that is, the culture of contemporary moral philosophy and Western culture *in general*—as predominantly emotivist in practice, and 2) to identify the lost morality of the past, and evaluate its claims to objectivity and authority, as its loss marks severe cultural degeneration (22). A crucial part of task 1 involves understanding historically what set the stage for emotivism's fracturing and displacement of morality; and a crucial part of task 2 involves reconstructing Aristotelian virtue ethics, in particular its conception of *who we are*.

Task 1. By Macintyre's account, the (Anglo-American) subject of the modern age is a subject that has been dissociated from its context: no social identity, no historical embeddedness, and, most tragically for Macintyre, no *telos,* i.e., no notion of a complete or whole human life. And because emotivism is limited to evaluations expressing personal preference (even if under the guise of a universal rule), there can be no

distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative relations because everything amounts to finding the means to one's self-interests, thus rendering others as means, as the goal is always to align the interest of others with one's self-interest (23-4). As Macintyre writes:

> For evaluative utterance can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others. I cannot genuinely appeal to impersonal criteria, for there are no impersonal criteria. I may think that I so appeal and others may think that I so appeal, but these thoughts will always be mistakes. The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preference and choices of another with its own. Others are always means, never ends. (24)

So the social scene of the modern age is that of decontextualized selves seeking to fulfill their own interests (capricious as they may be), doing whatever it takes to maintain their preferences, and becoming quite efficient at this process of establishing means to projected ends.

Macintyre thus diagnoses our culture as a culture of managers (seeking profit through skill, avoiding public debate), therapists (seeking to shift maladjusted individuals into adjusted individuals, avoiding public debate), protestors (seeking to make their dogma the dogma of others), and rich aesthetes (resembling something like Kierkegaard's 'A', governed by pleasure and pleasure alone). These four characters represent the masks worn by moral philosophies, and serve as representations of our culture. These characters—rat-racing to fulfill their self-interests—are part of an age that is governed by the ghostly bureaucracy of Heidegger's *Das Mann* or Kierkegaard's Public. Given our current social and political context in the United States at least, it seems clear that Macintyre's disturbingly accurate social theory is alive and well. Our current president is the manager *par excellence*, placed into office at least partially because he represents the values of the people: namely, the consumerism that drives people to make profit, spend

that profit, and do their best to become adjusted individuals by whatever means necessary, e.g., therapy, drugs, exercise, diet, etc.

Anglo-American culture *in practice* is clearly not Aristotle's just city or Kant's kingdom of ends, but rather an amalgam of physically and mentally disconnected individuals pursuing happiness—inevitably in competition with each other, tirelessly working to establish their place in the sun, whatever the price.

And how did we come to this? Macintyre's claim is that the Enlightenment's failure to solve its own problems was a key factor in determining our current academic and social problems (39). Both the Enlightenment and Renaissance before it—best exemplified in Kant's 'Copernican' turn—marks an era in which man as rationality became the standard of truth, rather than some external authority (e.g., religious doctrine or a teleological worldview). Man again became the measure of all things: liberated from the shackles of religious dogma and superstition. Some key consequences of the failure of the Enlightenment include the theoretical gaps established between 1) reason and emotion, 2) nature *as it is* and nature as *it ought to be*, and 3) self-interest/happiness and the interest of others/the happiness of the whole. As we saw in Chapter 1, to determine whether reason or sentimentality grounds morality became a central task in modern moral philosophy, in addition to the need to determine how human nature (nature as it is) relates to moral expectations (nature as it *ought* to be, or as it *could* be), and how self-interest could be reconciled with the interests of others. All of these gaps are problematic in the

sense that they involve attempting to connect and construct a relation of causal dependency between two ostensibly heterogeneous things.[70]

Beyond this, as Macintyre points out, Kantianism and utilitarianism-consequentialism are the two key Enlightenment theories that have failed, albeit remain at the center of moral philosophy, as though they have to some degree succeeded. They are the starting points of the vast majority of discussions in ethics, characterizing the 'two poles' in which we can place moral worth: either in the intention/principle or in the consequences. As Macintyre writes:

> I take it then that both the utilitarianism of the middle and late nineteenth century and the analytical moral philosophy of the middle and late twentieth century are alike unsuccessful attempts to rescue the autonomous moral agent from the predicament in which the failure of the Enlightenment project of providing him with a secular, rational justification for his moral allegiances had left him. I have already characterized that predicament as one in which the price paid for liberation from what appeared to be the external authority of traditional morality was the loss of any authoritative content from the would-be moral utterances of the newly autonomous agent. Each moral agent now spoke unconstrained by the externalities of divine law, natural teleology or hierarchical authority; but why should anyone else now listen to him? It was and is to this question that both utilitarianism and analytical moral philosophy must be understood as attempting to give cogent answers; and if my argument is correct, it is precisely this question which both fail to answer cogently. Nonetheless almost everyone, philosopher and non-philosopher alike, continues to speak and write as if one of these projects had succeeded. (68)

The chief problem with these accounts is that they lack a robust account of the good, as the modern age is marked, for Macintyre, by the death of teleology—killed partially because of the its affinity with religion. The modern age separates the happiness of the individual from the happiness of the whole, as though they are (naturally) mutually

[70] Reiterating the naturalistic fallacy or (is→ought fallacy), Macintyre stresses that prescriptive moral content does not derive from descriptive factual premises. As we saw in Chapter 2, the problem of trying to decipher how difference issues forth from sameness guided Aristotle's investigation in the *Metaphysics* (and beyond), and Aristotle ends up concluding that these differences simply constitute different aspects of the same thing. This is also an issue that Hegel identifies in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, highlighting and predicting the Enlightenment's (or natural consciousness's) inevitable failure to bridge the gap between allegedly heterogeneous phenomena—that is, phenomena that are heterogeneous because they have been conceptually separated by the philosophers analyzing them. This marks the *scandal* of modern philosophy.

exclusive, things, congealing an antagonism between the individual and the community—an antagonism that did not exist in the work of Aristotle, but *is* emphasized in the work of Kant by way of the tension involved when facing the fact of reason.

The trouble is: if these heterogeneous phenomena (e.g., my good *versus* the good of the whole, how things are *versus* how they ought to be) lack a common ground, then how can we successfully put them back together? Or 'unite' them as one? (A recast version of the problem between 'the one' and 'the many' that Aristotle faces in the *Metaphysics*.) This orientation is fundamentally misguided in the sense that it seeks harmony between antitheses, for instance, assuming that peace can be derived from war (or what Kant calls the 'immoral doctrine of prudence', which aims at securing the dominance of one's interest over the interest of others). As Macintyre puts it, by the modern account, we are free moral agents, who do not want to be manipulated by anything or anyone, but nonetheless seek to manipulate others to protect ourselves (68). We are agents marked by incoherence and war—agents who construct and attempt to justify fictions (e.g., impersonal objective criteria like 'utility' or 'rights'), which are ultimately, echoing Nietzsche, arbitrary expressions of our subjective will.[71]

Task 2. With this, we return to Macintyre's point that the philosophical debate in the modern age consists in opposing parties airing out their feelings, attitudes, and preferences. These are wars in which each side seeks to be understood, rather than truly

[71] Hearkening to Prichard, the modern age is marked by our seeking to find legitimate answers (e.g., the categorical imperative) to illegitimate questions (why should I take care of my neighbor?). Macintyre ultimately sees Prichard's way out—namely, appealing to our intuitions for moral truth—as a sign we have in fact lost our way in moral philosophy. To quote Macintyre, "Twentieth-century moral philosophers have sometimes appealed to their and our intuitions; but one of the things that we ought to have learned from the history of moral philosophy is that the introduction of the word 'intuition' by a moral philosopher is always a signal that something has gone badly wrong with an argument" (*After Virtue*, 69).

hearing, actively understanding the perspective of the other; each side is speaking a language/following a line of reasoning that is incommensurable to that of the other.

By Macintyre's account, in the wake of the "death" of teleology, modern moral philosophy is thus left with 1) failed rational, secular accounts of the nature and status of morality, and 2) Nietzsche's indictment of the "would-be objective moral judgments as the mask worn by the will-to-power of those too weak and slavish to assert themselves with archaic and aristocratic grandeur"–which is ultimately the 19th-century version of his diagnosis of the emotivist culture of the modern age (22). And for Macintyre, Nietzsche represents "one of the two genuine theoretical alternatives confronting anyone trying to analyze the moral condition of our culture," the other being Aristotelian virtue ethics (110). Macintyre perhaps unsurprisingly chooses Aristotle as the most viable theoretical alternative for moral philosophy,[72] as Aristotelian virtue ethics represents a radically different, 'lost' ethical tradition that does not fall prey to Nietzsche's indictment or the woes of emotivism.

[72] Contemporary moral philosophy (Macintyre included) has chosen Aristotle over Nietzsche for a variety of reasons, including the "negative" nature of Nietzsche's project (something Nietzsche himself was acutely aware of) (*Genealogy of Morals*, 2.24). Macintyre—following the footsteps of Elizabeth Anscombe, and fronting a line of ethicists whose work seeks to reclaim Aristotelian virtue ethics—perhaps unsurprisingly chooses Aristotle over Nietzsche. In addition to Nietzsche being a representation of individualism's last attempt to escape from its consequences (*After Virtue*, 259), problematic, by Macintyre's account, is the negative character of his project (destroying, rather than building edifices), as well as the fact that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is severely lacking in both activities and relationships. This is of course problematic because ethics is precisely concerned with the things we do and our relations to others. For Macintyre, Nietzsche's man of the future appears to be an individualistic moral solipsist in the sense that he must effectively cut himself off from his community, so as to most fully exercise his will to power: quarantining himself from any forces that might stifle his creativity and effectiveness (Ibid., 258). If the man of the future does not proceed this way, he risks degenerating into the very impotence that fuels a system of values based on resentment. Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, then, in recognition of his greatness, ought to protect himself from the slaves in society by embracing isolation. To hearken to a familiar image from the history of philosophy, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, immersed in his will to power, is one who has been freed from the shackles of Plato's cave, but knows better than to return to the weak-minded prisoners below, as they will surely annihilate his greatness. For a more thorough account of whether or not this is a fair depiction of Nietzsche, see Melissa Fitzpatrick, "A Nietzschean Ethics of Care?" in *misReading Nietzsche*, (Pickwick Publications, 2018).

And what is so radically different about Aristotle's ethics? Chief among the differentiating features of Aristotle's ethics are: A) Aristotle's conception of the self is *teleological*, and B) that Aristotle bridges the theoretical gaps that were chiseled open by the modern age.

A. For Macintyre, the Aristotelian self is a self that seeks unity-harmony, seeks to avoid conflict, and is able to do so because it has a final end/aim/good: *eudaimonia*.[73] The Aristotelian sense of unity that Macintyre has in mind is *narrative unity*, which ultimately corresponds to our narrative identity. Narrative identity is Macintyre's extrapolation of the (unproblematic) sense of identity that we get in Aristotle's work. As Paul Ricoeur (another advocate of Aristotelian narrative identity) puts it, the Aristotelian self is a self that is neither an incoherent series of events, nor an immutable, substantiality impervious to change.[74] The 'Aristotelian way' is ultimately a 'middle way' between multiplicity and unity, accommodating both discordance and concordance, thus suggesting that what it means to be human is to be *on-the-way-to-becoming-one*. In the same way that a plot smooths a multiplicity of events into a single, unified story, I, too, am unity of sorts—an integrated enumeration of inter-relations with a common task, namely, *the self who I am on the way to becoming*. To quote Macintyre, "The unity of human life is the unity of a narrative quest" (219): a quest for *the good*.

[73] Macintyre quickly problematizes this *unity*, questioning whether is it rationally justifiable to conceive of each life as a unity, so as to specify "one form of unity over another." Moreover, in the modern age—constituted by an amalgam of ghostly, context-less selves—compartmentalization, (a clear separation of aspects of oneself from each other, e.g., your roles are not your identity) rather than unity is prize (*After Virtue*, 204). Philosophers tend to analyze human action atomistically, rather than in relation to the character of the *whole person*, disregarding the virtue of integrity-constancy.

[74] Paul Ricouer, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *In On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited by David Wood (London: Rutledge, 1991), 32.

Narrative history is what provides the intelligibility or content of one's life, as narrative showcases the things we do, our activities. And for Aristotle, we just *are* (most fundamentally) our activities. The way in which we receive narratives is by way of conversation—"the most familiar type of context in and by reference to which speech acts and purposes are rendered intelligible"—, which is so "pervasive of a feature of the human world that is tends to escape philosophical attention" (210). But as Macintyre rightly notes, if we were to remove conversation from human life, what would be left? Conversation is "the form of human transaction in general" (211). Beyond this, our basic sense of *what we ought* to do emerges from an understanding of the stories communicated to us, the stories that we belong to. We can only understand communities through "stock stories" or mythologies (260). Stories are the source of a given community's values, privileges and duties, and our sense of what actions "are required to perform these and what actions fall short of what is required" (122). For example, courage is prized as virtue securing safety both in the household and for the community as a whole, safeguarding trust and reliance among community members.

For Macintyre, the two key features of narrative identity are: 1) that I am "what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living a story that runs from my birth to my death; I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else's, that has its own peculiar meaning" (217); and 2) that I am accountable and can ask others for an account. That is, to:

> Put others to the question…I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover this asking for and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives. Asking you what you did and why, saying what I did and why, pondering the differences between your account of what I did and my account of what I did, and vice versa, these are essential constituents of all but the very simplest and barest of narratives. Thus without the accountability of the self those trains of events that constitute all but the simplest and

> barest of narratives could not occur; and without that same accountability narratives would lack that continuity required to make both them and the actions that constitute them intelligible. (218)

All attempts to elucidate personal identity without appealing to accountability, intelligibility, or narrative are destined to fail, as all attempts to do so have failed—especially as such attempts (e.g., that of Sartre) employ narrative to make their case (219). Macintyre stresses that narrative and accountability are vital in assisting us in the ordering of goods (decision-making). They condition our capacity to do. The quest for the good (narrative unity) is a quest understood as education: hearing the accounts and stories of others, so as to facilitate both an understanding of the sort of character that we seek to be, as well as a deeper understanding of ourselves. The good life is a life spent seeking the good, and recognizing that we are not simply what we choose to be (again, based on arbitrary preference), as the modern age would have it, but we are actually embedded in a variety of contexts, roles, narratives, through which we can work to understand better and worse ways of living in our situation, keeping the limits of what we can predict in mind.

B. Aristotelian ethics also bridges the gaps that the modern age has constructed between 1) reason and emotion, 2) nature *as it is* and as *it ought to be*, and 3) self-interest/happiness and the interest of others/the happiness of the whole—and is able to do this precisely because these gaps did not exists for Aristotle. As we saw in Chapter 2, although reason ought to play a governing role (in the properly ordered self), the emotions and associated pleasure and pains also provide critical information. For Aristotle, one aspect does not take ontological precedence over the other in the sense of grounding/causing the other, and/or pushing the other to fall out of the moral schema all

together. Though Aristotle separates each faculty conceptually, he is committed to a sense of cooperation among our 'faculties' that precludes any sort of ontological divide between them. We might conceptually understand them as distinct, with different functions, but in actuality, they are also the same, of the same substance.

Moreover, Aristotle's notion of each thing having a function (*ergon*) and corresponding virtue-excellence (*arête*) 'bridges' the nature as it is *versus* nature as it ought to be gap that menaced/menaces modern philosophy. For Aristotle, a thing is what it does (e.g., a human being is the sort of thing that employs reason in speech and action), and to most fully be what one *is* is to do what one does excellently. A thing functioning excellently is a thing fulfilling its purpose, and a thing fulfilling its purpose is a thing coalescing with its good. As Macintyre writes:

> Within the Aristotelian tradition to call x good (where x may be among other things a person or an animal or a policy or a state of affairs) is to say that it is the kind of x which someone would choose who wanted an x for the purpose for which x's are characteristically wanted. To call a watch good is to say that it is the kind of watch which someone would choose who wanted a watch to keep time accurately (rather than, say, to throw at the cat). The presupposition of this use of 'good' is that every type of item which it is appropriate to call good or bad-including persons and actions-has, as a matter of fact, some given specific purpose or function. To call something good therefore is also to make a factual statement. To call a particular action just or right is to say that it is what a good man would do in such a situation; hence this type of statement too is factual. Within this tradition moral and evaluative statements can be called true or false in precisely the way in which all other factual statements can be so called. But once the notion of essential human purposes or functions disappears from morality, it begins to appear implausible to treat moral judgments as factual statements. (59)

Thus, within the Aristotelian framework, the notion of what a thing 'is' is already loaded with what a thing 'ought to be'. The loss of the notion of proper function, and excellence has led to a more shallow understanding of moral concepts, as factuality becomes two-dimensional—completely detached from anything prescriptive. As Macintyre points out, the prescription involved in Aristotelian ethics is marked by imperatives at once being

both hypothetical and categorical, e.g., hypothetical in that if you are a human being, then your *telos* is Y, therefore, you ought to do X, and categorical in that the ought is governed by Nature or God (60). Key in Macintyre's account is that for the Enlightenment, the loss of such *divine* governing forces was understood as liberation. However, this liberation—the birth of the autonomous individual—has left the subject without any guidance outside of oneself: *man became the measure of all things* in the sense that Socrates feared.

In regard to the gap between self-interest and the interest of others, the birth of the autonomous individual during the Enlightenment is intimately tied to what Macintyre refers to as the death of 'the common good'.[75] As we saw in Chapter 2, within an Aristotelian framework, the good of the individual and the good of the whole are not distinct as contrary to each other. But (reinforcing Macintyre's point), as we saw in Chapter 1, the tension between self-interest and moral duty is severe (acutely painful even), marking the shift that happens in modern philosophy.

For Macintyre, during the 17th and 18th-centuries (and beyond, into the present), human nature *as it is* became tied to an insatiable egoism, while human nature *as it ought to be* became tied to an often-painful altruism. Altruism became "at once socially necessary and yet apparently impossible and, if and when it occurs, inexplicable" (229). Macintyre continues:

> On the traditional Aristotelian view such problems do not arise. For what education in the virtues teaches me is that my good as a man is one and the same as the good of those others with whom I am bound up in human community. There is no way of my pursuing my good which is necessarily antagonistic to you pursuing yours because the good is neither mine peculiarly nor yours peculiarly—goods are not private property. Hence Aristotle's definition of friendship, the fundamental form of human relationship, is in terms of shared goods. The egoist is thus, in the ancient and medieval world, always

[75] This is to say that this marks the death of a non-utilitarian/consequentialist sense of the common good, as the rise of utilitarianism in the modern age of course prizes the happiness of the whole, but as Macintyre stresses, that whole is an amalgam of atomized individuals, rather than a harmonious community or unit.

> someone who has made a fundamental mistake about where his own good lies and someone who has thus and to that extent excluded himself from human relationships. (229)

For Aristotle, the egoist is a non-community member: one who has veered from the language, customs, and values of their community. With the rise of the conception of human nature understood as egoism we find ourselves at the origin of the *mistake* that moral philosophy rests on.

Macintyre illustrates this (modern) shift by highlighting Hume's questioning of why we should obey rules (justice) if it were not in our best interest to do so? And his answer, of course, is that it is *because it is in our long-term advantage to do so* (229-30). As we saw in Chapter 1, this is the springboard for Kant's desperate hope to revitalize a sense of morality that is otherwise than self-interested (though the attempt to provide a justification for the egoist/non-community member remains a cornerstone of his work).

It is important to return to the sense of self that is implicit in this false dilemma between what is in one's self-interest ('happiness) and the interest of others ('justice' or 'morality'). As Macintyre insists, it is ultimately a self who understands itself *as detached from the others*. That is, a self who understands itself as a morally autonomous agent: an individual, an island. It is an understanding of oneself as something distinct from *qua* over and against the others—others who almost inevitably infringe on its pursuit of happiness. This perception of oneself sets a standard of war, rather than cooperation, thus fostering an incommensurability between, on the one hand, my right to what I have, my possessions/acquiring more of them, and on the other hand, the desire (in the disturbing face of inequality) to redistribute justice, albeit never at the expense of the fruits of *my* labor. It seems clear that the capitalist-consumerist current in the Western

world cannot help but inculcate this antagonism, as it is *pleonexia*—the drive to acquire—rather than harmony that is valued in the modern age.[76]

Macintyre concludes that Aristotelian virtue ethics is our only hope for working ourselves out of our emotivist cultural reality—particularly our post-Enlightenment understanding of who we are. One of Aristotle's key insights is that the answer to the inescapable human question, *what sort of person am I to become?*, requires some conception of the unity and completeness of one's life (225). For Macintyre (and for Aristotle), we cannot answer questions about what is good for us if we do not have a complete sense of who we are and where we are headed, which requires a sense of the common good.

In addition to this, if our sense of who we are (as a narrative unity) derives from the complex of narratives in which we find ourselves embedded, and if we understand ourselves as part of a mythology, then unfortunately for the modern age, our mythology is one that at least ostensibly lacks a desire for unity-harmony, a sense of purpose (*telos*), or an adequate sense of community. Virtue ethics is, therefore, a theoretical tool that might enable moral philosophy to reclaim a sense of virtue that, as Macintyre puts it, restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes—helping moral philosophy work toward a more robust, unified account of the virtues, and assisting the modern age in shaping new forms of community that will allow us to sustain civility and

[76] As Macintyre writes, "In Benjamin Franklin's list [of virtues] we find almost all the types of difference from at least one of the catalogues we have considered and one more. Franklin includes virtues which are new to our consideration such as cleanliness, silence and industry; he clearly considers the drive to acquire itself a part of virtue, whereas for most ancient Greeks this is the vice of *pleonexia*; he treats some virtues which earlier ages had considered minor as major; but he also redefines some familiar virtues" (*After Virtue*, 183).

the intellectual and moral life "through the new dark ages which are already upon us" (263).[77]

That being said, because virtue, and more specifically the practice of the virtues, is culturally embedded—hinging on the values of a given community—the implicit question that Macintyre leaves us with at the end of *After Virtue* is the question of *how* we are to change our values. Or in other words: *how are we to facilitate the re-imagining of our understanding of ourselves in a way that liberates us from individualism?*

With Macintyre's critique of, and subsequent call to, the modern age in mind, we can turn to an exemplary account of contemporary virtue ethics. It is important to stress that with both of these neoaristotelian case studies, the authors have at least in some sense heeded Prichard's call to do moral philosophy in a way that strives to enrich our understanding of the relation among things that are self-evidently cherished. In Macintyre's account, chief among self-evidently cherished things is the good life as the narratively unified life.

3.3 RECLAIMING MACINTYRE'S TASKS: TALBOT BREWER & THE DIALECTICAL SELF

Talbot Brewer's 2009 text, *The Retrieval of Ethics*,[78] is one of the most current, comprehensive, and original works within contemporary neoaristotelian virtue ethics. In

[77] As Macintyre concludes *After Virtue*: "This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another-doubtless very different-St. Benedict" (263).

light of the section above, one of the most noteworthy aspects of Brewer's text is that it is an explicit effort to reclaim Macintyre's tasks in *After Virtue*—including its original distress and despair about the current state of ethical philosophy (6). This is to say that Brewer does not seek to offer virtue ethics as another solution *qua* normative theory in normative ethics (a tendency that is primarily the result of institutional pressures in the academy) (7),[79] but instead seeks to employ virtue ethics as a means of critiquing our current cultural and academic context, underscoring its fruits as capable of providing a more enduring moral scheme.

The text is an exercise in self-retrieval, and contests the reigning Anglo-American conception of the self (as a result of the Enlightenment and the contemporary liberalism that followed), drawing from the "conceptual scaffolding of compelling alternative pictures of the human self, its capacities, its aspirations, its concerns" (9-10). Brewer wants to sculpt a picture of the self that makes better sense of our lives *as we actually live them*, and does not reduce us to the production-oriented beings that the modern age has made us out to be.

Thus, Brewer, like Macintyre, is committed to acknowledging and working our way out of the prejudices of "the post-Enlightenment West," especially the notion—following the legacy of Kant—that it is possible to articulate and defend (universal) standards of rightness without reference to the 'all-too-subjective' concept of *the human good*. These allegedly value-neutral, Kantian-inspired standards of rightness are not

[78] Because I am providing a close analysis of *The Retrieval of Ethics* (and am not referencing other texts by Brewer) I will include parenthetical references in cases that would otherwise be relegated to footnotes.
[79] On this, Brewer writes: "It is far easier to present normative ethics to undergraduates in the form of a survey course—one that begins with a characterization of a well-defined field of questions and proceeds to set out and assess a series of competing answers to these questions… This self-presentation staves off questions of legitimacy and relevance that would undoubtedly arise if professors were to call in question the conceptual framework of the background culture's conversation about morality" (7).

adequate guides to flourishing, and their reign in contemporary ethics has resulted in *results-oriented* and *anti-contemplative values* (8). Brewer is clearly referencing Macintyre's sketch of the ghostly, emotivist self, who asserts and vents arbitrary attitudes and feelings under the banner of hallow objective standards. Like Macintyre, Brewer stresses that unless we contest this conception of the self and *construct new values*, we will not be able to make sense of our efforts to unify our lives, based on a conception of how best to live them—that is, the "yearnings that draw us to our ideals and to each other" (8).

Brewer also heeds Anscombe's call for a more adequate philosophical psychology, which he understands as a "far-reaching reconsideration of the notion of the nature and sources of human agency, particularly of the way in which practical thinking gives shape to activities, relationships, and lives" (8). This involves raising doubts about the status quo in philosophical ethics, and putting, like Macintyre, a more "tenable conceptual framework" in its place (8). Key is that Brewer does not just mean 'tenable' in that it holds up in current debates, but that it is something otherwise than armchair theory. That is, a philosophical ethics or ethical theory that is self-formative in its own right, thus constituting a "vital life activity" in and of itself (10).

With Frodeman and Briggle's remarks about the dire state of contemporary philosophy in mind, it seems fair to suggest that Brewer's Aristotelian project is invested in both knowing and doing the good, and restoring philosophy as vital practice, rather than a mere area of expertise. And with Prichard's conception of legitimate moral philosophy in mind, Brewer seeks to de-emphasize the significance of progress within moral philosophy, and emphasize the rich work of digging deeper into ethical phenomena

that are always and already a part of our everyday lives—thoroughly examining our concerns and corresponding activities, bringing them to lucidity, and then seeing if they stand up to reflective scrutiny (10).

I will focus my analysis here on two crucial threads within Brewer's complex text: 1) his notion of dialectical activity, and 2) his notion of universal self-affirmability. The first is Brewer's response to what he understands to be an inadequate conception of the human agency; the second is Brewer's elucidation of the fundamental role of others within an Aristotelian ethical schema.

Dialectical activity. For Brewer, the predominant conception of human agency—the "world-making" conception of agency—is that in which human action is ultimately "a species of production," the meaning of which derives from the "state of affairs [those actions] are calculated to bring about" (12). Even actions that are done for their own sake are done *so that they occur*; under this schema, human action is always oriented toward a future state of affairs or world that they aim to bring about—something outside of the present.

The alternative to this is what Brewer calls the "evaluative outlook," finding its roots in the ancient and medieval Platonic and Aristotelian tradition. This outlook involves a conception of the nature of human action as always stretching toward some sense of what is good for human beings to be. This conception of human nature and action need not involve calculated production, as it includes actions that are valuable in themselves, stressing that we can be motivated without being able to identify an achievable state of affairs (13).

For Brewer, the "world-making" conception of agency plagues contemporary ethics, and is problematic because it is insufficient in its depiction of desire and the role of practical thinking in the fulfillment of desire. This is partially due to the fact that it searches for "generic causal explanations for the events we call human actions" (13). That is, causal in the sense of one billiard ball causing another billiard ball to move—a linear transfer of energy from state A to aimed-future state B. This causal explanation of motivation misses a key aspect of what is involved in A's relation to B, that is, the justification for (rather than causation of) B: *what made the action worth doing?* With Macintyre's rendering of the emotivist subject in mind, the world-making view limits the subject to a form of desire that represents attitudes toward propositions, e.g., I will go dancing Friday night, and that these sorts of desires are guided by the "direction of fit" between the world and the proposition's object of desire, e.g., that I bring it about that I go dancing on Friday night (14). This explanation for action can always be traced back to a belief in the world or state of affairs that one desires to bring about: the pre-approved proposition.

It seems obvious that this conception of desire is at least in some sense bankrupt, failing to adequately describe certain aspect of what it is to desire another person, or what it is to desire to fully engage in an activity—and this is Brewer's point. This conception of desire is far too shallow, reducing human agency to calculation, empirically observable behavior. For Brewer, "To be an agent is to set oneself in motion (or to try to do so, or to adopt the intention of doing so) on the strength of one's sense that something counts in favor of so doing so" (28). The more linear, world-making picture misses the dynamism involved in being drawn toward a particular state of affairs that cannot be reduced to the

fact of that state of affairs, thus banishing "all evaluative content from desire." Evaluative content here means reasons or values, i.e., that which is understood to be *good*, *worthwhile*, *desirable in the object itself* (rather than in our projected perception of the object) (26). Evaluative content is what bestows action with meaning, lighting up the explanation for the doing in the first place—an explanation that often involves a multiplicity of reasons; desires are not merely random urges to make a state of affairs true, or a calculated execution of a plan.

Brewer's point is that human agents have a far richer teleological structure than spontaneity or calculation. There is a multiplicity of values one seeks to envelop oneself in when engaging in a given activity. And while the infinite variety of reasons-values one has for engaging in a particular activity makes it seem as though our desires are "fractured into a succession of different actions," Brewer vindicates the unity (e.g., going dancing on Friday night) involved in a given cluster of values with his notion of 'dialectical activity'. This term covers activities that are taken to be valuable in themselves, including "all those activities whose point lies in an intrinsic goodness that is to some considerable degree opaque to those who lack experience with the activity, but that tends to unveil itself incrementally as one gains first-hand experience with it" (39). Examples of this include kindling a friendship, initiating an intimate love relationship, parenting a child, striking up conversation with a stranger, or deepening our appreciation of an unfamiliar genre of music (39). These activities are, as Brewer puts it, *self-unveiling* in the sense that "each successive engagement [with the activity] yields a further stretch of understanding of the goods internal to the activity, hence of what would count as proper engagement in it" (37). (In the case of going dancing Friday night, the cluster of

values could involve, hearing music you love, being with your friends, traveling to the city, meeting new people, etc.; and each time you go, the cluster grows each time you engage in the activity as you gain a deeper understanding of all the dimensions that you enjoy.)

The 'dialectical' aspect of these activities denotes the movement of digging deeper and deeper into the phenomena at hand, more fully immersing oneself in the activity by diving into the cluster of values associated with it—*unimpeded* by calculation. This is to say that each time we fully engage in the activity, our sense of its value becomes richer, and our understanding of the activity itself is augmented. The 'teleological' aspect of dialectical activities refers to the sense one has of what it is to fully engage in or excel at the given activity (40). This is the 'good sought' (*telos*), albeit not a good sought somewhere beyond the activity itself, but rather by and through intimate engagement with the activity itself. Vital to dialectical activity is that the good sought is ultimately an appreciation of the activity as engaging in the activity; the point is not to produce something/bring something about in the future. Dialectical activity is a facet of every human life. These types of activities are things that we all do—and desire to do. The intrinsic goodness is at first 'opaque' for those lacking experience with the activity, but becomes more and more illuminated with experience. Their value derives from experience, engagement.

I think it is reasonable to suggest that dialectical activity so construed constitutes Prichard's conception of legitimate moral philosophy as the activity of digging deeper/placing ourselves into our practices and values, so as to perpetually illuminate the phenomena at hand, to understand it better. For Brewer, in addition to dialectical activity

being a key aspect of *who we are*, engaging in dialectical activity is a major aspect of the task of moral philosophy and the moral philosopher, as is universal self-affirmability (as we will see below).

Echoing Aristotle and Macintyre, Brewer contends that we only fully grasp the value of an activity upon recognizing and understanding its "*place* in a full and flourishing human life" (41). Otherwise, those activities can be pursued in excess, at the expense of other activities involved in a good life. Living a good life, by Brewer's account, is the most comprehensive dialectical activity—something that is the work of a lifetime, and involves experience, understanding, and pleasure understood as *losing oneself in* one's activities. Through experience in our activities, we are constantly gaining a better understanding of what living a good life means. This coming-to-understanding constitutes what both Macintyre and Brewer take to be the narrative unity of human life: the quest for *eudaimonia*.

Moreover, for Brewer, practical thinking's proper activity is fully grasping (by immersing oneself in) what one is doing in a way that brings one, moment by moment, closer to the ideal form [of the activity] in "whose light it is understood" (87). The activity of practical thinking is, therefore, dialectical (rather than calculative) by nature; it is constituted by an infinite approach toward the perfectibility as fullness of engagement in the activity is at hand. It is being *riveted*, which involves a crucial dimension of passivity (not simply active willing). Or in other words, it is an unreserved diving in—a surrender of oneself to the activity, rather than a willed calculation of what state of affairs the action ought to bring about.

The paradigmatic case of dialectical desire-activity is the loving desire for another—that is, the love for another that involves full engagement in the other before oneself, to the point of time, calculation, etc., melting away. It is a full gift of the self as present, now (63), before the other: inching ever-closer to that other in the sense of learning more, understanding more, and subsequently *loving* the other more. To desire an object in the sense that Brewer is committed to is not a desire to bring about some calculated end, bur rather a desire to understand and appreciate by being-with that object as fully, attentively, openly as possible. The pleasure involved in being-with someone you love is, again, the paradigmatic case of pleasure involved with engaging in any dialectical activity (e.g., reading a book, writing poetry, hiking, etc.). It is a pleasure best described as leaping or falling into the activity at hand, to the point of being unable to think about anything other than intensifying the activity: to be more fully with the other.

With Aristotle's notion of the *unimpeded* nature of the pleasure associated with virtue in mind, Brewer defines taking pleasure in an activity as engaging in it "while having only one occurent desire: a desire to the engage in that activity for its own sake" (119).[80] As Brewer puts it, engaging pleasurefully in a given activity (including the other) involves *paying tribute* to its intrinsic goodness *so clarified* (48). When desiring another, the object of desire is of course not one's own future psychological states, but rather something wholly otherwise than oneself. This "attention-arresting" mode of appreciation is best characterized as the activity of "unselfing." In this intense appreciation, we are

[80] Brewer continues, "one need not fulfill this attentional condition *perfectly* in order to take pleasure in an activity. Pleasure comes in degrees: we find mild enjoyment in some activities and boundless pleasure in others" (119). To experience pleasure is "relishing or savoring one's doings." And of course, as in the case in Aristotle, virtuous activity—practical thinking included—involves precisely this.

removed from all distractions, especially the "most banal and obsessive human distractions: the self" (64).

Desire so construed extends us beyond our self-concerns, as we yearn to bring the activity's intrinsic goodness into deeper focus (64). Complete and utter absorption in the activity is key. The pleasure involved in the loving desire for another—again, paradigmatic of the pleasure involved in any dialectical activity, varying only in degrees—is marked by the "mesmeric attraction," *the pull* to what is wholly present before oneself: an instance of goodness in the world that incites celebration (63). To desire the other is "to be a willing self-exposure, a free opening to another's gaze through which one permits oneself to be known in hopes of being appreciated and at the risk of being scorned" (63). Paraphrasing Brewer's apt description, the loving desire we have for one person has a very different object from the loving desire for another person. Each force of desire is singular, particular, as each is related to a different cluster of reasons and values. Echoing Aristotle, all of our respective desires are singular, particular, each related to its own cluster of reasons and values, albeit with *eudaimonia* in sight.

Universal self-affirmability. With Brewer's notion of dialectical activity in mind, we can now turn to his notion of universal self-affirmability. Vital (and unique) to Brewer's retrieval of the self is his elucidation of the account of friendship that we find in Aristotle, specifically as reclamation of friendship as a necessary condition of virtue.

Friendship based on the good—for Brewer, 'character friendship'—is central to the good life, as it is only through character friends that we are able to develop better evaluative outlooks in life ('evaluative outlook' referring to our sense of what is *admirable*/'good' and *contemptible*/'bad', e.g., immigrants should be treated with equal

dignity in the United States—this is *good*). In Brewer's terms, an evaluative outlook is "a person's characteristic sense of the evaluative features of actual or possible human doings" (244). An evaluative outlook is *subjectively* self-affirming when the subject is able to approve of the outlook at hand (i.e., when we are okay with what that outlook is suggesting to us); an evaluative outlook is *interpersonally* self-affirming if at least two people are able to approve of the outlook at hand; and an evaluative outlook is universally self-affirming if it affirms "all possible embodiments of the same outlook, whether in its possessor or in others" (244). For instance, the evaluative outlook that children should be forced to work at age 12 might have subjective or interpersonal self-affirmability, but clearly lacks universal self-affirmability, as plenty of people would contest this evaluation. Evaluative outlooks lacking universal self-affirmability warrant extensive conversation, so as to hash out whether or not the view in mind really warrant admiration or approval—and *why*.

Thus, for Brewer, hearkening to Aristotle, others ultimately provide a window of insight into the way in which we understand phenomena and what the implications of those understandings might be. In isolation, we cannot see every angle. When we self-reflect, our minds tend to take the same routes, and draw the same conclusions. The role of the other is to show us aspects that are not apparent to us (we are not transparent to ourselves), and thus deepen our understanding of the outlook at hand. Others help us hone our understanding of virtue and vice—exposing vulnerabilities, blind spots, strengths, and surprising connections. Beyond this, others challenge us to help ensure that our reasons and values are sound, and that they are conducive to living well. It is, therefore, by way of character friendships that we are able to build confidence in our

conception of goodness via "mutual approval of the admirable," which is a form of mutual self-awareness (242). Thus, the activity of refining our ethical judgments is marked by a shift from subjective self-affirmability to universal self-affirmability—and the only way to do this is through conversation with as many character friends as possible. It is through character friendship that we *immunize* disordered thinking, unclouding our moral vision through dialogic deliberation (266).

Because virtue, within an Aristotelian framework, is 'uncodifiable' (there are no hard and fast rules), universal self-affirmability is crucial, as this particular dialectical activity is the way in which moral outlooks come to be both shared and refined; it is the way in which common distortions in thought resulting from emotions, feelings, etc. are remedied. As Brewer writes:

> There is a dialectical relationship between the attainment of virtue and participation in these particularly valuable sorts of human relationships. We cannot enter into the relevant sort of friendship unless we already have a glimmer of appreciation for fine action. Yet as we kindle and deepen human relationships of this ubiquitous sort, our evaluative outlooks are reshaped so as increasingly to be affirmable as good from all relevant social perspectives. Indeed, such relationships cannot move into close approximation of their own defining *telos* unless participants become more virtuous. Hence it can be said both that these relationships are schools of virtue and that they are rewards of virtue. Virtue, then, emerges as a concomitant of an exceedingly valuable kind of human relationship that is not possible in its absence. It also makes possible a valuable sort of wholeheartedness in one's activities. (240)

Thus, friendship is both intrinsically valuable and vital to virtue. Proper friendship, as Brewer stresses, is grounded in *theorein*—focused contemplation on an object of understanding—in the sense that the love for other (ultimately the other's *nous*, their desire to strive toward goodness) constitutes an originary source of appreciative attention. It is in attending to that other that one is able to amplify the range of dialectical activities "that one can accompany and appreciate with appreciative attention" (242). Intimate relationships like these are what help us understand aspirations and admirations;

character friendships are lifelong sources of "an ethical education that tends toward outcomes that are both *eudaimonistic* and recognizably moral" (244).

By Brewer's account, character friendship does not require two completely virtuous souls, as it can occur between unequal friends (insofar as the goodness is proportioned to its object). Distinct to his notion of character friendships is that they can and do evolve; they are not simply instances of static mutual admiration. Essential to character friendship is that the other has intrinsic value. This is what differentiates character friendship from friendships based on pleasure and utility, as those sorts of friendships involve relationships in which the other has instrumental value: they are merely a means to one's own pleasure or gain. As we saw in Chapter 2, these sorts of friendships are tenuous. The moment the pleasure or use ceases, the friendship dissolves, as the friendship is not grounded in the intrinsic value of the other, but what the other provides for oneself. Or in other words, their value is contingent *on their service of each party's respective self-interest,* that is, the perceived/hoped-for effects (be it pleasure or utility).

This is again why character friendships are vital to the refinement and practice of dialectical activity, as it is through loving another for their own sake—having one's attention arrested by the other—that one is able to understand value in a sense that is otherwise than production-oriented/based on perceived optimal effects. Echoing Macintyre, Brewer reiterates the fact that prudence today is marked by production-oriented, efficient self-interest (253). (Producing more for oneself.) This is contemporary Western virtue. And as Brewer stresses—underscoring Macintyre's original despair—the culture one is embedded in conditions one's sense of virtue and vice (265). Hence the

need to retrieve a conception of the self that is otherwise than production-oriented/driven by perceived optimal effects, insofar as we want to resist reducing human life to being programed toward a pre-determined state of affairs.

Character friendship, then, is constituted by dialogic assessment in practical thinking, and is fostered by a mutual admiration of the other's sense of the good (253). And as we saw in Chapter 2, for Aristotle, this dialectical activity is vital to clarity. Mutual admiration allows each friend to give credence to the other's voice (concerned about the other's approval), and is what enables one to trust the other enough to offer one's own evaluative outlook to be inspected, scrutinized, or praised. This trust involves *not knowing* if your perspective will remain the same as it was when the conversation started, and being uncertain about where the conversation will go, what resolution might be reached. Brewer continues:

> We can assess and refine [the idiosyncratic portions] of our sensibility by dialectical alteration between expressing them in action and conversation, and interpreting the words and actions of our friends as further sources of evaluative insight. At its best, this is a mutual and continuously reiterated process, one that displaces each friend from the confines of his or her existing commitments and concerns, and permits them to discern the outlines of newly evolving concerns in the person of the other. This mutual, dialectical alteration is the process by which a distinctive, shareable sensibility comes to have a determinate and increasingly articulate form. (254)

Thus, a distinct, external perspective that we deem trustworthy is the way in which we work toward proper self-love and proper love of the others (257). And for Brewer, these two activities need not be in antagonism the way modern philosophy sets them out to be. They are only at odds if self-love is understood in the production-oriented sense, in which others are simply obstacles that need to be manipulated in order for one's desires to be satisfied. Brewer takes pains to illustrate (I think, convincingly) that this picture is two-

dimensional, missing the intrinsic, non-effect oriented value we find in others and our activities.

To return to Prichard's point that the only way to understand morality is to get ourselves into situations that occasion obligation, talk to those who have been in those situations, or imagine ourselves in those situations (letting our moral capacities do their work), Brewer's conception of character friendship is without question a means of facilitating this. It is through character friendship—something that actually constitutes a very common, day-to-day activity—that we "attempt to deepen our understanding of the difference between the tactless and the candid, the tactful and the dishonest, the kind and the over-indulgent, the generous and the profligate, the magnanimous and the pompous, the deeply felt and the maudlin or sappy, the self-confident and the conceited, the self-respecting and the self-indulgent, the prudent and the cowardly or spineless, the brace and the rash, the accommodating and the servile" (276). These conversations unveil understanding, provide lucidity, and illuminate value.

And as Brewer concludes, the real value of understanding—the activity of gaining insight into "why things are as they are, or how they cohere in larger patterns of order or coherence" (302)—lies in the actualization of that understanding itself, *both in one's own life and the in the lives of other*, especially as it pertains to living a good life (308-9). Understanding constitutes the intrinsic value of practical thinking, philosophical reflection on ethics, and friendship.

3.4 NEOARISTOTELIAN INSIGHTS

To summarize what has been established thus far: in the wake of the claim that moral philosophy has not only become stifled, but rests on a methodological mistake, we find a revival in Aristotelian virtue ethics that is at least partially motivated by a desire to recollect and thus salvage key dimensions of *who we are*. Echoing Brewer, this motivation is itself motivated by the understanding that each of us presupposes an understanding of what it is to be a human agent. And whether or not that understanding has been made explicit, each of us acts in light of that understanding. For example, if I understand myself to be an isolated creature, desperately trying to stay afloat all by myself, my actions will follow suit. And as such, I am less likely to trust others, and more likely to do what I can, by whatever means possible, to sustain myself.

As we saw above, the rise of Aristotelian virtue ethics in 20th-century Anglo-American philosophy is a direct response to the residual Enlightenment-inspired *ethos* in contemporary moral philosophy. ***On the one hand*****,** this response involves an attempt to shift away from 1) the theoretical preoccupation with action (rather than character); 2) morality being marked by *either* duty *or* the ends justifying the means; 3) the drive to locate a 'view from nowhere'; and 4) the impulse to provide an argument for why one ought to do their duty—as though, hearkening to Aristotle, an argument alone could push one into a more virtuous mode of being. ***On the other hand*****,** this response involves an attempt to address the state of moral philosophy as it is practiced in the Anglo-American West, questioning the task of moral philosophy and the moral philosopher. 20th-century virtue ethics seeks to address the disordered state of moral philosophy by contesting 1)

the prioritization of knowledge production; 2) the arcane, if not obscure state of the discipline; 3) the results-oriented and anti-contemplative values that permeate not only academia, but our culture at large;[81] and 4) paraphrasing Macintyre, the way in which moral philosophy has become insignificant in society and marginal in the academy.[82]

Insights. Both Macintyre and Brewer directly address the theoretical, practical, and existential worries above. Sociologically speaking, Macintyre's diagnosis of the dominant social, economic, and political order of morality in the (Anglo-American) Western world is on point, and his re-construction of the causal-chain that led to it is nothing short of illuminating. Whether or not the roots of the crisis are precisely as Macintyre depicts it, his diagnosis provokes us to reflect on *who we are, where we are headed, what we value, and why.* The Enlightenment's suspicious attitude toward religion and all of its associated baggage (teleology included) did in fact mark the beginning of a new anthropocentrism (epitomized in Kant's Copernican turn)—a new anthropocentrism in which reason could serve as the measure of what we should and should not do, regarding the appeal to anything 'outside' of oneself as a moral shortcoming.

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[81] It seems clear that the trouble with the theoretical emphasis on products and results is that is perpetuates (if not only implicitly) a conception of who we are that is chiefly governed by results-driven, anti-contemplative activities—contemplative in the Aristotle's sense of the word *qua* being arrested by something, cherishing that something for its own sake. This is an activity that has nothing to do with calculation or aiming for a future state of affairs, but rather a pleasure-filled diving into the here-and-now. And as we saw in Chapter 2, the calculative dimension of who we are is merely one dimension; there are other dimensions of the self that need nourishing (none of which at the expense of nourishing the others, balance is key). Beyond this, as we saw in Chapter 1, Kant's conception of embracing the moral law involves the cessation of calculation, the cherishing of the moral law for its own sake. That is, the active letting go of what is not in our control (hypothetical future state of affairs), and finding power in identifying with what is already there. One cannot help but think of the stoic mantra (Epictetus) to *not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do, and your life will go well*. Peace comes with understanding what is beyond oneself as something that cannot be shaped and shifted into something determinate—including the others, each of whom is also and end in themself.

[82] Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggle, "When Philosophy Lost Its Way," in *New York Times*, "The Stone" (January 11, 2016).

Macintyre's account of Kant's failure is important. Despite the fact that, as argued in Chapter 1, Kant is challenging the temper of his time, Macintyre's crucial point is that Kant was, no doubt, operating within a problematic paradigm: one in which the individual is understood as atomized—separate from the whole, from any sort of *telos*, and from any sort of context. Although Kant does grant teleological impulses (toward happiness) within each and every one of us, insofar as we are human, those human impulses are of course best understood as inferior to our rational impulses (self-conceited, intrinsically immoral), and far too contingent to safeguard anything like justice or equality. Macintyre's grim depiction of the liquated emotivist self—the birth child of the modern era, including Kant's moral project—underscores the way in which (whether or not it was intended) the Anglo-American self—the *individual*—has been both theoretically and practically disconnected from its community, its purpose, and, perhaps most disastrously, its desires. Its chief value is to acquire more for itself, and its extreme isolation has pushed it to understand itself as at war with the others. The self so understood is a self that needs *more*, but needs *no one*.

Macintyre's retrieval of the teleological or narrative dimension of human identity[83] is significant, as it reminds us of our need to appeal to a web of contexts (stories, activities, etc.) that we find ourselves enmeshed in when attempting to answer *who we are, where we are headed (what sort of person should I to become?), what we value, and why?* Macintyre's claim is that the teleological framework that we find in Aristotle is vital to working ourselves out of our de-contextualized state of affairs. Macintyre reminds us that there is an aspect of ourselves that inevitably strives for unity,

[83] Like Martha Nussbaum's and Paul Ricoeur's, among others.

coherence, as we are selves on the way to happiness: ordered (or disordered) with that absolute end in mind. For Macintyre, therefore, it is ultimately this teleological understanding of who we are that grants us access to our desires, our purpose, and our community (in addition to bridging all of the theoretical gaps that the modern age chiseled open). Macintyre I think rightly contends that Aristotle gives us the tools we need to re-emphasize character and *the good* of the individual and the whole, as well as the relationship between the good and our activities.

Brewer fine-tunes and builds upon Macintyre's account, elaborating on the first distinction that we find in Aristotle's *Ethics*. That is, the distinction between instrumental goods and absolute goods. Brewer's critique of the 'world-making' conception of human agency (and concomitant favoring of the 'evaluative outlook') should be understood as underscoring the problem with limiting human action to instrumental motivation, as this comes at the hefty price of neglecting (if not forgetting altogether) the vital role of non-calculative activities, i.e., absolute goods. Brewer resurrects the significance of absolute goods through his notion of dialectical activity, by which he retrieves the notion of goodness as intrinsic value: something deeply appreciated for its own sake, like someone we love—valuing them for no other reason than being who they are. The bottom line for Brewer, as was the case with Kant, is that we are more than machinery, calculators, searching for *more*.

Beyond this, Brewer elucidates both Aristotle's and Macintyre's teleological conception of the self in a significant way. He re-describes *telos* as immersing oneself ever deeper into a given activity. Dialectical activity, as Brewer coins it, involves an infinite unveiling of the activity itself—that is, an infinite approach toward a fuller

expression of the activity, being more enraptured by it. This activity does not involve seeking to bring about some further state of affairs, or calculating the means to some pre-determined end, but instead involves being present to the activity itself, for its own sake, desiring only to augment it (in awe), to make the experience fuller (in appreciation). In the case of universal self-affirmability, character friends engage in conversations that seek to understand the phenomena at hand, unsure about 'where' the conversation is headed.

Brewer takes pains to distinguish his notion of universal self-affirmability from Kant's 'universalizability test' (the moral law), stressing that although both are meant to "ensure a form of practical thinking that can be affirmed or acceptable…from the vantage point of any human being" (282), there are important points of disanalogy:

- **First,** unlike the Kantian categorical imperative, universal self-affirmability is not dealing specifically with maxims or principles of action, but is instead dealing with evaluative outlooks (282). For Brewer, Kant's perspective of what constitutes moral action is far too restrictive, limiting moral reflection to reflection on principles. The Aristotelian position allows for more moral content: that is, anything pertaining to value.
- **Second**, *the mode of employment* that we find in Kant is monological (in that it takes place within one's reflective consciousness), whereas universal self-affirmability is necessarily *dialogic* (283). This point is vital, as it emphasizes the role of the other in practical deliberation, ultimately rendering it a shared activity that hinges on experience and exchange.
- **Third**, although Kant acknowledges the need to take the others into consideration when attempting to decipher what to do, the rigidity of the *a priori* project is again too limiting (284). For Brewer (drawing from Aristotle), experience is not only valuable, but is also vital to character friends working to affirm or disaffirm a given evaluative outlook. Beyond this, the tools we have to evaluate evaluative content (echoing Macintyre) are the stock of narratives and values that arise within a given culture/political/economic context, including one's unique history or place within those narratives. Clearly, this means that the activity is to a certain extent 'subjective', but in the sense that subjective-contingent facts augment one's understanding of the phenomena, as other forces/dimensions/angles are taken into consideration. This is all to say that 'reason alone' is not enough.

Although, as Brewer points out, moral thinking is undelegable—it is something assigned to oneself, in relation to one's individual context—the others are vital mirrors who illuminate our blind spots, and suggest new ways of understanding things. This

Aristotelian point, while again perhaps obvious, is crucial. Brewer's account provides an invigorated rendering of the dialectical method that elucidates the *ethos* of Aristotle's ethics (as an alternative to the modern *ethos*), as well as a truly practical appropriation of that method.

Building. Although Macintyre and Brewer make strides in their respective reclamations of *who we are*—underscoring that we are more than dis-ordered self-interested selves at odds with altruism, while actually *preserving* various aspects of the spirit of Kant's moral project—I want to highlight a few key points that are worth expounding, and will ultimately be expounded in the next chapter.

Although the narrative dimensions of who we are, i.e., our tendency to find order, coherence, an intelligible *plot,* are difficult to contest, there is a risk that comes with assuming that there is a quasi-providential undercurrent to everything we do—especially from within the emotivist evaluative outlook, in which activities are, for the most part, for the sake of something else. This is risky because seeking to bring about states of affairs involves projecting a desired future state, which involves having in mind some end beyond the activity itself, thus stifling the ability to be *present*.

Beyond this, our understanding of the ultimate end toward which we aim—happiness, flourishing, living well—is the byproduct of our social/political/historical situatedness. More specifically, this understanding is a byproduct of the ways in which values/virtues are inculcated in society. Thus, the emotivist self and its subsequent values derive from the way that self has been socialized, politicized, and educated. This is to say that the stories that dominate Western culture (in the United States) are those that foster an alienated understanding of oneself—an understanding that effectively disconnects one

from their community, and drives one toward a survivalist mentality of perpetually seeking to take and make more for oneself.

How, then, are we to facilitate the re-imagining of our understanding of ourselves in a way that liberates us from liberalism's prized individualism? Hearkening to Anscombe's theses, it seems that it is important to consider the relationship between 'philosophy of psychology' and moral education, which shapes our understanding of who we are, in turn shaping what we desire and do. If the impulses of meritocracy, for example, are what we teach, we should of course expect ourselves to be at war with our neighbors, because within this outlook, the other 'getting ahead' signifies that you are effectively 'falling behind' in the race for more. As we saw in Chapter 2, education at both the inter-personal level (between friends) and the public level (as a value dimension of society) is key. Without virtuous education, there is no possibility for virtue. It is ultimately through education that injustice can be mitigated. And how? By nurturing virtues that involve cherishing a certain understanding of moral judgment. And 'previous' to this, fostering a sense of self that is otherwise than self-interested. That is, a self that embraces dialectical activity as moments of identifying with oneself as what is other than oneself—relinquishing the sovereignty of self-concern by opening up to what is otherwise than oneself. The seeds of this movement are in fact present in Kant (especially in his phenomenology of respect), though his insistence on (reflective) reason alone taking us there is problematic for the reasons discussed in this chapter.

How, then, do we begin to value this mode of being? Education. And more specifically, a model of education grounded in an understanding of the self as dialectical activity, and an understanding of teaching as an important instance of character

friendship. Key is that introspection and reason alone will not turn anyone toward morality, and that logic in itself does not breed virtue. Moral philosophy, as sketched by Prichard, does little more than push the philosopher to recoil inside the calculative dimension of herself in search of the next-best argument—all too often losing the forest for the trees. The value of virtue comes from others, and is instilled in each of us by way of conversation—be it from the stories we are told, or the conversations that help us understand new encounters, new thoughts, new feelings, new activities, or even old encounters, old thoughts, old feelings, old activities.

As we saw in Chapter 1, for Kant, conversation is a vital "cultivator of virtue and a preparation for its surer practice," and is itself is guided by the pursuit of clarity, truth. The health of society hinges on conversation, which, for Kant, hinges on honesty and no reservation. As we saw in Chapter 2, Aristotle's position is no different. It is through dialectic understood as engagement with the insights of others that we can inch ever-closer to truth itself; moreover, in its most complete form, friendship—the greatest of all external goods—centers on the activities of loving and activating the rational element within oneself and the other by *exercising reason* through dialogue, discussion, conversation. Though not explicit in Aristotle, based on the what was argued in Chapter 2, the habituation of conversation is vital—that is, conversation understood as opening oneself to what is other than oneself (e.g., another person's perspective), listening to the phenomena, and then working to understand-*with* the other. As Macintyre very briefly touches upon, at our core, we are communicators, receiving from and transmitting to others. "Conversation is the most basic form of human transaction in general." And Brewer of course incorporates this insight into his conception of character friendship and

universal self-affirmability, conversation serving as an exemplary form of dialectical activity.

Returning to Macintyre's meditations in *After Virtue*, are Aristotle and Nietzsche our two theoretical alternatives? Is Aristotelian virtue ethics the only radically different ethical tradition that does not fall prey to Nietzsche's indictment or the woes of emotivism? Is the Aristotelian self the self that will 'free' us from our state of disorder? Given the fluidity between Aristotle and Kant, it seems clear that the Aristotelian self is not so different from the Kantian self; their respective projects' emphases are simply different. Kant is interested in locating the ground for a proper ethics; Aristotle is interested in better understanding the good that each of us desire, insofar as we are human. In order to facilitate a re-imagining of our understanding of ourselves that liberates us from individualism, a more radical shift might be in order.

With this, we can turn to Emmanuel Levinas's radical re-rendering of *who we are*, paying close attention to his understanding of communication and conversation, which may help us re-consider our understanding of ourselves, as well as our understanding of the task of moral philosophy, the moral philosopher, and moral education. Levinas's account is perhaps more 'Kantian' than it is 'Aristotelian', though his insights, as we will see, deeply resonate with the motivations, critiques, and reclamations showcased in this chapter.

4.0 CHAPTER 4: THE DISRUPTED SELF

> *In like manner the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence, and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power.*
>
> *Glaucon said, with a ludicrous earnestness: by the light of heaven, how amazing!*
>
> **–Socrates, Plato's *Republic*, 509b-c**

This chapter will build upon the insights gleaned in the first three chapters by providing a critical interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas's account of the self: first, by analyzing his account of subjectivity as 'substitution' (a trope demonstrating what he means by metaphysical desire), and then by analyzing his account of conversation—in particular, 'the saying's' relation to justice. I will end by suggesting that in addition to providing an innovative approach to the problems in moral philosophy (specifically, the question of how we ground morality), Levinas's vindication of ethics exudes the spirit of Kant as portrayed in Chapter 1, while resonating with key insights from Aristotle, especially as retrieved in contemporary Aristotelian ethics.

My ultimate claim is that despite various dimensions of contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethics resonating with what we find in Levinas, Levinas's conception of the self as *disrupted*—being-for-the-other—goes further than contemporary neoaristotelians in their radical retrievals of ethics by insisting on a *deposed*, rather than self-governing, understanding of who we are. This is to say that Levinas seeks to provide a sense of the

self that is not primarily self-legislating (autonomous), or unified by a coherent quest for the good (teleological). For Levinas, the self, even 'prior to' its face-to-face encounter with the other, was not, is not, and never will be an island unto itself. And although autonomy (the self understood as a self-legislator) and narrative coherence (the self understood as an individual on a unique, unified quest for the good) are incontestable modes of being, for Levinas, they are antithetical to ethics.[84]

4.1 LEVINAS'S MOTIVATIONS

With a critical eye toward the atrocities of the 20th-century, Levinas's seminal text, *Totality and Infinity*, notoriously begins with the claim that "one would readily agree that it is of the upmost importance to determine whether we have been duped by morality" (21). He then links the suspension of morality to the ever-present possibility of war:

> Does not lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality… In advance its shadow falls over the actions of man. War is not only one of the ordeals—the greatest—of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory. The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means—politics—is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté. (TI, 21)

For Levinas, morality disrupts political ambition (the desire to win, and gain more) in the same sense that philosophy (the desire for wisdom) disrupts naïveté. That is, just as Socrates, in his pursuit of wisdom (and work as a *gadfly*), interrupts the naïveté of his

[84] The interpretation of Levinas that is provided in this chapter is deeply indebted to Richard Kearney's innovative, imaginative, and timely work on 'carnal hermeneutics'. I was fortunate enough to participate in his first graduate seminar on the topic, and to witness his masterful hermeneutic investigation and reclamation of a phenomenon that has been underemphasized (if not outright ignored) in the Western philosophical tradition. I am grateful to him for spearheading such an original conversation, and for inviting his graduate students—myself included—to engage in rich, ongoing conversations with him on the topic.

interlocutors (e.g., pushing them to examine the phenomena that they take for granted), morality, too, interrupts one's political pursuits by throwing an "objective order from which there is no escape" (TI, 21) into question (e.g., the pain in the face of a child being separated from their 'undocumented' mother, prompting one to refuse to participate in the executive order to separate them). Morality so construed is most easily understood through Kant's formula of humanity,[85] which involves safeguarding the others as ends that should not be exploited, manipulated, or totalized.[86] This involves a resistance to making definitive (totalizing) claims about the other—claims that result from assuming that there is nothing more to understand. As we saw in Chapter 1, morality, contrary to war, preserves the possibility of justice, and also serves as a response to the political precept that one ought to use whatever means necessary to secure a given end.[87]

It is helpful to understand the question of whether we have been duped or deceived by morality as an echo of Kant's questioning of whether the supreme, absolute, universally necessary moral principle that he seeks may, in the end, be nothing more than a chimera: a theoretical dream among philosophers. Levinas's (rhetorical) worry is that if we *have* in fact been duped by morality, and morality is in fact nothing more than a dream or myth among philosophers, then war is our inevitable and total reality. And if war is in fact our total reality, then morality is rendered 'derisory', because war, by its very definition, intends the usurpation of the other. And this necessarily entails the consumption and/or transformation of what is different (e.g., an ideology, like

[85] James Mensch, *Levinas's Existential Analytic: A Commentary on Totality and Infinity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 19-20.
[86] To 'totalize' the other is to encapsulate them into a presumed category or concept (e.g., X is a racist).
[87] Contrary to everything political, justice involves the cessation of calculation, thus securing the freedom of every being (insofar as its rational). As Kant stresses, locating 'good' and 'bad' in experiential consequences is the most real threat to morality itself, as this renders the good something brought about: a future state of affairs, a consequence of action.

'communism', or a category of people, like 'communists') into a rendition of the warring force (e.g., an ideology like 'democracy', or a category of people, like 'democrats'). In war, there is a conqueror (as Levinas puts it, 'the same', which refers to a certain understanding of the self) and a conquered (the other). And in war—in obedience to an objective order from which there is no escape—the other is to be destroyed, overthrown, or assimilated in some way, leaving no room for morality.

The most important point for Levinas is that if reality is in fact war, and morality is nothing more than a fiction, then what we are tragically duped into is an alienated understanding of ourselves as 'soldiers', who are perpetually at war with the others and ourselves. As Levinas puts it, war "destroys the genuine identity of the same" by driving the same to reduce anything and everything other into an extension of itself (TI, 21); war drives its soldiers into an isolated and production-oriented mode of being (struggling to produce more of the same, motivated by the need to self-preserve and persevere), which, as we saw in Chapter 3, is part and parcel of a disordered understanding of the self that is alive and well in the Anglo-Saxon West, and that Aristotelian virtue ethics is both contesting and attempting to overturn. This understanding of the self is disordered in the sense that it has forgotten the fact that it is constituted by the other, and exists (is animated) by virtue of the other. The self, for Levinas, is not in any sense *causa sui*. And Levinas, like Brewer, is committed to phenomenologically contesting the reigning conception of the self (as *causa sui*, self-legislative, and results-oriented), convinced that if we do not, we will be stuck playing roles in which we no longer recognize who we really are.

Levinas is ultimately interested in evoking an understanding of morality that is not merely something that philosophers hope for, or a principle that we can argue ourselves into endorsing but is instead something extant—ontologically preserved in 'metaphysical desire' for the other, which, for Levinas, is the most essential dimension of who we are—'beneath' oneself understood as a self-aware ego, which again, by Levinas's account, denotes the reigning self-reflexive conception of who we are (self-conscious, self-aware, etc.).

Echoing Prichard (and Aristotle), no argument or proof, in itself, is ever going to convince us to be moral. We do not simply reason our way into moral being. Morality involves something affective, immediate, intuitive, and *inconclusive,* as there is no one-size-fits-all guide to moral difficulties. Perhaps most vital to Levinas's account, reverberating Prichard's point in "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" is that the commands of reason will not deliver our duty to the other. The 'ground' of morality is not hiding somewhere within reason understood as argumentation. For Levinas, the source of ethics is sensible, lived. And *sense* always refers to the other, which is 'revealed' (albeit concealed from cognitive consciousness) in the face-to-face encounter, conversation, and the unremitting proximity of the other to me. It is important to point out that in addition to referring to the other person, 'the other' ultimately denotes any disruption that pulls us out of our reflective, self-conscious selves [88] (projects, productions, reflections, and expectations). Therefore, the other can also be understood as

[88] For Levinas, *consciousness* denotes an understanding of cognition that involves perceiving, intending, intuiting concepts or essences, and offering them to retention (memory) and protention (anticipation of the future). Consciousness is the process by which we thematize phenomena, and store those themes for ourselves for future use. This can be understood as theoretical reason, reflection, introspection, discursive reasoning, speculative reason, etc. I will use these terms somewhat interchangeably to signify the conceptual mode of knowing that relies on memory and expectation.

the new, the unknown, the unpredictable, or the future, as all of these entail indeterminate content—*otherwise than the simple presence of the self to itself* (TI, 35).

Very generally speaking, Levinas's project is best understood as a critique of what he calls Western philosophy's history of 'egology', which for him has reached its apex in the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger. 'Egology' here refers to what Levinas takes to be a theoretical preoccupation with understanding truth is some *thing*—an articulable *essence*—that can be located somewhere 'within oneself' by way of self-conscious reflection (OB, 103). Levinas's project can, therefore, be interpreted as a critique of a tendency within a particular strand of Western philosophy[89] to narrowly rely on first-personal reflection in its efforts to locate the truth of being: e.g., the cogito (Descartes), the *a priori* structures of cognition (Kant), intentionality as consciousness of… X (Husserl), what is constitutive of Dasein (Heidegger), etc. Levinas is instead committed to an understanding—or better, undergoing—of truth that involves divesting the self-conscious self.

By Levinas's account, what is missing from the Western philosophical tradition is 1) a concrete understanding of morality that looks 'out' (to what is beyond oneself), rather than looking 'in' (to the structures of cognition), and 2) a notion of moral responsibility that has nothing to do with the will (e.g., responsibility as an altruistic act of the will, or form of accountability). Levinas is interested in establishing ethics as first philosophy (metaphysics), which is to say that for Levinas, being ought to be understood

[89] 'Western philosophy', as employed by Levinas, is an extremely problematic category. Levinas is most explicitly taking 20th-century transcendental philosophy to task (and the traditions that influenced it, e.g., various threads within Greek philosophy), but is important to stress that not every tradition within what constitutes Western philosophy falls prey to his critique.

ethically, and responsibility—rather than being a willed decision or a debt to pay—is woven into the fabric of who we are.

Levinas is not, therefore, offering a prescriptive account of ethics, or a robust defense of a moral theory, but is instead providing an evocative, phenomenological account of what it is to be. For Levinas, morality is not a synthetic *a priori* formula for right action, a calculation of how to proceed in any and every situation, or a series of emulable qualities exhibited by the one who has practical wisdom (the Aristotelian *phronimos*). Ethics is first philosophy in the sense that it conditions the science of being *qua* being, knowledge *qua* knowledge, etc., and in the sense that we are ontologically determined by the other(s).

With this in mind, the key questions guiding Levinas's work are: does all meaning proceed from essence? Does subjectivity draw its own meaning from essence? And is the meaning of subjectivity brought out of a struggle for existence? (A refusal of death? A hope of escaping the 'end'?) (OB, 176). The various elements of these questions need to be carefully parsed, but as we will see below, his answer to all of these questions is no.

4.2 THE LEVINASIAN SELF

Does all meaning proceed from essence?[90] Levinas begins "The Exposition" of his 1974 text, *Otherwise Than Being,* by stressing that the philosopher's task is to seek and express

[90] I am going to, for the most part, limit my analysis here to Levinas's rendering of subjectivity as substitution in *Otherwise Than Being*. While an incredibly difficult text, it is less bound to the language of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, and thus less confined in its depiction of what it is to be. Beyond this, the other in *Otherwise Than Being* is primarily *autre* rather than *autrui*, ultimately signifying

truth: "Truth, before characterizing a statement or a judgment, consists in the exhibition of being. But what shows itself, in truth, under the name of being? And who looks?" (23).

As Levinas describes it, the history of Western philosophy asks 'what' shows itself in truth? What is the real? And he then points out that the request for a 'what' inevitably leads toward an answer that "is already wholly enveloped with being, has eyes only for being, and already sinks into being. Concerning the being of what is, it wants to know what it is" (23). The point here is that the answer to the question, *what is it?* is always known and expressed by way of the 'essence' that appears, is disclosed, is intelligible (24). Moreover, the answer to the question, *who looks?* is also always 'known and expressed by way of essence—meaning that the 'who' inevitably devolves into an essence, as essence is what is manifest to reflective cognition.

To better understand what Levinas has in mind when he references 'essence' or 'being' (in relation to the Western philosophy's history of egology), and *why* it is a problematic place to locate truth, it is worth turning to Book *Zeta* in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—specifically his analysis of what the 'what' refers to when we ask: *what is it*?[91]

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the other more broadly, i.e., not restricted to the other person (as is predominantly the case in *Totality and Infinity*).

[91] Given the fact that Brentano was one of Husserl's key mentors, and that Brentano was himself immersed in the Aristotelian tradition, it is helpful to turn to Aristotle to glean some of the inspiration behind phenomenology as a discipline. Beyond this, Husserl's "return to the things in themselves" as a means of finding a way out of the epistemological absurdities that have plagued modern philosophy (i.e., its attempt to connect or find a point of coordination between a heterogeneous "inner" and "outer" (whatever those "inner" and "outer" may be) no doubt parallel Aristotle's critique of the metaphysical absurdities associated with 'Platonism'. Husserl's project is in some sense a modern recasting of Aristotle's critique of the Platonists in Book *Alpha* and Book *Zeta* of the *Metaphysics*. Utterly perplexed by the way in which the eternal, self-subsisting, unified Platonic Forms cause/contribute to/relate to/coordinate with the ever-changing world of flux and difference (A.9.991b1-10; Z.8.1033b20-5, etc.), Aristotle dismisses the dualistic model of Form (as it inevitably leads to the Third Man argument, among other absurdities) and substitutes it with concept of form that is immanent in the things of experience—granting "appearances" or experience itself the primacy it deserves qua giver of meaning. Although they are taking very different

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle commits himself to a thorough investigation of being itself (what is being *qua* being?), and explicitly refrains from deeming any particular mode of being as the only case of its kind, though he is determined to uncover what being *is* in its most fundamental, *true* sense. In Book *Zeta*, which is notoriously difficult and unsatisfying,[92] Aristotle argues that "the term 'primary' or 'first,' or 'prior to all others' is used in many senses, yet a substance is primary in every sense: in formula, in knowledge, and in time. For of the other categories no one is separable, but only substance" (Z.1.1028a33-5). For example, the attribute brown is an aspect of 'substance' (*ousia*), and denotes a real mode of being, but only in a partial or accidental sense, as it is always understood in relation to, or predicated of, given substance (e.g., this brown cat, this brown banana, etc.). *Substance*, on the other hand, is not an attribute of anything, and 'stands alone' as the primary definition of being, toward which all other senses of being are related. Without substance, a thing would not be at all, nor would it be what it most fundamentally is, because substance constitutes a thing's essence: *what it is to be that particular thing*. The Aristotle of Book *Zeta* is therefore committed to the fact that 1) being in the most fundamental sense is substance, 2) that essence is a key way of understanding substance, and 3) that substance (even when understood as essence) denotes what it is to be a *particular* thing, rather than a universal predication. To be is to be a particular *this* (*tode ti*), and despite sharing common properties with other things

approaches to very different problems (and thousands of years apart from each other), both thinkers are keen to the unbridgeable gap problem, and turn to the things themselves as they are given in experience, understanding essence qua immanent in experience, to perception. Both thinkers also recognize that matter how hard one tries, one can never "glue" two metaphysically heterogeneous actualities together. The solution must reside in an essential relation between two modalities of the same thing – and for Husserl, it's clear that this "same thing" is consciousness itself.

[92] See Lesher, 1971; Loux, 1991; Yu, 2003; and Weigelt, 2007.

(e.g., both Socrates and Plato being philosophers), to be is to be one (e.g., Socrates). That is, a singular one that is recognizably different from other beings.

For Aristotle, then, the principle of being must involve that which differentiates one thing from another, meaning that difference itself is vital, as the *tode ti* (*this* particularity thing here, e.g., this man, Socrates) denotes, or points towards, what makes something what it is, and thus distinct from everything else. Although 'form' as primary substance/separable *this* (again, denoting the essence of a thing, making it what it is) seems to be the answer that Aristotle is looking for in *Zeta* (answering the question: *what is substance?*), Aristotle stresses that *how* form denotes primary substance is unclear, as it the most perplexing feature of substance (Z.3.1029a33). As we saw in Chapter 2, part of form's perplexity is attributed to the (alleged) Platonic conception of form as a universal One over many. The 'problem of universals'—a major preoccupation in medieval philosophy—questions the ontological status of universals, e.g., Man itself or Beauty itself or Justice itself. That is, whether universals are self-subsisting entities (out there, somewhere, in the difficult to access, really real intelligible world), or instead exist *qua* immanent in their particular instantiations (as Aristotle would have it).

For Aristotle, much is at stake with the ontological status of universals, as language is grounded in concepts. In the last *aporia* in Book *Beta*, Aristotle writes:

> We must raise these problems, then, concerning the principles, and also whether the principles are universal, or, as we call them, individuals. For if they are universal, they will not be substances; for none of what is common signifies a *this* but only a *such*, and a substance is a *this*. And if a common predicate is a *this* and can be exhibited, Socrates will be many things: Socrates himself, and a man, and an animal, and indeed each of these indicates a *this* and a unity. If the principle is universal, then, these results follow; if they are not universal but exist as individuals, they will not be known; for all knowledge is universal. So, if there is to be knowledge of them, there will be, besides these principles, other which are prior and are predicated of them universally. (*B*.6.1003a7-18)

The thrust behind the *aporia* is that we can only know, define, and articulate *what it is to be* by way of universal concepts. These are what are manifest to speculative reason as truth. Substance, however, as Aristotle stresses over and over again, necessarily denotes a particular *this*—different and thus distinct from everything else. Therefore, if substance *qua* particular *this* is what a thing most fundamentally is, there cannot be any knowledge or articulation of what it is, which would make the pursuit to determine what being *is* a bit of a lost cause, as language, grounded in universality, will inevitably fail to articulate what is particular or singular. The point here is that language-thought, in its efforts to capture the truth of a given thing, cannot help but (in Levinas's jargon) totalize a given phenomenon: reducing it to a particular theme, which inevitable falls short of capturing what a thing most essentially is (as an actual, existing thing, distinct from other things).

One of the problematic conclusions in Book *Zeta* is that, insofar as language goes, the ability to determine and articulate what substance most fundamentally is fails, because a *this* cannot be known or defined—at least not to theoretical reason. Although Aristotle insinuates throughout *Zeta* that *this* thing's essence, or what it is to be that particular thing, is peculiar, singular, distinct to that thing,[93] essence can only be known and expressed in terms of a universal *such*, i.e., a concept, inevitably failing to explicate the peculiarity of *thisness*, thus rendering the *tode ti* ungraspable. Essence, while pointing to something particular, is inevitably intelligible, *said*, thematized, and conceptualized as something universal. And again, this thematization is what makes it known, grasped, an object of cognition. Given this *aporia*, Aristotle decides to switch gears (in Books *Eta*

[93] As he puts it, "The essence of a particular thing and that thing itself are one and the same, and not accidentally so" (Z.6.1031b19-21), and, "Of things which are primary and are stated by themselves, then, it is clear that each of them and its essence are one and the same. Evidently, the sophistical refutations of this position and the problem of whether Socrates and the essence of Socrates are solved in the same way" (Z.6.1032a5-10).

and *Theta*), and instead investigates being in terms of act and potency, ultimately conceding that being in the most fundamental sense is activity (e.g., the activity of being this particular cat here).

So, how does this relate to Levinas's project? Levinas is ultimately criticizing Western philosophy's bias toward the intelligible and articulable, i.e., the mode of being that is present to reflective cognition (*essence*). This critique is helpfully understood as a restitution of Aristotle's initial commitment to extant singular beings as the principle of being, though Levinas will attempt to dig 'deeper' than Aristotle's *tode ti*. Levinas is convinced that the sense of being that has been favored in Western philosophy, following Aristotle, is that of essence, which is, as Levinas puts it, phenomenality fixed in a tale, a narrative (OB, 39); essence is memorable, and can be thus named. This is not to say that essence stands before or represents some truer entity behind it, but rather that the way in which being appears to speculative/theoretical reason is universal, predicable—resounding in *logos,* and temporally extended within and before consciousness. As he writes:

> Essence is not only conveyed in the said, it is not only "expressed" in it, but originally—though amphibologically—resounds in it qua essence. There is no essence or entity behind the said, behind the Logos. The said, as a verb is the essence of essence. Essence is the very fact that there is a theme, exhibition, doxa or logos, and thus truth. Essence is not only conveyed, it is temporalized in a predicative statement. (OB, 39)

Beyond this, Levinas also points out that what is implied in our understanding of essence as that which makes a given thing what it is (without which it would cease it be), is that essence is understood as *interest*. That is, an interest to continue being what it is. In Aristotelian terms, essence as interest could be understood as the *telos* of a given thing: the desire that a thing has to keep on doing what it does, and to ultimately augment what

it does (by doing it in an ever-fuller way)—not only with the aim surviving or continuing to be, but with the ultimate aim of flourishing in that being. That is, most fully actualizing, by virtue of itself, what it is for it to most fully be, e.g., an acorn becoming a tree, a child becoming a well-reasoning adult.

While Levinas, much like Kant, is not contesting this 'teleological' feature of reality (i.e., that things really do persist in interest, the desire to keep on being what they are, and to enjoy existence and all of the pleasures it entails), Levinas is more concerned with what nourishes that interest in the first place, and thus seeks to reclaim another form of desire, *metaphysical desire*, as that which animates, inspires, *incarnates* (what appears to reflection as) essence (OB, 68-69).

Again, Levinas is not proposing to have discovered a really real 'noumenal' reality subsisting *behind* essence (OB, 45), but instead seeks to unveil our primordial desire for the other: the desire that constitutes one's existence. Key for Levinas is that metaphysical desire is not a desire that spawns from our finitude (desiring to bring about something that we lack), nor is it a desire to return to the origin (this is self-conscious reflection, a willed return to oneself), but is instead an insatiable desire that overflows "beyond everything that can complete it" (TI, 34), "sought in the Other, but by him who lacks nothing" (TI, 62). It is the desire that ignites wonder (being awestruck by something different than one had thought before), and philosophy's love of wisdom; it is desire without agenda, projected goals, or 'foreseen' ends. It is a desire that nourishes itself with its hunger (TI, 34), driven by a pull toward that which one cannot foresee, and without any promise of resolution, only the promise of encountering something new. It is the desire that fuels, as Aristotle puts it, our tendency to reach out in understanding. That is,

our desire to shed light on that which seems so close that we can taste it, but somehow manages to fall through our fingertips when we reflect on what it is (e.g, the *tode ti*).

Vital to Levinas's account is that the 'opening' between the desirer and the desired is never closed. Metaphysical desire, as Levinas construes it, is preserved by the conjunction—the 'and'—that inhibits the desirer and desired from constituting a closed system (a totality in which the two are ultimately one). It is this opening that preserves the hunger that gives desire its motor. It is helpful to think about the fissure between the desirer and desired through the example of a rich, ongoing conversation between two friends, in which the two friends' perspectives are never fully fused in to one—at least not to the point of one utterly ceasing to be different, as the this would then cease to be a relation between one and the other, and would instead denote a relation between one and oneself. This is to say that one never fully possesses, grasps, or attains the other's perspectives or interpretations in their entirety. The labor involved in understanding another never ends because the other is never fully exposed: there is always something more, something surprising, something new, something other than what is currently *known*. Metaphysical desire denotes that pull toward the other; the 'opening' between oneself and the other denotes the chasm between what is known and what is unknown.

Sensibility: the subject as subjected. With his critique of essence in mind, Levinas writes, "Oneself is a singularity prior to the distinction between the particular and the universal" (OB, 108). For Levinas, the Aristotelian *tode ti* is already in some sense manifest, thematized, something that I can designate, whereas the singularity that he has in mind does not appear as something that we can grasp conceptually. Levinas calls this mode of knowing 'sensibility', which signifies the experience of understanding

via 'brute', immediate contact, prior to conscious schematization (e.g., enjoying food, basking in the heat of the sun, hearing the sound of music, feeling your feet in the sand, being engrossed in a beautiful sunset, etc.). Sensibility is the experience of being in one's skin, en-fleshed, touching or being in contact things. Echoing Aristotle in Book II of *De Anima*, to be is to be tactile and sensate. To be *alive* is to touch what is outside of us, to be in relation-to…X; and to touch is to be utterly exposed, at perpetual risk.

For Levinas, sensibility—most essentially constituted by flesh and touch, "'epidermal' vulnerability"[94]—denotes who we most fundamentally are. We are, first and foremost, embodied and sensing: 'subjects' subjected to what is outside of ourselves, constantly fissured and interrupted. This is a conception of the self that is ultimately affected and constituted by the world, rather than affecting and constituting the world (as, for instance, Kant would have it).[95] Sensibility signifies the openness, undergoing, susceptiveness of one's flesh—pure exposure without dwelling or 'somewhere' to hide: *skin laid bare*. For Levinas, it is in this sense that sensibility signifies my irreplaceability as one-for-the-other, or put differently, my responsibility for the other. My response-ability—that is, my responsiveness, by default, to the experiences that I undergo—cannot be given to somebody else, e.g., someone else cannot feel the water on my feet in precisely the same way that I do, or experience the taste of a juicy peach in precisely the way that I do. It is in this sense that sensibility-as-responsibility constitutes me (distinct

[94] This is Bettina Bergo's illuminative term, taken from her entry on Levinas in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

[95] Kant notoriously states, "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B76). Levinas is contesting precisely this point, stressing that this there is a gnosis that is otherwise than perception, intentionality, and conscious identity. Levinas is describing what it is to intend an object that exceeds our intentions. That is, a non-spatial, non-temporal, non-cognitive content: that is, the infinite. It is the encounter with something offering more than we can formulate in our intentions, requiring us to readjust our interpretation, or understanding, over and over again.

from other beings). In ontological terms, sensibility serves as the 'principle of individuation'.

For Levinas, the sensible self denotes the veracity 'prior to' truth as essence, though ontologically speaking, they are two sides of the same 'coin') (OB, 143). Sensibility marks the forgetting of self-concern, albeit not by an act of the will, but as being seized—held hostage, persecuted—by the other. This seizure from self-concern, by Levinas's account, constitutes freedom in the most authentic sense: that is, freedom as the relinquishing of self-concern, rather than freedom as a self-determining act of the will:

> Freedom is animation itself, breath, the breathing outside air, where inwardness frees itself from itself, and is exposed to all winds. There is exposure without assumption, which would already be closedness. That the emptiness of space would be filled with invisible air, hidden from perception, save in the caress of the wind or the threat of storms, non-perceived, but penetrating me even in my retreats of inwardness, that this invisibility or this emptiness would be breathable or horrible, that this invisibility is non-indifferent and obsesses me before all thematization, that the simple ambiance is imposed as an atmosphere to which the subject gives himself and exposes himself in his lungs, without intentions and aims, that the subject could be a lung at the bottom of substance—all this signifies a subjectivity that suffers and offers itself before taking a foothold in being. It is a passivity, wholly a supporting. (OB, 180)

To be clear, the affective undergoing of sensibility is 'prior to' the "I think," or reflective self-consciousness's representation of objective content to itself. The self as sensibility is a self exposed to, immersed in, and in contact with what is outside of reflective consciousness. The sensible self is a self without will, without intention, without a projected end or aim in mind. The self of sensibility is moved by, and thus responsible for, as responsive to, what is outside of itself. And again, this is a notion of responsibility that has nothing to do with resolve or accountability, but rather the impossibility of evading assignation by the other.

To think about this notion of responsibility more concretely, consider that our bodies are subject to a host of forces outside of ourselves. This affective exposure is immediate (e.g., being rained on, being burned by fire, struggling to breathe because the air is thick, experiencing the sweetness of a ripe peach, etc.), and this exposure leaves us vulnerable to both suffering and enjoyment (OB, 63). Sensibility is thus constituted by pure absorption, e.g., enjoying the refreshing temperature of the sea on a hot day, and attending only to that feeling (*being there*) without reflecting on it. As Levinas writes:

> The immediacy on the surface of the skin characteristic of sensibility, its vulnerability, is found as it were anaesthetized in the process of knowing. But also, no doubt, repressed or suspended. By contrast with this vulnerability (which presupposes enjoyment differently than its antithesis), knowing, being's disclosure to itself, marks a break with the immediate, and in a certain sense an abstraction. The immediacy of the sensible which is not reducible to the gnoseological role assumed by sensation is the exposure to wounding and to enjoyment, an exposure to wounding in enjoyment, which enables the wound to reach the subjectivity of the subject complacent in itself and positing itself for itself. This immediacy is first of all the ease of enjoyment, more immediate than drinking, the sinking into the depth of the element, into it incomparable freshness, a plentitude and a fulfillment. It is pleasure, that is, the complacency in itself of life loving life even in suicide. The complacency of subjectivity, a complacent experience for itself, is its very "egoity," its substantiality. (OB, 64)

Key for Levinas is that sensibility, in perpetual proximity to what is other than oneself, has the structure of being-one-for-another. 'Proximity' is Levinas's way of describing the contact that is not already parsed into a duality of receptive sensor (known subject) and a received sensed (determined object). Proximity denotes our immediate exposure to and experience of things other than ourselves, as well as the non-indifference one has toward what is *next to, up against, in contact with* oneself, which can of course be be enjoyable or painful (OB, 90). Key is that we only experience ourselves in reflection (concerning ourselves with ourselves). When immersed in experience, what we experience is activity: the reflective self ultimately disperses into the activity itself (e.g., feeling cool in the sea). We can of course reflect on the experience, but once reflection starts, one realizes one

was 'lost' in the experience: consciousness realizes that the conscious self was nowhere to be found.

Sensibility so construed plays a vital role in Levinas's schema, because ontologically speaking, its structure is that of living-from-the-other, albeit existing-for-the-other: absolutely exposed. Sensibility denotes the affective undergoing that is intrinsic to existence. To be 'nude' in one's skin is to exist for, to be moved by, what is other than oneself (e.g., feeling the heat of the sun, or the sweetness of a peach). As Levinas writes, "The expression 'in one's skin' is not a metaphor for the in-itself; it refers to the recurrence in the dead time or the meanwhile which separates inspiration and expiration, the diastole and systole of the heart beating dully against the walls of one's skin" (OB, 109). What is inseparable from who one *is* is one's corporeality (OB, 78),[96] which is ultimately animated, inspired, incarnated *from without*, e.g., being birthed into existence by another, inhaling and exhaling air, being nourished by food, etc. We are each uniquely who we are by virtue of being incarnated by something other than ourselves; the other animates us, beginning with birth.

Self-consciousness: the subject as agent. For Levinas, self-consciousness is the result of experiencing the insecurity intrinsic to sensibility.[97] That is, the risk of being wounded, of experiencing pain, that inescapably accompanies exposure. This is ultimately a risk that sensibility does not notice until it is wounded in a way that drives it to retreat, so as to attempt to avoid future suffering. To avoid future suffering requires calculation: identifying means that will secure the identified end (i.e., avoiding pain).

[96] That is, to be this particular set of flesh and bones.
[97] As Levinas writes, "Enjoyment is the very production of a being that is born, that breaks the tranquil eternity of its seminal or uterine existence to enclose itself in a person, who in the living world is at home with itself" (TI, 147).

Consciousness is therefore born once one's vulnerability is recognized and reflected upon. Its anxiety about the possibility of future pain drives it to withdraw from the world upon which it depends, and thus build a dwelling to try and escape the anxiety *of the morrow*—'the morrow' signifying the unpredictability of the future, what is not determined. Once it retreats into its newfound dwelling, it begins to recollect itself (marking the birth of time, and self-concern), shifting into the world of intentionality, conscious perception. One's hands and eyes begin to take and comprehend, to gather and master. This marks the transition from the self as sensibility to the virile self of representation, which, as Lisa Guenther puts it, "represents itself as having given birth to the world in itself and to itself;" it is the I that has "the ability to represent itself as it were *causa sui*… as if it had even chosen its own birth," characterized by "…the eternal temptation of the one who dwells in a home, who can lock the door and peer out the window…to see without being seen."[98] This dwelling is ultimately consciousness: the interiority of self-reflection, the schematization of inner experience, and the multiplication of identity.

The important takeaway here is that by Levinas's account, inner experience (self-consciousness, the "I") is necessarily conditioned by outer experience (the world). This is metaphysically significant; self-consciousness—including the first-personal experience of time as past, present, and future—does not come first. For Levinas, following an under-appreciated point in Kant's theoretical work,[99] outer sense is ontologically prior. Levinas

[98] Lisa Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 62.

[99] It is important to point out that Kant's tweak in the B-edition of the first *Critique* involves him making this precise point, albeit by arguing for a relation of dependency between our *a priori* intuitions (space and time) in his refutation of psychological idealism (which is ultimately an attempt to prove the objective reality of outer intuition). As Kant writes, "However harmless idealism may be considered in respect of the

tips his hat to Kant by underscoring that the Copernican revolution's crucial insight is that being is determined on the basis of sense (Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic), rather than sense being determined on the basis of being (OB, 129).

Thus, the self as sensibility (outer sense) marks who we are in the most fundamental sense, whereas the self as self-conscious reflection (inner sense)—the self of predications, judgments, propositions, and calculations—is the result of anxiously being thrust back onto oneself because of the fear of future pain. It is important to stress that the subject as subjected (sensibility) and the subject as agent (self-consciousness) ultimately represent two sides of the same coin, two modes of being—the later marked by a retreat from the world in the hopes of constructing new worlds within reflection. These 'new worlds' are worlds in which one has (a perceived sense of) control over reality, fostered through careful calculation of efficient means to pre-determined ends based on memory and anticipation (e.g., avoiding intimate relationships to avoid the pain that might come with those relationships ending).

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essential aims of metaphysicians, it still remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us (from which we derive the whole material of knowledge, even for our inner sense) must be accepted merely on faith, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof… This consciousness of my existence in time is bound up in the way of identity with the consciousness of a relation to something outside me, and it is therefore experience not invention, sense not imagination, which inseparably connects this outside something with my inner sense. For outer sense is already in itself a relation of intuition of something actual outside of me, and the reality of outer sense, in its distinction from the imagination, rests simply on that which is here found to take place, namely, its being inseparably bound up with inner experience, as the condition of its possibility… But though intellectual consciousness does indeed come first, the inner intuition, in which my existence can alone be determined, is sensible and is bound up with the condition of time. This determination, however, and therefore the inner experience itself, depends upon something permanent, which is not in me, and consequently can be only something outside me, to which I must regard myself as standing in relation. The reality of outer sense is necessarily bound up with inner sense, if experience in general is to be possible at all…" (B xl). Key for Kant is that inner experience is conditioned by outer experience, so even though the only thing we can be 'sure' about is inner experience (time), this is ultimately determined by what is outside of myself. Kant's thesis is that the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence prove the existence of objects in space outside of me (space denoting permanence, time-determination) (B276).

Substitution: the self as being-for-the-other. With these two dimensions of the self in mind (pre-conscious and conscious activity), Levinas uses the trope of 'substitution' to further express what he means by *being-for-the-other* (metaphysical desire); 'for' here signifies the deposing of self-concern. Key for Levinas is that substitution is not an act of the will, i.e., you *ought* to substitute for your neighbor because you owe them, but a metaphor that aids us in understanding ourselves as perpetually disrupted from our self-conscious selves in our metaphysical desire to attend to what is otherwise than reflective consciousness.

By Levinas's account, substitution, like sensibility, is responsibility, albeit understood as the self's responsive-ness to what is other than itself. That is, a response-ability to others from which one cannot resign, because it was not a willed decision in the first place. There was no business deal, no contract; the other was already on the scene, *hosting*, when each of us arrived. Substitution is a way of describing the unrelenting proximity of the other(s) to me. I am always and already surrounded—held hostage—by the other: the other obsesses me, insofar as I am. This is something that I cannot be indifferent to, though my response can be that of hostility or hospitality: fleeing from the other I fear, attempting to control or eliminate the other, or opening myself, welcoming the other. And again, the other refers to a disruption that pulls us out of our reflective, self-conscious selves, e.g., a stranger wanting to have a conversation with you while you are working on an article in a coffee shop, or a turkey crossing the road and stopping traffic when you are late for work, or the humidity making you stop in your tracks and forget where you were headed. In each of these cases, the other seizes you, and you substitute your self-concerned self for the other, to be-for-the-other.

Beyond this, substitution denotes the ever-present freedom from the anxiety that plagues reflective self-consciousness:

> Substitution frees the subject from ennui, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distraction of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out. This liberation is not an action, a commencement, nor any vicissitude of essence and of ontology, where the equality with oneself would be established in the form of self-consciousness... (OB, 124-5)

Thus, rather than being a limitation on one's freedom, responsibility is better understood as that which frees the subject from being trapped inside one's head, paranoid about the future, obsessed with the regrets from the past. Responsibility saves us from our self-interested, production-oriented, calculating selves. And for Levinas, questions like, *why does the other concern me? Am I my brother's keeper? What is Hecuba to me? What do we owe each other?* Only have meaning if one has already supposed that one's self (my happiness, my contentment) is the only matter of concern for itself. Only in this hypothesis is it incomprehensible that the other would concern me, or that I would need to hunt for reasons to care for my neighbor (OB, 117). Levinas challenges this hypothesis, and reminds us that responsibility is not about paying off a debt that you owe, but literally offering yourself (your appreciative attention).

Crucial to Levinas's account is that responsibility (that is, the *responsiveness* built-in to sensibility) is prior to every willed decision, constituting what ought to be understood as an original freedom. As Levinas puts it, we are most free when we give ourselves to the other, (OB, 115). On this, Levinas writes:

> To be without choice can seem to be violence only to an abusive or hasty or imprudent reflection, for it precedes the freedom non-freedom couple, but thereby sets up a vocation that goes beyond the limited and egoist fate of him who is only for-himself, and washes his hand of the faults and misfortunes that do not begin in his own freedom or in his

> present. It is the setting up of a being that is not for itself, but is for all, is both being and disinterestedness. (OB, 116-7)

As Kevin Houser puts it, we are not beings who are also responsible (dodging the naturalistic fallacy), *we are beings made of responsibility*.[100] For Levinas, responsibility is an ontological category; answering without prior commitment; as Levinas puts it, is "human fraternity itself" (OB, 117). And again this is sensibility, i.e., the immediate response to what it not oneself, including (but not limited to) other persons. Responsibility so construed is prior to modern philosophy's *willed* freedom (positive freedom for Kant), which is to say that metaphysically speaking, the will is always and already conditioned by something other than itself—and the call to respond is immediately apprehended. Although our experience of decision-making might (and often does) provide the illusion that one constitutes oneself by and for oneself, Levinas's point is that every aspect of our being is constituted by what is 'outside' of us.[101]

Metaphysical desire. Substitution is a helpful way of understanding what Levinas means by metaphysical desire, 'during' which we are seized, held hostage, obsessed by the other to the point of losing oneself. We *substitute* ourselves for the other; reflection ceases, and a new sense of temporality commences: a temporality that does not involve holding the past (memory) and future (anticipation), but instead living without consciousness of time. One is wholly overcome, and reflective content disappears from the scene. To substitute is to experience a lapse of linear time (what Kierkegaard would

[100] Kevin Houser, "Levinas and Analytic Philosophy: Towards an Ethical Metaphysics of Reasons," in the *Oxford Handbook of Emmanuel Levinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

[101] For example, the meal that nourishes me is from my community (farmers, distributers of their goods, etc.), the language that helps me share the world with other people is a gift from my community (even the voice inside of my head is not my own), my education is a gift from my teachers (public education itself being a gift from the state), my privilege is a gift from my parents (especially my grandparents who immigrated to this country with the hope of a better life). The list goes on. Everything we *are* is constituted by what we *are not*, albeit re-integrated into ourselves *as the fabric of who we are*.

call *the fullness of time*); it is to contract oneself to sensibility, exposure, a cessation of speculation. The self is effectively not keeping track of itself anymore: the agenda is surrendered, the projects foregone, and the concern for the past and the future is forgotten, suspended. Although Levinas's language is far more hyperbolic than Brewer's, it seems similar to what Brewer has in mind with dialectical desire. Dialectical desire involves a lack of concern for oneself—an obsession for what is otherwise. It is complete and total devotion, cherishing, and appreciation. Essential to this experience is that one forgets what one is doing because one *is* what one is doing, void of any sort of reflection on what is happening or what is going to happen.

Levinas goes so far as to describe substitution as traumatic—that is, the traumatic effect of persecution, being harassed by the other, to the point of divesting, dispossessing, outdoing, forgetting oneself. He appropriately describes this obsession as anarchy, in the sense that the self is seized from its self-governance (Kantian autonomy), and from any sort of predictable consistency. Levinas's claim is that our *arche* is precisely that anarchy, and the recurrence of oneself as perpetually responding to self-disruption by the other.

Crucial to Levinas's account is that the other does not let one rest. Consciousness is constantly menaced, haunted, obsessed by the other—interrupted by what is 'outside' of itself: disturbed, left speechless, awestruck, torn from its tasks and projections. This obsession by the other is distinct from the restlessness of anxiety, as anxiety thrusts us back on ourselves—driving us to dwell in reflective consciousness, and attempt to control all of the aspects of being that cannot be controlled. The disquiet provoked by the other is a provocation that undoes what 'belongs' to me (my memory, my anticipations, my

identities, my goals) by calling me to be outside of myself.[102] As Levinas understands it, this divesting, immolating, exciding, dispossessing, contracting of the conscious self (and all that it 'possesses') is the response to being summoned as someone irreplaceable, called to empty out for the other, called to make room. And again, this is not the other limiting oneself (and one's respective pursuits), but, as I understand it, bringing one to greater fullness and joy: the joy of being with the other(s), and free from the shackles of self-conceit—open to the new, the unpredictable, the surprising.

What Levinas is emphasizing is that we are in fact most at home with ourselves when we are giving ourselves to the other, being-for-the-other. We are most at home in responsibility, exposure, overflowing, and giving-over ourselves in generosity. For Levinas, metaphysical desire is the original goodness of creation (OB, 121). That is, creation construed as birth, overflow, bounteousness, gift. This original goodness (*responsibility*, substitution) is being-for-the-other, literally existing for each other. It is the extraordinary forgetting of death—that is, being without regard for death, *imprudently* exposed—as the ego has already divested itself, lost concern for itself, delivering itself to something different. As he writes, *the good chooses me before I can be in a position to choose* (OB, 122); no one is good voluntarily, no one is enslaved to the good. We are good by virtue of responsibility, which is not just an ethical aspect of being, but "the non-place in which ontology is situated" (OB, 140). For Levinas, to be is to respond to the unknowable that disrupts our flow of consciousness. The good is precisely that disruption, that anarchy—accusing, calling one into question, and summoning one to sincerity.

[102] As Levinas writes, "In substitution my being that belongs to me and not to another is undone, and it is through this substitution that I am not 'another', but me" (OB, 127).

Quoting Levinas, "The plot of the good is the plot of substitution" (OB, 137). The good is the source of non-indifference, being pestered, provoked, from without. Substitution signifies the outdoing of unity—that is, the anguish of (self-reflection's) breakup that is a movement into fullness. It is ultimately through responsibility that one is able to "catch sight of and conceive of value" (OB, 123). As Levinas writes, "the proximity of the neighbor in its trauma does not only strike up against me, but exalts and elevates me, and, in the literal sense of the term, inspires me. Inspiration, heteronomy, is the very pneuma of the psyche" (OB, 124). It is by virtue of the other that one is filled up, urged to give, to create, to speak, to live—literally able to breathe in. Giving, creating, living, speaking in the face of the other constitutes the *me* that is otherwise than a graspable identity. And for Levinas, to believe that one rests, in isolation, on nothing but oneself is nothing short of tragedy.

4.3 SUBSTITUTION AS 'SAYING' & THE SAYING'S CALL FOR JUSTICE

The saying. To return to the questions guiding Levinas's project, Levinas provides an account of language that locates the source of meaning (ultimately the source of being) in 'the saying', rather than 'the said', i.e., what is manifest in essence.

Language plays an important role in Levinas's work, because language is the fundamental way in which we relate to what is other than ourselves. Language enables us to share our 'private' or singular experiences with others,[103] and we do this by disclosing

[103] Anna Strhan writes that conversation is used by Levinas "to describe the relation between self and Other, which maintains a separation between the two terms," as language, for Levinas, demonstrates our

sensibility in 'the said', or essence. Language grounds thought, the world, and community; all of which are offered by the other to me—first and foremost, through speech (as is obviously the case for the child learning how to express itself and share thoughts with others). For Levinas, the first fact of being (*responsibility*) is confirmed in speech, as language denotes a being relating to more than it contains—responding to the other by reaching out for the other.

Thus, for Levinas, 'the saying' denotes the breakup of inwardness/reflection, the "abandon of all shelter," the risky exposure to the trauma that wounds and the joy that births: one's skin laid bare in proximity to the other (OB, 49). *To say* is to respond before being called, to deliver oneself over (ceding ego), or as Levinas puts it, to hold open openness itself—to give over one's appreciative attention, to 'give into' metaphysical desire. Saying so construed is *communication* or *conversation*, which is best understood as an openness that is not concerned with a particular agenda of things to be said—an offering that is not in search of recognition (OB, 119). To say is (confusingly) not to *say* anything in particular, but rather to depose oneself of the 'sovereignty' associated with Kant's autonomy of the will (OB, 59). For Levinas, saying is a passive gesture in the sense that it is not an act of the will, the byproduct of reflection, or an assertion of one's truth. To say is to make a gift of one's own skin, ultimately safeguarding (as we will see below) the possibility of a truth that is not ideology (OB, 136).

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relationship with alterity. Anna Strahn, "'Bringing Me More Than I Contain…': Discourse, Subjectivity, and the Scene of Teaching in *Totality and Infinity*," in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 3 2007: 411-30, 413. Quoting Levinas, "To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [*enseignement*]. Teaching is not reducible to *maieutics*; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain" (TI, 51).

With structuralism in mind, Levinas describes 'the saying' as the diachronic (or better, *anarchic*) dimension of language that perpetually informs, but ultimately betrays language as synchronic language system of significations.[104] The saying denotes that which does not fit neatly into the language system—the residue, so to speak, which, while not expressed in the system itself, drives the subtle changes that occur within the language system over time, ultimately influencing its rules. Crucial to Levinas's account (*contra* Saussurian structuralism) is that plurality, rather than homogeneity lies at 'the heart' of language. That is, a plurality of tongues (or better, *skins*)—inter-related ones—that contribute to the language system so construed. The common plane of a universal system of relations (the language system) is what is wanted, "yet to be constituted" (TI, 73). What makes language *language* is the fact that agreement or sameness is not given: a fundamental dimension of otherness remains, is yet to be discussed, so to speak.[105] What

[104] In regard to Ferdinand de Saussure's proto-structuralist account of language in the *Course on General Linguistics*, Levinas is challenging neither his distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, nor his distinction between the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of *le langage*. For Levinas, the language system *qua* system of relations (Saussure's answer to the question: what is the essence of language?) is the common or universal plane in which we participate. Similar to Saussure, Levinas recognizes the law that pertains to thematized world of la langue, as well as how crucial it is for community, world, and justice. However, for Levinas, law is not grounded in *la langue*. In Saussurean terms, *la langue* (for Levinas) takes its cue from *la parole* and is thus dependent on *la parole*. Furthermore, while the synchronic dimension of language in a Levinasian world maintains all of the qualities that Saussure gives it (homogeneity, systematicity, universality, law-like nature, etc.), for Levinas, the synchronic is necessarily subordinate to the alterity of the diachronic, as the language system only exists by virtue of a plurality of speaking subjects that are not me. But, for Saussure, the synchronic is thought to function independently of speaking subjects, despite the fact that speaking subjects are what, at least in some sense, define or condition synchrony: speaking subjects are what participate in and, to borrow Levinas's term, thematize the world of language. Even though the signifier (speaking subject) is not signified by the sign, the language system itself is necessarily conditioned by a plurality of speaking subjects. For Levinas, the world (consciousness, thought, justice, the phenomenological experience of the "I") is always and already conditioned by the Other. The difficulty that inevitably follows from Saussure's separation and subsequent subordination of la parole from la langue, i.e., how one aspect is able to subsist and effectively ground a 'system' without the other, is part of the risk that he was willing to take in the name of systematicy. It is important to note, however, that Saussure recognizes Levinas's point regarding the inexorable influence of *la parole* early on in the *Course* when it is unclear how Saussure will be able to overcome the interdependence of various dual objects of language (*la langue*/*la parole*, static system/evolutionary process, etc.).

[105] "But to make of the thinker a moment of thought is to limit the revealing function of language to its coherence, conveying the coherence of concepts. In this coherence the unique I of the thinker volatizes. The function of language would amount to suppressing "the other," who breaks this coherence and is hence

makes language *language* is a plurality of ones sharing experience—signifying to each other—all co-directed toward the same thing, co-construction meaning and values *together*.[106] This co-construction (what is collected in 'the said') is of course the byproduct of conversation, but vital to that co-construction is a directedness toward the *to whom* that speaks.[107]

To use the language of transcendental philosophy, conversation could be understood as the condition for the possibility of such co-construction, denoting the meaning of language before language scatters into words (OB, 150). By Levinas's account, conversation is most essentially the experience of transcendence, "*a traumatism of astonishment*" (TI, 72). And ethics hinges on this fundamental linguistic revelation: our encounter with language is our most basic experience of being proximate to what is different. This cannot be reduced to the transmission of spoken or written words, as one's hand being touched by another is an instance of precisely this. Language as saying is the other's gifting of the possibility of universality, community, and *justice* (TI, 76); it is through saying that I offer myself to the other and the other offers to myself. To say is to interrupt egoism, welcome the world, and lay "the foundation for a possession in common" (TI, 76).[108] In conversation, I am called to respond—an existence called into

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essentially irrational. A curious result: language would consist in suppressing the other, in making the other agree with the same! But in its expressive function language precisely maintains the other—to whom it is addressed, whom it calls upon or invokes. To be sure, language does not consist in invoking him as a being represented and thought. But this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the revelation of the other. In this revelation only can language as a system of signs be constituted" (TI, 72).

[106] For an excellent account of this phenomenon in relation to Heidegger (who Levinas is clearly in conversation with) see: Irene McMullen, *Time and the Shared World: Heidegger on Social Relations*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013).

[107] Houser, p. 6.

[108] Levinas thus modifies Saussurean structuralism's vernacular in his treatment of language by recasting the "signifier" as the speaker or issuer of the "sign" (the sign signifying what Saussure would call the signifier), and recasting the "signified" as the meaning that is "never a complete presence," a meaning

question—called to justify myself, speak for myself, and also called to host the other's justification, to hear what the other has to say, to receive what I cannot get myself: *to be taught*. As Mensch aptly puts it, in conversation we open a space for the other to have her say, thus opening ourselves to a response that may put our sense of things (or in Brewer's terms, our evaluative outlook) into question, requiring reinterpretation. Although those communicating seek to better understand each other, 'the goal' is not to unite interlocutors that are separated in discourse. What is vital is that there is always more to be understood: the work of conversation is never over. This is precisely what safeguards the possibility of a truth that is not ideology—the repetition of a given creed without a move to understand that creed.

Conversation, then, is not a stable economic exchange of things said—that is, one making her truth manifest, and then the other making her truth manifest without any element of co-construction, tacitly agreeing to disagree; each bearing witness to themselves before the other, effectively talking over each other—but rather "saying holding open its openness, without excuses, evasions or alibis, delivering itself without saying anything said. Saying saying saying itself" (OB, 142-3). Conversation is above all listening: an orientation marked by infinitely open, humble, passive reception. To communicate is to go outside of oneself to the other, to approach the other without knowledge (of what they will say or how you will respond) or blindness (to the difference between the other and oneself). Communication is, as Levinas puts it, the adventure

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simultaneously revealed and concealed via expression (TI, 96). Crucial for Levinas is that the signifier is not signified by the sign in the way the sign signifies the signified. As he writes, "The Other, the signifier, manifests himself in speech by speaking of the world and not of himself; he manifests himself by proposing the world, by thematizing it" (TI, 96). Thus, the signifier is, in a sense, never separated from the sign, as language reminds me that I am not alone, always already possessed by the Other, but in another sense the signifier is utterly separated from the sign insofar as the signifier is not what is, in the Saussurean sense, signified by or connected to the sign.

involving uncertainty, a dangerous life, *a fine risk to be run*—exposing oneself at the risk of misunderstanding or being misunderstood, and a lack or refusal of communication (OB, 120). To communicate is to seek first to understand, rather than to be understood. If one's priority is to be understood, than the *to whom* is forgotten, and the saying is absorbed by the said.

As Levinas writes, "to require that a communication be sure of being heard is to confuse communication and knowledge, to efface the difference, to fail to recognize the signification of the one-for-the-other in me" (OB, 167). This is to say for communication to be communication, understanding the other takes precedence over the need to be understood. Moreover, a known-agenda cannot be sought, as this would then be rhetoric, manipulation, rather than communication. Thus, for communication to be communication, it must be born out of hospitality—what is signified in the simple gesture, "after you."

Another way of understanding communication so construed is as *sincerity*, albeit not the sincerity of Kant's duty to be honest, but a delivering over of oneself without saying any thing in particular. That is, the saying dedicating itself to the other: an exposure signifying, "Here I am" (OB, 143). 'Saying' announces peace to the other in its desire to listen to the other—in its desire to exhaust oneself in exposure, in being-for-the-other. Conversation so construed is another way of understanding metaphysical desire as appetite that does not spring from lack. For conversation to be conversation, one cannot be preoccupied with one's own projects, concerns, etc., as this inhibits listening. Experience is a testimony of this. Though by Levinas's account, even when one is not listening, one is still not indifferent before the other, whether or not one chooses to hear

what the other has to say. This is precisely why saying is not an act of the will, but something that is always and already the case, despite the fact that one can choose to fixate on their own concerns, rather than the voice of another.

Levinas insists on the priority of the diachronic dimension of language, as language is always from and for another. Signs are to someone, which necessarily involves a *facing relation,* or orientation toward another.[109] As Houser points out, this facing relation (the saying) is the most basic feature of language, and it entails 1) answerability (synonymous with responsibility), as well as 2) the issuing of ambiguity. Answerability as responsibility conditions the functioning of all speech, and marks the passive dimensions of oneself (vulnerable) before another in conversation, while the issuing of ambiguity marks the active dimension of offering a position to be interpreted and ultimately undone by those receiving it. As Levinas repeats over and over again, the said is always undone by the saying. And as Houser underscores, this happens because in issuing a position or statement, one is called to attend to it by responding to clarificatory demands,[110] assisting (like a midwife) in the birth of what is disclosed, undone, disclosed, undone, and so on. Houser points out that when the saying is absorbed in the said, we lose the "thick" or affective dimension in which everything said is anchored: the relation of *proposing to*, "with its open-ended-ness, non-assertiveness, potential awkwardness, tentativeness."[111]

[109] Houser, 11.
[110] Ibid., 9.
[111] Ibid., 12.

As Houser argues, reason-giving follows the same logic.[112] When providing reasons or justifying positions, beliefs, or behaviors, one does so from a facing relation. When asked to justify ourselves, we respond by checking in on the factors that play a role in fixing our beliefs and offer them to another—again, making those reasons vulnerable to clarificatory demands, which ultimately gives one further access to one's reasons, which are always less clear to oneself then one would like. As Houser stresses, reasons exist as expressions to others. They do not 'exist' before being expressed. They are birthed into existence by virtue of being responsible for—responding to—the other. Reasons are thus expressions of *qua* derived from responsibility (as who we are); they are how we share ourselves with and are accountable before others. To offer a reason is to offer one's labor, and invite the other to join one in one's thinking—ultimately subjecting oneself to the interlocutor putting those thoughts into question. The important point is that this gesture is ethical, an offering, hospitality—being seized by the other, being-for-the-other, gifting to the other. Reasons find their origin in responsibility itself, born out of the point from which I express those reasons: that is, *to whom* I express them. Because thought searches for order and arrangement, we share reasons to build a common ground, to work toward something objective and universal, albeit not stagnant.

In regard to the saying being responsible for the birth of thought, crucial to Levinas's account (echoing Aristotle) is that thought lives in language. But what does this? This means that knowledge always refers to what is said, manifest, *essences*, rendering the saying something 'outside' of knowledge's parameters. But what does *this* mean? It means that 'the saying'—here understood as diachronic, anarchic, interruption,

[112] Key is that 'reasons' are not synonymous with 'demonstrative proof'. Reasons are an invitation to understanding something better, or to make something clear.

transcendence, holding open openness itself—denotes the aspect of conversation that is *unknown*, *unpredictable*, *new*, *other*. Thinking finds its 'ground' in the perpetual interruptions that provoke its efforts toward clarity, objectivity, measurement, and order (analogous to the language system finding it source in the plurality of tongues that influence and shape its function and flow).

In addition to Aristotle's dialectical method, which has been discussed at length, the most obvious example of this activity is the 'Socratic method' as illustrated in Plato's dialogues, in which one offers their understanding of a given phenomenon (e.g., justice), and the other (Socrates) questions that understanding: demanding elaboration, clarification, justification. In this process, the original definition dissipates and a new one is offered, and then the process ensues in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at hand. What is manifest, said, is the proposed essence, and what allows that manifestation to take place is the interruption (of consciousness, order, organization) by the other. This process involves both listening to the other (saying), and responding, gifting, offering oneself not only in holding open the space for conversation, but in saying 'a said', too. The saying and the said are not too separate events, causally related like two billiard balls, but rather two aspects of the metaphysical relation that Levinas has in mind. Crucial is that the 'source' of thinking, reasoning, is the ethical event: that is, the experience of encountering something from without, something other, which seizes us and pushes us to break away from ourselves (as conscious reflection), thus reminding us that the subject, the self, is always subjected. The truth of conversation is the encounter.

Justice. For Levinas, the search for measurement, intelligible arrangement, and order (*synchrony*) in conversation is the work of justice. Justice is the way in which we

realize ethics, the good—judging and measuring among things that are ultimately incommensurable ('equal' only in their difference, their singularity). This is to say that justice denotes not just our responsibility for the other (substitution, *who* we are), but also our responsibility *to* the other in word and deed; that is, our responsibility to offer what is ours, to distribute our resources, so to speak: to offer our position, perspective, to speak our piece, our 'said'. By this account, justice is in fact the offspring of the good, birthed from responsibility, the need to respond. To recap, the saying's interruption of self-consciousness is 1) the call to listen, to open one's categories to being called into question (to have one's thought *shattered*), to invite the other have her say, and to then 2) respond to that 'said' with one's own said, justifying oneself in light of the other's interpretation, ultimately working together to construct something new, a new understanding.

As Mensch aptly puts it, the first gift *to* the other is speaking the world to the other (e.g., holding a child right after its born). This gift is justice, the urgency of a response to the other.[113] If the other is *silenced* or *ignored* so that I do not have to respond, I attempt to eliminate the possibility of putting myself into question, thus inhibiting me from learning anything, or from following anything other than my own train of thought.

This oblivion in one's own perspective is another way of understanding injustice as the need for more of one's own, *pleonexia*. This can also be understood as the movement of ideology: the unchecked quest of a being (or institution) so convinced by its own logic that it fails to hear anything outside of itself. Or rather, fails to understand truth

[113] Mensch, 112.

as constituted by a movement outside of oneself and one's ordering of things. This failure marks the attempt to ignore metaphysical desire, substitution, responsibility—*who one is*—instead committed to the execution of the projection of one's principle, eliminating anything otherwise, anything *new.*[114] To avoid ideology is, therefore, to embrace disruption from oneself, to undergo the movement from saying to the said, which is a movement that has no agenda. As Levinas poses to Kant: "But the problem is that one can ask if a beginning is at the beginning, if the beginning as an act of consciousness is not already preceded by what could not be synchronized, that is, by what could not be present, the unrepresentable, if an anarchy is not more ancient than the beginning and freedom" (OB, 165).

In addition to this, justice also emerges when one's proximity to others becomes *a problem*, which can be understood in at least two different ways: either 1) when one is tasked to offer something to the other after being called into question (determining how to respond), or 2) when there are multiple others (or as Levinas puts it, when a third party enters), and one is tasked to consciously sort out how to give oneself, taking oneself into consideration, too. Crucial to Levinas's account is that proximity to the others

[114] As Levinas writes, "Does not the coherent discourse, wholly absorbed in the said, owe its coherence to the State, which, violently excludes subversive discourse? Coherence thus dissimulates a transcendence, a movement from one to the other, a latent diachrony, uncertainty and a fine risk. Are the renderings of the logical text mended by logic alone? It is in the association of philosophy with the State and with medicine that the break up of discourse is surmounted. The interlocutor that does not yield to logic is threatened with prison or the asylum or undergoes the prestige of the master and the medication of the doctor: violence or reasons of the State of an approach ensures to the rationalism of logic a universality and to law its subject matter. The discourse then recuperates its meaning by repression or mediation, by just violence, on the verge of the possible injustice where repressive justice is exercised. It is through the State that reason and knowledge are force and efficacity. But the State does not irrevocably discount folly, not even the intervals of folly. It does not untie its knots, but cuts them. The said thematizes the interrupted dialogue or the dialogue delayed by silences, failure or delirium, but the intervals are not recuperated. Does not the discourse that suppresses the interruptions of discourse by relating them maintain the discontinuity under the knots with which the thread is tied again? The interruptions of the discourse found again and recounted in the immanence of the said are conserved like knots in a thread tied again, the trace of a diachrony that does not enter into the present, that refuses simultaneity" (OB, 170).

(substitution) in itself is not a *problem* to consciousness. Substitution is the dispossessing of reflective self-consciousness, a forgetting of ego that is best understood as a sort of oblivion: there is no calculus to be solved. One is given over, subjected entirely to desire. When seized by desire, as Levinas understand it, one is not asking oneself any questions, as one is not asking oneself anything: self-conscious reflection dissolves.

It is, therefore, the emergence of the third party that 'wakes' consciousness, reflection, introspection, and *problems* to be solved. As Levinas writes:

> The third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction. It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and intellect, the intelligibility of the system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice. Essence as synchrony is togetherness in place. Proximity takes on a new meaning in the space of contiguity. But contiguity is not a "simple nature." It already presupposes both thematizing thought and a locus and the cutting up of the continuity of space into discrete terms and the whole—out of justice. (OB, 157)

Thus, as an expression of responsibility, justice involves asking how to give my things away, not asking how to protect my assets.[115] The 'limitations' involved in justice are not limits to one's self-interest, but limits based on one's finitude. I can only give so much (and only have so much time to do so), and my 'lot' is important, too, as I am one among the others. These are facts that cannot be denied.

Essential to Levinas's account, however, is that it is the forgetting of oneself (in being-for-the-other) moves justice. For justice to be justice it cannot be the movement toward a projected agenda, security for oneself, or a manipulation toward sought-outcomes, but instead an expression that flows from sincerity before the other. Unique to

[115] Michael H. Gillick, "The Place of Justice in the Thinking of Emmanual Levinas" (doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, 2004).

Levinas's account is that justice is not primarily attempting to harmonize an original antagonism set up by nature, as this would imply that justice is birthed from war (driven by securing one's place in the sun). Justice instead gauges the outdoing of oneself *to* the others—a gauging birthed in conversation, as described above. It is in justice that we find the birth of community. That is, the common ground, *logos*, discovered in conversation.

The task of philosophy. For Levinas, justice so construed is the task of philosophy (moral and otherwise): making things appear with an intelligible arrangement, providing reasons for this to be so, and then probing and undoing that arrangement in an attempt to retrieve what has fallen through the cracks, and reclaim some dimension of what is not readily manifest in the words we write and speak. As he writes:

> Thematization is then inevitable, so that signification itself shows itself, but does so in the sophism with which philosophy begins, in the betrayal which philosophy is called upon to reduce. This reduction always has to be attempted, because the trace of sincerity which the words themselves bear and which they owe to saying as witness, even when the said dissimulates the saying in the correlation set up between the saying and the said. Saying always seeks to unsay that dissimulation, and this is its very veracity. (OB, 152)

The 'sophism' with which philosophy begins is the business of conclusively taking 'this as that' by way of proving it to be so, which necessarily involves having the conclusion in mind and using whatever means possible to arrive at that conclusion. The 'veracity of the saying' is that it cannot be wholly contained in a theme. (E.g., in the *Republic*, each definition of justice that is offered, including Socrates's, somehow fails, misses something—containing an element that guarantees its own destruction.)

This is to say that the work of philosophy involves providing themes and assessing them, digging deeper, working to understand them more, with no (determined) end in sight. This can be understood as constructing problems, creating questions. The

more philosophy understands, the more ambiguous a given phenomenon becomes (e.g., the Platonic dialogues ending in *aporia* after covering so much ground, only ostensibly making progress). This ambiguity is what perpetually reclaims the element of transcendence that bleeds into essence; "Transcendence owes it to itself to interrupt its own demonstration…[it] requires ambiguity, a blinking of meaning which not only a chance certainty… it needs the diachrony that breaks the unity of transcendental apperception" (OB, 152). Thus, transcendence (that which is otherwise than the 'simple' presence of the self to itself) and our desire *for* transcendence, being-for-the-other (substitution), is the perpetual reminder that sought-unity (coherence) is consciousness's projection—a projection that is not the whole story.

Levinas takes pains to describe transcendence as the 'immemorial past', so as to point toward what cannot be pulled to the present by way of memory because it is precisely what cannot be remembered. And why can it not be remembered? Because being-for-the-other, substituting, is otherwise than self-consciousness, 'outside' of consciousness's retention. When 'given over' to desire, oneself as self-aware ego is divested, dispossessed, seized. And again, the knowledge or thinking involved in being-for-the-other belongs to sensibility. It is a desire that has no object, a desire that knows not what it seeks, a desire that deepens desire without fulfilling it, always hungry for more (TI, 34). And this desire for more desire never ceases in the way that it does when executing a particular goal.

Philosophy, therefore, seeks to make transcendence *immanent* , to make it *appear* in word and deed, though this process is constantly undoing itself. It is in this sense that philosophy, as the work of justice, is not goal or product-driven, but persists in the

repetition or renewal of metaphysical desire, perpetually moving back and forth from the ethical encounter (being-for-the-other) to essence (what is said), reinterpreting and recalibrating essence in light of essence's deconstruction. As Levinas continues:

> Philosophy serves justice by thematizing the difference and reducing the thematized to difference. It brings equity into the abnegation of the one for the other, justice into responsibility. Philosophy, in its very diachrony, is the consciousness of the breakup of consciousness. In an alternating movement, like that which leads from skepticism to the refutation that reduces it to ashes, and from its ashes to its rebirth, philosophy justifies and criticizes the laws of being and of the city, and finds again the signification that consists in detaching from the absolutely one-for-the-other both the one and the other. (OB, 165)

Levinas's project itself can be seen as a criticism of the 'laws of being and of the city', finding again the signification that consists in detaching from the 'absolutely one-for-the-other' both the one and the other. Attempting to remember, recollect that which cannot be thematized or remembered in the sense of being brought to reflection's attention.

Levinas's point is that the history of philosophy has been a refutation of transcendence (OB, 169), and it must be because philosophers try to bring coherence, order, systematicity to that which strikes them, confounds them, moves them, inspires them in the first place. *Philosophy begins in precisely that wonder*. That is, the (metaphysical) desire that drags me from myself as concerned about myself to a state of being-for-the-other.

It is important to note that justice, as Levinas construes it, can of course be understood in a more political sense (literally figuring out how to distribute resources, contesting laws, unmuting the voices of the oppressed, etc.), but also ought to be understood as movement back and forth between the disruption and re-collection that constitutes conversation. Philosophy's task is to safeguard thinking from the delusion that truth has been discovered once and for all. Philosophy's task is to break it up, to contest

that order—or better, to not take that order for granted, even if it is at the risk of incoherence and uncertainty. **If** philosophy is understood as the activity that begins in the sort of wonder that seizes one from oneself (disrupting one's concern for oneself), ultimately driving one to *justify*, organize, arrange, bring clarity to that disruption (the justificatory state), **then** philosophy is the work of justice as derived from responsibility. That is, the work that moves one from being responsible-for-the-other to being responsible to-the-other; the work of justifying or revealing one's justificatory state in conversation, and not resisting the uncertainty that accompanies the breakup of a particular mode of self-legislation, as this uncertainty is what allows for the possibility of an existential shift, a new way of understanding things, a new mode of being, and an excise of the old. That is, to welcome—in hospitality—the death that necessarily accompanies birth, change.

Crucial for Levinas is that this shift is never the result of an act of the will. It is not induced through careful reflection and introspection, and cannot be provoked by oneself. These shifts are birthed from communication, conversation, which involves listening to (rather than turning away from) what is always and already most proximate to us, in contact with us: the other. Philosophy's task is to remind us that self-disruption is the work of the good.

4.4 THE SPIRIT OF KANT & THE INSIGHTS OF ARISTOTLE

So, how does Levinas's account relate to Kant, Aristotle, and neoaristotelian ethics*?* Despite the fact that on the face of it, the resonances among these diverse accounts are by

no means self-evident, upon taking a closer look, there are essential connections that are worth making. My claim is that Levinas's project exudes the spirit of Kant, but also implicitly reclaims key insights from Aristotle, especially as retrieved in contemporary Aristotelian accounts.

Kant. What seems clear is that Levinas, like Kant, is interested in safeguarding morality as something more than just a chimera, and to not only preserve the possibility of peace, but also to wake us up (from our self-incurred dogmatic slumber) to an understanding of desire that involves something other than the satisfaction or fulfillment of a projected end. This is to say that for both thinkers, ethical desire cannot be based on contingent future goals or projected ends, but is instead something present, here, now.

For Kant, this 'desire' (though Kant of course would not call it that) is ultimately a desire for freedom in oneself and the others (the autonomy of the will) that simultaneously involve the 'striking down' of self-conceit (the self as hypothetical projections to be fulfilled). This is our desire for justice. For Levinas, this desire is a desire for the other that simultaneously involves the divesting of oneself (the self-reflective self). For Kant, this movement is a painful, albeit exalting—coming to self as member of the kingdom of ends. For Levinas, this movement is inspiring—animating the self, as oneself (as sensibility) is fundamentally a pure undergoing, responding as responsible for the other(s). For Levinas, it is in the undergoing of metaphysical desire that we substitute the others for ourselves, divested of reflective content altogether. When undergoing metaphysical desire, one is simply not concerned about or reflecting upon oneself.

Key for Kant is that a disinterested, *purely rational* mode of being is who we really are: that *who* involving an understanding of the others-as-oneself (humanity), which is ultimately something that cannot be understood empirically or grasped as a concept in the same way that other concepts can be grasped (precisely because there is no intuited-empirical content). Levinas of course does not depict the self in precisely this way. He instead appeals to sensibility, and locates metaphysical desire not only at the heart of our being (sensibility), but as the source of being and any meaning there within.

Beyond this, for Levinas, ethics is not the movement of understanding the others *as oneself*, but rather understanding oneself as the others—and this order of relation is crucial. Ethics is not about consumption, assumption, assimilation, but rather difference, singularity. And while assimilation or absorption of the other into oneself is likely *not* what Kant had in mind, his language can often suggests otherwise, e.g., with the homogeneity implied in humanity. Further, Kantian freedom still presupposes an adherence to rules within consciousness. And for Levinas, this is war-like by its very nature, as obeying oneself inevitably makes one deaf to anything that falls outside of reflection's schematics.

Crucial is that both thinkers are committed to a sense of morality that involves holding open a space for transcendence—and again, transcendence in the sense of what is not immanently present to conscious reflection, thus disrupting self-conceit. Although Levinas does not construe the 'self' as a being caught between two worlds, like Kant, he emphasizes that we are more than the production-oriented, predictable, self-aware modes of being that have been over-emphasized by the temper of production-oriented (if not obsessed) times. For both Kant and Levinas, morality involves the cessation of (means-

ends) calculation before what is other. That is, embracing (*or even leaping into*) the unpredictable, the new, the unanticipated. And this also involves being honest about our relation to phenomena: we have no control over the consequences of what we push into the world, thus rendering honesty an important virtue. Levinas goes further than Kantian honesty in his account of sincerity, stressing that above and beyond the importance of being honest with the others, vital is holding open a space for the other to have her say, and to respond to what she says. It is not about having one's truth heard, but rather participating in truth through conversation, *alteration among singulars*, as this is the work of justice. What Kant missed, therefore, is the significance of answerability ('the saying'), which is fundamentally receptive.

Within this vein, the most crucial difference between the two thinkers is of course that for Levinas, morality is not an act of the will. For him, ethics cannot involve an active choice on the part of the subject (*choosing* altruism), and he instead insists on an ontological understanding of moral responsibility. This is to say that the crucial distinction for Levinas is not between acting from duty and acting in accord with duty, but instead between willing the good and *being subjected to the good*. For Levinas, we have no choice in the matter, and the question of whether we should be just is resolved in the sense that our responsibility to the others is 'there' from the beginning. We are always and already responsible; the other has made its claim on each and every one of us, whether we are comfortable with it or not—mirroring Kant's fact of reason.

This is to say that despite ourselves, the other affects us—obsesses us—from the start (OB, 129). We can choose to be otherwise (concerned predominantly with

ourselves), but morality itself is not a choice. The subject is, from minute one, subjected. As he writes:

> Obedience precedes any hearing of the command. The possibility of finding, anachronously, the order in the obedience itself, and of receiving the order out of oneself, this reverting of heteronomy into autonomy, is the very way the Infinite passes itself. The metaphor of inscription of the law in consciousness expresses this in a remarkable way, reconciling autonomy and heteronomy. It does so in an ambivalence, whose diachrony is the signification itself, an ambivalence, which, in the present, is an ambiguity. The inscription of the order in the for-the-other of obedience is an anarchic being affected, which slips into me "like a thief" through the outstretched nets of consciousness… This ambivalence is the exception and subjectivity of the subject, its very psyche, a possibility of inspiration. It is the possibility of being the author of what had been breathe in unbeknownst to me, of having received, one knows not from where, that of which I am the author. In the responsibility for the other we are at the heart of the ambiguity of inspiration. The unheard-of saying is enigmatically in the anarchic response, in my responsibility for the other. (OB, 148-9)

Although Kant is pushing up against an understanding of morality as an undergoing—being called, in the experience of respect (for the moral law), to *let go* of self-conceit—he nonetheless holds fast to a sense of autonomy that involves consciously constituting oneself morally, commanding the will to be good. That being said, what is clearly latent in Kant's account of respect is that despite the fact that respect occurs within me—bringing me to the moral law within myself—***I am not the origin of that affect***. It is ultimately the moral law in another that shakes me from without, awakening what lies 'within' myself. As Levinas suggests, what we find in Kant is the reverting of heteronomy to autonomy: I become the origin because the origin is forgotten, as it is not available to memory, or conscious reflection (OB, 148).

What I hope to have illustrated is that Kant's attempt to provide a phenomenology of respect could be understood as an attempt to describe the *diachrony* that Levinas has in mind: that is, the disruption that shakes us lose from consciousness (as memory of past and projection of the future), humbles a proud ego, and delivers us to ourselves as for-

the-others: as sensibility. The misstep that Kant makes is concluding 1) that I am the origin of ethics as the willed exercise of the autonomy of the will, and 2) that key is gaining self-mastery over myself to ensure my self-worth as an iteration of the worth of the others. Kant is so concerned with the will being unbound by externalities (as these externalities are the source of war), that despite his efforts to avoid construing 'man' as a island, in removing man from any and every 'externality', man is in fact left with nothing but himself and his will (as unmoved mover).

The most important point to take away from Levinas's project is that I am not the origin of ethics, I am not the origin of myself, and any obsession with one's own self-worth, one's own existence (before death), and one's own-destiny is derisory, tragic, even comic, as it is a 'willed' forgetting of *the good*, which will never cease to disrupt us in our self-interested pursuits insofar as we exist. The good is precisely the forgetting of oneself in being-for-the-other, substituting for the other, being otherwise than in-sync with an agenda; in Levinas's words, the extraordinary forgetting of death that is not ignorance of death. The good, which is the source of all meaning whatsoever, flows from the breakdown of unity and consistency. I will never find it within myself, and it is not something I am on the way to. The good is *immanent* (as transcendent) in the encounter with the other. And while encountering the good can be traumatic, the 'pain' is not painful in itself—we simply judge it to be so. Learning may involve suffering, but it is a suffering soon forgotten in the joy of relinquishing self-concern and truly being-for-the-other.

Again, I think it is reasonable to claim that Kant is pushing up against this conception of the good by locating the good in the good will's identification of itself with

the moral law, but his commitment to autonomy and the moral law as a tangible maxim does not go as far as Levinas in identifying the 'source' of goodness outside of reflective consciousness. As Brewer puts it, Kant's account is problematic in that it is limited to principles of reflection, is monologic, and is non-experiential—which inevitably loses sight of the significance of the influence of others, as it is the *a priori* work of one's reason and reason alone.

Aristotle. Although Levinas is not explicitly engaging or critiquing Aristotle or Aristotelian virtue ethics, he is engaging-critiquing-building upon a method in philosophy that emerges from a re-engagement with the insights of the Aristotelian tradition, aiming to return to phenomena—the things in themselves—and (*contra* Kant) sever all ties with transcendence. That being said, there are clear points of agreement between Levinas and the interpretation of Aristotle provided in Chapter 2, and there are illuminating resonances between Levinas and contemporary reclamations of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

First and foremost, although Levinas is not providing a prescriptive account of ethics, the question of "what if one does not *feel* what Levinas describes? Or put differently, what if one is not compelled by the other?" is often posed to Levinas. As Claire Katz convincingly argues in *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism*, it is not enough to say that Levinas is simply telling us the way that things are (whether we realize it or not). The crucial point and often-overlooked point is that the Levinasian subject is ultimately *developed* as such. Katz stresses that when addressing questions about how to "gain certainty" about the authority of the face or the other, or why we are our brother's

keeper, **moral education** is the elephant in the room.[116] As she puts it, if we do not appeal to moral education, then we are left (in Levinas) with an account of innate feelings or arguments that either compel us or not. Katz's argument is that we obviously do not emerge into the world as adults, and Levinas is in fact describing the experience of an adult who understands certain values, and who has not been duped into believing that the care of self can overcome death, or that the sovereignty of ego is a healthy orientation toward reality.[117] Katz bolsters this claim by appealing to Levinas's work on Jewish education, and his insistence that education is fundamental to the formation of a subject who is not simply a being-for-itself.[118] This orientation must be cultivated, which means that the concrete 'ground' of moral being is education, as this is where moral sensibility, i.e., the nourishing of metaphysical desire, is fostered.

As was illustrated in Chapter 2, education in virtue is the single most important thing: the condition for the possibility of *eudaimonia* is excellent education, which is itself a species of justice. This involves fostering the proper orientation toward desire, i.e., fostering the proper ordering of the soul. As Katz point out, for Levinas, teaching is more than a mere trope.[119] The teaching relation—the ethical relation—is fundamental to the project's coherence, and key to his philosophical project.[120] One does not simply choose to become Levinasian (ethics, as Levinas understands it, is not a willing duty instead of inclination). One is educated, reared, and nurtured in a way that cultivates the desire that drives us to undo ourselves—the desire to *forget ourselves*. Without this sense

[116] Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 89.
[117] Katz, 78. As Katz writes, *the turn to self-preservation is a function of the sickness that plagues humanity. When a being is healthy, it can give up its grip on self-preservation*.
[118] Ibid., 161.
[119] Ibid., 128.
[120] Ibid.

of desire, ethics has no meaning. This is not to say that 'adults' who are not already 'inside' what Levinas is describing have no hope of accessing it, but rather this mode of being is fueled affectively through discourse, being disrupted from oneself.

As Katz concludes, education does not simply make the new possible, but is itself the emergence of the new, of something other.[121] As was shown above, conversation-communication (as Levinas understands it) is what allows for the possibility of an existential shift. And despite the fact that Levinas is not interested in shaping the Aristotelian self (the properly habituated self that was presented in Chapter 2), this insight resonates with Aristotle's understanding of how we come to virtue: through good friends, education, loving others who are invested in guiding us toward a healthy soul. Our being depends on the other(s) not just practically, but ontologically.

Within this vein, the most important resonance between Aristotle and Levinas is the significance of conversation-communication. For Aristotle, this serves as one of the most important human goods, and for Levinas, this is the good. Aristotle understands it as the vehicle to virtue, and I think it is safe to say that Levinas agrees, though Levinas emphasizes that it is the diachronic dimension of communication—*that which teaches*—which serves as the sources of all meaning whatsoever: truth being the alteration among singulars that takes place in conversation. Again, Aristotle's methodology hinges on this same understanding of truth in the sense that clarity is only achieved dialogically-dialectically: that is, through engaging other perspectives and interpretations, and then challenging them and allowing them to challenge your own point-of-view. This

[121] Ibid., 167.

movement is essential to virtue. Otherwise, we are fallaciously trapped within a narrow, first-personal lens.

Beyond these points about education and communication-conversation, Aristotle's insistence on the fact that we are moved by existing particulars (these are what we desire) is clearly retrieved in Levinas, as is Aristotle's general commitment to the most concretely experienced dimensions of being. Despite the fact that Levinas is committed to 'transcendence' (in the sense of what is not manifest as essence), he is not actually describing something that is entirely absent (in the sense that it does not exist). It is absent to reflective consciousness, but is experienced sensibly in our encounter with what seizes us from self-concern.

Hearkening to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is well aware of the significance of that which is *not* immediately manifest to reflective thought, as this is what 1) denotes being in the most fundamental sense, and 2) serves as the 'source' of desire. This is where Levinas's insistence on sensibility is key. Through sensibility we affectively press up against what is other—this contact itself signifying the experience of being seized by what is otherwise than reflective self-consciousness. The essentially receptive (or better, *open*) nature of sensibility, as well as the vulnerability, susceptibility, exposure that receptivity entails, is vital to both Aristotle and Levinas's respective accounts. It is precisely in utter openness to unpredictability, fluctuation, and the unanticipated that one is seized, arrested, captivated by something otherwise than oneself—and called to respond in a way that cannot be anticipated. This response-ability sits at the heart of ethics. Responsibility in this ontological sense is ethical. To be is to be called to respond

by the other; to be is to be interrupted from self-concern (by the other person, by the environment, by hunger, etc.)

Neoaristotelian ethics. In contemporary neoaristotelian accounts, we find a reclamation of 1) the significance of metaphysics (as informative to ethics); 2) a robust sense of goodness/the good; and 3) the importance of narrative and conversation. Though Levinas may seem like an unlikely ally (particularly in the sense that he is not providing a description of human *agency*), his account of ethics complements the majority of these objectives—especially those that relate to the troubled state of moral philosophy, as we will see in the concluding chapter.

1. As was illustrated above, the reclamation of metaphysics is without question alive and well in Levinas's project. Levinas's focus is on providing an ethical depiction of reality, which, much like Macintyre points out in relation to Aristotle's ethics, eliminates the is→ought issue raised by Hume, as the 'prescriptive' dimension is housed within a notion of what it is to be (that is not statically descriptive). For Levinas, being is ethical; to be is to be subjected, responsible, perpetually un-selfed, beginning with the most basic sensory responses to stimuli outside of oneself. To be is to be-in-relation-to-the-other, immersed in a web of inter-relations, always and already facing what is other than oneself. As has been stressed over and over again, for Levinas, responsibility is ontological. It is not a choice or the product of reflection.

Echoing what we saw in Chapter 3, the theoretical emphasis on production is itself the result of a perpetuation of a sense of self that is predominantly results-oriented and anti-contemplative: that is, ignoring doings that are done for their own sake, i.e., activities that are otherwise than calculated activities, oriented toward a projected future

state of affairs. This lends itself to an atomized understanding of oneself—*man as an island*—rendering community a problematic duty (*painful* altruism), as it infringes on one's pursuit of securing more for oneself i.e., needing more, but needing no one. Levinas is of course concerned with the perpetuation of this sense of self because it is precisely in the fixation with production that one loses sight of *the good*, meaning we may in fact have been duped by morality, accepting war as our only reality, i.e., understanding the others as nothing more than obstacles. But fortunately, the good is not a willed choice.

2. It seems clear that both the common good and the good as something *desired*, rather than something painfully chosen from duty, are restored in Levinas's project, though in markedly distinct ways. For Macintyre, part of what has been lost in modernity is the significance of the unity of human life, understood as a narratively unified quest for the good. (Answering: *what sort of person am I to become*?) The thrust behind Macintyre's restoration of unity is the restoration of *telos*: the ordering of oneself toward desired ends. Levinas is of course not seeking to provide an account of the good that we are on our way to—the result of a complete and unified life—as this is at least ostensibly a life lived for-itself. Nor is he interested in safeguarding narrative identity, as this, too, emphasizes the ego-driven side of the coin: the pursuit of an intelligible ordering, which is, in the end, neatly packaged with a bow, as it quells my anxiety about my salvation (what is in store *for me*).

Crucial to Levinas's account is that the good is precisely what interrupts me from any unified pursuit, above all, my quest for happiness. Although striving for coherence is, without question, a vital dimension of who we are (for Levinas, this is the work of

justice), ethics is not about an absolute end that we are striving toward, but rather the desire that drives us out of ourselves to reach out toward the other: the disruption of our various pursuits toward coherence, both enriching and stifling clarity. Key is that these pursuits are inconclusive, and the good is precisely the disruption that preserves the lack of conclusiveness. For Levinas, there is no providential undercurrent intimating that one day, at long last, the kingdom of ends—justice, peace, happiness—will be ours. This is not even something that we should *hope for*, as hope so construed ultimately tempts us to build agendas based on the state of affairs that we would like to bring about. And again, agendas are what bring one to the realm of political ambition, which by its very nature attempts to mute morality, i.e., any disruption of well-calculated schemas of means and ends (objective orders from which there is no escape).

In addition to this, as is the case in the neoaristotelian case studies analyzed in Chapter 3, the role of desire is fundamental to Levinas's account, as substitution (metaphysical desire) is the good. Goodness is precisely the desire to stretch beyond oneself as ego. Brewer's elaboration of what we find in Aristotle and Macintyre speaks to this point, and I think could be understood as exemplifying what Levinas has in mind. Brewer retrieves the notion of goodness as intrinsic value, something deeply appreciated for its own sake, as we do with someone we love: valuing the other for no other reason than their being who they are. *Telos* denotes the unimpeded immersion of oneself deeper and deeper into the appreciated activity; dialectical activity denotes the infinite approach toward a fuller expression of the activity, being more enraptured in the joy of being the activity. This unimpeded immersion of oneself in a given activity necessarily involves the divesting of self-conscious reflection. Otherwise one would not be able to *be there*, fully

attending to the activity, as the process of reflection pulls one into themselves and away from their surroundings.

Brewer aptly describes this un-selfing (for Levinas, the divesting of the self) as attention arresting, being riveted, utterly absorbed, engrossed, caught up in what one is doing—paying tribute to intrinsic goodness. When desiring (the good), it is impossible to reflect or project—digging into memory or projecting into the future—as you are no longer a concern for yourself. Your only concern is the activity. There is no sense of where, specifically, that activity is headed (based on the past), no knowledge of a future state, but simply the mesmeric attraction to what you are undergoing and the desire to experience *more* of that undergoing. Based on the description that Brewer provides, paying tribute to the intrinsic goodness so clarified is precisely unhindered, unrestrained activity, meaning there is no conscious fixation on a determined end outside of being-in, being-with, activity itself. As Brewer points out, love for the other is what constitutes the original source of appreciative attention. Being enraptured by another (whether it is a friend or a lover) is paradigmatic of losing sense of time, one's projects, one's memories, etc. Love of another provides the 'architecture' of dialectical activity and its associated desire.

This description of dialectical activity clearly resonates with Levinas's account, and Levinas goes so far as to claim that the self *is* most fundamentally dialectical activity. That is, substituting oneself for the other. Key for Levinas is that desire so construed is literally what animates us, inspires us: both in the sense of the warmth of the sun enlivening us, and in the sense of conversation delivering the urge to open up, give, and create. I think that Brewer's account of desire is strikingly similar to what Levinas has in

mind in his depiction of substitution: the receptive movement of un-selfing, divesting, dispossessing. But again, this is not something a human agent *chooses* to do, but instead denotes the way in which we are perpetually pulled by the good, despite ourselves. *The good is an affective undergoing.* Levinas is, therefore, more concerned with recovering the claim that the other has on each and every one of us—and this claim being the original liberation (freedom) from reflective self-consciousness, as well as the source of all meaning whatsoever. There is a strong sense in which Levinas's project does the work of exposing the pervasiveness of dialectical activity, as Brewer intends to do, but for Levinas, without it, we cease to be.

Although it seems reasonable to suggest that Brewer would not necessarily disagree, Levinas's position is even more radical than Brewer's. Brewer asks what a given agent sees in a given activity such that it made sense of him to engage in it. I.e., what confers value upon our doings? Levinas's answer is the other. Our desire for the other is the most fundamental dialectical activity. And the self, at its 'core' is precisely this: a being divested of retention and protention (all forms of reflective 'self-identity'), including narrative unity as the unified pursuit of happiness.

3. The importance of conversation is the most crucial resonance with Levinas's project, though Levinas is not interested in narrative, or any fixation on achieving coherence within one's own life. Moreover, despite the fact that he does not provide a robust account of friendship, the significance of character friendship (as a source of not only enhancing a wholehearted appreciation of goodness being seized by goodness, but also opening us to new angles, interpretations, ways of thinking) is mirrored in Levinas's account of communication, specifically as it relates to justice. Conversation involves a

disruption from oneself, ultimately assisting us, as Brewer describes, in refining our judgments, immunizing disordered thinking, and unclouding moral vision. For Brewer, character friendships are schools of virtue in this fashion, illuminating things that we cannot see, pushing us to think otherwise.

Similarly for Levinas (as we saw above), conversation is the work of justice, insofar as it involves precisely the sort of refinement, immunization, and unclouding that Brewer has in mind. Brewer fleshes this out in terms of dialogic practical thinking that is fostered by a mutual admiration of the other's sense of the good, ultimately allowing each friend to give credence to the other's voice, thus enabling one to trust the other enough to offer one's own evaluative outlook to be inspected, scrutinized, or praised—not knowing if one's perspective will remain the same, uncertain about where the conversation will go. This 'dialectical alteration' is the vehicle for constructing a shareable sensibility, something in common, and making that more and more clear, coherent, though that work is never done; coherence and clarity are always interrupted, as truth is not static. Levinas's insight, which is present in Brewer's account as well, is that conversation so construed requires exposure—the outdoing of oneself—and being open to embodying a new understanding of things. This new understanding, is always and already a gift from the other, and the work of the good.

The key distinction between Levinas and what we find in neoaristotelian virtue ethics is that narrative unity—happiness as the unified task of a lifetime, a coherent ordering of oneself—does not have the final word. And with this in mind, we can turn to critiques of Levinas, and a final defense of the significance of 'self-disruption' in ethical development, especially as incited through conversation.

5.0 CHAPTER 5: SELF-DISRUPTION

> *This refusal of death in fact measures the depth of its inwardness in essence, or its interest. The belongingness to being is in fact not a rest in a harbor of peace; the dialectic of being and nothingness within essence is an anxiety over nothingness and struggle for existence. From the irony of essence probably come comedy, tragedy and the eschatological consolations which mark the spiritual history of the West, in which to the ultimacy of the concept and the death of the subject is opposed the hope of escaping the end.*
>
> **–Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, Or Beyond Essence*, 176**

In light of the 'crisis' (and neoaristotelian response to that crisis) that was sketched in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 claimed that in Levinas, we find a fresh vindication of ethics that challenges Western philosophy's preoccupation with self-concern, albeit without relying on anything like willed agency (Kant), or a unified quest for the good (Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethics). For Levinas, morality is not something we are *on the way to*, or the coherent task of a lifetime, but a lived sensibility, an affective undergoing—the fission of self-consciousness, which he describes as metaphysical desire, substitution, being-for-the-other.[122] Moral sense, for Levinas, necessarily comes from without; I am not the source of moral value. Morality is not something I lack and am therefore seeking to actualize, or self-constitute. It is not something to be found within reflective, conscious

[122] In her wonderful and comprehensive article, "Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence in Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophy," Bettina Bergo supports the reading of *Otherwise Than Being* that I provide in Chapter 4, insisting that unlike what we find in Levinas's earlier works, in OB we find a "hermeneautic phenomenology of transcendence-in-immanence," i.e., "the condition for the possibility of intentionality in passive sythesisis" (141-43). For more, see Bettina Bergo, "Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence in Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophy" in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 35 (2005): 141-179.

cognition, and it is not something we can locate within narrative coherence and order (for him, essence). Morality is instead something that I am always and already undergoing. The self as sensibility is most essentially ethical: immediately *exposed* and drawn toward that which affects it.

The aim of this concluding chapter is threefold. First, I will address two salient critiques of Levinas. Second, in light of my responses to these critiques, I will underscore the significance of 'self-disruption' in ethical development—inspired by Levinas's re-imagining of 'the good', but also as latent in 1) Kant's account of the moral self, 2) Aristotle's account of the virtuous soul, and 3) the teleological account of the self that we find in contemporary virtue ethics. And finally, I will briefly discuss moral philosophy's relation to moral cultivation, with a view toward the significance of self-disruption and its relation to justice as described in Chapter 4.

5.1 CRITIQUES OF LEVINAS

1. *Paul Ricoeur.* Levinas is frequently criticized for the hyperbolic nature of his writing—a style that he employs for the sake of provocation. His insistence on the *radical* infinite separation-distance-distinction-difference between 'the self' and 'the other' can evoke an understanding of ethics that seems like a violent *irrelation*, in which the self is both assaulted and enslaved by an utterly uncognizable other, leaving no room for the possibility of reciprocity or friendship.

In his 1996 text, *Oneself as An*other,[123] Paul Ricoeur criticizes Levinas along precisely these lines in an effort to strengthen his own ethical theory, which finds itself predominantly situated within the Aristotelian and Heideggerian traditions. The text is marked by an extraordinary effort to bring ethical projects within the Continental and analytic traditions into conversation, while developing a hermeneutics of the self and 'petite ethics' for that self. I will begin by providing an overview of Ricoeur's eclectic position to contextualize both his critique of Levinas and my response to that critique.

Brian Treanor neatly summarizes Ricoeur's somewhat complicated notion of narrative identity, beginning with Ricoeur's key distinction between *who* we are and *what* we are; the former denoting our *ipse*-identity (selfhood or self-constancy), latter denoting our *idem*-identity (sameness).[124] These are the first two fundamental dimensions of the Ricoeurean self, and as Treanor notes, the former (self-constancy) is perhaps more interesting than the latter, as it involves something beyond mere persistence through time ("e.g., when I wake up, how do I know I am the same person who went to sleep the night before?").[125] Treanor characterizes *ipse*-identity as the less abstract dimension of selfhood, which is ultimately where we turn to answer to the question: who is responsible? *Ipse*-identity is influenced and permeated by otherness or externalities (e.g., history, culture, tradition, community, and environment), rendering it the *ethical* dimension of oneself, which deals with others and institutions. As Ricoeur writes:

> Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can *count on* that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another. The term "responsibility" unites both meanings: "counting on" and "being accountable for." It unites them, adding to them the idea of response to

[123] I will use parenthetical references *for Oneself as Another* for this portion of the text.
[124] Brian Treanor, *Emplotting Virtue: A Narrative Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014), 111.
[125] Ibid., 112.

> the question "Where are you?" asked by another who need me. This response is the following: "Here I am!" a response that is a statement of self-constancy. (165)

The ethical dimension of *ipse*-identity involves what Ricoeur calls *attestation*, intimately bound up with credence and trust (299).[126] The self's response, "Here I am!" is what he calls the ethical moment of imputation, as the self is prompted by the call of another. Informed by Heidegger's account of Dasein potentially being attested by conscience, Ricoeur explains that attestation marks the shift from the imagination's notion that it can try anything to the voice that says, "everything is possible, but not everything is beneficial to others and yourself" (167). When attested, the self understood as activity (constituting itself as a spontaneity with infinite possibilities) shifts to the passive, naked self's declaration: *here is where I stand*. Where one stands is where "one's feet are planted" (or in Brewer terms, one's 'evaluative outlook') when called by the other. This 'call' by the other relates to self-constancy in the sense that *how* one attests expresses *who* they are ethically.

How, then, should we attest? And how does this relate to narrative identity? Ricoeur mentions a host of figures that contribute to his ethical model, but it is perhaps best characterized as a dialectic between the Aristotelian and Kantian ethical/moral paradigms. Ricoeur defines our ethical intention as: aiming at the "good life," with and for others, in just institutions (172). The "good life" involves striving to become the

[126] It is worth noting that Ricoeur acknowledges and concedes Macintyre's account, as it mirrors what we find in *After Virtue*. For Macintyre, the two key features of narrative identity are: 1) that I am "what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living a story that runs from my birth to my death; I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else's, that has its own peculiar meaning" (*After Virtue*, 217); and 2) that I am accountable and can ask others for an account. Macintyre stresses that narrative and accountability are vital in assisting us in the ordering of goods (decision-making). They condition our capacity to do. The quest for the good (narrative unity) is a quest qua education: hearing the accounts and stories of others, so as to facilitate both an understanding of the sort of character that we seek to be, as well as a deeper understanding of ourselves. The good life is a life spent seeking the good, and recognizing that we are not simply what we choose to be.

phronimos, characterized by an ability to deliberate well about means and ends, determining "at the same time the rule and the case, by grasping the situation in its singularity" (175). Ricoeur explains that the good life is "the nebulous of ideals and dreams and achievement with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled" (179). This is marked by the "unending work of interpretation applied to what seems to us to be best with regard to our life as a whole and the preferential choices that govern our practices" (179). Insofar as one perdures through time (as self-conscious), one is called to interpret, judge, act, reinterpret, judge, act, and so on, until we cease to be.

The second part of Ricoeur's definition of ethical intention (with and for others) is best described as *solicitude*: being concerned for (as open to) others. Moving away from Levinas's allegedly asymmetrical "*irrelation"* between oneself and the other, Ricoeur instead turns to Aristotle's account of friendship, extracting what he calls Aristotle's ethics of reciprocity, marked by a "fragile balance in which giving and receiving are equal" (187-8). Ricoeur is careful not to reduce reciprocity to an economy among equals, and relies on Martha Nussbaum's notion of the "fragility of goodness" to capture the dual-vulnerability of oneself and another that does not assimilate the other's suffering into oneself, but allows for the affective "flesh of feeling" among selves (192). This is what Ricoeur calls the search for equality among inequality. As is the case for Aristotle, giving takes precedence over receiving, albeit never at the expense of one's flourishing. With Levinas's notion of the other as *absolutely* other than oneself in mind, Ricoeur describes the relation among individuals as that of similitude; similitude necessarily preserves plurality (to be similar is to still be different from that which you are similar to)

and sets the condition for promise and trust (because the others are like me). Establishing similitude in this way allows for "the esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as an other*," without reducing plurality or difference into homogeneity or sameness (194).[127]

By Ricoeur's account, morality enters the realm of ethics to further protect "the respect for others and for 'oneself as another'" (203). Self-respect, for Ricoeur, is the expression of self-esteem (aiming at the good life) "under the reign of the moral law" (204). It maintains the delicate balance between similitude and difference, and promotes each individual's ability to achieve the good life. For Ricoeur, the destruction of self-respect is the destruction of one's power-to-act, which, in its most extreme cases, would institute the depths of evil (220). Thus, Ricoeur's riff on the Kantian categorical imperative is: "Act solely in accordance with the maxim by which you can wish at the same time that what *ought not to be*, namely evil, will *not exist*" (218). Crucial for Ricoeur, however, is that morality is always governed by the *achievement* of the good life. Others play a crucial role on the road to happiness, though, *contra* Levinas, it is ultimately lack or neediness (our vulnerability, our being wounded) that drives us to the other (185). Key for Ricoeur, like Kant, is that self-esteem derives from esteeming others *as* oneself, i.e., capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing priorities, and of evaluating the ends of actions (193). Ricoeur footnotes that this (esteeming others as oneself) is the "secret" of the commandment to *love thy neighbor as thyself* (194).

[127] The final dimension of Ricoeur's ethical intention (just institutions) is the more systematic, political preservation of solicitude within the community. Solicitude, safeguarding the singularity of each individual and an economy of reciprocal equality, therefore, manifests itself as justice at both the micro and macro level in the community. Striving to fulfill the three dimensions of the above-sketched ethical intention characterizes what Ricoeur calls self-esteem.

Thus, for Ricoeur, to constitute oneself as an ethicomoral self is to understand that *who* we are is the result of self-constancy, and that self-constancy implies 1) a perpetual need to re-constitute that who, and 2) the perpetual occasion, at every moment, for self-transcendence, i.e., ethical transfiguration. These two processes involve deciphering what activities constitute *eudaimonia*, perpetually moving back and forth between particular events and the particularity of one's life as a whole (179). This hermeneutic process (what Ricoeur calls "critical *phronesis*") not only hones one's ethicomoral sensibility, but also contributes to the perpetual revision of the *mores* that are working toward more just communities, i.e., communities moving away from social discordance (war) toward social concordance (peace). Key is that the 'critical' dimension of critical *phronesis* is always an expression of solicitude, undergirded by a standard of radical openness. This means that the constitution of oneself as another always seeks to recognize and preserve the other in their singularity (perhaps best exemplified in Levinas's "*après vous*").

With this sketch in mind, the differences between Ricoeur and Levinas should already be somewhat clear, but as Ricoeur writes:

> E. Lévinas's entire philosophy rests on the initiative of the other in the intersubjective relation. In reality, this initiate establishes no relation at all, to the extent that the other represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego defined by the condition for separation. The other, in this sense, absolves himself of any relation. This irrelation defines exteriority as such...it is in the accusative mode alone that self is enjoined. And the summons to responsibility has opposite it simply the passivity of an "I" who has been called upon. The question then, whether to be heard and received, the injunction must not call for a response that compensates for the dissymmetry of the face-to-face encounter. (189)

Most problematic for Ricoeur is that Levinas's 'other' *abruptly* summons the self to responsibility (calling for obedience to duty by *seizing*, *persecuting*, *holding one hostage*, etc.) in a way that precludes the possibility of reciprocity, or receiving anything from the

other. He also stresses that because the other is nowhere to be found (phenomenally speaking), oneself and the other are effectively *not* in relation. For Ricoeur, a responsible response to the other's call is "presupposing a capacity for reception, of discrimination, and of recognition that, in [Ricoeur's] opinion, belongs to another philosophy of the Same to which the philosophy of the Other replies" (339), i.e., Ricoeur's. In addressing Levinas's notion of substitution, Ricoeur asks *who is hostage to the other* (340)? And wants to maintain that this *who*, contra Levinas, is a benevolent spontaneity, a conscious individual agent who can and should discriminate: "And what are we to say of the Other when he is an executioner? And who will be able to distinguish the master from the executioner, the master who calls for a disciple from the master who requires a slave?" (339).

Ricoeur points out that he is well aware of the fact that Levinas's language is deliberately hyperbolic to evoke "the effect of a break with regard to the idea of exteriority in the sense of absolute otherness" (336). And it can be inferred from this (and his deep admiration for and employment of Levinas's conclusions) that he understands his perspective as a corrective to Levinas's view,[128] providing the necessary space for 1) a truly reciprocal relation between the self and the other, and 2) a notion of otherness residing within consciousness itself: namely, conscience (the other within myself that I consult while making decisions) (341).

So, how might Levinas respond to this critique? First, it is crucial to point out that Ricoeur's project seeks to ground otherness within consciousness—something

[128] Michael H. Gillick does a fantastic and comprehensive job illustrating the problematic between the two thinkers in his dissertation, "The Place of Justice in the Thinking of Emmanuel Levinas" (doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, 2004). Many of his critiques resonate with my own, though his objectives are very distinct.

understood by the active self—which is the precise standpoint that Levinas seeks to 'overcome'. For Levinas, I am not the source of morality (it is not a principle that I can locate within reason, or a value I can locate within myself). And what we find in Ricoeur is something reminiscent of Kantian morality, despite its attentiveness to vulnerability, in which I locate the value of the other. Levinas is not concerned with the experience of two self-concerned individuals in relation to each other, but rather the moment that self-consciousness identity *ceases to be*.

Second, while Ricoeur's notion of attestation ("Here I am!") is reminiscent of Levinas's notion of sensibility (pure exposure, nakedness before the other), Ricoeur stresses that the moment of imputation marks the shift from the imagination's notion that it can try anything to the voice that says, "everything is possible, but not everything is beneficial to others and yourself" (167). When attested, the self understood as activity (constituting itself as a spontaneity with infinite possibilities) shifts to the passive, naked self's declaration: "here is where I stand. In Levinas, this process is inverted, so to speak. Levinas is not describing Kant's moral encounter, i.e., the prohibition *we place on ourselves* (as autonomous individuals) when realizing that we share this world with others, and are for that reason called to consider that we cannot and should not do anything and everything we would like to do. As Ricoeur puts it, when we are attested, considering the benefit of the whole, oneself included, becomes paramount, and thus the way we consciously—willingly—respond to this dilemma (between my spontaneous interests and the interests of others) defines the ethical dimension of who we are. Ricoeur is describing practical reason's response to an impasse to self-interest.

For Levinas, morality is not simply the willed prohibition of self-interest or the halting of absolute spontaneity.[129] (This gets us no further than Kant.) Levinas is committed to overthrowing self-consciousness as a fundamental mode of knowing, instead advocating a form of affective consciousness or 'pre-conscious' being that is otherwise than self-aware, i.e., an expiation or divesting of oneself, albeit not by result of the will. It is the experience of being captivated from without. This is to say that Ricoeur's account involves consciously deciphering how to be with the others in a way that enhances one's self-esteem, i.e., maintaining the self as an object of concern for itself; and by Levinas's account, this type of activity involves a sort of plotting that inevitably amounts to an assertion of power. And why? Because in order to determine how to proceed, one must possess criteria (truth values) by which one is able to make that sort of decision. As Ricoeur puts it, how are we to judge the other (as good or bad) if they are beyond consciousness's grasp? Levinas would insist that that sort of discrimination, while an undeniable feature of our existence, is not ethics, but rather calculation—always and already governed by a pre-figured end, a state of affairs one would like to bring about. *How* we respond (in the sense of what future state of affairs we bring about) is not what defines us. What defines us is whether or not we listen—and the will is only involved when one shirks, in fear, away from the other, the unknown.

Third, the most radical dimension of Levinas's perspective is that ethics is otherwise than or beyond moral judgment (of good and evil), as these necessarily

[129] That being said, it is important to underline that in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas notoriously describes the face as commanding, "Thou shall not kill," suggesting (albeit inconsistently) that the face-to-face encounter marks the moment in which absolute spontaneity is put into question from without. Although the content itself does not radically change, Levinas sings a slightly different tune in *Otherwise Than Being*, avoiding language that depicts the prohibitive halting of conscious activity, instead favoring language that describes the passive undergoing of metaphysical desire—the inspirational experience of being-for-the-other (substitution, metaphysical desire).

presuppose truth standards by which one can effectively discriminate. The ethical, for Levinas, is not the power of discernment. The good is the movement of being seized from self-concern by opening to new value, i.e., what is otherwise that what one contains within oneself. A more concrete way of understanding this is that the good is precisely the openness that allows one to hear what the other has to say: that lets the other to make her case—open to the possibility of learning something new, and changing one's perspective. The good is suspending disbelief, which requires surrendering presuppositions, admitting that you may not know, that you may be wrong. In other words, the good is undergoing of existential shift understood as being pulled away from oneself, led to new terrain, bare before an utterly affective experience. Key here is that self is not the measure of the good; 'the good' is a way of describing our capacity to be affected in ways that we cannot determine in advance. As Claire Katz puts it, to be seized by the good is to be "unable to harden one's heart to the other." That is, to listen unconditionally.

Beyond this, the golden rule (self-esteem deriving from esteeming others as oneself) as any sort of ethical standard would, by Levinas's account, be problematic, as it presupposes self-concern as the standard by which we are to consider how to treat others. Ethically speaking, the self (me as an individual) is not an object of concern: I am responsible for the other regardless of how he responds to me or what I wish for myself. If I am principally concerned with what I have determined that I want for myself, how can I truly be open to the possibility of something that is otherwise than what I have already determined is best for me?

Fourth, in regard to Ricoeur's claim that what Levinas provides is ultimately a non-relation between oneself and the other that effectively precludes the possibility of reciprocity and friendship, it is important to understand what that relation between self and other is. What does Levinas have in mind? As we saw in Chapter 4, Levinas is describing the experience of (metaphysical) desire, in which the self is not interested in itself, no longer a self-conscious individual, but is instead wholly for the other. This is best understood as the experience of being 'lost' in what you are doing: forgetting about yourself, who you're with, why you're doing what you are doing, what specifically is happening between the other and yourself, where you are headed, how long you will be or have been engaging in the activity, etc., as answers to all of these question require one to consciously reflect on the activity rather than being engrossed in the activity itself. In reflection, one's appreciative attention is re-directed toward oneself (being in 'their own head'), rather than the experience.

A good example of this is getting lost in a conversation. The moment you stop having the conversation (asking what time it is, how long you've been talking, what conclusions you two have reached, how each other feels, whether you are getting enough from the other, etc.) you are effectively not 'lost in' the activity anymore, but are instead re-collecting it, which is a different activity altogether. For Levinas, those questions are not ethical, but practical—within the 'realm' of justice, in which measurement and the search for order ensue. Moreover, measured reciprocity requires expectations, and a quantification of what is owed to each, which again, may be practical—and even *just*—but not ethical. For Levinas, ethics is asymmetrical in the sense that there are no expectations for getting something in return. If you are having a conversation with the

hope of acquiring something (getting the other to agree with you), the conversation devolves to rhetoric and manipulation because there is a goal is in sight, i.e., what one expects to get in return for the time spent conversing.

Asymmetry so construed is not antithetical to friendship based on the good as we find it in Aristotle or as retrieved in contemporary virtue ethics. The fundamental openness that Levinas has in mind is vital to being able to share and augment your world with someone else. It is a necessary condition for the sort of friendship that cannot be reduced to simply furthering one's self-interest. If one is chiefly concerned about reciprocity, it is worth asking whether the friendship is in fact equal or based on the good.

Fifth and finally, as Levinas understands it, when utterly engrossed in something (substituting for the other) one experiences a different order of time altogether, during which there is no room for deliberation, calculation, and evaluation because the past and the future drop out of the picture. From the perspective of consciousness, the past is forgotten, and the future is lived rather than projected. Ricoeur may be correct in stating that insofar as we perdure through time, we are called to interpret, judge, act, reinterpret, etc., but the mode of temporality that he has in mind is key. If I am engrossed in something, I am not judging my experience, but am undergoing *mesmeric attraction*. From the perspective of consciousness, this might seem like enslavement, but from the perspective of the affective undergoing, it is liberation from self-conscious concern and diving into what you desire and truly enjoy. We are only 'enslaved' by the other in the sense that we are captivated, enthralled, and riveted—so much so that we forget about ourselves (and our projects) despite ourselves.

This point is important because depending on how 'strong' one's will is, metaphysical desire (as Levinas describes it and as it is actually experienced) can be agonizing, traumatizing, violent, risky, *imprudent*. This brings us to Ricoeur's notion of *ipse*-identity, i.e., the kind of person that I want to become (which requires some form of prudence and measure). Ricoeur envisions an ethics that is aspirational. To be ethical is to aspire to goodness. This is notably Aristotelian, but problematic in that it presupposes an understanding of that good that we are on the way to. As Socrates puts it in the *Republic*, understanding the good as prudence (as the refined do) involves being prudent about the good (505b), which means that a pre-supposed understanding of the good is employed when one determines how to actualize the good, i.e., how to be prudent (as the *phronimos* is). Thus, to live in a way that is predominantly governed by concern over the *kind* of person that I want to be is a life that favors a particular type of self-projection: holding the 'ideal' in place as that toward which we constantly aim.

Now, Ricoeur would by no means suggest that this ideal is stagnant (as we are dynamic unities, and our understanding of things is perpetually influence by our interpretation of what is 'external' to ourselves), but it seems clear that acting in light of a projected ideal necessitates an activation of the will. And why? Because aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions involves determining the means to achieve that end—even if the end is perpetually evolving. In general, means-ends schemas (holding a big picture in sight) involve calculation by the will. How else will you achieve the end that you seek? Again, the radical move we find in Levinas is that practical reason, by its very nature, involves a certain awareness of and ownership over oneself and what one brings into the world, i.e., self-mastery. Self-mastery involves some

notion of self-perfection (precisely becoming the master of oneself in a particular manner), which is to say that self-mastery involves an ideal mode of being (e.g., minimizing harm and maximizing pleasure, obeying the moral law) that we are on the way to becoming, and that we intentionally strive to bring about when facing difficult practical decisions. This means there has to be a self that one is concerned about.

That being said, Levinas does not deny that we partake in practical reason, and that we experience a projection of ourselves within reflection (though this 'self' is merely a projection, or even a fiction), but insists that the movements of practical reason are by their very nature economic, for which ethics has no business. This is where Levinas does in fact go further than Kant. Any measure whatsoever falls outside of ethics. Self-conceit cannot even accidentally be the motivation for ethics because there is no self-concerned self involved in morality. Morality denotes where I 'end' and we 'begin'. Brewer provides an account of practical reason that does not completely fall prey to this criticism, though in the end, Brewer concedes that our chief dialectical activity is unifying our lives (based on our conception of how best to live them, which, in the end, presupposes ideals, and ultimately some notion of self-perfection). And again, for Levinas, a focus on the development of self-perfection is antithetical to ethics.

2. ***What if I do not feel compelled by the other?*** The second salient critique of Levinas is what is often referred to as the challenge of egoism or moral skepticism. The skeptical questions that are posed to Levinas are: what if I do not feel compelled by the other? Can we not be indifferent to the other? And why should we not reject the other? Especially if, echoing Ricoeur, the other is the type of master who wants to be surrounded by slaves.

First, this critique of Levinas mirrors the critique of voluntarism/ethical intuitionism as sketched by Christine Korsgaard in *The Sources of Normativity*. In her text, based on a series of lectures, Korsgaard hunts for a justification of moral obligation, which, by her account, is simply a variation of the call for the examined life. The chief question she is interested in (the normative question) is: how are moral obligations normative? 'Normative' here refers to the binding force of the moral law. Another way of putting this question is: why should we be moral? Which she thinks spawns from our being self-conscious reflectors (as we saw in Prichard, reflection cannot help but ask *why*?). For Korsgaard, this question becomes pressing when the demands of moral obligation require a taxing sacrifice on the part of the agent—a sacrifice that makes them question why they have to do what they do not want to do. Although a proper account of her argument exceeds the scope of this project, her Kantian-inspired answer is that obligation is normative *not* because it is grounded in the apprehension of some objective truth about objective values, but because of the reflective structure of consciousness, i.e., human nature. Human nature (including the structure of reason) is normative given the authority we have over ourselves (that is, the way we confer reasons for action), i.e., the two selves that constitute who we are: 1) the current me and 2) the projection of myself that I must live with. And if we violate moral obligation we violate ourselves as members of human nature.[130]

So, how does this relate to this relate to the moral skeptic's critique of Levinas? By Korsgaard's account, the second (problematic) answer that we find to the normative question, is that of moral realism, which asserts that legitimate moral authority is real

[130] It perhaps goes without saying that her answer clashes with Levinas, as she grounds morality in reflective self-consciousness.

(whether it is a procedure or a fact), and is something that we experience, but it is not something that we can explain. Obligation is simply *there*, part of the nature of things, and although you cannot prove that it is real (because it is self-evident), you can rebut skeptical arguments. Prichard is a clear example of this type of answer to the normative question, stressing that it makes no sense to ask the normative question because the answer begs the question, as the conclusion is presupposed. Moral obligation is, therefore, intrinsically normative, forbidding future questions.

For Korsgaard, the trouble with this position is that it hinges on confidence, i.e., I find it self-evident, so it is in fact self-evident—and the fact that you do not find it self-evident does not mean I have to prove it to you (because it is not the kind of thing you can prove). Moral *confidence* is unable to answer the legitimate question of how these obligations are normative, and ends up rendering the normative question an illegitimate one. (To which Korsgaard replies: normative concepts clearly exist because, as self-conscious reflectors, we inevitably face normative problems.)

With this in mind, as well as the various resonances we have traced between Levinas and Prichard, it seems clear that Levinas could also fall prey to this critique. Levinas is providing a descriptive, albeit ethically charged account of reality, suggesting that morality is always and already the case, which could be understood as: "well, you have either experienced the call of the other or you haven't. And until you do, you will remain in your dogmatic amoral slumber."

That being said, what Levinas provides (that rational intuitionists do not) is an answer to the question of how morality is normative, albeit not by way of argumentation (conclusions following from premises). Levinas is not appealing to logic, and is

ultimately challenging that model of justification in morality, as it involves having a particular conclusion in sight and getting there by whatever means-premises possible. For Levinas, this method inevitably remain deaf to what falls outside of its conclusion, as the 'executive order' (one's presuppositions) governs the whole enterprise—leaving one committed not only to what follows, but what can be known in advance. Levinas's answer turns instead to 1) a phenomenology of sensibility, i.e., the basic structure of receptivity-exposure-openness that we all share, which serves as a primordial mode of being-for-the-other; to 2) conversation, which also denotes a primordial mode of being-for-the-other—another mode of sensibility—that each and everyone one of us experiences, insofar as we exist; and to 3) metaphysical desire. As we saw in Chapter 4, the concrete reality of our exposure to the other and desire for the other is the source of all phenomena whatsoever—including conscious thought. Our existence begins with us responding, as *responsible*. For Levinas, it is reflective reason that issues moral doubt of both the senses and desire (am I really my brother's keeper? What is Hecuba to me?), but the skeptical question is inevitably a response to a former position of moral regard: that is, acknowledging the 'call' of morality and, rather than living out the desire to 'obey' it, evaluating whether or not you should.

This is to say that for Levinas, morality is normative in the sense that our existence is such that the unknown—what is outside of ourselves as reflectively self-conscious—calls us, and ignites desire, whether we like or not. As we saw in Chapter 4, enjoyment is a testimony of this, language is a testimony of this, and the very fact that we provide reasons is a testimony of this. Desire is necessarily ignited from without, and paralleling (albeit opposite of) what Korsgaard suggests about reflective endorsement,

desire is normative in the sense that we *do not* have authority over ourselves. We are affectively pulled by the good; this is a basic feature of our existence. And if we ignore or attempt to extinguish desire altogether, we would in fact cease to be—or would be such in a way that we alienate ourselves from what animates us in the first place. And although valuing my own humanity (my capacity to set ends, reflectively endorse those ends) does not necessitate that I value the humanity of others, valuing desire necessarily involves valuing the other, as desire is always for the other.

Second, as was briefly discussed in Chapter 3, the question of how we can gain certainty about the normative authority of the other (because otherwise we are left with innate, 'magic' feelings that either compel us or not) is innovatively addressed by Claire Katz, who suggests that moral education is the giant elephant in the room when we ask these questions. Katz's point is that we do not emerge into the world as adults with a prefigured set of values. And echoing what we saw in Chapter 2, moral cultivation is at least theoretically part of education in general, and our orientation toward desire (again, an incontestable feature of our existence) has everything to do with the way we have been taught to understand it (e.g., being taught to deny it). This is to reiterate that the question of whether I am my brother's keeper only has meaning if one has already supposed that oneself is the only object of concern for itself. Only in this hypothesis (that the ego is the only concern for itself) is it incomprehensible that the other would concern me, or that I would need to hunt for reasons to justify helping my neighbor, or to act from duty.

That being said, Korsgaard raises a very important point. The normative question is legitimate in the sense that it arises because we have normative problems. Which suggests that we have been educated in such a way that has led us to value, above all,

ourselves: that is, our respective projects, our success, our individual pursuits of happiness, etc.. In light of this understanding, it is reasonable to ask the normative question: why should I substitute my interests for the sake of someone else? Key here is that education is fundamental to the formation of a subject that is not simply living for itself. The ethical subject is taught and developed—and the teaching relation is itself normative. The normative force comes from developing young people who are 'trained' to hear what is always and already outside of their reflections.

As Katz puts it (invoking Levinas's work on Jewish education),[131] Anglo-American culture prizes a specific sort of scientific knowledge—certainty in the sense of conclusions necessarily following from certain presuppositions—above everything else. As a testimony to this point, while giving a teaching presentation at Harvard in 2017, I asked the audience what they think happiness is, and the first answer I received was 'security'. And this ended up being the answer that the audience almost unanimously agreed on. If security (understood as certainty about our safety) is the end that we seek, the impetus will of course be to avoid to risk and danger. And to avoid risk and danger, we need to calculate—carefully weighing pros and cons. This is how we maximize the sought-results. And in order to calculate well, we need to act with as much certainty as possible, avoiding as many potential missteps as possible. In other words, we need to *know before we do*, which implies that we are not willing to undertake anything without knowing everything—or at least not without knowing at much as possible.[132] This is the prudent way to proceed *if* security is what we seek. As Katz puts it, to act otherwise is

[131] As Katz points out, before writing *Totality and Infini*ty, Levinas taught high school students at the École normale Israélite orientale in Paris, and eventually became the director of the school in 1946 when he returned after WWII.
[132] Katz, *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism*, 92.

understood to be childish. Paraphrasing Levinas, Katz points out that our culture is a culture that is *in a hurry to live, but impatient to feel*. And proceeding this way makes it easier to ignore the things that affect us from without: principally, other people, but also a host of perceived 'dangers' that are endemic to life—perhaps above all, death.

Third, can we really be indifferent to the other in the sense of being utterly unaffected by the other? This is an interesting question, because Levinas's claim is that we cannot be utterly indifferent to the other, no matter how hard we try. We can attempt to 1) mute the 'noise' outside of us (e.g., putting on headphones to avoid contact with the homeless, absorbing ourselves in our cell phones to ignore a conversation, changing the channel when a 'save the animals' ad comes on, etc.); 2) to avoid contact with the 'others' who fall outside of our pre-approved circles (e.g., subscribing to media outlets that bend toward our political preferences, wanting a wall to be built in a town bordering another country, concentrating homeless communities in spaces outside of spaces the general public frequents, etc.); 3) to isolate ourselves from the communities that we belong to (e.g., moving away from home to a new city to be anonymous, or getting a fresh start in a new work environment, etc.): or 4) to deny that we cannot predict what the future holds, (e.g., planning out every detail of our career trajectory, obsessing over ant-aging products, avoiding facing the fact that each of us will die, etc.).

While these efforts are not completely futile (we can get very good at ignoring things), the point is that each of these efforts is a response to or 'privation' of what is always and already the case. We are not, for reasons detailed in Chapter 4, impervious to the other. And the way in which the other never fails to seize our attention is a result of the fact that we desire to be affected by the other. (At least initially, we welcome what is

other.) The point to be underlined is that each of these efforts concedes being affected by—and in most cases being afraid of—the other. For instance, xenophobic behavior is the result of being afraid of the diverse others surrounding you, unsure of *what they might do, because they are different*. But the undeniable fact remains: the others surround you. Or to give another example, we may do everything in our power to avoid the inevitability of death by being vigilant with doctor's visits, eating healthy, and exercising, but still end up with a terminal cancer. Again, the fact remains that the future is unknown and something will always get in the way of a smooth execution of any plan—the way in which the plan will unfold is never 100% in your control. The unpredictability of the other (as unknown, what is not represented to consciousness) is precisely what gives rise to fear, and fear provokes a mode of calculative being that perpetually strives for security. The other plagues consciousness's attempt to shape the future. And quoting Levinas, *the other is the future*. The question reflective self-consciousness faces is whether or not to project desired states of affairs and attempt to bring them into being by whatever means possible.

This gives rise to an important question. In absorbing ourselves in the other, aren't we (unethically) ignoring other others? The answer is yes, and Levinas addresses precisely this point by way of his account of justice. As far as ethics is concerned, one is completely enraptured by the other at the expense of other others. Justice marks the work of attempting to measure among incommensurables, divvying up our resources. We of course cannot feed every mouth, and we do in fact have to consider ourselves, but again, for Levinas, this is the work of practical reason, whose measuring activity cannot help but be self-interested—seeking particular outcomes. That being said, as we saw in Chapter 4,

the work of justice involves striving toward coherence and order, but inevitably having that ordered disrupted in a way that requires perpetual re-evaluation and re-consideration. Order is always interrupted by something that falls outside of the given order's logic, so to speak. For example, creating laws to protect the rights of a particular group of disenfranchised people, only to realize that that law does not protect certain others, necessitating a revision of the existing law or a construction of a new law to protect the others.

Fourth and finally, why shouldn't we reject the other? Especially if the other appears to be 'evil', e.g., the Nazi? This point is particularly controversial, and the answer is not only unpalatable, but one that Levinas himself struggled with (as evidenced in his critical attitude toward Heidegger's affiliation with National Socialism). The question we face is: what type of otherness should one be open to and what type of otherness should one be closed to? And on what grounds?[133]

My initial attempt at a Levinasian answer would be that, ethically speaking, there is no ground for moral judgment. If openness is to be open, one cannot discriminate in their openness to otherness. Ethics is radical openness to the other (full stop). And again, measuring among the incommensurable particulars (you, me, him, her, they) is the problematic work of justice. And this requires the laborious work of hearing, weighing, and ordering all points-of-view—even those of X (insert force of 'evil' here). Disordered as they may be, the Nazi has reasons, too, and those reasons need to be heard, understood, and challenged. Echoing Levinas, communication is not the auto-affection of

[133] George Heffernan posed this pertinent question to me in response to a paper I wrote on Heidegger and Levinas on language, and I find it salient, as it probes the uncomfortable dimension of providing an ethics that is truly beyond *good and evil*.

certainty. To communicate is indeed to open oneself, but the openness is not complete if it is on the watch for recognition and acceptance (of one's own truth values). As we learn from Hannah Arendt, in a tyranny, free speech is one of the first things to go. The only activities permitted in a tyranny are those that reiterate the current ideology. There can be nothing new, nothing other. For ethics, at least as Levinas depicts it, there must be, at the very least, a standard of listening. And it seems that a lack of discrimination in what is heard is the risk of democracy (*contra* tyranny). This is unsettling, but key is that the possibility of new understandings requires suspending disbelief, so as to truly hear what the other has to say. The possibility of encountering a new perspective or experiencing a shift in understanding is ethics, and the only way for this is to happen to refuse to believe that the other is evil.[134]

The question that follows from this is: is this refusal (to believe that the other is evil) an act of the will? It seems clear that within a Levinasian schema, it cannot be. If I will myself to believe something other than I do, it is up for debate as to whether I *wholeheartedly* believe it (beyond a rational justification). This is to say that the grips of belief are not simply rational, but are also affective—and what we are affected by is not a product of free will, but simply happens to be the case or not. To assume that the other is not evil involves being exposed to the other, which involves deposing oneself of one's pre-established certainties. Or put differently, this involves letting go of assumed knowledge because there must be something that you are missing—something that has fallen through the cracks, something more to be understood (in the position of the other). It is worth pointing out that this cannot simply involve finding a common ground with

[134] For a thought-provoking conversation on this topic (as it relates to the abortion debate), listen to Krista Tibbet's interview with Frances Kissling on "What Is Good in the Position of the Other."

someone you are diametrically opposed to (as this suggests there is a degree to which you will not budge), but rather gaining a deeper understanding of each other. To seek understanding, rather than knowledge, is to assume the priority of understanding a different position, rather than having one's own position be understood. The most difficult aspect of this 'deposing' of oneself is being honest about the fact that we do not have the answers to everything. If we are honest with ourselves and able to listen to what is outside of ourselves, our convictions (i.e., our orderings of reality) will always be undone by the unanticipated and unforeseen: *by the other*. Orderings of reality (*essences*) can only cover so much. There are always other perspectives to be heard; essence is always undoing itself.

In Levinas's words, 'the saying' (difference) always finds a way to undo 'the said' (essence). And there is something arbitrary to ordering in the sense that orderings are based on the preferences of the one who orders. This is to say that if order—coherence, law—is primarily based on taste (what one likes, enjoys), it seems clear that there is not only room for other perspectives, but that there are always new tastes to be explored and enjoyed. For instance, you may love ice cream and be committed to exclusively ordering ice cream for dessert, until you go to dinner with someone who loves pie and tries to convince you to give pie a shot. Although pie is new, unknown, and *not ice cream*, you have no idea whether or not you will like it. The only way to find out is to suspend your prejudices and give it a try.

5.2 WHAT IS THE GOOD? SELF-DISRUPTION & AFFECTIVE UNITY

This project has been elucidating the significance of what I will now call 'self-disruption' in ethical development. 'Self-disruption' refers to the experience of being torn away from self-concern by something other than oneself. 'Self-concern' refers to the self's attachment to its projects and plans—including the future self that it seeks to produce, a preservation of its current identity. And 'ethical development' refers to the process of understanding how to flourish. My claim is that this insight, inspired by Levinas's ethical-metaphysics, is implicit within 1) Kant's account of the moral self, 2) Aristotle's account of the virtuous soul, and 3) the teleological account of the self that we find in contemporary virtue ethics.

But what exactly does it mean to be disrupted or torn away from self-concern in each of these distinct accounts? Before addressing this question, it is important to first define which 'self' we have in mind, and to then underscore an important distinction. The self of self-concern is the imperative issuing self that we encountered in Chapter 1, the isolated and production-oriented self that was challenged by contemporary virtue ethicists in Chapter 3, and the reflectively self-conscious self that was undermined by Levinas in Chapter 4. This self is marked by a mode of being that is governed by the will—a self that confers imperatives (to itself), self-consciously reflecting on those imperatives (based on what it wants) and acting in light of those imperatives with the aim of bringing a particular state of affairs into being. No matter how murky the representation of itself may be, the self of self-concern is a self that identifies and thus represents itself to itself. It is a self that makes itself an object of concern for itself.

The important distinction I have in mind is clearly expressed in Kant's delineation between two modes of issuing imperatives to oneself, i.e., categorically and hypothetically, which parallels, albeit building upon the distinction that we find in Aristotle between absolute ends and instrumental ends. This distinction is between ends sought for their own sake, and ends sought for the sake of something else. Crucial is that morality (in the case of Kant) and virtue (in the case of Aristotle) belong to the former. And each of the abovementioned accounts is marked by an attempt to emphasize the ethical significance of the former, so as to move away from what is best understood as consequence-driven decision-making model. Kant identifies this mode of practical thinking as outside the scope of morality, and while Aristotle and contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethicists do not admonish instrumental goods in the same way that Kant does, they underscore that human flourishing hinges on doing things for their own sake—i.e., giving oneself over to unimpeded activity, 'self-sufficient' in the sense that nothing is lacking, as one is channeling all of one's appreciative attention—or better, *desire*—into the present activity.

Kant's moral self. As we saw in Chapter 1, Kant describes the immoral self as a self whose will is governed by hypothetical imperatives. That is, principles of action that, above all, seek to secure projected ends in the future. This is a will that is governed by self-conceit. For Kant, it is in the experience of respect that self-conceit is affectively *disrupted*, and one is presented with the option of doing something for its own sake or of doing something for the sake of self-interest. Key is that the experience of disruption is not simply that of prohibition (*thou shall not do X*), but the experience of a different type of desire: that is, the desire for the moral law, here synonymous with acting from duty,

'obeying' the moral law, and acting for the sake of humanity. The disruption of self-conceit discloses the *good* will, which is free from projected, hypothetical ends, and is honest about what is and is not in its control. For Kant, self-disruption is vital to ethical development in that it is only when we interrupt self-interest's projections—what we seek to acquire in the future, based on our conception of pleasure and pain—that we fully identify with our authentic, moral self, i.e., a self that is not an island, but rather one among other members in the moral community. This disruption is the 'effect' (or perhaps better, 'affect') of encountering the moral law in the other, and experiencing the simultaneous desire for the other's freedom and yours. Kant would admittedly not use the term 'desire', but as was illustrated in Chapter 1, for Kant, we do in fact desire to be free, and our freedom entails the freedom of the others. In the case of Kant, to aspire to the good is to heed the good will—unifying activity and purpose, thus obeying the moral law for its own sake.

Aristotle's ethical self. Because there is no will or 'reflectively self-conscious individual' for Aristotle, and voluntary action, by Aristotle's account, is best understood as being able to do what is in our power to do (free from external constraints), self-disruption is here understood a bit differently and requires more justification.

My hypothesis is that self-concern, within Aristotle's schema, would amount to a mode of being that involves the experience of having conflicting desires (e.g., being enraged and wanting to scream at someone, but simultaneously recognizing that it is perhaps not prudent to do). Or put differently, self-concern is a way describing the experience of being at war with oneself. That is, being concerned with the preservation and perpetuation of certain pleasures, while resisting or wanting to avoid future pain. As

we saw in Chapter 2, aspiring to the good involves immersing ourselves in the activities that we desire (by nature), and that are good for their own sake. This means that these activities are pleasant in themselves, unimpeded by ends outside of the activity itself—especially anticipations of the future. This point is crucial. It is worth recalling that *eudaimonia* is self-sufficient in the sense that *nothing is lacking*, which is to say that there is no more to be gained beyond one's present state. The virtuous soul is not seeking anything beyond what she is experiencing. The only thing she 'seeks' is to augment, deepen, and enrich her present mode of being, i.e., to keep on being what she is.

Moreover, the pleasure that accompanies Aristotelian virtue—the lack of pain or internal strife that completes virtuous activity—requires *unity*. But in what sense? Is it in the narrative sense that Macintyre offers, which amounts to a form of coherence? I want to propose that it involves unity in another sense. That is, in a sense that we find in Levinas's account of becoming more and more singular *qua* less and less reflectively self-conscious. Key for Aristotle is that the virtuous soul is a soul that is not pulled in opposing directions (caught between conflicting desires). Every aspect of the soul is in harmony; each part is doing what it ought to do, heeding reason's desire. I would suggest that this type of unity is best understood as 'affective unity', as one is not paralyzed among options, caught between incommensurable goods, but is rather devoting oneself entirely to a given activity for the sake of the activity itself. It seems fair to suggest that pleasure is the experience of wholeheartedly giving oneself over to what one is doing: being enthralled, absorbed, and engrossed.

To better understand how Aristotelian virtue involves self-disruption and how self-disruption relates to affective unity, it is helpful to describe (phenomenologically) the

experience of what Aristotle calls 'moral weakness' (*akrasia*). By Aristotle's account, what is distinct to the morally weak soul is that it is torn between two or more courses of action—inhibited from taking the 'virtuous route' because of the projected pain involved in the activity *if* one were to partake in it. Consider, for example, the decision of whether to be honest with your current partner (who you are living with) about the fact that you are not in love with them anymore. You feel like the two of you are going through the motions, you find yourself apathetic about everything, and it seems your mental health and physical health are deteriorating. But there is still a strong sense in which staying with your partner and not being honest about how you feel appears to be more pleasant. You two have a certain rhythm, and you can count on the comfort of stability: everyday is very predictable (even if unfulfilling). There is also a strong sense in which the very idea of being honest seems painful—above all, because it involves a huge amount of uncertainty, *how* it will be is unpredictable, and as projected, it seems painful. Key is that moral weakness is marked by the experience of being affectively torn, divided into (at least) two: namely (as Korsgaard delineates it), the self that you currently are, and the future self that you hope to be. You clearly do not desire to be in the relationship you are in, because you do not love your partner anymore, *but* you are afraid, stifled, paralyzed by the anticipated pains that (may or may not) come with being honest with them, and thus entering a new, unpredictable mode of being.

To bring this back to self-disruption, the important takeaway is that flourishing requires a disruption to your current understanding of how things are, e.g., which things are pleasant and which things are painful. Thus, disrupting your current understandings of things—that is, disrupting your current *identity*—is vital to ethical development, as it

requires opening yourself to what is new, unpredictable, unanticipated: what is other than your current self. Virtue, unlike moral weakness, involves a unification of desire. The soul is not spliced into more than one, but is affectively unified: confident about what one desires, therefore pouring 'all of itself' into the present, open to whatever will be (which, from the standpoint of reflection, is *unknown*). In the example above, this would involve being honest, as this is what you ultimately desire, for its own sake—and thus disregarding your preconceptions about what may be painful about the process, conceding that in the end, you cannot predict the outcome.

In addition to this, as we saw in Chapter 2, for Aristotle, others are the condition for the possibility of virtue, and are perhaps best understood as the vital 'disruptions' that facilitate these shifts in our understanding of things. This is the role of friends and of moral education in the state—the latter shaping the desires of the youth by training them to love and celebrate their rational principle (Aristotelian 'self-love'), thus cultivating an orientation toward unpredictability and indeterminacy (*the other*) that teaches them to not only deliberate with confidence, but to find 'tranquil freedom' in this activity. This trust in oneself is a necessary condition for being hospitable to, and thus vulnerable before, new data, and is nurtured by and through friendship and education. Echoing Aristotle, friends and moral educators are the mirrors by which we are able to observe and understand the nature of our actions. As mirrors, friends and moral educators are those who disrupt our current understandings of things by asking us questions, demanding reasons, challenging us to think otherwise.

Contemporary virtue ethics' teleological self. Within this same vein, contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethics is marked by an effort to salvage the significance

of activities that are good for their own sake in the 20th-century, in hopes of undercutting the reigning production-oriented understanding of the self. As we saw in Chapter 3, this culminates in Brewer's account of dialectical activity-desire, i.e., our intrinsic desire to be riveted, absorbed, engrossed, caught up in what we are doing—forgetting about ourselves, not getting in our own way. As Brewer stresses, echoing Aristotle, friendship (loving another) is the paradigmatic case of appreciative attention. Love provides the architecture of dialectical activity and its associated desire. It is a mode of being for something other; the self is disrupted and engrossed in the other, as is in the case, for instance in conversation. As Brewer puts it, dialectical desires are attention-arresting modes of appreciation of something wholly other, "serving to remove us from the condition of distraction, and in particular from that most banal and obsessive of human distractions, the self."[135] The important point here is that aspiring to the good does not consist in bringing about or producing projected deliverables, but rather being present to what one is doing—so much so that one cannot reflect on the activity as it is happening, as this would pull one's attention toward reflective representations or images of the activity. Self-reflection is disrupted as one engages in the present activity, utterly opening oneself to the unanticipated.

In summary, what is essential to each of these accounts is that goodness involves a disruption of reflective self-consciousness, which in turn involves a unification of desire. Crucial is that when we are affectively unified in this way, we are not only no longer caught between conflicting desires, but are completely divested of ourselves (think of falling in love). We are not participating in the ordering of phenomena, we are not

[135] Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, 64.

organizing, measuring, judging, and bringing to coherence to disparate moments. And we are no longer consciously identifying ourselves. We are instead arrested—in Levinas's terms, *chosen* and held hostage by the good—which involves the extraordinary forgetting of death. That is, being imprudently exposed in the sense that the self has lost concern for itself and the preservation of its current identity: unsure about where it is headed, delivering itself over to something different.

The good thus signifies the disruptive activity that provokes the simultaneous shedding of calcified truths (i.e., our current convictions) and the cultivation of new understandings. The antithesis to the good would be the resistance to such exposure, or as Levinas puts it, to prioritize the fear of death (and the hope of escaping any and every end) over the fear of war (identifying everything and anything as a means to self-preservation). This involves the steadfast work of preserving one's current sense of self (identity) *and its values* (what it likes), and seeking to produce the self that one seeks to become in light of one's current understanding of who one is now, e.g., I want to be a doctor and make X amount of money each year, and to be married to a successful husband with two children. Thus, one effectively constructs a narrative for oneself based on what is presently certain, projecting that what is certain *now* (e.g., I value money, marriage, and building a family) will remain certain in the future. And in so doing, one inevitably closes off the possibility of new desires and values, operating under hypothetical imperatives that find means to secure pre-figured ends in the future based on one's current values and convictions (or rather, one's current understanding of pleasure and pain).

The question of narrative coherence. Given everything that has been said thus far, the question that inevitably follows is: is the above-sketched notion of the good incompatible with the notion of the good as that toward which we are on a unified, narrative quest, i.e., happiness?[136] The answer is of course no, but I do want to underscore a few important points.

If we recall the conclusions that we reached in Chapter 3, Macintyre's reclamation of narrative identity is a way of working us (in the Anglo-American West) out of the context-less situation in which we find ourselves: isolated, results-oriented individuals, who have become affectively detached from the welfare of the community at large. Inspired by Aristotle, Macintyre reminds us that we are in fact contextualized selves (always and already embedded in, and thus identifying with, a rich web of narratives) on the way to happiness. Again quoting Macintyre, "The unity of human life is the unity of a narrative quest." We are on the way to becoming one: that is, a unified, coherent story—'ending' with happiness. Brewer ultimately follows suit, stressing that we only grasp the value of an activity upon recognizing and understanding its place in a full and flourishing human life; living a good life is the most comprehensive dialectical activity: everything that we do is for the sake of *eudaimonia*.

The point that I want to underscore here is that this only becomes incompatible with goodness as self-disruption if our conception of happiness is one that involves a pre-figured sense of the state of affairs that we seek to bring into being based on what we

[136] It is worth flagging an interesting movement within contemporary psychology that challenges the following twin claims: 1) each of us constructs and lives a narrative-story (this is our identity), and 2) that each of us must possess a full and explicit narrative picture of who we are to fully develop as people. (I am here paraphrasing from Galen Strawson's 2008 text, "Against Narrativity.") I am grateful to Ana Hurka-Robles for pointing me toward her research on this movement, which suggests that for some, constructing a narrative identity (as advised in therapy) is contrary to living well—provoking both depression and anxiety.

identify with now (our evaluative outlook). This is clearly distinct from *eudaimonia* as Aristotle or contemporary virtue ethicists envisions it, but it is worth considering that our current results-oriented and anti-contemplative habits and tendencies make it quite difficult to get out of a productive, results-oriented worldview. Even the language that we find within virtue ethics seems to point toward a notion of the good life as crafting a coherent story: providing order to what might otherwise be understood as a series of unrelated moments, and successfully achieving a particular end. This is to say that, given our orientation in the Anglo-American West, we almost cannot help but understand happiness as something to be achieved, a state of affairs that we bring into being. And again, this is not necessarily a problem in itself, but becomes a problem if we become so married to a particular result—a predetermined order of things—that we close our selves off from anything other than our self-constructed programs, agendas, narratives, identities.

The worry here is that projecting a representation of what happiness might entail based on what we currently know to be the case can all too easily turn into an impulse to achieve happiness at all costs (even war), which—if the neoaristotelian diagnosis is correct—amounts to some form of self-preservation. To self-preserve is to seek to secure one's identity, as is it. What inevitably accompanies this mode of being is a resistance to uncertainty, a fear of change—which is, most fundamentally, *anxiety before the unknown*. And why? Because in committing to self-preservation, which aims for future security, one cannot help but stick to the imperatives that *might* yield secure results. This is less risky, less dangerous, and more conducive to comfort.

With this in mind, the crucial point is that the fear of failing to preserve oneself is antithetical to ethics—antithetical to the good in its attempt to resist change, i.e., *resist the other*. As has been argued in the preceding chapters and above, goodness involves an openness to the shattering of one's current convictions, and the shattering of one's projections based on those convictions, as this involves conceding that there is always something that fails to meet the eye: a residue that prevents us from having a god's eye view of things. Hearkening to Levinas's notion of justice as our inevitable search for order subsequent to disruption, it is here that we can find a way in which happiness is not at odds with the good as self-disruption. We can of course set goals, standards, and ideals to be attained, insofar as we recognize that those orderings will inevitably be undone (perhaps entirely). This is not only okay, *but good*. And not good in the sense of something that can be known or defined (essence), but good in the sense of giving ourselves over to our the intrinsic desire that leads to the deposing of self-concern.

5.3 A FINAL WORD ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY'S RELATION TO MORAL CULTIVATION

The trouble we are left with is: if the good (here understood as self-disruption) has nothing to do with the will, but is something that we do in fact desire, how can we aspire to be disrupted? To at least begin to address this question and bring this project to a close, I want to briefly focus on what we mean when we employ the commonplace aphorism that "perfection is the enemy of the good"—in light of an understanding of goodness as self-disruption.

Typically what we mean is that holding ourselves to a particular standard of perfection, or better, to an expectation of what ought to be achieved can stifle our ability to 'be good' in the sense that it can paralyze you (e.g., not being able to finish a project because it is not 'good enough', or not dancing because you haven't mastered the steps). Implicit is that 'perfection' involves trying to get something 'right', to produce something that ourselves and others approve of, and, above all, to fulfill certain pre-figured expectations. Setting standards of perfection is the enemy of the good in the sense that it stifles activity, halting us in our efforts. And not just in the sense of inhibiting the execution of a particular task, but in the sense of letting oneself—specifically one's projected expectations for oneself and what one ought to achieve for oneself—get in one's way. With 'affective unity' in mind, it is worth stressing again that it is only by way of splicing ourselves into two (the self as it is now and the self to be attained in the activity) that we are able to get in our own way, because there are two of us.

To build on this point, I want to very briefly address the claim that our age (the 21st-century in the Anglo-American West) is an age of anxiety, most tangibly in the sense that young people are more and more frequently finding themselves paralyzed in the sense that was just described. *The New York Times Magazine* recently issued an excellent feature titled, "Why are more American teenagers than ever suffering from severe anxiety?" (October 11, 2017). 'Severe anxiety' here refers to an inability to deal with failure (*imperfection*)—to the point of being reclusive, unable to attend school, unable to act without 'certainty' about what is to come. As the article stresses, this is ultimately the result of locating value in achievement. Echoing what was established above, the chief virtue that corresponds to value so construed is *self-perseverance*: preserving oneself

from harm. The article does a brilliant job of illustrating that anxiety, plaguing more than half of our undergraduates in the United States, is best defined as the overactive fight or flight response that perceives threats where there often are none—an overproduction of *what ifs* when standing before the future. And despite the fact that we are all anxious to some degree, as anxiety helps us detect danger, our culture's obsession with achievement and fulfilling self-imposed expectations has fostered an epidemic of overachieving perfectionists plagued by a crippling fear of failure—which is, more fundamentally, a fear of the pain associated with rejection and inadequacy. The article aptly describes the 'crippling' dimension of anxiety as a dread that the moment of 'being able to stop because you have *finally* achieved enough' will never come.[137] That one will never be enough, never be perfect.

Perfection is, therefore, the enemy of 'the good' in the sense that perfection—here synonymous with achieving expectations—inhibits us from straying from what we think we know is best, or from going against the agenda or expectations we set for ourselves (our self-legislation), or from inadvertently arriving at new understandings. Perfection inhibits us from taking risks, which in turn inhibits us from exposing ourselves to unexpected things: that is, from disrupting ourselves. The trouble that young people face today is an unwillingness to venture outside of their comfort zones, habituating a lack of resilience in the face of the unexpected, rather than the welcome of exposure, confidence before the unanticipated.

To return to the question above: how can we aspire to be disrupted (that is, to get out of our own way), especially if it is not a product of the will? Reiterating what was

[137] For more, see Benoit Denizet-Lewis, "Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?" *The New York Times Magazine*, October 11, 2017.

discovered in Chapter 4, the work of philosophy, which is ultimately the work of justice (in Levinas's sense of the term), is most essentially conversation, which involves offering concepts (*essences*), so as to dig deeper—justifying and undoing them with no pre-determined end in sight. Justice ought to be understood as the movement back and forth between the disruption and re-collection, actualized in conversation. Philosophy's task, therefore, is to safeguard thinking from the delusion that truth has been discovered once and for all. That is, to break proposed identifications of truth up, to contest that order—to refuse to take it for granted, even at the risk of uncertainty. *If* philosophy is understood as the activity that begins in the sort of wonder that seizes one from oneself, disrupting one's concern for oneself, and ultimately driving one to *justify*, organize, bring clarity to that disruption (one's justificatory state), *then* philosophy is the work of justifying or revealing one's justificatory state in conversation, and not resisting the uncertainty that accompanies the breakup of a particular mode of self-legislation, as this uncertainty is what allows for the possibility of an existential shift, a new way of understanding things, a new mode of being, and an excise of the old. This amounts to welcoming, in hospitality, the death that necessarily accompanies birth, change.

Crucial is that these shifts in understanding are birthed from communication, conversation, which involves listening to (rather than turning away from) what is always and already most proximate to us: the other. Philosophy's task is to remind us that self-disruption is the work of the good. And with Prichard's critique of modern moral philosophy in mind, it seems clear that this is legitimate mode of moral philosophy.

While we cannot will shifts in our moral understanding in precisely the same way that we will ourselves to do or not do something (e.g., go to the gym), because it requires

something *other than ourselves*, we can engage in experiences that occasion moral sense, listening to others—embracing the 'passivity' that sits at the heart of conversation. We can converse. Or in Levinas's terms, we can celebrate sensibility, which is nothing other than our perpetual exposure to what is outside of ourselves; to be is to be for the other.

Within moral philosophy in particular, especially as educators in the humanities, we can seek to instill an appreciation for goodness so construed by provoking our students, disrupting their current understandings, habituating conversation (listening to what is otherwise than certain to ourselves, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us), and then do the same for ourselves (engage in conversations) when we get a little too cozy in our convictions, self-constructed narratives, and projections, as there is always something that fails to meet the eye: this 'something' being the good. To understand moral philosophy in this way (as a form of moral cultivation) is to ensure that philosophy remains the love of wisdom (*sophia*), rather than the love of knowledge (*episteme*). Instilling this sort of appreciation for self-disruption begins the process of reclaiming *courage* as a virtue: that is, courage in the sense of welcoming the unknown, confidently facing the new. Moreover, instilling this sort of appreciation for self-disruption also teaches us how to value, nurture, and habituate a mode of being in which the self (and its preservation) is not the only object of concern for itself. Given what we know about our anxious youth in the Anglo-American West, the time is ripe for this work.

With Platos's *Phaedo* in mind, it seems clear that philosophy is in fact a preparation for death—or better, learning how to welcome death, to welcome learning, to welcome suffering. The point that I want to underline here is that philosophy is not only preparation for death in the sense of preparing for the end of our physical existence, but

more broadly, preparing for death in the sense of preparing for change. Or in Aristotle's terms, preparing for the world of coming-to-be—the ebb and flow of things coming in and out of existence, including our convictions and understandings. To prepare for death *qua* change is to foster resilience, recognizing that exposure to the other is the best way to vanquish fear.[138] The crucial insight that we find in Levinas is that this precise exposure, which sits at the very heart of our being, is the 'source' of moral sense: our desire for the other. To resist exposure—or as Levinas puts it, to be duped by morality—is to attempt to deny reality in a way that is not only self-defeating (as the other is always and already most proximate to us), but in a way that is in fact anxiety inducing, as we attempt to control what is out of our hands. It seems clear that we owe it to ourselves to heed reality as it is, celebrating our exposure to the other by, perhaps first and foremost, celebrating the self-disruptive experience of conversation, and learning to appreciate that the shattering of the old inexorably promises the birth of something new.[139]

[138] Quoting Vigilus Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety*: "Whoever is educated by possibility remains with anxiety; he does not permit himself to be deceived by its countless falsifications and accurately remembers the past. Then the assaults of anxiety, even though they be terrifying, will not be such that he flees from them. For him, anxiety becomes a serving spirit that against its will leads him to where he wishes to go. Then, when it announces itself, when it cunningly pretends to have invented a new instrument of torture, far more terrible than anything before, he does not shrink back, and still less does he attempt to hold it off with noise and confusion; but he bids it welcome, greets it festively, and like Socrates, who raised the poisoned cup and shuts himself up with it and says as a patient would say to the surgeon when the painful operation is about to begin: Now I am ready" (159).

[139] *These conclusions are indebted to extensive conversations with my friend, colleague, and primary thinking partner, Vicente Muñoz-Reja, who has not only helped refine my thinking in general, but has helped me parse and more fully understand the relation between thinking, willing, knowing, time, pleasure, and pain—especially in regard to self-conscious reflection's orientation toward the future, the new.*

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